

FUNDRAISING

Chick-Fil-A, American Legion Auxiliary team with Soldier's Best Friend

By Marge Christianson
SPECIAL TO THE INDEPENDENT

Arrowhead Chick-Fil-A and Peoria's American Legion Auxiliary Unit 62 have teamed up to sponsor an Arizona veteran with a "comfort dog" through Soldier's Best Friend.

With their training facility in Peoria, Soldier's Best Friend pairs Arizona veterans who are diagnosed with post traumatic stress disorder or traumatic brain injury with a rescue dog — "touching two lives at once."

While there is no cost to the veteran, the cost of the program is \$4,000 per pair. Both the veteran and dog go through extensive training. In honor of the World War I peace treaty signed at 11 a.m. on the 11th day of the 11th month, Chick-Fil-A donated 11 percent of sales on Veteran's Day to the Auxiliary, covering more than half the cost of a sponsorship.

Soldier's Best Friend is a special emphasis this year for the Department of Arizona's Auxiliary president, Jan Cushing. As a result, Unit 62 will apply the donated funds and has raised the rest of the funds needed to sponsor a veteran and companion.

"We love partnering with Peoria's Auxiliary," explained Leo Lichter, Glendale resident and owner/operator of the Arrowhead Chick-Fil-A at 83rd Avenue and Bell Road. "They are in touch with opportunities to make a difference in the lives of military and veterans, and we are



From left, Leo Lichter, Jan Cushing, Becky Theissen, and Alison Bosen. [Submitted Photo]

pleased to be part of the wonderful things they do."

Unit 62 recently worked with Major League Baseball to conduct a Veteran's Day tribute at a fall league game at the Peoria Sports Complex, 16101 N. 83rd Ave. More than 1,000 spectators were greeted with American flags and "In Memorium" poppies distributed by American Legion Auxiliary Juniors, Sons of the American Legion and Dysart High School JROTC members. Complimentary tickets were distributed to veterans by West Valley American Legion posts, Arrowhead Chick-Fil-A and Mayor Cathy Carlat, among others.

"We look for opportunities, large and small, to support veterans with the help of other organizations," said Unit 62 President and Sun City resident Mary Ruehs.

For example, Unit 62 acquired more than 50 cases of bottled water through Fry's Marketplace and more than 200 pairs of shoes from a local sporting store (whose owner-

ship wished to remain anonymous) for U.S. Vets, a group home for veterans in need.

"We find that organization want to help, but aren't sure how or don't have the mar power," Ms. Ruehs continued. "That's where we come in."

Unit 62 received wheelchair bags filled with comfort items from the Daughters of the American Revolution for distribution to veterans. In December, the unit sponsored an annual holiday party for Luke Air Force families with a deployed airman. Support from local businesses helped make the party successful.

To learn more about the ALA's mission or to volunteer, donate or join, visit www.ALAFORVeterans.org. To contact the local American Legion Auxiliary in Peoria, email ALAAunit62AZ@gmail.com

Editor's Note: Marge Christianson is public relations volunteer with American Legion Auxiliary, John J. Morris Unit 62, Peoria.