

# Holiday SALUTE





# Donate to Military Support

Our veterans have enabled us to peacefully celebrate the holidays, so it's important to honor them during the holiday season, as well as throughout the year on a daily basis. One of the easiest and most effective ways to show our local heroes we care is by donating to military support organizations.

These entities are committed to providing a better life for veterans, whether they served decades ago in Vietnam or have recently returned home from efforts in the Middle East.

Read on to learn about a few of the nation's more prominent military organizations and don't forget to check in with your local military organization to see what kind of help is needed. Your time and monetary donations will help strengthen their ability to help veterans and their families in need.

## HOPE FOR THE WARRIORS

Military wives founded this organization in 2006. The group's mission is to enhance the quality of life for post-9/11 service members who have sustained physical and psychological wounds in the line of duty. The organization offers a broad range of services that include career transition and education programs, health and wellness counseling, and community-building initiatives – all designed to help veterans transition back into civilian life.

## IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN VETERANS OF AMERICA (IAVA)

This 10-year-old organiza-

tion that serves the 2.4 million veterans of Iraq. It was founded and built by an Iraq veter-

an to provide new veterans with health, education and employment support. The

group is also instrumental in connecting veterans with each other through active

networking and relationship-building opportunities.

## THE UNITED SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS (USO)

USO is a nonprofit organization chartered by Congress and since 1941 has provided care packages, entertainment and recreation-type services to military members and their families. It operates more than 135 centers worldwide, including 10 mobile canteens in the U.S. and overseas.

## HOMES FOR OUR TROOPS

For more than a decade, this group has built more than 150 mortgage-free and specially adapted houses for multiple amputees and veterans with traumatic brain injuries. It also adapts existing homes for handicap accessibility.

## DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS (DAV) CHARITABLE SERVICE TRUST

This organization supports physical and psychological rehabilitation programs that provide direct service to ill, injured or wounded veterans. Its suite of services include driver rehabilitation services for veterans with traumatic brain injuries, to treatment for post-service mental health.



# Spend Time with a Veteran

**T**he most priceless gift someone can give this holiday season is their time. This applies especially to our veterans who need our encouragement. Veterans in general are at risk for depression, anxiety, homelessness, joblessness and other more serious effects like suicide.

According to a report of 21 states by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, veterans comprised approximately 22.2 percent of all suicides reported during the project period. Some of our veteran population suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder that occurs after someone goes through a traumatic event like combat, assault or disaster.

These are unfortunate facts of veteran life, as they have given us so much of themselves to protect our freedom and safety. Our job as civilians is to do whatever we can to support veterans during tough times – and simply spending time with them can do wonders.

## VISIT WOUNDED VETS

A great way to show veterans you care is by visiting those who have been wounded. Your local veterans facility or hospital likely has visiting programs in place that can make this a possibility. Find out if you can arrange a visit by contacting the facility's staff, who may be able to point you in the direction of veterans in most need of human interaction.

Spend time with these veterans and really listen to their stories or questions. They may be interested to find out about you and your family as well, so be ready to fill them in. This



human relationship building can be a natural part of the healing process for them as they work through serious injuries and rehabilitation.

You may come to their mind as they are suffering through painful treatments, helping put their mind at ease. You never know what kind of impact your simple gesture of talking and visiting can have on a daily basis.

## SAY THANK YOU

No matter where and when you visit a veteran, one of the easiest ways to show your appreciation is by simply saying “thank you.” A sincere thanks can go a long way toward making veterans feel like their service has made a positive impact.

Say it verbally or put it in a written card. Veterans are hum-

ble people and deserve our thanks at every opportunity. This may seem like a small gesture, but a sincere thanks can brighten a veteran's day.

## HELP A VETERAN

One unique and well-deserved way to support veterans is to help them around the home. Perform home repairs or household chores for a veteran in need. Many suffering from

disability, a severe injury or even low income levels may be in need of this type of help.

If you have a particular handyman skill and see that a veteran is in need of help, offer your services for free. This can save them not only the effort of performing the repair themselves but also the cost of bringing in outside work. Your efforts will be appreciated for years to come.



# Unique Gift Ideas

Christmas can be a difficult time for veterans, especially those deployed or suffering from disabilities. This can make it the perfect time to make a positive impact with a thoughtful gift for our veterans and their families.

