

March 17, 2015

Front Royal 2382 “Turns up the Heat” at Local VAMC

Imagine that you have made detailed plans for a ceramic craft you intend to make at the recreation Hobby Shop. You can visualize the finished product, you have selected the exact model you want, chosen the necessary mold, picked out the colors you will use, the size of the brushes needed, and now you are ready to start your ceramics project.



You enter the Hobby Shop only to learn that the kiln has broken down and there is no plan for repairing or replacing it. The loss of the ceramics oven, or kiln, will leave a major void in the hospital’s Recreation/Therapy program. The hands-on, individualized ceramics projects are just one of many forms of therapy employed by a large number of both resident and non-resident patients at this Veterans Medical Center. Planning, molding, drying, firing, trimming, painting and glazing—each undertaking requires the patient to become completely immersed in their project and ultimately enjoy the satisfaction of creating something that is entirely of their own making.

However, despite the unexpected loss of the existing kiln, here comes the Front Royal 2382 Veterans Service Committee, which, several weeks earlier, had realized that the existing kiln received very heavy use and was nearly fifteen years old. The Lodge had already prepared a Freedom Grant request from the Elks National Foundation (ENF) in an effort to obtain funding to help purchase a new kiln.

Therefore, even before the old Kiln had baked its last craft, these Elks had determined that the existing kiln should be replaced and had taken steps to accomplish that mission.

After conducting a due diligence search, members of the Lodge Veterans Service Committee met with a local Front Royal ceramics shop dealer (The Kiln Doctor), explaining the importance of the ceramics program at the Martinsburg VA Medical Center. Since it was in support of our nation's veterans, Mike Swauger, owner/operator of The Kiln Doctor, offered to do this job at a significant discount. The Front Royal Elks membership approved the additional funding required to obtain a top-of-line, digital controlled kiln – one that will stand up to a lot of use and can be expected to last a long time.

The Grant was awarded by the ENF in the fall of 2014, and a few days after Christmas the new kiln was installed at the Martinsburg VAMC Hobby Shop. Since then, it has been churning out beautiful ceramic items at a steady rate.

On March 12, 2015, Front Royal Elks Exalted Ruler Dennis Henline officially presented the new kiln to the Martinsburg Hobby Shop. The Medical Center Director, Mr. Tim Cook, formally accepted the unit. Director Cook explained to those in attendance, that the mission of the hospital is 'healing' and he pointed out that "...the healing process takes many forms and working with one's hands and using one's own creativity, is a perfect example of helping to achieve this goal."

Mr. Cook expressed his own personal appreciation for this donation, as well as speaking on behalf of the thousands of veterans who will be using this new kiln over the coming years.

During the presentation ceremony, held in the Hobby Shop area, one wheelchair-bound veteran could be seen diligently working on a ceramic Easter Basket. When asked if he would have it ready in time for Easter, with twinkling blue eyes, his smiling response was, "Of course. With the help of the Elks, I'll even have the colored eggs ready to fill it."

An extract from the Esteemed Leading Knight's new member initiation part pretty well sums it up: *"The daily gifts we bestow increase our own riches. The help we extend to those in need is added to our own strength."*

