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# Rev. John Cooper rucking 222 miles to raise funds for homeless veterans in Western New York

Niagara Gospel Mission Press Release

The Rev. John Cooper Jr., executive director of Niagara Gospel Mission at 1317 Portage Road, Niagara Falls, is rucking 222 miles before Easter to raise funds to expand the RECON recovery program for homeless veterans in Western New York.

"I was challenged to walk a mile in a homeless person's shoes, so I am doing 222 of them," Cooper said.

"As a former infantryman in the Army, I know what it is like to walk everywhere and have your life on your back - that is why I am doing this; to walk some miles in their shoes," he added.

Rucking is marching with weight on your back for miles. In the military, soldiers put all their gear in their rucksacks and live out of them for months at a time.

"When I was a sniper, my bag would typically weigh 120 pounds," Cooper said. "I'm glad it doesn't weigh that now."

Cooper is rucking around



The Rev. John Cooper Jr. is walking more than 200 miles to raise funds for military members in need. (Submitted photo)

Niagara Falls and greater Niagara County for 222 miles with a goal of finishing before Easter on March 31. He has already rucked more than 67 miles.

"I want to walk where the people who come to our mission are walking," he said.

Niagara Gospel Mission serves homeless men in Niagara Falls, housing 100 men a night and serving dinner to hundreds of people in the surrounding community who are in need.

The agency is currently in the planning process of starting a

women's emergency shelter.

Funds raised by rucking will go to the RECON program, which is the recovery program at the NGM. The agency stated 70% of all the homeless veterans who have come to NGM enter this program to work on the root issues that lead to addiction and recovery.

"I am doing this to hopefully add six more rooms to the RECON program so we can bring hope to more of my veteran brothers who are experiencing homelessness," Copper said.

To follow his journey, visit the Niagara Gospel Mission's YouTube or Facebook page. To donate, go to <https://www.gofundme.com/f/222-miles-for-homeless-vets-in-western-new-york> or on the missions website at [niagaragospelmission.org](http://niagaragospelmission.org).

Niagara Gospel Mission is a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit providing services to the homeless and poor. Visit [niagaragospemission.org](http://niagaragospemission.org) to learn more.

## Piper announces angel addition to Lewiston Cemetery

Hello once more everyone. As spring is fast approaching, I am continuing to work on my cemetery enhancements.

Last year saw the addition of the historical cemetery plaque along with adjoining memorial benches. My intentions were to create a parklike setting for visitors to its hallowed grounds. My final addition was to be an angel statue

to stand vigil to those who repose there.

My wish came to fruition with a generous donation of the angel statue by Jim Farchione of Niagara Monument Works, who aided me with the potter's field monument and memorial bench along with the placement of the historical bronze plaque and additional memorial benches.

She is proudly keeping watch. A nice addition to complete my parklike setting. I am forever grateful for the donation.

With the addition of the ornamental trees being placed in the spring, I am still hopeful I will be able to raise the \$1,700 for the placement of a permanent flagpole to honor those who served our country (from the Revolutionary War to the Vietnam War) and currently in repose. The VFW will always make sure a flag will fly over the grounds. I'm hoping to have this project completed in time for Memorial Day, so as to be dedicated in time to honor our veterans.

In the meantime, I have added more artwork, books and artifacts

to the museum collection for the public to enjoy, and also aiding with inquiries about Lewiston history.

Anyone wishing to help me complete this project may make donations to the potter's field monument fund in care of the village clerk's office.

Once more, a heartfelt thank you to those who have donated in the past to my historical projects. Looking forward to being able to continue with my work preserving the vast history of the village.

Russ Piper

Village of Lewiston Historian

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## Hats off to Jaelyn!



By Lisa Bielmeier  
Orleans/Niagara BOCES Public Relations Director

After seeing videos on social media about a teacher who knit hats for her class, Early Childhood Education student Jaelyn Reilly of Niagara Falls collaborated with her great-grandmother, Marion Irwin, to do something similar with the preschoolers she works with at the Niagara Career and Technical Education Center's Preschool Learning Center.

Jaelyn created a template for the children to color during the preschool's winter theme, "Marvelous Mittens." After the children colored their paper hats, Jaelyn gave the children's designs to her Grandma Marion, who made them a reality.

Jaelyn presented the hats to the children at the end of January and they loved them!

"I think some of the best teachers draw their inspiration from all aspects of their lives, and Jaelyn is one of the best!" said her teacher, Laura Koeppel. "She placed first in the in the Early Childhood Education Program classroom competition and will be representing her class at the SkillsUSA Area 1 Regional Competition at Alfred State College in March."

Jaelyn is shown with preschoolers Julian Strickland, Luna Vaillancourt, Analiiese Piotrowski and Juniper Friscia. (Submitted photo)

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