Think hard about the veteran in your life before settling on a gift. What does he or she really need this holiday season? Is there a gift that would make their lives easier? Is there an upcoming event they would love to experience? Think creatively when giving gifts to veterans. They have sacrificed so much for our country – the least we can do is show our appreciation with a well-thought Christmas present.

## UNIQUE GIFTS

Have a female veteran in need of some relaxation? Consider sending her on a trip to the spa or treating her with a pedicure foot set. Even soldiers need this type of pampering!

You can also give the gift of memories in the form of picture books or framed artwork with sentimental value.

Guys can also use some spoiling this holiday season in the form of a new grill or smoking oven. And who doesn't love the latest video game to help keep us young? Consider the hobbies and interests of your veteran friends and family members to treat them to the best presents possible.

Many military organizations offer custom-printing services for gifts like T-shirts, plaques and decorations. These can be great ways of offering gifts with



tailored messages for extra meaning.

## GIFTS FOR MILITARY SPOUSES & CHILDREN

Deployed veterans aren't the only ones in need of a pick-me-up this holiday season. Think of their family members. Sure, technology has made it

easier for military families to keep in touch thousands of miles apart. But there is no replacement for having a loved one home for the holidays.

Military spouses and children in your area may be disheartened this Christmas if their loved one is away, so do something special to brighten

their day. Invite them to your home for a holiday feast. Take them to enjoy your favorite traditional activities like attending a church program, going last-minute shopping or taking in a Christmas day movie.

Children would love that new technological device or hot-ticket toy. Consider sur-

prising them with their favorite snacks or meal – whatever brings a smile to their little faces.

Your actions will help keep their minds off the sadness they feel when they think of not being able to spend Christmas with their deployed veteran.





One of the best ways to salute your local veterans this holiday season is to give them jobs. Many business owners have taken note. According to a 2015 Bureau of Labor Statistics Report published by the Labor Department, unemployment among veterans is at its lowest rate since 2008.

With an economic upturn across the country and a more concerted effort to educate business owners on the benefits of hiring a veteran, this improvement has been in the works for many years.

So what is it about veterans that make them great employees? Read on for the top reasons to bring a veteran onboard in your organization.

#### **CROSS-TRAINING**

Military personnel, whether they are deployed or becoming specialized in a new discipline, are often cross-trained in multiple skills. The progression of a military career often involves numerous promotions and transitions into new units.

What does this mean for a business owner looking to make a great hire? Veterans often have broad, deep skill sets that makes them highly adaptable to new positions. Even if you're hiring for a spot that may be a bit outside of his or her military background, the rewards can outweigh the risks of hiring a veteran based on their diverse expertise.

#### **CORE STRENGTHS**

The background of a veteran includes many core strengths that will translate well into your company. They include:

- Working well in team environments and individual contributor roles.
- Handling concurrent responsibilities in demanding and high-stress situa-

tions.

- Having the self-confidence to take on new roles and responsibilities.
- Selfless commitment to others, including peers, senior leaders and customers.
- Strong organizational skills and meticulous attention to detail.
- Expert problem-solving abilities under fire.
- Commitment to following through on assignments.
- Exemplary work ethics developed through tough training.
- Dedication to policies, rules, regulations and procedures.
- Respect for authority and willingness to go above and beyond the job description.



# Sending Gifts Overseas

**T**here is power in words, and written letters can encourage and uplift those actively serving in our military this holiday season. For deployed military members overseas, providing our thoughts in written cards, letters or emails can give them great support.

Words can encourage, uplift and validate the efforts of our troops. They need to know we care and are thankful for their sacrifice. A lot of them will be gone during the holiday season and will miss their families while we enjoy ours.

Letters can be sent simply in an envelope or in addition to a card. Those cards can be homemade or bought at your local arts and crafts store.

## **INVOLVE THE KIDS**

If you are a teacher or Sunday school instructor, there are many ways to involve children in the process of writing and sending letters to deployed troops.

Make it a holiday class project that teaches art, writing, history and humanities all in one! It will allow the children to display their art talents by creating their own cards with markers and stickers and other crafts. They can write their own letters to tuck inside too.

A bit of history could be added to it with descriptions of the military and what they do. Invite a local veteran to come and visit the classroom. It is a good possibility that many of the students have family members in the military – maybe even a parent.

This project will also teach them to give to others. The development of character is



just as important as reading and writing. That makes it perfect also for the Sunday school class.

