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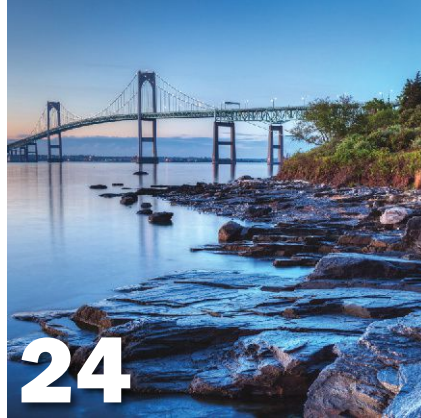


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COVER IMAGE: Staff members and VFW members at the VFW National Home in Eaton Rapids, Mich., gather for a photo at the campus in May. The Home, which offers a patriotic, nurturing residence for veterans and their families, celebrates its 100th anniversary in 2025. *Photo by Janie Dyhouse*

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A fixture of VFW's mission to help veterans and their families marks its centennial this month. The VFW National Home in Michigan now has a new leader and a renewed focus. **By Janie Dyhouse**

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VFW magazine's "Destination Post" series continues with a visit to "The Ocean State." This issue features four Posts located in the Newport area that contribute significant service to their communities. **By Janie Dyhouse**

42 HELP AFTER THE HURRICANE

Hurricane Helene, one of the deadliest on record, hit the inland areas of North Carolina and Tennessee last September. VFW members were on the scene immediately to offer supplies and support. **By Dave Spiva**

52 VFW VISITS STURGIS MOTORCYCLE RALLY

VFW was well-represented last August at the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally in South Dakota. VFW officials offered VA claims help, information about VFW services and a recruiting booth that signed up 135 new VFW members. **By Janie Dyhouse**

Need help? Veterans Crisis Line: Dial 988, then press 1 or text 838255



COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF
Al Lipphardt

The VFW National Home is a 'Special Place'

The VFW National Home in Eaton Rapids, Mich., celebrates its 100th anniversary this year. Its mission is to provide a safe haven for the families of active duty troops, veterans and relatives of VFW and VFW Auxiliary members.

This unique campus of 42 homes is a true community. The campus includes a fitness center, gymnasium, game room, computer lab, library, fishing pond, four miles of hiking trails and five playgrounds. There also is a real feeling of patriotism and respect for veterans that is palpable.

Children who spent some of their lives at the Home are examples of that sense of duty. Since 1925, more than 250 former residents went on to serve in the military. Four of them paid the ultimate sacrifice for the nation.

The Home's Director of Community Development and Alumni Engagement, Brian Daniels, is a former resident who served in the Iraq War. Daniels credits the Home's Executive Director Mike Wilson for leading the Home into a new era.

Wilson is a former Army command sergeant major who served in 1991's Persian Gulf War. Wilson, a Gold Legacy Life member of VFW Post 1355 in Sturgis, Mich., has led the Home since 2022. He summed up why the Home's mission is so popular with VFW members: "Children shouldn't have to struggle just because mom and dad do."

Improving the lives of veterans and their families is at the heart of why the Home exists and why it is important for VFW members. An example is the VFW Auxiliary Child Care and Early Education Center, which offers free child care while parents are working or attending school.

Each of the Home's 42 houses is sponsored by a VFW Department, with some Departments sponsoring more. The Home receives donations from VFW and Auxiliary units at all levels of the organizations, from members up to Departments. In February, VFW Auxiliary President Brenda Bryant and I plan to attend the Home's 100th anniversary gala.

The important thing for me is that the Home offers a hand-up instead of a hand-out for its residents. The Home gives parents a chance to readjust and reassess while preparing for the next stage of their lives. And they can deal with the transition in a patriotic, stress-free environment that nurtures their development.

I also believe the Home tells our members throughout the country that if they or a veteran's family needs a hand-up, the VFW has a resource to help. Check out this month's cover story to learn more about the VFW National Home's rich history of helping veterans and their families. It is a special place.

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THE VFW**



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Vietnam Documentary

We are writing to express our deep appreciation for the publication of the full-page article with information about our documentary film in the November/December issue of the *VFW* magazine. We especially admire you giving credit to VFW Commander-in-Chief Al Lipphardt who does so much for veterans — thank you so very much.

JIM DICKSON

SECRETARY — FILM COMMITTEE

CHAIRMAN

ATLANTA VIETNAM VETERANS BUSINESS ASSOCIATION FOUNDATION

I have been a member of the VFW for more than 35 years and was never prompted to write to the magazine in the past. However, on page 34 of the November/December edition, you ran the article regarding the documentary film — Vietnam War. The film

presented by the AVVBA Foundation did more to clarify the events of the truths about the Vietnam War than anything I have experienced in the 50-plus years since leaving Vietnam. I sincerely thank you for sharing it.

