

VACF AWARDS \$500 TO EAGLES



The Vermillion Area Community Foundation recently awarded \$500 to the Fraternal Order of Eagles "The Mission Continues" project. The project involves renovating the basement of the Eagles Club at 114 W. Main St. in Vermillion to provide Veterans of all ages a place to gather for fellowship and meetings as well as space for Veterans to store flags and other items. Pictured (from left) are area Veterans Club members Eddie Delarosa, Brendan Whalen, Shawna Christie, Emily Wiess, Greg Christie, Eric Gage, LeighAnn Dunn, project coordinator Ryan Bartholomaus and Jerry Rodriguez receiving a check from Young Moore, (VACF board member) Cliff Deverell, (representing the Fraternal Order of Eagles) Paula Keller, (VACF chair) Ted Muenster, (VACF board member) and Anthony Edelen (VACF board member).

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especially appropriate, given that Christmas is coming up and these are things they probably would really appreciate having." Simunek said she does not have a specific goal in mind in terms of the number of donations received.

"This is the first drive that

I'll be doing with (household) items instead of food, so right now I don't really know what to expect," she said. "I'm hoping to have a lot of items, but I'm not sure what I will be getting."

"I'm hoping for a lot of community involvement, for a lot of people to make a good turnout," she said.

Although it's still early in the drive, Simunek said she has received good responses from people who have heard about it.

"People do seem interested in wanting to help out," she

said. "It's always positive feedback."

A native of Hot Springs, Simunek was fourth runner-up for Miss South Dakota in 2011 and second runner-up in 2012. She also is a long-term student volunteer at the VA Black Hills Health Care System.

Advocating for veterans is something she plans to make a lifetime pursuit, she said.

"My grandfather was a veteran, my great-grandfather was a veteran, I have two cousins who are currently

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"The conditions were terrible, and we loved every single minute of it," Mercado said. "We knew it was only a matter of time before we transformed our outpost into a well protected fort that provided our soldiers with everything they needed and much more."

Completing the task on time was an operational victory, he said, because it allowed the company to project influence over the district from a local center and allowed for a rapid response within the district.

"Most importantly, it allowed us to foster better relationships with the Afghan people we were charged to protect," Mercado said.

The Bushmaster Company next turned its attention to the enemy's headquarters, and were again met with an obstacle. The Taliban had retreated toward Dast-e Archi following a long battle with the previous unit, and it had destroyed many roads and bridges along the way.

After repairing the roadways, the company moved into Dast-e Archi, finding success where many thought it was impossible.

"We had been warned that Dast-e Archi was so dangerous, that we would be unable to penetrate into the district at all," Mercado said. "Our first mission, however, resulted in us clearing through nearly the entire district."

Having penetrated deep into an enemy stronghold, the company was determined to hold the ground it had fought desperately to seize. This required some help.

"Too small of a company to physically hold the terrain by ourselves, we created space for the local police to move in and for (a local security force) to hold the terrain," Mercado said.

With everything in place, the Bushmaster Company finally began implementing its campaign.

The plan targeted the relationship between the enemy and the people of the region with a combination of infantry missions and more peaceful solutions.

"In addition to more

conventional infantry-type combat operations like raids, ambushes, reconnaissance and security patrols to clear Imam Sahib and Archi Districts of insurgent activity, we often found ourselves engaged in situations that required a more delicate touch, including mediation, conflict resolution and crisis management," Mercado said.

After several successful months, he said the company transitioned from "a population-centric counterinsurgency campaign to a security force assistance mission," and he relinquished his command to assume command of his battalion's Headquarters & Headquarters Company.

While he is unsure of the mark the Bushmaster Company's work will make on the region, Mercado said he was pleased with the success of the mission. However, he knows the war is not over.

"Looking back on the experience, I know that though we accomplished much, much more remains for others to complete," he said.

serving, as well," she said. "I believe every citizen needs to get involved."

Simunek said she hopes

other feel the same way.

"I'm just hoping for a great turnout and for a lot of community involvement," she

said. "I hope everybody understands it's a really good cause and will help families in need."

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Holiday Open House

Thursday, December 13 | 1pm - 4pm

There is no time more fitting to say *thank you* and to wish you a happy holiday season. Please join us at our Holiday Open House for cookies, refreshments and door prizes.

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