

Legion makes Christmas special for vets in Amarillo

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ABOVE: Members of Liberal's American Legion and Legion Auxiliary unload Christmas gifts earlier this month from several vehicles at the Thomas Creek VA Hospital and Nursing Home in Amarillo, Texas. LEFT: One of the veterans at the hospital receives her gifts from American Legion Auxiliary members Linda DeCamp, center, and Kay Epp, right. Courtesy photos

By ROBERT PIERCE • Leader & Times Thanks to one local organization, a group of veterans in Amarillo, Texas, had a very merry Christmas.

After collecting items such as sleep pants, shirts, pajamas, house shoes, socks and toiletry items in November and early December, members of the American Legion and Legion Auxiliary of Liberal traveled to the Thomas Creek VA Hospital and Nursing Home in Amarillo to deliver those items earlier this month.

Auxiliary member Kay Epp, who along with fellow member Linda DeCamp organized the holiday drive, said after arriving in Amarillo at the clinic, staff members greeted them with book carts to help unload the items, but they would soon find out that more was needed in order to do so.

"They saw all of the stuff," Epp said. "We opened it up, and they could not believe all the clothes

and articles we had for them. They were just amazed.”

Epp said local Legion and Auxiliary members were in luck because a Christmas party was taking place the afternoon on which they arrived at the Amarillo hospital. “They had a lot of the veterans gather in the dining room waiting on the music,” she said. “We did go ahead.”

Among the articles delivered were 140 posters and poems from youngsters at Liberal’s Cottonwood Intermediate School and two bags full from the Dorothys at Dorothy’s House.

“With all of them gathered, we did get to pass them out,” said of the veterans gathered at the clinic.

Epp said the father of a lady at Thomas Creek had passed away in 2010. The father had made a practice of taking mints and writing poems for veterans, and his daughter continued that ritual the day of the delivery – in honor of her dad.

Epp said she believes the veterans in Amarillo will keep the posters and Christmas cards they received for the entire year. She said getting the items was emotional for both the veterans and those who gave them.

“When we handed them to them, they all got tears in their eyes,” she said. “The ones that could read read them and cried. The ones that weren’t able to read for themselves, we read them, and we all teared up.”

Epp said staff members of Thomas Creek and veterans went through the clothing and other items brought to them by the Liberal group.

“We had told them they had all of these gifts coming, and they were really appreciative,” she said. “They really were. This really made our Christmas when you do stuff like that for people that really don’t have any way or any financing to get them a good Christmas.”

Epp said she feels the Liberal group accomplished its goal of getting everyone sleep pants, pajamas and shirts, and she added the number of toiletry items collected was simply “unbelievable.”

“They probably won’t have to buy that stuff for a long, long time,” she said. “I really do feel like we did hit our goal that we had aimed for back in October.”

Epp said many of those donating would like to do so more often.

“We have had people ask us when they would donate why do we just have to do it at Christmas time,” she said. “Our response to this is we don’t have to, and anybody that wants to donate all year long but does not go to Amarillo, we have told them they can bring it to KSCB or our shop at Aaron Epp Repair.”

Epp said with local vets constantly going to Amarillo for appointments at the hospital there, items can be taken to the veterans there.

“We will deliver whether we have one sack or 100 sacks,” she said. “In fact, we got a TV donated to us that we are planning on taking down in January. First of all, we didn’t have room to take it Friday. He did bring it over, and we will deliver that in January. We go back in January.”

Epp said the Legion and Auxiliary have never done anything like this.

“Linda and I were just talking and we thought, ‘Let’s try it,’” she said. “We had no idea whatsoever that it would be anything like this. We were overwhelmed. The people of Liberal and the surrounding area, they have just been wonderful.”

Epp said the Liberal group is willing to continue efforts to take items to Amarillo, and vets at Thomas Creek have a great appreciation for what they are given.

“They have fought for our country,” she said. “It’s really an overwhelming thing to see. We will continue it as long as we have donations. People’s needs go on and on all year long, not just at the holidays.”

Epp said for the first time, the outcome of the holiday drive was also unbelievable.

“No words can be put into it,” she said. “Once we unpacked and went through the articles and tried to separate things out, it was just overwhelming with the articles that we had. You would get them and kind of pile them somewhere, but when you actually went through them and separated them, it was overwhelming. Everybody was very generous.”

Epp expressed gratitude to local and area communities.

“Linda and I would like to thank everybody that helped us out because we couldn’t have done it without the people that donated,” she said. “The papers have been wonderful to us with the advertising. KSCB, we couldn’t have done it without them either. We have really done good.”