

Prison Inmates Donate to VFW

A VFW Post in California works together with a group of incarcerated veterans who have devoted themselves to serve the veterans and local communities outside of the prison

Mar 11, 2024

When VFW Post 7168 in Sanger, California, struggled financially five years ago, Jim Anderson found help in the unlikelyst of places.

Anderson, who had transferred to Post 7168 to help it stay open, brought this up to a group of incarcerated veterans he sponsored and met with weekly at the Avenal State Prison in Avenal, California.

“Since I started doing a little bit of counseling with them seven or eight years ago, I quickly learned they are a very strong group of veterans,” said Anderson, a past Post 3225 commander and current Department of California District 9 quartermaster. “Despite what they have done in the past, they have been very committed to helping our veterans and the community where they can.”

On behalf of the Veterans Group of Avenal, the prisoners began raising funds for Post 7168 by collecting donations around the prison, as well as by having Post 7168 auction their artwork at golf tournaments open to the community.

“They do their own fundraising activities within the prison, and quite often, they get the rest of the blocks to donate,” Anderson said. “It requires the help of the officials within the prison, but they are good talkers and usually get that kind of support to allow them to fund-raise.”

They have since helped raise thousands of dollars for Post 7168 and its initiatives, which include Post grants for local veterans in need, as well as donations to the Fresno VA Medical Center in Fresno, California, homeless shelters in Fresno and Sanger, and overseas missionaries.

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

406 W. 34th Street
Kansas City, MO 64111
Office 816.756.3390
Fax 816.968.1157

WASHINGTON OFFICE

200 Maryland Ave., N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002
Office 202.543.2239
Fax 202.543.6719

info@vfw.org
www.vfw.org

Their most recent fundraiser was held on Sept. 22, when the prisoners helped raise \$3,138.56 during a food sale at the prison's canteen, which they later presented to the Post in the form of a novelty check. They are allowed to do about two of these a year, according to Anderson.

The Veterans Group of Avenal also makes cards throughout the year and presents them to Anderson for distribution to local veterans' hospitals, Blue Star mothers and others around the two communities.

"The scope of who they touch is rather large for such a small group of veterans," Anderson said. "They are making a real difference, and they have done this type of work several times a year."

Anderson says that Post 7168 shows its gratitude by donating art supplies and other equipment to the prison. He added that working with more than 200 incarcerated veterans at the prison has been personally fulfilling.

"One of the most gratifying things I have done is work with this group of veterans over the years," Anderson said. "We have built a great relationship, and I have seen them time and again repent for what they did on the outside by committing themselves to serving others."

This article is featured in the 2024 March issue of [VFW magazine](#), and was written by [Ismael Rodriguez Jr.](#), senior writer for VFW magazine.