

# 'We Don't Want These Things To Be Forgotten'

## A VFW Post in West Virginia remains devoted to a more than 70-year-old tradition of providing a Christmas to those unable to afford one

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For as long as there has been a VFW presence in Madison, West Virginia, the Christmas spirit has remained within reach of all in and around the community.

Without missing a beat in more than 70 years, members of VFW Post 5578 and its Auxiliary members in Madison have annually prepared and distributed baskets of food to residents in nursing homes and assisted-living facilities, as well as those suffering from food insecurity.

Embodying the community's togetherness, Post Commander and life member Curtis Mayhorn credits local businesses and residents for providing donations to help VFW bring Christmas to those less fortunate.

"This community has always stepped up when there is a need," Mayhorn said. "I can't say enough about the people in this county and how they take care of one another."

Chartered in 1946 by Consocio C. Smarr, among others, Post 5578 began its Christmas Basket Program in 1951. The inspiration for the program came while Smarr was deployed to France, where he noticed a VFW Post distributing food baskets to those in need during World War II.

Smarr decided to bring the idea for the program back to West Virginia. The original food baskets in Madison contained an assortment of flour, corn meal, salt, canned food, ham, bread, potatoes, peanut butter, jelly, milk, sugar and other seasonal items. The Post issued a sign-up sheet in mid-October each year, and recipients could collect the baskets in early December at the Post, which today sits beside the Madison Civic Center.

When the COVID-19 pandemic swept across the world in 2020, Mayhorn and Post 5578

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were determined to keep the program active.

“We always had a local Boy Scout group in here filling the baskets while we loaded,” Mayhorn said. “The parents of the scouts always helped, too. It was a real community thing. I did not want to expose all those people to the coronavirus, so we started doing the food cards instead.”

What ensued was specific food deliveries to those confined in nursing homes and assisted living facilities. Other residents suffering from food insecurity received food cards worth \$100 each, redeemable at Kroger, a local grocery store in Madison. In 2021 alone, Post 5578, with help from the community, provided more than 300 food cards worth some \$30,000, according to Mayhorn.

“It actually seemed to work better this way for us and for those who sign up to receive them,” Mayhorn said. “There is a good chance that we’ll keep doing it this way moving forward.”

Post 5578 and its Auxiliary also operate a Christmas Toy Program for children in Madison that coincides with those families applying for food cards.

“Our applications have information to fill out the ages of boys and girls and the number of each,” said Post 5578 Quartermaster Johnny Saunders. “I say that about 150 kids each year receive gifts.”

Paying it forward to the younger generations, added Mayhorn, is the surest way to continue a tradition of unity within the community of Madison.

“We don’t want these things to be forgotten in the future,” Mayhorn said. “We need our younger members to carry it forward.”

The food cards and toys this year will be distributed between 9 a.m. and 3 p.m. at Post 5578 on Dec. 6, 7 and 8.

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