



American Legion post in Fairfield donates \$50,000 to Operation Lakeshore

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Jeff Hansen -- The Birmingham News



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Jose Flores, left, and Tony Newman with Cox Pools work on a fountain Monday at the Operation Lakeshore cottage community, where injured veterans and their families will stay while going through a Lakeshore Foundation program that teaches them to live independently. (NEWS STAFF/LINDA STELTER)

American Legion Post 137 in Fairfield has just 155 members and runs public bingo twice a week.

The paper cards cost a dollar apiece, and the small jackpots each night total about \$1,750.

But large deeds can grow from small gifts.

Next week the post will donate \$50,000 to Operation Lakeshore for naming rights to a duplex being built on the campus of Lakeshore Foundation in Homewood.

The duplex is one of 10 new homes called The Cottages of Lakeshore. After opening next month they will offer free lodging for injured veterans and their families who come for a Lima Foxtrot program at Lakeshore that teaches active and independent living -- despite paralysis, blindness, amputation or other service injury.

"We figured we couldn't afford not to do it," said Roy Gallups, commander of the Fairfield post. "When it was brought to the floor, it was a unanimous decision to do that for veterans."

Members of the American Legion post were swayed by a video that featured Noah Galloway, a double-amputee 101st Airborne veteran from Alabaster, and by a story about the cottages in The Birmingham News.

Gallups said the gift fits one of the main missions of the American Legion -- veterans rehabilitation. Other missions of the nonprofit organization for veterans who have served in the military during times of war are Americanism, such as the civics learned in Legion-sponsored Boys State and Girls State; child welfare, including youth baseball; and national security.

"Our commander wanted to do something that would be a lasting reflection of everyone who has gone before us in the post," said post adjutant James Mosier. "It's the largest gift we've ever attempted to accomplish."

The cottages are a \$2.3 million charitable effort organized by Birmingham's Capstone Companies and supported by more than 90 companies and groups that have donated labor, materials and money. They fill a need for veterans and families who come to a Lima Foxtrot program -- the chance to stay together as veterans learn how much they can accomplish physically.

Up to now, the 800 military service members who came to a Lima Foxtrot program stayed in dorms, while their families stayed elsewhere off campus.

This gift from the Fairfield American Legion pushes fundraising for the cottages past \$2 million, with just \$260,000 to go.

Operation Lakeshore is still offering several naming rights at the cottages, from benches to the naming of the entire community.

The gift from American Legion Post 137, founded in April 1932, is the second from a west Jefferson County veterans group. Last month the Veterans of Foreign Wars Bailey-Rogers Post in Bessemer gave \$50,000.

The two posts have decided to share one duplex, and plaques on each front door will mark the donations.

Mosier said the American Legion gift fits the pledge that post members recite at the close of each monthly meeting: "Let service to the community, state and nation be ever a main objective of the American Legion and its members . . . (and) nothing shall swerve us from the path of justice, freedom and democracy."

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