## **CARE PACKAGES**

If you want to give something bigger or specific to a special member of the military, a care package is a great idea. This would be perfect as

a holiday gift.

Your care package could include packaged non-perishable goodies for that special treat. Sometimes personal items are needed, so load up your package with toiletries, razors, lotions and toothpaste.

Some fun things to include would be card games to help

them pass the time. To make everyone happy, buy a pre-paid phone card for more personal phone calls. These types of ideas may sound simple, but the thought behind them will be appreciated by our deployed troops.

Many military organizations can walk you through the process of sending gifts

overseas, as some branches can have different requirements you will need to follow to ensure the timely delivery of your times.

Unless it is a surprise, always alert your veteran friend or family member to be on the lookout for a special piece of mail from you and yours.



# Volunteer in Your Area

**V**olunteering is a great way to get involved and help local veterans this Christmas. With many opportunities available both across the nation and in your specific region, it couldn't be easier to get involved.

So carve out some time and hook up with an organization that needs your time. The veterans of America thank you!

## WHY VOLUNTEER?

People choose to volunteer for many reasons, especially during the holiday season with veterans organizations. Doing so allows us to connect with those who proudly served our country.

The impact you can make on a veteran's life by simply volunteering your time is immeasurable. There are many veterans-focused organizations making major strides in bettering the lives of veterans, but more help is needed. So get involved today as a way to say "thank you" to those who have already given their time and efforts for you.

## NATIONAL PROGRAMS

If you're looking to make a difference at the national level, there are many great organizations aimed at doing just that. Check in with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs facilities in your area and find out how you can help.

These organizations are in need of your time and energy to carry out community-focused initiatives

aimed at strengthening their veteran services.

You may be asked to distribute marketing materials, serve meals or simply stop and chat with veterans recovering from various health or physical issues. Whatever your task, just know that your efforts will be appreciated during this busy holiday season.

## LOCAL & REGIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Oftentimes you can make a larger impact through involvement with locally focused organizations, which may be smaller chapters of the larger national groups. Find out what type of programs are in your area and see how you can help.

Utilize your skills to make the biggest difference. If you are a business owner, offer to provide your acumen in financial management, sales, marketing and team leadership. If you are a physician or nurse, there may be organizations in need of your medical expertise.

Own a pet or have a passion for animals? Many groups focus on training dogs for veterans. They need help caring for these future pets during their intense training period.

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# Properly Fly the Flag

**T**here is no better way to show veterans that you care this holiday season than by proudly hanging the American flag at your home or business. Following proper flag etiquette is key to pulling off an honorable display of appreciation and reverence.

The United States Flag Code establishes advisory rules for display and care of the United States flag. It is Chapter 1 of Title 4 of the United States Code, and is a federal law applied within U.S. jurisdiction.

The code is extensive with many rules and regulations. Visit [www.usflag.org](http://www.usflag.org) for the full list and be sure to share your findings with your friends and family members this holiday season. While all want to honor the veterans around us, we must ensure the proper flying of the flag in order to do so.

Here are a few of the bylaws under the code's section "Respect for Flag:"

- The flag should never be displayed with the union down, except as a signal of dire distress in instances of extreme danger to life or property.

- The flag should never touch anything beneath it, such as the ground, the floor, water, or merchandise.

- The flag should never be carried flat or horizontally, but always aloft and free.

- The flag should never be used as wearing apparel, bedding or drapery.

- The flag should never be fastened, displayed, used or stored in such a manner as to permit it to be easily torn, soiled or damaged in any way.



- The flag should never be used as a covering for a ceiling.

- The flag should never have placed upon it, nor on any part of it, nor attached to it any mark, insignia, letter, word, figure, design, picture or drawing of any nature.

- The flag should never be used as a receptacle for receiv-

ing, holding, carrying, or delivering anything.

- The flag should never be used for advertising purposes in any manner whatsoever. It should not be embroidered on such articles as cushions or handkerchiefs and the like, printed or otherwise impressed on paper napkins

or boxes or anything that is designed for temporary use and discard. Advertising signs should not be fastened to a staff or halyard from which the flag is flown.

- No part of the flag should ever be used as a costume or athletic uniform. However, a flag patch may be affixed to

the uniform of military personnel, firemen, policemen and members of patriotic organizations. The flag represents a living country and is itself considered a living thing. Therefore, the lapel flag pin being a replica, should be worn on the left lapel near the heart.