

Ford donation protects veterans



Golightly Education Center Principal Orlando Bogins (left) and Assistant Principal Kelly Patterson (right) accept a shipment of donated masks from Ford Motor Company as part of a larger program to deliver 10 million face masks to communities across the U.S.

With over 5,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19 among patients at Veterans Affairs medical centers, using personal protective equipment—or PPE—is among the many protective steps necessary to manage the spread of the virus.

In September, the Ford Fund—the philanthropic arm of Ford Motor Company—donated 1 million masks for VA medical centers, volunteers and patients around the country.

The medical center in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, reported a high number of active cases in the fall. Even with growing case numbers, Milwaukee continues to serve as an example for how other VA facilities can begin to handle their COVID response, with the help of Ford, as well as a dedicated number of

volunteers.

“With the masks that Ford Motor Company has donated, it’s been awesome,” said Milwaukee Hospital Service Coordinator Patty Davis.

Since the donation, Davis and her staff have been handing out masks in their waiting room for veterans awaiting a ride from the DAV Transportation Network. When passengers get in the DAV-purchased and donated vehicles, Davis and her drivers provide Ford-donated masks to ensure all passengers are protected and safe.

“I happen to like those masks. I like the way they fit,” said Chapter 19 Adjutant and DAV Volunteer Driver John Polk. “For me personally, I like wearing them, but it’s just another option we have for when people get into the vehicle. I’ve actually had a couple veterans ask me for an extra mask to take them home because they were out.”

“Without the Ford vehicles, a lot of these veterans, especially in certain areas of Milwaukee County, wouldn’t be able to get here for their appointments,” said Davis. “The volunteers, they love the vehicles and the veterans really appreciate it.”

Since the pandemic began, VA facilities across the country have seen a large drop-off in numbers of volunteers, especially volunteer drivers. With an aging demographic of drivers, the risk of contracting the virus is just too high for many, as well as fear of passing the virus along to others.

“Here in Milwaukee, we have been going and going and going, however, our driver corps has dropped,” said Davis. “We have about 20 [drivers] who do not want to come in, but we have those dedicated ones that come in on the days that they’ve scheduled themselves.”

Even before the pandemic, recruiting new drivers has been a challenge. With volunteer numbers shrinking, waiting rooms growing and distances for drivers lengthening, Davis and Polk say that volunteers and members should take every opportunity they have to spread the word about the Transportation Network and the work that DAV does.

“Every opportunity I get, I talk to people about the DAV Transportation program,” said Polk. “Usually, within the first two minutes, people will say, ‘Oh wow, I didn’t know they did that.’ Through that approach, I have found new drivers in the community.”

Polk said the mask donation has helped spread the word about DAV’s programs and services.

“Obviously, it says Ford on the mask, but that often leads to us talking about the Transportation Network itself,” said Polk. “I explain how DAV purchases the vehicles and how Ford has helped us do that, and we provide volunteer drivers.”

In the coming months, especially with all the unknowns related to the pandemic, volunteer drivers are needed now more than ever. If you or someone you know would like to become a volunteer driver, you can visit www.dav.org/volunteer.