



Benefits support Guard fund that helps families of those deployed

Operation Thank You at Redhook soon

Photo 1 of 2 | Zoom Photo +



Andrew Boyden sits for a tattoo with clown Pam "Lollipop" Bridge.

Photo by Andrew Moore - Sun 08/14/2005 in Portsmou

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August 03, 2008 6:00 AM

PORTSMOUTH — What do two shooting tournaments, The Meat House and Redhook Ale Brewery have in common?

All are holding events to raise money for a nonprofit organization — the Chaplain's Emergency Relief Fund — which gives financial assistance to families that have someone deployed through the N.H. National Guard.

Mark Forster, retired National Guard chaplain, said the fund was established in 1990 during the First Gulf War.

"It's a fund to provide quick temporary help for families in need," he said. "It is completely run by volunteers and typically serves Air and Army Guard with a military connection with New Hampshire. It's aid for cars that break down and they just don't have the financial ability to cover it. Sometimes we help with rent and mortgage, fuel and utility bills and medical bills. We try not to pay credit cards because you don't know what's on them."

The fund is operated independently of the N.H. National Guard.

The requests are checked out. Forster said they use the Red Cross to screen the inquiries. "The Army sometimes gets paychecks mixed up and we don't want any soldier in a combat zone worrying about how his wife gets to work if her car breaks down," he said.

The fund has very little red tape. Forster said 99.5 percent of the money goes to the financial aid. He said its only overhead is stationery, stamps and filing fees with the state for its nonprofit status.

"The grants are typically modest," Forster said. "I think right now we have a limit of about \$700. We network with other agencies for further help."

The program is totally supported with the generosity of the public through the events and donations.

"Sometimes people donate back after they are in a better place," Forster said. "As the mobilizations increase, our cases have gone up dramatically. This year we saw about 90 cases. From 1990 to present, we're well over 500. These are the largest mobilizations since WWII, so we need a lot of income available."

Chaplain Bill Paige is the head trustee of the fund. Anyone wishing to donate can send checks to Chaplain's Emergency Relief Fund at 279 Shaker Road, Concord, NH 03031.

The shooting tournaments happened this weekend on Saturday at the Pioneer Sportsmen Club in Dunbarton and today at the Major Waldron Sportsmen's Association in Barrington.

Rye resident John Tata helped organize both events.

"I heard about CERF a couple of years ago," Tata said. "My dad was involved with the Massachusetts National Guard. He retired as a lieutenant colonel, but has now passed away. I have an understanding of how it affects families."

The shooting events include a raffle for a SIG SAUER handgun. Tata said the winner would need to pass all the requirements that a person wanting to buy a handgun would, including a background check.

"SIG SAUER came and shot in another event," Tata said. "They have George Harris, a world-class trainer in the Reserves. SIG got behind it in a big way and they offered a certificate for one of their handguns."

There are other donations that will be raffled off as well.

Then, on Aug. 17, there is Operation Thank You, sponsored by The Meat House and Redhook. Open to the public, it begins at 11 a.m. and runs until 4 p.m.

Hosted by Greg Kretschmar from WHEB's Greg and the Morning Buzz, the event includes music, children's activities and a cookout. There is also a communications center where attendees can send audio/video greetings to loved ones in Iraq or Afghanistan. Tickets can be purchased at any Meat House. The cost is \$10 and children under 12 are admitted free. Proceeds are again donated to the Chaplain's Emergency Relief Fund.