

How Chicago women are lending their hands and warming veteran hearts

Helping homeless veterans the best way that they can

By Kami M. Simmons

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[LINK TO VIDEO]

HOMEWOOD - Hands from the Heartland is a knitting and crocheting program that has been going on for over 10 years. Volunteers in the group knit and crochet hats and afghans for the active military and homeless veterans. They send their finished designs to active military and homeless veterans via the Chicago West Side Jesse Brown Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center, formerly known as the West Side VA Medical Center. The medical center serves over 58,000 enrolled vets who reside in the Chicago metro area. The medical facility serves veterans in the City of Chicago, Cook County, Illinois, and in four counties in northwestern Indiana.

According to VA.gov statistics, nearly over 600,000 people in the U.S. are homeless and there are over 60,000 homeless veterans. This means that 10.6 percentage of the nation's homeless population are veterans.

“I really feel these veterans who we hear called, homeless, is a pathetic situation for this country. Veterans who have served our country and be homeless when they come home from doing it?” says Joyce Becker, a volunteer member of the group who has been crocheting for 79 years.

Joyce and others in the group are aiming to combat this issue.

“I’m glad to be part of helping to fill that need a little bit,” says Elaine, a former South Side Chicago K-12 high school music teacher of 36 years. She makes up to thirty-five to forty hats a year for this program.

Hands from the Heartland founder, Mary McDermed says, “We’ve sent over 650 hats...and they, in turn, thank us.”

Her contribution to the Chicago VA community and beyond has come full circle. She’s a spouse to a World War II veteran who celebrates his 92nd birthday next month.

They are looking for monetary donations, yarn, and more volunteers to continue to help with this effort.

WHERE: Homewood Public Library

WHEN: March 9th, 2019 from 10AM-12PM is the next meeting

CONTACT INFORMATION: 708-799-5071

*** Yarn is always provided.