

Family Video collecting videos for troops, Tennessen trying to help

By Brian Roebke
Editor

November is the month when veterans who served our country are thanked and honored for their service, and Family Video is taking part by holding an "Operation: Entertain the Troops," effort throughout the month at all Family Video stores.

Family Video has more than 700 stores in 19 states — including stores in Kaukauna and Kimberly — and is the second largest video store chain in America.

Family Video is located at 1800 Crooks Ave. in Kaukauna and 225 N. Washington St. in Kimberly.

Their goal is to collect one million movies to send to military bases worldwide.

It's a pretty lofty goal for the store chain, but Lindsey Fletcher, store manager in Kaukauna, said she's very proud of the community for its effort thus far to donate to the troops.

"They're really doing a lot to get involved and help support the troops," she said. "Everybody is showing a tremendous amount of support."

She said it can be hard to get people to donate in this economy, but people have been participating like no other promotions the store has ever had.

"We're super excited, and Family Video is going to be reaching that goal of sending a million movies out to the troops in Afghanistan and Iraq," she said. "We're super excited."

People can either pay \$2 to purchase a movie or bring in their own movies to donate before the end of November. People who donate will receive a card saying they donated to the troops.

Matt Tennessen, a veteran from Kaukauna, got involved when he went to Family Video and started asking questions about the promo-

tion.

Now he'll be coordinating the delivery of the movies to the 395th Ordinance Company based in Appleton.

Tennessen said troops appreciate the time they get during "regeneration" or relaxation time while on missions when they can kick back and watch a movie.

"If you can laugh or get sucked right into it and forget about what you're doing for an hour or two, that makes a big difference," he said.

Tennessen, 32, is proud of his service to his country but has some lingering effects that will likely be with him the rest of his life.

He was deployed with a Wisconsin National Guard unit in 2009 and now is an associate with the group, "Wounded Warriors in Action," which advocates not only for wounded veterans, but all veterans and people currently deployed.

"When I went into Family Video, I explained that I was deployed and I thought that was an awesome thing they were doing and the manager happened to be there and she didn't know where to send it, so that's when I started checking my contacts," Tennessen said.

He made contact with the 395th unit from Appleton that's currently deployed, and they thought it was a great idea.

"They said they'd be more than happy to get the DVDs," he said.

Tennessen wants to help out troops because he is a wounded veteran.

"I have a big heart for veterans and I've navigated the system with the VA and all that quite a bit and it's very complicated, so it's always been my goal to help out any soldier whether they're deployed and getting stuff to them or whether they got back from a deployment or just any type of help they need."

Tennessen wishes he could quit his job and help veterans all the time, but that won't pay the bills.

He uses his leave time to take Purple Heart recipients on hunts, so he tries to do what he can.

Tennessen was deployed with the 951st Unit Sapper Company, 3rd Platoon, RCP 6, from 2008-09, where he suffered a significant head injury.

He received a Purple Heart of his own from an IED that struck his vehicle in Afghanistan.

"I will never forget the date, it was Easter Sunday of 2009," he said.

His company's overall mission was to clear roads of IEDs so other units had freedom of movement without the IED threat.

Tennessen suffered a concussion or TBI, which is the Army's new term for traumatic brain injury.

"I still struggle with simple memory tasks and just simple stuff like remembering to take a wallet or cell phone," he said. "I've had to rely on my wife significantly as my memory bank."

Thus, for him, life hasn't really turned to normal upon his return home. While in Afghanistan, his unit saw significant combat and he lost a good friend.

"It was a really tough year," he said. "That's how I got connected with Wounded Warriors in Action."

They put him on a turkey hunt in Wausau and they brought in an associate, who helped him on the hunt.

"He was significantly injured, where you could see he lost his eye, had multiple skin grafts," he said.

Tennessen talked to him about how he was struggling to return to normal life back home.

"He said, 'you know what buddy, this happened five years ago. You haven't even been back for two

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years; just hang with it, it will come,' he was a great mentor toward me," Tennesen said.

That's the first time he got out of the house and started to do things. "It was by far the biggest turning point in my recovery and I guess my return to normalization, the Army calls it 'reintegration,'" Tennesen said.

Now, Tennesen is an associate helping and mentoring others.

In October, he used a week's vacation to guide hunts for wounded soldiers so he could mentor them, be with them, and help them with their healing process.

"It's an unbelievable feeling being able to do that," he said. "It's by far one of the best feelings that a person can have. It's phenomenal trying to help them out in that healing process and being able to be there for them."

The son of Mike and Ellen Tennesen has health issues himself, but knows it could be far worse, and sees that in the wounded

soldiers he deals with, so he's happy to help out.

"Because of the issues, I've had a lot of dealings with the VA and I know the ins and outs," he said. "I was older when I was deployed and I had professional jobs. I had professional careers, I've been successful, so I know what it takes to get jobs done and it takes that to navigate through the VA."

Tennesen appreciates his perception that almost everyone supports the troops, regardless of if they agree or disagree with the government's decisions to send troops to various places.

Tennesen will do anything he can to help fellow veterans, whether it be GI benefits or helping people to know where to send papers at the VA. "I love it," he said. "I'd give my eye teeth to be able to do that for a living."

Tennesen can be reached via email at matt@wwiaf.org, or by phone at 809-3696.

You can also check out his bio on the WWIA website at www.wwiaf.org/detail_associate.php?id=28.