

Free fuel for veterans

Mike Dutile of Dutile Oil has provided thousands of gallons of oil to those in need

By MICHAEL KITCH, LACONIA DAILY SUN

LACONIA — Two years ago, shortly before Christmas, a gentleman in Meredith asked Mike Dutile of Dutile Oil Company to bid on replacing his boiler. When Dutile, himself a veteran, met the man he discovered he had fought in the Korean War and a week later, when he returned to tend to the boiler, was stunned to discover the man has passed away and that his widow, a woman of 90, was left with a failing boiler and an empty tank.

"She told me she had five gallons coming from Easter Seals, but wouldn't get more until January," Dutile said. "I had 150 gallons delivered that day," he said, "and fixed the boiler, which I've been babying ever since."

That evening Dutile began his Free Fuel for Veterans program. He said that in 2015 he provided oil, together with servicing and repairs, to more than 40 veterans in need and a year later had delivered some 3,000 gallons heating oil to veterans in the Lakes Region and beyond., among them a veteran of World War II in his 102nd year.

Dutile stressed that the program is intended "for the truly in need" and for the families of those serving in combat overseas. "I'm the program," he said, "and I'm the boss." He said that many veterans are reluctant to seek, even accept, assistance, yet has met many who need a helping hand. He has enlisted three volunteers willing to drive vets wherever they need to go to see to their health care or tend to their affairs.

Apart from his own generosity, Dutile has drawn on donations from others, many of them longtime customers of Dutile Oil Company and including a significant contribution from Bank of New Hampshire. Likewise, he turned to the New Hampshire Chapter of the Combat Veterans Association of New Hampshire, whose members have spread word of his program throughout the state as well as contributed to its success. To serve to remote locations, Dutile draws on network of suppliers who deliver the oil and send him the invoices.

Dutile has pitched his program on local radio stations — WLNH and WEMJ — and advertised it in The Laconia Daily Sun to seek donations, which he said can be made online at the company's website, <http://www.dutileoil.net/free-fuel-for-veterans.html>. Or he said, "You can drop it through the slot at the office on Messer Street." He emphasized that 100 percent of every penny donated to the program pays for fuel for veterans who are either in need or in combat. "This is all about helping our veterans," Dutile said.

