Lending a Helping Hand

Union Grove volunteer surpasses 5,000 hours helping veterans

Rhonda Bose first found out about the Veterans Home at Union Grove through her nephew a few years ago. Though she was born and raised nearby, she never knew that more than 100 military veterans and some of their spouses lived just a short drive away.

Bose recently celebrated a monumental achievement, surpassing over 5,000 volunteer hours at the Veterans Home. She said that while the sheer amount of hours don’t mean much to her, the relationships she’s built over the years with the veterans and staff make it all worth it.

“It makes me happy, so that’s why I go,” Bose said. “If it wasn’t for them, we wouldn’t be here. It’s the best thing I’ve ever done because they are all so happy there.”

It’s not just the veterans who have an impact on Bose; she also has quite an influence on the veterans themselves.

“Rhonda has a very strong connection with the members; they miss her when she is gone,” Activity and Volunteer Coordinator Teresa Presser said. “They can see her heart by how she humbly serves them. She shies away from accolades and truly just wants to assure that members are happy.”

Serving Those Who Served

Bose had just retired and was looking for a way to spend her free time when she agreed to help out her nephew and volunteer at a deli at the Veterans Home. With deep family roots in the military and a stepson who recently returned from Afghanistan, she desired to give back any way she could.

Right away, Bose saw the close camaraderie with those who frequented the deli on campus, whether it was playing a game of cards, drinking a cup of coffee or just sharing in some conversation. Since it started, the deli has continuously grown in popularity.

“It’s so awesome,” she said. “These guys don’t pay a penny;
it went from like 10 guys to 50 now... it's something they look forward to, and it makes you feel so good that you do it."

Because the amount of veterans gathering in the deli has risen so much, the number of volunteers serving them has, too. What started with just Bose has swelled to 14, and the WDVA expanded the operation to a larger space known as the “pub.”

“It would be very difficult to sustain the deli operation without the volunteers,” Presser said. “They provide countless hours serving our members.”

A Community Effort
In addition to the many volunteers who fill the halls at Union Grove, the deli relies on donations from the community. Various Veterans Service Organizations generously donate funds, gift cards and their time to help the deli stay afloat, and several bakeries in the area help out with baked goods for the members.

Bose usually visits the veterans at the home who she now calls friends about three times every week.

“They are spoiled in there, and we want it to be that way,” she said. “They deserve it, and that’s why we do it. It’s hard for us to leave... once you get there you don’t want to ever leave them, and you feel guilty when you take a day off. They become family.”

Although she has put in so many hours, Bose credited the volunteers who surround her for the success they have had. One in particular is Kathy Penish-Garross, whose son was killed while serving in Iraq. Although she doesn’t have a physical tie with the home, Bose said Penish-Garross organizes a car show and an ice cream social every year for the members, in addition to offering monetary donations.

The camaraderie built throughout the years has also stretched to family members of veterans who used to be residents at the home. Although their family member is no longer there, Bose said families still visit and take the time to volunteer because of the connection they have with the facility when their loved one was living there.

April is National Volunteer Month, and the WDVA wants to recognize the hundreds of volunteers at its three Veterans Homes. They generously donate thousands of hours every year to help veterans receive the compassionate care they earned by bravely serving our country.

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Without the assistance of volunteers, the WDVA would not be able to achieve its goal of serving those who served.