

AMERICAN LEGION POST 57

Standing up for veterans



Photos by TONY BRITT/Lake City Reporter

Megan Douglas (right), a representative of The Fire Watch, talks to a veteran during the Veteran Stand Down and Resource Fair at the American Legion Post 57 on Wednesday.

Stand Down event connects vets, resources

John Daniels (seated) gets a hair cut from Florida Gateway College student Kaley Kight during Wednesday's event at the American Legion Post 57.



By TONY BRITT
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American Legion Post 57 was brimming with activity Wednesday morning.

From veterans getting free haircuts, eating breakfast or collecting information about services they are eligible for, the facility was continuously busy for hours.

The crowd in the building was attending the Veteran Stand Down and Resource Fair where several vendors were telling about the services they offered veterans.

Bill Huggins, American Legion Post 57 commander, was thrilled with the amount of

people the event attracted.

"It blew our mind," he said. "This turnout is the best we've ever seen for this. We've got great representation of resources for our veterans. It's far bigger than anything we've ever had here. As it turns out, we've had some non-perishable food items that were left over that will be going out to the Panhandle and help our posts over there."

Huggins estimated that more than 200 veterans attended Wednesday's event.

"It's our family coming together to better our community," he said, noting they plan

VETERANS continued on 7A



Photos by TONY BRITT/Lake City Reporter

American Legion Post 57 is filled with veterans and veteran service providers during the Veteran Stand Down and Resource Fair event Wednesday.

VETERANS

Continued From 1A

to continue scheduling the event since the response from veterans has been positive.

Gerald Jayne was one of many veterans stopping at multiple tables during the event.

"It was great," he said of the Veteran Stand Down and Resource Fair. "I think we should have it more often. I visited all the tables. I loved having all the vendors."

Sean Johnson also visited several tables while he was at the event.

"It's really good," he said of the event. "I've been to everything. I've gotten to talk to a lot of nice people and I was really impressed with it being local to where I was at."

Johnson said the event was beneficial for veterans. He added the thought it was important to continue to have events such as the resource fair.

"It's important so they understand what's available for them from outside the VA, in the community and the digital economy," he said. "The services available represent Medicare/Medicaid in the VA and it's good for them (veterans) to know what's available."

Mandy Jones, a Florida Gateway College Associate professor and instructor of cosmetology, said the college had seven students that provided veterans with haircuts during the event.

"They are doing everything from short haircuts to long haircuts, to long-layered haircuts," she said. "We've had some dress this morning that we cut into a bob and these are our seniors who will be graduating Dec. 8."

Jones said the students were happy to attend the event to provide services.

"This is one of the best days. They look forward to this day to be able to give back, not only to our veterans but even some of the Legion employees have come in and gotten their haircuts... Plus, I have two Marines and that's special to my heart."

Jones said FGC student cosmetologists have participated in the program for more than 10 years.

"It's just to be able to give back and it gives great practice for them. They work on mannequins a lot, so this gives them practice of anybody walking in and sitting in their chair."

Crystal Dyer, an employee of M3 Wale Research of Lake City, was one of many vendors in attendance and noted that around 80-100 people visited their table during the event.

"We do clinical trial research and many do not know that's an option



Rod Douglas (from left) talks to Living Hope representatives Ken Burkes, Erin Crumitie and Keri Spradley during the Veteran Stand Down and Resource Fair.

in town and it's ran by local doctors," she said. "Everything is local and a lot of people don't know about that resource, so we're educating the community about clinical trials, the opportunity that it can give and everything about clinical research."

Keri Spradley, a Living Hope peer specialist, was at the Living Hope table along with Ken Burkes and Erin Crumitie talking to veterans.

"Today was introducing people to First Things First and giving them information regarding how we can help connect them with community resources," she said. "We offer wellness training, wellness coaching, peer support and trauma healing groups. People don't know about all the resources available to them and they need the help and we want to help connect them to that help."

Meagan Douglas, working with The Fire Watch, was happy to work with veterans during the event.

"It means everything," she said of the event. "I think that we don't realize how hard it is for veterans once they transition to come out and find work and what's resources are available in the community or to even know where to go. You get a lot of people that are getting out of the military that don't really have it all figured out. So, having these events are imperative to keep us from having people that don't know where they're going to work at, where to get mental health treatment or healthcare. It's imperative for our veterans to know what we offer as a community."



Kasey Stewart (from left), Voluntary Services Assistant at the VA Center for Developmental and Civic Engagement, talks to Amanda O'Connell at the Veteran Stand Down and Resource Fair.



Veterans get lunch during Veteran Stand Down and Resource Fair at American Legion Post 57 on Wednesday.



Dwayne Crawford (left) talks to JB Hinton, American Legion Northern Area Women's Vet Chair, as he visits the Veteran Stand Down and Resource Fair on Wednesday at American Legion Post 57.