



Ladies Auxiliary collecting donations for 'Xmas in July'

By Wade Coggeshall

— AVON — In the case of the Ladies Auxiliary of American Legion Post 145, it's not too early to be thinking about Christmas.

The auxiliary is collecting winter clothing for homeless veterans. The initiative, called "Xmas in July," is part of a larger collaboration with the Hoosier Veterans Assistance Foundation.

Tina Shelley, HVAF's volunteer coordinator, says on any given night there are about 900 homeless vets in Marion County. Statewide, the estimate is about 3,500.

"(The need is) kind of a secret," Shelley said. "We're trying to get the word out about the problem, and how many the numbers are."

It came as a surprise to Ladies Auxiliary member Pam Cline, who spearheads the organization's HVAF project. Cline learned of the problem through a newspaper article, showed it to her fellow auxiliary members, and contacted HVAF to see how they could help. They've been helping the foundation for six months now.

"In that short time, I have found the experience to be humbling, at times unnerving, and last but not least, a shocking awareness of the many needs of our veterans who have honorably served our country," Cline said.

"Without HVAF and other appropriate interventions, the cycle of dysfunction will continue not only with this generation, but with the children of these veterans."

Shelley says many homeless vets suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health issues. Still others are simply down on their luck. The Ladies Auxiliary is continually collecting non-perishable food items that are delivered quarterly to HVAF. The foundation is currently renovating a building at 964 N. Pennsylvania St., Indianapolis, into housing for up to 22 veterans. The auxiliary has already supplied sheets and towels for that.

Those cleaning out their closets from winter can donate gently-used coats, long underwear, gloves, and stocking caps in larger sizes (X and bigger) and boots in sizes 10-12. Cline got a jump on the drive, buying coats, long-sleeve shirts, and stocking caps on clearance.

"We've got four big boxes already stuffed," said Donna Mullins, Ladies Auxiliary president.

Monetary donations also are accepted, and are placed in a special account for HVAF initiatives only if identified for that. Checks may be mailed to Beth Gurley/treasurer, American Legion Auxiliary, Avon Post 145, 375 S. State Road 267, Avon, IN 46123.

Assisting HVAF has become the auxiliary's main project. Assisting veterans, Mullins said, is "what the American Legion is all about."

Shelley says service organizations like the Ladies Auxiliary are "a tremendous help."

"We rely on organizations and individuals who would like to make donations for the pantry — whether it be bringing in hygiene items, blankets, food, towels, clothing — so that we can pass them out to veterans who come in," Shelley said.

Those who solicit help from HVAF must certify they are a veteran.

Donations are generally plentiful around the holidays, "But in the late spring and early summer, people don't really think about it," Shelley said.

The Ladies Auxiliary is doing its part to make sure homeless veterans are helped year-round.

"We're doing a lot here," Mullins said. "This is a very active post."

wade.coggeshall@flyergroup.com

Online:

www.hvaf.org

www.avonlegion.org

Copyright © 1999-2008 cnhi, inc.