

Legion Post 57 feeds first responders

More than 100 fed during biannual buffet.

By **TONY BRITT**
tbritt@lakecityreporter.com

A huge contingent of local first responders were the guests of honor during an American Legion Post 57 luncheon on Wednesday.

The local post held its fall luncheon for first responders at its post on Wednesday and served more than 100 local first responders, ranging from employees of the Lake City Police Department,

Columbia County Sheriff's Office, Florida Highway Patrol, Columbia County Fire Rescue and Columbia EMS.

At least 80 first responders attended the luncheon and there were at least 30 to-go plates taken to other first responders that could not attend the event.

The food provided was a taco bar, with choice of chicken, steak or hamburger, refried beans and yellow rice along with various desserts.

In addition to the food, each first responder was given 2-3 pairs of Bombas

LEGION *continued on 8A*



TONY BRITT/Lake City Reporter

Columbia County Sheriff's Office Maj. Katina Dicks (from left), gets a bag of to-go plates for CCSO staff from Lisa Toliver, an American Legion Auxiliary member.

LEGION

Continued From 1A

socks, a bag of candy and some were awarded gift cards after drawings. First responders who are veterans were also given cards to become American Legion Post 57 members.

William "Bill" Huggins, American Legion Post 57 Commander, said the post holds two luncheons a year for first responders, one during the spring and the other during the fall of the year.

"These guys and gals are out here 24/7, 365 days a year to keep us safe and to protect our daily lives," he said. "The least we can do is show our appreciation and give a little bit back for as much as they gave."

Huggins said Legion members feel it's important to honor first responders and their contributions that impact the well-being of the community.

Huggins said before he became post commander, he would be out in the community and see a veteran with his cap on, shake his hand and thank him for his service, but when he asked the veteran whether he was a member of the American Legion, and often learned the veteran was not familiar with the local organization.

"Our first responsibility is to take care of our veterans. If they don't know we're here, we cannot do our jobs," he said. "So, it's important that we get the word out in the community about who we are, what we are and what we stand for so we can better serve our veteran community."

There were 26 volunteers from the American Legion that participated in

Wednesday's event to honor local first responders.

"Our first responders are out there everyday protecting us in events we can't even imagine," said Kelly Valliere, American Legion Post 57 first vice president, noting the importance of honoring first responders. "The things that they go through. The processes that they have to deal with, the people that they have to deal with, we are very respectful of that being veterans. A lot of our veterans have gone through a lot of the same situations, so we understand who they are and why they do what they do."

Sharon Huggins, American Legion Post 57 kitchen manager and Karen Lunch, assistant kitchen manager, said 6 volunteer cooks prepared 35 pounds of steak, 40 pounds of hamburger and 40 pounds of children, as well as cutting 12 pounds of tomatoes, 10 pounds of onions and prepared four cans of refried beans, three pans of rice and few cans of Queso cheese.

"It was important to serve the first responders because they take care of us," Sharon Huggins said. "They protect us and they help us when we need the help. It's important. They're just like another branch of the military to me, because they protect this country."

Sally Christopher, volunteered her time providing socks and candy to first responders on Wednesday and noted she felt it was important to participate in the luncheon.

"It's important to participate because the first responders do so much for us. Without them in our community, I don't know where we would be, because when you need help, they're there," she said.



TONY BRITT/Lake City Reporter

An unidentified Florida Highway Patrol officer gets a box of to-go plates from Lana Hagy during the American Legion Post 57 First Responder Luncheon on Wednesday. The event lasted from 11 a.m.-1 p.m. and more and 100 local first responders were served.