

Tolleson VFW is No. 1

Post 6310 recognized as tops in the nation for community service

by Emily McCann
staff writer

Thousands of veterans who served their country by fighting in wars are now continuing the tradition of service at home.

In Tolleson, the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 6310 took the commitment above the call of duty and has been named the No. 1 post in the nation for community service.

At a national convention in August, the post will also be given all-American status for the second year in a row, an honor that hasn't been held by a post in Arizona since 1977, Tolleson Quartermaster Paul Sausedo said.

Out of 8,400 VFW posts worldwide, about 120 achieve the all-American status and only one is given the community service award, said Jerry Newberry, director of communication for the VFW national headquarters.

A post has to meet certain criteria, such as high membership, performing community service and being involved in church and youth activities, to be nominated by the state for the award.

"The most important thing for our post is community service, because that's where you get the people involved," Sausedo said. "We're here to help any way we can, whether it's money or wheelchairs or whatever."

The veterans get involved with the city by providing services at funerals, delivering meals to about 200 homebound residents, distributing wheelchairs, holding car washes; to raise money and maintaining the grounds at Blessed Sacrament Church.

"A lot of people for the longest time had the wrong impression of veterans — that they're a bunch of drunks who don't get anything done," Sausedo said. "Well, we totally wanted to change that image, and we have."

Passing the torch

The veterans also help out at local schools, giving presentations about their experiences in the war and replacing worn out flags on campus.

"If we see a tattered flag, especially at the schools, we'll replace it," Sausedo said.

"The more they can help us educate our children on flags and patriotism, the better," Tolleson Elementary District Superintendent Bill Christensen said.

The Tolleson VFW was first instituted as Post 8016 in 1967, but was disbanded in 1988, according to the Veterans of Foreign Wars Department of Arizona. It was reinstated as Post 6310 in 1991. Two years ago, the post had 183 members and has since grown to 394.



PAUL SAUSEDO, QUARTERMASTER of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 6310 in Tolleson, affixes a new POW-MIA flag to replace a tattered one that flew in front of the post. Post 6310 has been named the No. 1 post in the nation for community service.

"It takes a membership's help for us to accomplish this," Sausedo said. "I have to get these guys to back me up and we have to get it done."

The veterans' next fundraiser will be grilling hamburgers and hot dogs from 3 to 6 p.m. Saturday at Pepe's Lounge, 9152 W. Van Buren St. The cost will be \$5 per plate.

"Our VFW has been a huge asset, because it keeps us in touch with our veterans and gives the city an opportunity to show how important they are to us," Assistant City Manager John Paul Lopez said. "They do quite a bit here, because they have a group that loves to get involved."

During the state convention last month, the post was also presented with numerous awards.

- Sausedo was named to the All State Quartermaster team for the fourth time in five years.

- Commander Ralph Arvins was named to the All State Commanders team for the second year.

- Service Officer Julio Martinez received the Service Officer of the Year award for helping soldiers with post-traumatic stress disorder file paperwork to get benefits.

"I devoted myself to help all veterans, because we're all brothers in the same cause," said Martinez, who served in the Vietnam War. "By continuing my service, I can help them out in the long run."

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