

Officers visit highlights new VFW Mental Wellness Program

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A new State Veterans of Foreign Wars program is sounding a call for veterans to “have each other’s backs” in a different way. The “all hands on deck” effort is in response to a national crisis of more than 20 veterans committing suicide daily.

Dovetailing with this effort is a call to reach out to more veterans to strengthen VFW advocacy efforts. Hillsville Post 1115 was the next-to-last stop last Thursday for State and District 9 officers who are getting the word out on the efforts.

“This is the VFW Mental Wellness Campaign. What this is, is trying to make people aware of those with potential signs of mental issues and are not being identified and referred. This is a special project of the current Commander-in-Chief Brian Duffy and Auxiliary President Colette Bishop,” said State VFW Commander Tom Gimble. “We think some of this can be identified and helped. You don’t have to be a mental health professional to see these things. Just being around people you can see some of this. It may not be you don’t need help. You may just need someone to talk through some things but we’re trying to get this out to as many people as we possibly can. This is bigger than the veterans’ community. First responders have the same issues. It’s all around. We’re really proud of this program. I believe it will continue on. It’s that good. It’s that important.”

Five signs of emotional suffering highlighted by the campaign are sudden or gradual changes in someone’s typical behavior, uncharacteristically angry, anxious, agitated or moody behavior, a person pulling or withdrawing from family and friends, a person stopping taking care of themselves and engagement in risky behavior and hopelessness where a person is overwhelmed by their circumstances.

Resources (outside of someone locally to talk with) include the Veterans Crisis Line (1-800-273-8255 or www.veteranscrisisline.net), Give an Hour at www.giveanhour.org and clicking on search for a provider, the Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration (1-800-4357 or www.samhsa.gov), patients Like Me at www.patientslikeme.com or VA Health Care (1-877-2228387 or www.va.gov/health).

“We have 135 posts in Virginia and we report our community activities in five categories, Americanism, community service, safety, youth and hospital. All of that is stuff going back into the community. All that you see going on around here fall into one of those five categories. Last January we went up on the Hill, Richmond, and reported some 442,000 volunteer hours had been poured back into the communities last year. We donated \$2.6 million in cash and equivalent items.”

Gimble said the Department of Virginia’s 135 posts gave back roughly \$13 million in services last year. He said the down side of this is officials think this



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VFW State Officers, VFW Post 1115 members and Post 1115 Auxiliary Members took time out before an informational session last Thursday to take this group photo. A VFW Mental Wellness Campaign is calling for an “all hands on deck” effort in response to a national crisis of more than 20 veterans committing suicide daily. Dovetailing with this is a call to bolster membership to strengthen VFW advocacy efforts.

is 20 percent of what was actually done by VFW posts.

“We have a challenge of reporting. People don’t necessarily do community-service type activities and don’t report them in and that is a challenge we have. Anyway, we feel like we have a major impact in the community throughout Virginia. I can tell you this, the Hillsville Post has historically been an outstanding post in Virginia. They are fully reported on their community activities this year and they have done everything they’ve been asked to do.”

“The challenge they have, and a lot of Posts have, is membership. They need to reach out to these veterans who are eligible but are not members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars to come in and join to do the community projects,” Gimble said. “We also advocate for veterans issues both in Virginia and Washington, D.C. We need



State VFW Officers and District 9 officers visiting VFW Post 1115 last Thursday pictured from left, are District Quartermaster Gary Adams, District Commander Howard Minton, State Judge Advocate Rick Raskin, State Commander Tom Gimble and State Membership Chair and Past State Commander Tommy Hines.

to have that strength in membership. We like to have active members. We need to have people who carry the card. We need to go on the Hill and say we represent 32,000-plus members of the VFW and 9,000 members in the Auxiliary. We are a voting block.”

Gimble said he feels Virginia is a veteran-friendly state doing a lot of good things to assist veterans. He said the State officers’ trip

last Thursday had two messages, support the veterans and that the VFW wants to be good members of the community and do good with community-service work.

“What we are doing specifically this week in District 9, which includes Hillsville and 11 posts, is State Officers to come down and encourage recruiting and assist local commands and help with membership and programs,” said Gimble.

“Honestly, to give out new information which is not readily available. This is our goal. We’ve been out all week and have one more post to visit on this trip, Pulaski. We’ve had a great turnout and a great reception at all the posts. We’ve had some good conversation both ways to improve post operation.”

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