

'We Pride Ourselves in the Work We Do'

A VFW Post in California created a free service for veterans in need of tree and brush removal

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When Evan Tyler Cruz became active with VFW in 2022, the first thing he inspired in his fellow Post 904 members in Loomis, California, was to find new ways to serve veterans.

A skilled arborist with experience in managing sick and fallen trees, Cruz joined Post 904 Senior Vice Commander and Service Officer Shawn Simmons in establishing two work parties that would deploy when needed by veterans around the county.

Nestled between rural communities 30 miles to the northeast and Sacramento about 25 miles to the southwest, Post 904 members soon found themselves with many opportunities to serve veterans across Placer County, California.

“It is very labor-intensive but just like when we were in the military, it has built strong bonds and camaraderie,” said Simmons, an Air Force veteran with deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan. “We pride ourselves in the work we do and seeing the smiles and hearing the ‘thank yous’ that come from a job well done is of immeasurable satisfaction to us.”

The work parties vary based upon weather, intensity of the job, length of the job and availability. They are made up of five to eight VFW members organized by Simmons and often deploy with an assortment of equipment that includes wood splitters, dump trailers, quads, chains, ratchet straps, axes, ladders, weed eaters and chainsaws.

“We use chainsaws to cut fallen trees and split the rounds into firewood for use by the veteran property owners,” Simmons said. “In some cases, if the veteran doesn’t need the firewood, we load it up and haul the firewood to other veterans who can use it during the winter.”

Throughout 2023, Post 904’s work parties have assisted more than 25 veterans and removed more than 20 tons of lumber from their properties.

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They also have provided power chairs, downed trees, made dump runs, conducted lawn and house maintenance, repaired equipment and cleaned up trash at veterans' properties.

"They are always amazed when we show up with our team," Simmons said. "California is notorious for people hustling people, so they are often surprised when we show up free of charge, in good spirits, and get it done."

Simmons added that the Post hopes to continue providing service opportunities every week to 10 days, though the work "ebbs and flows" depending on the need.

"We also try and keep in touch with those we help for further assistance," Simmons said. "Our goal is not just to provide a service but to build quality friendships that will hopefully last a lifetime."

This article is featured in the 2023 February issue of [VFW magazine](#), and was written by [Ismael Rodriguez Jr.](#), senior writer for VFW magazine.