

PARKERSBURG, W. VA. - (January 2019) For the 15th year in a row, volunteer woodturners gathered at Woodcraft stores nationwide over Veterans Day weekend to make pens during the Turn for Troops National Turn-a-Thon. This year's event produced 17,097 one-of-a-kind wood pens which will be sent to active duty or recovering military personnel across the globe. That total is the second highest in the event's 15-year history, with the record year being 2009 with 17,228 pens. Since the first event in 2004, 175,224 pens have been crafted for the troops.

Dedicated Volunteers

Though many volunteers are practiced turners, for a lot of folks woodturning is a first-time experience. Anyone with a desire to say "thank you" to the troops can come in and make pens during a Turn for Troops event. Youth, college students, Veterans and senior citizens have all given their time to turn pens, with an opportunity to include a personalized note with each pen made.

The San Diego State University Gamma Phi Beta sorority and Phi Gamma Delta (Fiji) fraternity have participated in Turn for Troops by making more than 400 pens over the last three years.

Sorority member Gianna McCrystal's father Eric, who owns the San Carlos Woodcraft store, has assisted the college students in their volunteer efforts as well as hosting events at the store. After submitting a total of 727 pens in 2018, a happy Eric said, "We joined the 10,000-pen club this year!"

Store Milestones

Four other Woodcraft stores have exceeded the 10k mark since the program began: Tucson (19,308), Nashville (18,921), Boise (16,154) and Grand Rapids (15,682). The top four contributing stores for 2018 are Grand Rapids (2,981), Tucson (1,764), Nashville (1,390) and Boise (1,086). The Boise location has been a Top 4 contributor all 15 years.

According to Boise Woodcraft owner Monte Eldfrick, their store looks forward to the Turn for Troops event each year. "It brings a community of woodworkers together for the benefit of people they may never meet. We get a chance to honor, pray and spend time thinking about our service men and women across the world," he said. Though it makes for a long, hard day, "everyone leaves our shop with a huge smile on their faces knowing their day and craft counted for something beyond themselves."

Other stores submitting 1,000+ pens in 2018 are Seattle (1,054) and Milwaukee (1,050). The single highest contribution overall was Grand Rapids with 4,004 in 2016.

Expressing Thanks

Woodcraft President Jack Bigger extends his own heartfelt thanks for another successful year of Turn for Troops. "On behalf of Woodcraft, thank you to the many store owners, employees and volunteers for their wonderful contributions of time and talent, which have collectively allowed us to support more than 175,000 service men and women over the last 15 years," he said. "Most importantly, our brothers and sisters in uniform who serve for all of us will benefit by knowing someone else cares about the sacrifices they make."