JOHN L. ROTUNDO

FORT WORTH, TEXAS

I watched the documentary “Truths and Myths” about the Vietnam War. It was a very good presentation to say the least. It really shows the average viewer everything that hasn’t been shown in previous documentaries about the war.

I would suggest doing a documentary about the Gulf of Tonkin incident. It was the legal justification of the U.S. involving itself in the war. Two U.S. ships — *The USS Maddox* and *USS Turner Joy* were supposedly attacked by North Vietnamese PT

boats on Aug. 4, 1964. I would say this is where the term “truths and myths” would come into play.

JOHN HEFFNER

ENOLA, PA.

Convention Coverage

Once again, I thoroughly enjoyed the *VFW* November/December magazine. As a Post 106 life member and a USAA member since 1978, I zeroed in on the USAA portion of the article (VFW Partners and Top Performers) on page 24.

I spent 31 years in the U.S. Navy but still know that Gen. John Richardson is a two-star general not a two-star colonel.

TOM MCCARTHY

WEST CHESTER, PA.

Editor's Note: Indeed, John Richardson is a retired two-star general.

With this issue, VFW magazine is now publishing six double issues annually. As a VFW member and

magazine subscriber, you will continue to receive six printed issues every year. This new frequency of double issues (see table below) still gives our readers the award-winning combination of stories and photographs they've come to enjoy and rely upon in a more regular, easier-to-understand schedule.

New Frequency

January/February

March/April

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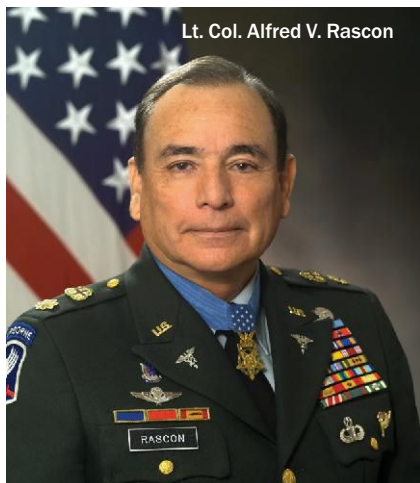
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Lt. Col. Alfred V. Rascon

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National Hispanic Month

The picture labelled Lt. Col. Alfred V. Rascon is incorrect. The picture is actually Gen. Richard Cavazos. The picture can be found online when you do a search for Cavazos.

LARRY BETHEL

ANCHORAGE, ALASKA

Destination Post Series

Regarding VFW Post 76 in San Antonio, Texas, there is one correction to this article. The house was built in 1895 not 1904.

MONICA MORRIS

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER

VFW POST 76

Editor's Note: On the list of Texas Posts on p. 42 of the November/December issue, the Pottsboro VFW is Post 7873.

"Mail Call" features letters from our readers in six issues per year. If you have questions, comments or concerns about any subject or article from our most recent issue, letters can be emailed to magazine@vfw.org, with the subject line "Mail Call," or mailed to: VFW magazine, Mail Call, 406 W. 34th Street, Suite 523, Kansas City, MO 64111. Letters must be no more than 200 words, and VFW magazine reserves the right to edit letters for clarity, length and accuracy.

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Distinguished Service Cross Awarded to WWII Soldier

An Army medic who treated wounded troops under enemy fire on the beaches of Normandy in World War II received a posthumous Distinguished Service Cross in September. The family of Army Staff Sgt. Waverly B. Woodson Jr. accepted the award on Woodson's behalf at a Sept. 24 ceremony in Washington, D.C.

Woodson, who died in 2005, was serving with the 320th Barrage Balloon Battalion on June 6, 1944. His unit was responsible for deploying balloons to deter enemy planes during the landings at Normandy. As Woodson's vessel, *LCT 856*, approached the beach, it struck a mine and was disabled. Then it was hit by a German 88mm shell.

Wounded, Woodson swam ashore and helped other medics set up an aid station on the beach. Amid artillery, mortars and small-arms fire, Woodson helped treat an estimated 200 wounded troops for 30 hours before he was treated for his wounds.

In 1994, Woodson told the Associated Press about his experience.

"The tide brought us in, and that's when the 88s hit us," he said. "They were murder. Of our 26 Navy personnel, there was only one left. They raked the whole top of the ship and killed all the crew. Then they started the mortar shells."



