

# Difference Makers: Vet-Owned Blue Ice Creamery Teams With Madison County Veterans Commission To Provide Ice Cream For First Responders

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer  
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*of the Riverbend*

**EAST ALTON** - A retired Navy veteran and law enforcement officer who now owns an ice cream stand in East Alton has teamed up with the Madison County Veterans Assistance Commission to provide ice cream to first responders and medical staffers during the COVID-19 pandemic as a way to thank them for their service.

Kyle Shirley, who operates the Blue Ice Creamery stand in East Alton along with his wife, Kelley, has joined forces with the VAC to start the Happy Heroes project, which provides gallons of ice cream to the local first responders. Kyle Shirley is a Navy veteran who retired last year from the United States Marshall's Service due to medical reasons, and opened the stand shortly after his retirement.

The project began last month, and has already been successful in providing the first responders with ice cream.

"We are working with the Veterans Assistance Commission of Madison County," Shirley said in a recent interview. "What they're doing is, at the start of April, they began purchasing ice cream for first responders, both firefighters and police officers, and this week, they're buying ice cream for hospitals, and the reason is that on Wednesday (May 6), it was Nurses Appreciation Day. So they bought ice cream for the hospitals, and it's mostly to show extra appreciation for all their extra work during COVID-19."

The Commission bought the ice cream at a wholesale price, and distributes it to the hospitals, as well as police stations and fire houses to show their support to the first responders, and a way to show support to veterans-owned small businesses such as Blue Ice Creamery.

"One of the reasons they chose us is that we're a veteran-owned small business," Shirley said, "and another reason was to get the Veterans Assistance Commissions' name out there, so veterans can know what they can do to help them. It's an awesome organization."

The VAC helps to provide military veterans and the unremarried spouses of deceased veterans needed services, such as rent and utility payments, providing food and personal hygiene items, burial expenses for indigent veterans, referrals for homeless and transitional housing, limited emergency dental and property tax assistance and other services as needed. The commission also works to provide advocacy-based and administrative services with the Veterans Administration for pension benefits, weekly counseling sessions, assistance in obtaining military and medical records, and many transitional services for job placement, bus transportation, a computer lab and

community transition. The VAC also partners with the Disabled American Veterans network to provide transportation to medical appointments and other needed medical services.

The providing of the ice cream is a win-win situation for everyone involved.

"They're helping us," Shirley said, "and they're also helping the first responders, and they're doing a fantastic thing."

It's also a way to thank the first responders and hospital workers for their service during the current pandemic and crisis that has struck around the area, nation and world.

"We wanted to thank the first responders for all their hard work during an unprecedented time," Shirley said. "We want them to know that they're appreciated and thought of. I'm a veteran and a retired first responder, so I see both sides of it."

For more information about the Veterans Assistance Commission and their services, please call (618) 296-4554, E-mail the Commission at [mcvac@co.madison.il.us](mailto:mcvac@co.madison.il.us), or log in to their website, [www.co.madison.il.us/departments/veterans\\_assistance\\_commission/index.php](http://www.co.madison.il.us/departments/veterans_assistance_commission/index.php)

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