

Vets helping vets: American Legion brings Christmas to retirement facilities

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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GODFREY - Veterans from **American Legion Post 354** visited residents of **Integrity Healthcare** of Godfrey Wednesday afternoon to deliver Christmas cheer.

Commander Joe Brice and **Rick Plunkett** visited the facility with gifts provided by "**Yanks**," a group within the **American Legion** dedicated to getting gifts and much-needed items for fellow veterans residing in care facilities. Brice said he goes into the facilities with a list of items and invites veterans there to mark the ones they wanted. Five veterans at Integrity Healthcare asked for jogging suits. Two others who were not present during the first visit were given bags filled with ready-to-use gifts such as socks.

"I don't know what all is in it, but it looks like a lot of good stuff that is ready to use," Brice said.

Over the course of Wednesday, Dec. 7 Brice and Plunkett visited around 30 veterans and gave gifts to each. In the morning, they visited **Rosewood Care Center** on Humbert Road. After the visit to Integrity Healthcare, located on West Delmar, the pair went to **Eunice C. Smith Nursing Home** near Alton Memorial Hospital.

Seven veterans received gifts at Integrity Healthcare, including **John Buescher**, **Bob Howard**, **Eldon Smith**, **Robert Pohlman**, **Carl Markovich** and **Sam Jones**.



Brice said the American Legion is currently working towards developing more programs for veterans, including organizing visits to care facilities so veterans have someone to talk to who is not a part of their family. He said the legion's current administration is being proactive with the needs of all veterans, regardless of age.

"A lot of veterans right here in town don't know what's out there for vets to get, and some of them won't know until they ask," he said.

Membership of American Legion posts is on the decline. Brice said old members were dying and no one was taking their places. The post in **Gillespie** recently closed, and Brice said members were welcome to join the Alton post, but he recognized the amount of travel involved.

"Many people are a part of the American Legion, but a lot of them aren't affiliated with any post," he said.

The Alton American Legion Post 354 is located at 600 George Street. It can be reached at (618) 462-2644.



