

235 Volunteer Hours

VFW member honored for work at food pantry

May 12, 2021

Since 2019, Robbie Harkabus has been on a mission to help feed veterans who are food insecure in Ashtabula County, Ohio. The VFW Post 2836 Junior Vice Commander volunteers with Feed Our Vets Ashtabula each month.

In January, Post 2836 Commander Jim Jones presented Harkabus with a certificate recognizing him for 235 hours of volunteer service to the food pantry.

“I was totally shocked by this,” Harkabus said. “I didn’t expect anything like that.”

Feed Our Vets is opened in October 2019. About the same time, Harkabus sold his business, Harbor Beverage and was looking for a group to donate his coolers and other items.

That’s how he met Feed Our Vets founder Tracy Bidwell. A month later, he began volunteering for the monthly food distribution and hasn’t missed a Saturday since.

“Robbie is there all the time and he puts a lot of hours in,” Commander Jones said. “He does a lot to help out veterans, and we wanted to do this for him.”

The Air Force vet, who served in Thailand from January 1973-August 1974, said the third Friday of the month volunteers gather to pack boxes for distribution the following day.

Each box has about 25-30 pounds of food and contains items like canned goods, cereal, cheese, eggs and meat.

“A lot of times, veterans on fixed incomes have no money left by the end of the month due to medicine,” Harkabus said. “This box helps hold them over. When I leave there, I’m really tired, but it’s a good tired. It makes me feel great.”

In addition to donations from the Cleveland Food Bank, Feed Our Vets receives donations of food and money from the community.

The food pantry serves 235-240 veterans the third Saturday of the month. Vets pull in, show

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their DD-214, pop their trunk and a volunteer places the box into their trunk.

Harkabus said the volunteers are like family. He added that the residents of Ashtabula County are “fantastic” in their giving.

Jones said Post 2836 donated toward the purchase of a permanent building for the pantry and also purchased a new freezer for the facility.

“A lot of veterans don’t want to use the pantry because they think it’s for the ‘needy,’” Jones said. “But we encourage all that may need a little help to use it.

Harkabus says he enjoys the camaraderie that comes with serving at the food pantry.

“It’s a good feeling to serve alongside other people again,” he said.