

Standing up for veterans



TONY BRITT/Lake City Reporter

Amy McCaughan, a Primary Care Mental Health Integration social worker at the Lake City VA, talks to Frank Bassett, a veteran, who volunteers at American Legion Post 57.

Legion Post 57 hosts resource fair

By TONY BRITT
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More than 100 local veterans grabbed lunch and learned about a variety of services available to them through the federal, state and local governments, as well as local organizations during the Veterans Resource Fair/Stand Down.

The event took place Thursday at American Legion Post 57.

"It's an event where we bring the community together with all the resources that are available to our veterans," said William 'Bill' Higgins,



COURTESY

Veterans grab lunch during the American Legion Post 57 Veterans Resource Fair/Stand Down event Wednesday.

LEGION continued on 8A



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William 'Bill' Huggins (from left) American Legion Post 57 Commander, stands with Andrew Farmer, Peter Houghland and Shauna Mosley as they present him with a painting for the post on Wednesday afternoon during the Veteran Resource Fair/Stand Down event.

LEGION

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American Legion Post 57 commander, noting that approximately 50 agencies attended the event to aid veterans with services.

Huggins estimated roughly 125 veterans attended the event and noted he was pleased with the turnout.

"The veterans enjoyed it a lot," he said. "They (agencies) were able to hook up a lot of veterans with resources they didn't know were available to them out here and I actually picked up a few new members."

Huggins said the Resource Fair/Stand Down plays an important role for area veterans.

"It's important because we

have so many veterans in our community that don't know what's available for them," he said. "By doing the event here, we're able to bring them here. As the American Legion our job is to provide support for our veterans. If you bring them here, now they know who we are, where we are and what we can provide."

Amy McCaughan, a Primary Care Mental Health Integration social worker at the Lake City VA Hospital, visited with Frank Bassett, a veteran, who volunteers at Post 57.

"I think it's important to be able to address the mental health concerns with our veterans," she said of attending the event. "A lot of veterans don't necessarily understand why they might have trouble sleeping, why they might

find themselves irritated more than usual, why their anger is a little bit more than the average persons and to be able to show them where that's coming from and there's help at the VA for them is extremely important."

Bassett said he felt it was important to attend the event as a volunteer as well as a customer.

"The biggest thing, from my own personal experiences is that most veterans don't have any idea that most of these benefits exist," he said. "There's 50 vendors in here that I've never seen. The biggest thing is education and information. We had a really huge turnout. I didn't know how many people were going to be here. They came here in vans."

McCaughan agreed with Bassett's thoughts on such a

large number of veterans attending the event.

"I think most veterans seemed to be surprised at the number of resources that are available to them that they didn't know about," she said. "That's why these events are so important, because it's not just mental health, its physical health, emotional health and spiritual health. Being able to wrap around the services for veterans. That's the importance of this. You can come, you find everything at one stop. Find out what's going on, find out what you need and then you can access the services when you're ready if you're not ready today."

During a brief presentation during the event, Transplant Retirement Group presented

Post 57 a painting for the Gift of Gratitude Foundation, which was founded by Doug McDermott.

"We gave a painting that deals with the prevention of suicide," said Shauna Mosley, managing partner for Transparent Retirement Group.

"It's just one of the biggest issues that we face here and just want to make sure we're supporting our brothers and sisters that are struggling the most," added Andrew Farmer. "Part of the Gift of Gratitude Foundation is to make sure we're targeting our military, first responders, police, medical professionals — those who are serving in some of the most difficult ways to their brothers and sisters making sure they have that support available for them as well."