

First responders treated to luncheon at Legion

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An assortment of local first responders were about to grab a well prepared meal for lunch, courtesy of American Legion Post 57, its members and several volunteers.

Wednesday afternoon the post hosted its First Responders Appreciation Luncheon for the year, feeding several first responders a lunch that was fast food fare.

"We planned for 150 and we feed over 200," said William 'Bill' Huggins, American Legion Post 57 Post Commander, of the luncheon. "It's probably the best turnout for the first responders we've had to date. It's our way of giving back to our first responders who are either 24/7, 365-day (employees) protecting and serving our community."

Employees from the Florida Highway Patrol, Columbia County Sheriff's Office, Lake City Police Department, Columbia County Fire Rescue, Lake City Fire Department, and local EMS workers from several different agencies attended.

"It was very well represented all the way around," Huggins said, estimating the event had at least 25% more first responders attend, over the previous event.

The luncheon, which takes place at the American Legion Post 57, is held twice a year — a luncheon during the spring as well as a luncheon during the fall. The American Legion has hosted the event for at least 4 years.

"The reason we do it is because these men and women are out there 24/7, 365 days a year, keeping our streets safe and keeping us safe," Huggins said. "They're there in the rain, cold, when it's hot, it doesn't matter. The least we can do is show them our appreciation and let them know that we're here for them, because there here for us."

Huggins said the concept behind the luncheon has been well received by legion post members, with almost 30 volunteers attending Wednesday's luncheon to help set up, cook, serve the food and cleaning after the event. He said the volunteers represented several



First responders and guests line up for grub at the American Legion Post 57's First Responders Appreciation Luncheon.

branches of the legion family.

In addition to the food, first responders who attended were given free Bombas socks. The Legion's Auxiliary, Sons of American Legion and America Legion Riders contributed money and gift cards were purchased and raffled to first responders.

"Again, it's just a little something giving back to our first responders who give so much," Huggins said.

The food provided during the luncheon included hamburger steak, homemade mashed potatoes with gravy, green beans

with rolls and sheet cake.

Many of the local first responders didn't have an opportunity to sit and eat in the legion hall, and take out containers were provided.

"We started the day out, before I even started serving, with an order for 27 (takeouts) to go to the county jail for the staff out there," Huggins said. "We went through approximately 100 to go containers today going to different agencies that couldn't come. We tried to make sure not only the first responders, but also the staff that supports them was fed today."