

Spectrum Business Quarterly

VFW 'fulfills the brotherhood you had while serving'

By Deborah Rose

A resource, a gathering place, an open door for camaraderie.

These are just a few of the things offered by the Andrew B. Mygatt Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 1672 in New Milford.

For Bob Madorran, 27, of Gaylordsville, the post has played — and still plays — an integral role in his healing after serving in the Army National Guard for six years, including a tour in Afghanistan in 2010.

"One of the VFW members saw me all broken up from my injuries," Madorran said of how he first learned of the VFW, "and saw I was getting nowhere" with securing support for his medical needs through the Veterans Hospital and the other resources.

He accepted the invitation to attend a meeting and joined shortly thereafter.

"I was all beat up and I didn't want to hear about anything," Madorran said.

When he went to the VFW he felt "a comfort ... it was a bunch of guys who knew where I was coming from."

Members organized and secured financial support for Madorran and put him in touch with other resources to follow up on some of the challenges he faced to ensure his needs were met.

"I like the camaraderie with the guys," said resident John Avalone, a Vietnam veteran who has been a VFW member since 1990. "I come (to the VFW) a couple of times a week and go to meetings."

While the VFW was "created to help war veterans — to make sure veterans get their benefits," it's more than that, said post commander Jim Delancy during a recent interview at the VFW on Avery Road.

The local post follows in the footsteps of its national parent organization, which "strives to do



DEBORAH ROSE/STAFF PHOTOS

The Andrew B. Mygatt VFW Post 1672 has a proud history in New Milford. Representing the post and its ladies' auxiliary are, from left, in front row, auxiliary members Kathy Simmons, treasurer; Bette Lou Emmons, president; and Kathy Maher, secretary; and in back row, the post's officer of the day, Yvon Dumas; Junior Vice Commander Herman Izzard; Commander Jim Delancy; Senior Vice Commander John Avalone and Quartermaster Wayne Maher.

good things for deserving people — our veterans, their families and their communities," according to the organization's website, www.vfw.org. "From local grassroots ideas to national influence, we work every day to make a difference."

Locally, the VFW and its ladies' auxiliary (see sidebar, Page S11) offer veterans resources, as well as community activities and educational programs, and supports veterans' efforts and projects in general, such as the Prisoner of War/Missing in Action Connecticut Forget-Me-Nots, based in New Milford, which hosts an annual dance at the hall.

The VFW is open to men and women who are U.S. citizens and served honorably in an overseas conflict, received a campaign medal for overseas service, served 30 consecutive days or 60 non-consecutive days, or received hostile-fire or imminent-danger pay.

Membership plays a vital role in the VFW and its future.

Although the local post has a membership

of 254 — some of whom are lifetime members and/or have retired out of town and state — less than 20 members are active.

It can be challenging to keep things going with a limited active membership, and with the majority of the work falling on the shoulders of those few.

Local officers and members of the post's ladies' auxiliary hope to break the VFW's stereotype, educate the community about its role and bring in new members.

"I think there's a stereotype," said Kathy Maher, secretary of the VFW Ladies Auxiliary. "People think (the VFW is made up) of a bunch of old guys, and people don't think we have things to offer."

Maher emphasized the men and women who continue to serve today can find the VFW a valuable tool upon their return home.

"I had no idea how involved the VFW is," Madorran said. "Everything they do helps another veteran."

Quartermaster Wayne Maher, of New Milford,

looks forward to the next generation of veterans.

"What I'd like to have happen is to have the younger men and women come in and realize the VFW isn't just for elder folks," he said. "There's potential here for (the younger veterans) to give back to the community. That's huge."

Maher said he envisions the post being more active and perhaps someday serving as a community center of sorts — a destination — with an in-house resource center for veterans and their families, and a gathering place where people can visit with one another and use WiFi.

The post already has a valuable resource in Delancy, who is the post's veterans service officer and is commander of District 5 in the state, of which Post 1672 is a part.

Madorran is one of the newer, younger members, who recently joined and was helped by the VFW. He served in the infantry during his tour in Afghanistan, where he suffered traumatic brain injury after being struck



The Veterans of Foreign Wars hall in New Milford is located on Avery Road, off Route 202.

with an ammunition can, and survived a 15-foot fall from a cliff halfway through a patrol, injuring his back, hip and legs.

The VFW "is not just a hangout" for older folks, he said, citing the camaraderie among members. "Even though there's an age difference, they still feel like my brothers," Madorran said, noting the friendships that have formed.

The camaraderie and understanding shared among members "fulfills

that brotherhood you had while serving," he said.

Madorran has shared his positive experience with a fellow veteran, also 27, who is expected to join the VFW in the coming weeks.

For more information about the VFW, call the Avery Road post at 860-354-7995 or 203-770-3665, find "New Milford VFW on Facebook or visit www.vfw.org or www.vfwct.org.

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