



## *American Legion Auxiliary*

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### VETERANS AFFAIRS AND REHABILITATION

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Both unemployment and homelessness rates run higher for veterans than for the general population. Assisting in activities that help homeless veterans is one of the goals listed in the American Legion Auxiliary National Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Plan of Action. Each VA health care system (for us that's St. Cloud, Minneapolis, Fargo, Sioux Falls) has a homeless veterans coordinator. They are good sources of information on what your unit or you can do to help homeless veterans in your community. Each VA health care system participates in the VA Project called **CHALENG**. No, I didn't misspell challenge! **CHALENG** stands for "Community Homelessness Assessment, Local Education and Networking Groups." Social service agencies, law enforcement, charitable organizations and others partner together to assess the needs of homeless veterans and how they can all work together to assist veterans with housing and employment.

So, besides contacting the homeless veterans coordinator at the closest VA health care system, what else can your unit do? You could **crochet, knit or collect hats, scarves, mittens/gloves to distribute to homeless veterans**. These items are always welcome at homeless shelters, transitional housing projects and MAC-

V offices. Your county veteran service officer might be willing to have a box of these items at their office to distribute to veterans who stop by to consult with him or her during this cold winter. A local Duluth knitting club hung their completed items on fences and poles around the community this month with a note saying "I need a home. Please feel free to take me if I could be of use to you."

Have you considered working with your post American Legion Family to **host a job fair** for veterans? Almost every business these days has a sign in the window saying "HELP WANTED." Homeless veterans struggle with application forms when they have no permanent mailing address or contact information. The unemployment rate for returning veterans is very high. Connecting with a possible employer in Post surroundings may be less intimidating than in the actual workplace.

**STAND DOWNS** are a wonderful way to connect with and assist homeless or struggling veterans. Besides the free haircuts, legal advice and meal, attending veterans receive some much needed goods. On a personal note, my West Duluth Unit 71 collected bags of new white crew socks to distribute to the veterans attending the Duluth Stand Down held in September. They were graciously and gratefully received by the attending veterans. The used clothing, bags of toiletry items and duffle bags quickly disappeared. Just a note: Our "Sock-It-To-Em" project started months in advance of the actual Stand Down. By posting our sock "goal thermometer" on a visible wall in the Post, other members of our American Legion Family enthusiastically assisted the unit with their support. Come up with a project for a future Stand Down and start collecting items now!

I'd like to thank everyone who assisted in any way with our annual Hospital/Home Holiday Gift Shops. They are always much anticipated and warmly received by the residents and in house patients. Special thanks go out to Gift Shop Chairman Vida Bacon and Gift Shop Committee Member Linda Deschene. They did an awesome job purchasing and assembling all the items for this year's distribution. Thanks also go out to Osseo Post 172 for letting us use their facility on distribution day. It was fun to see all the items and spend time with our Hospital/Home Reps when they arrived to pick up their "goodies." I got to bring the Silver Bay Veterans Home gift shop items up to them when I attended their pheasant dinner in November.

Happy New Year! Happy Valentine's Day! I know you all have big hearts. Keep up the good work of helping our veterans and their families in any way you can.

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