

A community “elevates” veterans



DAV Chapter 19 of Lima, Ohio, repurposing used ramps donated from community and VA's across the country to help build ramps for aging veterans.

Lexaville Harris is one of many veterans in the small city of Lima, Ohio. The 80-year-old Navy veteran has spent the latter half of his life in his one-story home. However, with growing health concerns—and several difficult incidents while getting himself up the steps to his front door—Harris and his wife began to worry about the accessibility of their home.

Naturally, a ramp would be the solution to their concerns. But a project like that could have cost the couple several hundred dollars, and many companies were not willing to work on the project due to precautions related to COVID-19.

Harris and his wife heard about a group of veterans who were recycling ramps free of charge. The couple reached out to DAV Chapter 19 in Lima, and shortly thereafter, a group of fellow veterans were outside the Harrises' home, ready to begin construction on the ramp.

“They had reached out to other organizations before, who said they could put them on a waiting list for next year,” said Steve Montgomery, senior vice commander of Chapter 19. “Well, they were to the point where they needed [a ramp] now.”

Montgomery and the rest of his chapter had donated and installed several ramps before this and gathered what they could to complete the project.

“What we are doing is repurposing ramps that the VA has put in somewhere else,” said Montgomery of the donated ramps that were no longer in use. “We are then taking those and repurposing them to people who need them right now and may not qualify for help in other cases.”

Although perfectly functional and safe, the ramps the chapter is building are not necessarily meant to be a permanent solution but offer a needed fix until veterans can be approved by the Department of Veterans Affairs to have brand-new ramps built at their homes.

According to Montgomery, the process has been a true community effort. When word got out through a local news story about DAV building the ramp for Harris, Montgomery began receiving calls about other people throughout the community looking to donate their ramps.

“Since that story has come out, we’ve received five more ramps,” said Montgomery.

“These generous donations are exactly what we, at DAV, are trying to highlight with our ‘100 Acts of Honor’ initiative,” said National Voluntary Services Director John Kleindienst. “We challenge all of our members and community members to give back to our servicemen and women through simple acts of kindness, the Lima community is a shining example of this initiative.”

According to Montgomery, a disabled Vietnam War veteran, this

effort is meant to serve as a safety net.

“We’re trying to be a backup to veterans that have a need that can’t be met at the time,” said Montgomery. “We are in a position to where we can help them. As long as I can keep getting donations—and I’ll accept them from anywhere—I’ll continue building ramps.”

If you or anyone you know would like to volunteer or donate to DAV and assist veterans, please visit dav.org/help-dav/volunteer.