

LOCAL NEWS

Twenty years later, volunteers still want to 'Rebuild Together'

Hoffman once again helping out veterans on 9/11



Cal Maritime's Kyle Yamamoto loads supplies into the back of a vehicle during a Rebuilding Together Free Safe at Home Kit and Food Box Distribution to Veterans on Saturday. (Chris Riley/Times-Herald)

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On a day filled largely with sadness, Rebuilding Together Executive Director Elizabeth Hoffman wanted to wake up Saturday morning and feel more positive.

For over a decade the group Rebuilding Together has put on a Sept. 11 giveaway event for veterans. It's a way of helping out veterans in need, but also a way for people who like to volunteer to help out the community.

"I was very sad watching the news today," Hoffman said. "Hearing that one person say goodbye to his wife on the phone while on the plane was just too sad. So I'm here today to help out and try to do something positive. And as soon as I started working today I felt amazing and a lot better. The sense of humanity you feel when helping out others, that's what 9/11 is for me."

The event held at the Vallejo Veterans Building was a drive-thru giveaway special distribution dedicated to veterans, active military, and other military families in Solano County. The program was co-sponsored by Costco Vallejo, Wells Fargo, Home Depot, Phillips 66, Valero Benicia Refinery, Bank of America, Vallejo Community Presbyterian Church, and local community residents.

About an hour into the event, 75 cars had already driven up and taken advantage of the helping hand of these organizations. Hoffman said Rebuilding Together had enough for 275 people.

Solano residents showing a military identification were given a Smoke Alarm, CO alarm, fire extinguisher, an earthquake tool used to pry open doors and smash glass, an LED flashlight, an LED motion nightlight, light bulbs, trash bags, hand soap and sanitizer, face masks, safety information, a 20-pound box full of perishable food, a 15-pound box full of produce and a card from Cal Maritime students that helped out personally on Saturday.

In fact, 32 Cal Maritime students were on hand to help out the veterans, including freshman Nathan Trieu.

"I feel like I'm honored to be here and helping the veterans," Trieu said. "I'm only here because of my parents, so when I heard about this event and that I could help out I wanted to be here today."

Cal Maritime senior Kyle Yamamoto doesn't remember 9/11 since he was just 2, but he does remember his father working a very long shift soon in Los Angeles soon after after the tragic events. Yamamoto has volunteered at the event for four straight years.

Cal Maritime Community Engagement Program Specialist JoEllen Myslik said her job is to work with the school's cadets during the day, but also educated them on what happened 20 years ago as most of the students don't remember the day or weren't born yet.

"Although we acknowledge that what happened that day was a terrible situation, we still want to do our best to help out," Myslik said. "I remember that I was supposed to fly out on an airplane later that day and my mom called and said, 'Have you gotten on the plane yet?' I felt so emotional watching everything that happened. I remember later walking around aimlessly and it felt like I was in this big fog. Nothing seemed real."

Rebuilding Together Solano County (RTSC) is a local nonprofit organization dedicated to allowing low-income veterans, seniors and disabled residents the ability to remain in their home – safely and with dignity. Their mission is to provide safe and healthy homes, revitalize communities and rebuild lives.

Since May, 2020, RTSC has provided a Drive Thru Food Pantry to low-income veteran, senior and disabled families in Solano County as well as 14 mobile sites including low-income mobile home parks throughout Solano County, a low-income elementary school and disabled organizations. RTSC has distributed more than 500,000 pounds of food to in the past year as part of Feeding America / Food Bank of Solano Contra Costa County.

"It's been really nice to see all the people come up and get excited, especially when they see what they are getting," Hoffman said. "It makes this sad day a little more positive. There will be no more watching the news today when I get home!"

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