

The Power of a Hat

(how to host a free breakfast for veterans)

Two men recognized each other as veterans in an Aldi's parking lot because they were wearing their Navy ship ball caps. Their 10-minute chat ended with Dave passing a card to Norm listing 13 locations hosting free breakfasts for veterans every Saturday in East Tennessee.

Norm called the number for sponsoring a breakfast, and met Buzz Buswell, the breakfast coordinator. The American Legion Post 212 in Maynardville meets the requirements for hosting a breakfast, and chose the second Saturday of every month, beginning January 10.

The idea of a free breakfast for veterans every month originated in Clinton in 2016, which regularly serves over one hundred veterans at their breakfasts. Then-Knox County mayor Tim Burchett challenged Buswell to offer free breakfasts to veterans in Knox county, and the Free Veterans Breakfast Project was born, in association with United Veterans Council of East Tennessee and their major sponsors including Food City, Rusty Wallace Automotive and Wampplers Farm sausages, and many others.

American Legion Post 212 is honored to expand the free breakfasts into Union County. So what can you expect? Doors at 140 Veterans Street open at 07:45, with coffee and donuts served at 08:00, and the chow line (scrambled eggs, sausage, biscuits and gravy, fresh fruit and orange juice) opens at 08:30. As good as the food is, the primary purpose of the breakfast is to provide a venue for socializing and fellowship with others who have "been there, done that!" – your fellow soldiers, sailors, marines, airmen and guardsmen. Breakfast concludes with a brief program recognizing veterans, hearing from the Veterans Service Officer, and door prizes, wrapping up by 09:30. Veteran's guests, family members and caregivers are encouraged to attend and mingle.

So about the hat – announce who you are and your history by proudly wearing your "colors" so the whole world can see! Who would have guessed that two ball caps would lead to feeding hundreds of veterans (hopefully!) monthly in the heart of Maynardville?