



American Legions best kept Secret?

Operation Comfort Warriors is a program dedicated to meeting the needs of wounded, injured or ill military personnel by providing them with comfort items not usually supplied by the government. OCW ensures

that patients at U.S. military hospitals and warrior transition units are given items like sweat suits, DVDs, puzzles, electronic devices, books, calling cards and more. OCW also provides larger items such as ping pong tables, entertainment centers, computers, kayaks and other recreational goods for use by wounded warriors in common areas.

This program started out small but with the help of Past National Commander James E. Koutz, this has become one of our most important charities we have! The Sons of the American Legion as well as the American Legion Riders have also helped in bringing OCW into the limelight by hosting fundraising events all over the country, bringing in hundreds of thousands of dollars. Holding fundraisers such as fish fry's, barbecues, motorcycle rides, golf tournaments, walkathons and even fishing tournaments are ideal for generating funds to donate to OCW. My squadron, 327 in Norfolk, VA has partnered with Joe Thompson owner of Koru Village and the Avon Fishing Pier in Avon NC to hold the PBR Classic Fishing Tournament on Veterans Day weekend to benefit OCW. Over 50 fishermen and woman, fish day and night reeling in Red Drum and Bluefish hoping for the best catch. Pabst Blue Ribbon Beer along with a lot of local and regional sponsors help make this possible. Tournament registration fees, sponsor fees, raffle prizes, 50/50 drawings and donations all benefited OCW. Over the last 2 years we have raised more than \$14,000. Each year the tournament has grown and we are looking forward to our biggest year yet in 2018.

So why the Secret? Everyone has heard of **Wounded Warrior Foundation** because of all the money they spend paying actors to advertise for them. They also pay their directors and staff, so even though they are doing a lot of good for our Veterans, a lot of money is going to the wrong places. **DID YOU KNOW 100% of donated funds** go directly to purchasing items and providing recreational activities for recovering warriors? All of OCW's administrative and marketing expenses are covered by membership dues received by the Legion. This makes for an easy sell to potential donors as they know all their money is going to help our Veterans. The biggest problem I see is that most people not affiliated with the legion and some who are, don't know anything about OCW. That's why it's up to us to keep on having fundraisers and spreading the word through our local news and social media outlets. Below are a couple of early examples showing some early growth for O.C.W.

February 2010

The entire Legion family bands together and wins \$250,000 for Operation Comfort Warriors (OCW) in PepsiCo's Refresh Everything Project, submitting the most votes in an online contest and beating out hundreds of other groups and charities to take first place in the contest's first month. A big part of getting the word out was the *American Legion Online Update* e-newsletter. This is an early example of the still growing power of online and social media to augment everything the Legion does.

Aug. 30, 2013: National Commander James E. Koutz announced that the American Legion family raised more than \$1.1 million for Operation Comfort Warriors during the 2012-2013 fundraising year. It easily surpassed his original goal of \$500,000.

Raising awareness and funds for OCW has become a passion of mine. Won't you at your Squadron or Post join in, have a fundraiser and help make this the best year yet for OCW and our Veterans! Thanks to all our Veterans for their service and sacrifice to our great nation, and know The Sons of the American Legion has your back!

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