U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY ELIZABETH FRASER

Family members of Waverly B. Woodson Jr. — grandson, Brian Williams, left; widow, JoAnn Woodson, center; and son, Stephen Woodson, right — attend a ceremony on Oct. 11, 2023, at Arlington National Cemetery to accept a posthumous Bronze Star and Combat Medic Badge for former Army Staff Sgt. Waverly B. Woodson Jr., (photo on easel). Last September, Woodson's family also accepted his posthumous Distinguished Service Cross for his actions as a medic on the beaches of Normandy on June 6, 1944.

The Distinguished Service Cross is the Army's second-highest military award for soldiers who display extraordinary heroism in combat.

Bronze Star Awarded for Iraq Action

An Air Force master sergeant whose actions in 2023 to secure an air base in Iraq during a drone attack was recognized with a Bronze Star Medal. Air Force Master Sgt. Peter Pease received his award on May 23, 2024, during a ceremony at Moody Air Force Base in Georgia.

On Oct. 18, 2023, Pease was leading 44 security forces airmen of the 443rd Air Expeditionary Squadron deployed to the Al Asad Air Base, about 100 miles west of Baghdad. A drone attack that day destroyed two aircraft hangars and resulted in minor wounds to a small number of troops.

Pease helped evacuate seven troops and civilians. He also established a safe area for firefighters and explosive ordnance disposal units. *Military Times* reported that the base's airfield was restored within an hour, with no missions compromised.

"It was a crazy night," Pease said. "There used to be something there, and now it's not to the full extent that it was."

Air Force Tech. Sgt. Mark Melchiori, who served with Pease, said the master sergeant's actions inspired those he led.

"He's the one that groomed us to be the leaders," Melchiori said. "On that day, he really gave all his trust to those flight chiefs, those tech sergeants, those staff sergeants."



U.S. AIR FORCE PHOTO BY SENIOR AIRMAN DEANNA MUIR

Air Force Col. Paul Sheets, left, 23rd Wing commander, presents the Bronze Star to Air Force Master Sgt. Peter Pease, 23rd Fighter Group first sergeant, on May 23, 2024, at Moody Air Force Base, Ga. Pease received the award for his leadership in 2023 at the Al Asad Air Base in Iraq following a drone attack.



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VFW Continues Advocacy for Unaddressed Toxic Exposure

VFW's work related to military toxic exposures is not over. Many health conditions still need to be covered by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

BY DAVE SPIVA

The *Honoring Our PACT Act*, passed in August 2022, provides veterans who served in countries such as Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq with expanded access to VA health care and earned disability benefits due to exposure to burn pits and other toxic substances. Some consider the *PACT Act* to be the most significant piece of veteran legislation in history.

But VFW's work on military toxic exposures is not over. The *PACT Act* was originally intended to address not only health conditions due to burn pit exposure but also it called for VA to continuously research and review conditions related to any toxic exposures from the past, present and future.

However, lawmakers instead included a process that is internal to VA, and advocates have found it to lack transparency, timelines, and input from veteran stakeholders.

VFW National Veterans Service Director Michael Figlioli said that VFW wants more health conditions related to toxic exposures to be recognized by VA. One of these includes suspected uranium exposure at Karshi-Khanabad Air Base (K2 or Camp Stronghold Freedom) in Uzbekistan. There also was water contamination at Alabama's Fort McClellan and at the Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii.

"Despite the abundance of conditions already covered under the *PACT Act*, veterans continue to report many unaddressed issues tied to toxic exposure," Figlioli said. "The VFW will continue to demand that VA continually updates the presumptive conditions evaluation process."

VFW IS HERE TO HELP

In August 2024, VA reported that 333,767 veterans with *PACT Act*-related symptoms enrolled in VA health care thanks to the law. About 1 million veterans are receiving *PACT Act*-related disability compensation, according to the department.

VFW urges veterans to visit <https://pactactinfo.org/questionnaire> and answer a few questions to determine eligibility and connect with one of VFW's VA-accredited service officers. Also, services that VFW service officers provide are free to all veterans (members and nonmembers) and families, no matter what. VFW also wants veterans and their families to be aware of predatory companies, known as "claim sharks," that target veterans' earned VA benefits. These companies promise veterans increased disability ratings and expedited claims decisions. Charging fees for initial claims assistance is illegal, and veterans should be aware that they put themselves at risk of committing fraud by working with any unaccredited consultants. Learn more at <https://dontfeedthesharks.org>

MORE TOXIC REFORM IS NEEDED

The Disabled American Veterans and the Military Officers Association of America in September 2024 released a report titled *Ending the Wait*, that found on average, veterans who were



VFW National Legislative Service Deputy Director Kristina Keenan testifies before Congress last year on behalf of veterans. VFW's advocacy efforts on toxic exposures are not over, and more changes are needed through legislation.

exposed to toxins while in the military wait an average of 34.1 years to receive expanded access to VA health care and earned benefits.

