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## Travis airmen volunteer for those 'who paved the way'

Help Rebuilding Together's Veterans Day activities



Married couple Brent and Ashlie Sarte help fill emergency preparedness boxes that Rebuilding Together will give out to veterans on Veterans Day. (Chris Riley/Times-Herald)

By **RICHARD FREEDMAN** | [rreedman@timesheraldonline.com](mailto:rreedman@timesheraldonline.com) | Vallejo Times Herald  
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Elizabeth Hoffman never served in the military. And she doesn't have any relatives in the military.

Yet, the executive director of Rebuilding Together Solano County lights up at every home renovation for low-income veterans, or dropping off food at veterans buildings, or as she and others will do on Veterans Day next Thursday, drop off food boxes and hundreds of Safe At Home Kits.

"I have such an infinity for them," Hoffman said of veterans, laughing that "I have adopted some."

The source of Hoffman's inspiration is simple: "People have sacrificed health and in some cases lives for our country. This is our small part in saying 'thank you.'"

On Friday, Hoffman coordinated RTSC volunteers and 15 airmen from Travis Air Force Base in an assembly line boxing 1,000 Safe at Home Kits, with many expected to be delivered at Vallejo's two traditional Veterans Day ceremonies — the Mare Island Cemetery from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m., and behind City Hall from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Next Thursday's efforts complements the 250 Safe at Home kits Rebuilding Together distributed at the Veterans Building on Admiral Callaghan Lane on Sept. 11.

Sgt. Hongtao Woo coordinated Friday's Travis Air Force Base contingency from Fairfield and said the community project takes on special meaning because it benefits the older veterans.

"I think it means a lot," Woo said. "They paved the road for us to be here today. It's one of the smaller things we could do that helps them out a lot."

Eight years at Travis, Woo pondered years from now when young veterans perhaps help him out.

"Hopefully, for sure," he smiled.

Woo had joined 250 colleagues in 2019 in a volunteer effort for Rebuilding Together and happily returned with members of the 9th Air Squadron.



The help included airman Brent Sarte, 22, and his civilian wife, Ashlie, who worked out their own assembly line — husband walks backward holding the cardboard box and wife drops in the numerous emergency and PPE items.

Why volunteer Friday?

"Honestly, it seemed like a good thing not only for me, but it makes the Air Force look good," Brent Sarte said. "I want to make sure what we're doing is for the right cause and helping the people that paved the way for the Air Force and armed forces in general, I think, is a good thing to come and help out. It gives you that feeling after you're done that you're doing something for someone who needs it."

Ashlie Sarte joined her husband in Fairfield a few months ago after relocating from their former Las Vegas home.

"I think when he joined the Air Force, it was a bit of a shock at the time, being a girlfriend," she said. "Once you get into the community, especially the military community, it opens your eyes to a lot of people. The kindness they show one another is a lot different than in the civilian world. If you can spread that kindness and do something like this, like he (Brent) said, it's paving the road."

After two years after enlisting, the Air Force "really changed me for the better," said Brent Sarte. "It's helping me develop skills."

Sarte's wife was more than happy to join her husband Friday at Rebuilding Together's warehouse at Building 535 on Mare Island's Walnut Avenue. Helping a veteran takes on special meaning, she said.

"I've gone through many veterans days as a 22-year-old and didn't pay much mind to it," she said. "I think after him joining the military and us experiencing the military life and getting to know other people, I think Veterans Day has a different symbolism in our life. If we can bring more awareness to people about that and realize the different sacrifices by not just the Air Force but other military branches, it would change people's perspective on life and spread a little kindness."

Brent Sarte remembered his school days right before the Veterans Day holiday of "being told by a teacher to do a minute, 30 seconds of silence for those who sacrificed their lives for this country."

He understands it far more as an adult.

"They fought for your freedom and liberty," Sarte said.

RTSC's Safe At Home Kit includes: an 4-in-1 earthquake emergency tool (gas and water pry bar and glass breaker), a 10-year lithium sealed smoke alarm, a carbon monoxide alarm, a fire extinguisher, an emergency LED flashlight, LED plug-in night lights, emergency whistle, hand sanitizer, hand soap, face masks, light bulbs, a set of trash bags and disaster backpack with emergency information. Each kit is valued at \$150.

Wells Fargo donated \$62,500 and Home Depot \$25,000 in home safety items, Hoffman said.

"It is Wells Fargo's honor to support Rebuilding Together Solano County's efforts that help the men and women who tirelessly fought for our country's freedoms," said Kevin Barri, Northern Golden State region bank president, Wells Fargo said in a press release. "We salute our veterans and thank organizations like Rebuilding Together Solano County for continuously filling pressing needs in our communities."

Other workday donors include: Bank of America, Costco Vallejo, First Bank, Food Bank of Contra Costa / Solano Counties, M & M Sanitation LLC, Medic Ambulance, Minuteman Press, Phillips 66, The Nimitz Group, Valero Benicia Refinery, Vallejo's Community Presbyterian Church and other community supporters.



Nate Wynne with Travis Air Force Base puts a fire extinguisher into an emergency preparedness box as he helps Rebuilding Together get ready for Veterans Day. (Chris Riley/Times-Herald)

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