

ON THE MOVE

Talking a Stand for homeless vets

Story by
Mike Latona

Photos by
Mike Mergen



Erin DiCaro of the Holy Ghost youth group hands clothes and supplies to veteran Juan Howard at Rochester's East High School on July 31, while Kelly Nasradinaj, center, readies more supplies.

Other Holy Ghost volunteers who helped at the Stand Down were Adam Vogler, 17, and Veronica Passantino, 16, as well as adult assistants.

The Stand Down began in San Diego, Calif., 12 years ago and had spread to the Rochester area by 1993. Stand Downs provide food, clothing, sleeping bags and footwear, as well as social service resources and on-site health services.

Jim Carra, organizer of the Rochester Stand Down, said that the County of Monroe as well as numerous donors fund the event. Goods and services are free to Vietnam veterans and their families who are either homeless or living on the edge.

"They may be in a certain income bracket — where they may not be homeless, but are just making ends meet," said Carra, who served with the U.S. Army in Vietnam in 1968 and 1969.

Casey DiCaro said she conversed with one veteran who has found work by attending a previous Stand Down.

"It helped him get back on his feet," Casey said.

Unfortunately, the Holy Ghost youths were unable to take in the entire Stand Down experience. They had planned to stay overnight in tents, and volunteer through Aug. 1, but were sent home in the early afternoon of July 31, when most of the remaining activities were cancelled due to a heat wave.

"The primary concern is the health and safety of not only the participants, but the volunteers," Carra said.

The Holy Ghost volunteers were disappointed about the abrupt end, but Erin said she was glad she took part.

"I'm looking forward to coming back next year so we actually have the whole experience," Erin said.

Orman noted that this marked the first time a youth group has ever volunteered at a Rochester Stand Down. The Holy Ghost teens became involved through the encouragement of Orman's father, William, a Korean War veteran.

"At first the kids were a little hesitant about being in the city, being out of their comfort zone. But my dad talked to them and got them hyped up," Orman said.

The group earned high praise from Orman and Carra for its cooperative nature.

"These guys have been wonderful. I've never seen a group take on responsibility in hot, humid, dirty and dusty conditions like this," Orman said.

"The kids were great," Carra added. "They worked hard, they really did. They seemed to be very enthusiastic about helping out."

COMING NEXT WEEK:

Diocesan Youth Convention



Members of Holy Ghost youth group handed out boots, sleeping bags and large bags of supplies that included clothing and a blanket on July 31.

No one in the Holy Ghost Church youth group is old enough to recall the Vietnam War. But through a recent volunteer project, the teens got a close-up view of the distress that some Vietnam veterans are still experiencing.

Poverty-stricken veterans — many of them homeless — were the focus of the Stand Down held July 30-Aug. 1 at Rochester's East High School. The annual event provides assistance for Rochester-area veterans of the Vietnam War, in which the United States fought during most of the 1960s and into the early 1970s.

According to Laurie Orman, Holy Ghost's youth minister, seven teens from the Gates parish assisted at the Stand Down. After helping with set-up duties earlier in the week, the group arrived at 7 a.m. July 31 to pass out food and supplies to the veterans.

"Some of them were, like, really grateful," said Kelly Nasradinaj, 14, who volunteered along with her sister Jennifer, 16.

"You could see that these people were down on their luck," said Casey DiCaro, 15.

Rob Dettman, 15, remarked that the veterans appeared to still be feeling the effects of insufficient support from the American public upon returning home from the war.

"They served our country, fought a war, risked their lives — and they come back and nothing's done for them," Rob said.

Erin DiCaro, 13, agreed that the soldiers have been faulted — unfairly — for the United States' controversial involvement in the war.

"It wasn't their fault they got sent there," Erin said.

Meanwhile, Kelly said that helping the veterans at the Stand Down made her realize how lucky she is to have a comfortable lifestyle.

"I really appreciate that I have a home to go to at night, that I have a roof over my head and food on the table," Kelly said.