VFW National Legislative Service Deputy Director Kristina Keenan, who was a consultant for *Ending the Wait*, said this only highlights the need to establish a more efficient presumptive process for toxic exposure-related health conditions.

"The *PACT Act* was an historic piece of legislation that primarily addressed dozens of serious illnesses associated with burn pit exposure for Persian Gulf War and Post 9/11 veterans," Keenan said. "The presumptive process established in that legislation is not the robust and transparent model we originally wanted. We will work with VA, Congress, and our partner veteran service organizations to find solutions that will ensure there is a continuous review of toxic exposure conditions for all eras of veterans."



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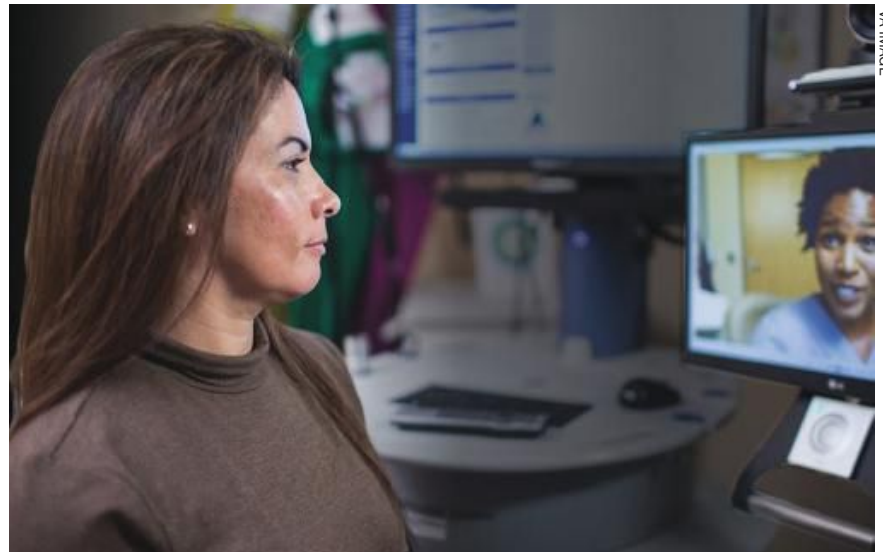
VA Plans to Rid Copays for Telehealth Services

The VA in November proposed a new program that could provide access to free health care services to rural veterans attending telehealth appointments.

The proposed program — Accessing Telehealth through Local Area Stations (ATLAS) — would not only eliminate copays for patients but fund organizations, such as the VFW, that aim to facilitate remote appointments between patients and VA's health care providers. ATLAS also will fund the training of personnel who assist veterans using VA telehealth services.

“VFW is in favor of eliminating obstacles that make routine health-care for veterans more difficult,” said VFW Director of National Veterans Service Mike Figlioli. “The ATLAS program would be especially valuable for veterans that may be home-bound or geographically challenged in accessing their earned healthcare benefits. Eliminating co-pays for essential services is also a momentous step forward, especially for those veterans having to choose between paying their bills or for their health and wellness.”

“We look forward to continuing to partner with ATLAS and collaborate on initiatives to deliver critical health-



VA IMAGE

care services as timely as possible,” said Figlioli.

In recent years — mainly due to the COVID-19 pandemic — VFW has called on lawmakers and VA to expand the department's health care services to veterans living in rural areas across the country. Other VFW priority goals related to health care include:

- Eliminating service member and veteran suicide by addressing both clinical and non-clinical needs.
- Strengthening care and research for mental health and traumatic brain injuries.
- Improving oversight of Vet Centers to ensure adequate staffing, resources and funding.
- Enhancing programs and ser-

vices for women and underserved veterans.

- Eliminating copayment requirements for preventive health care and medications.
- Researching the efficacy of medical cannabis and other alternative therapies.
- Preserving the integrity of Tricare.
- Properly implementing VA and Department of Defense health IT systems.
- Expanding nursing home eligibility and long-term care options.
- Enhancing services for veterans outside of the U.S.

Visit <https://www.telehealth.va.gov> to learn more about VA telehealth services.

Veterans Homelessness Sees Record Low

VA in November provided data suggesting that veterans homelessness has seen a 7.5 percent decrease since 2023. Overall, VA claims that veterans homelessness has seen a 55.6 percent decrease since 2010.

VA in a statement said there were 32,882 veterans experiencing home-

lessness in January 2024, with 13,851 being unsheltered. The number of homeless veterans since 2023 went down from 35,574 and 15,507, respectively. The number of unsheltered dropped by more than 10 percent.

VA reported that during fiscal year 2024, the department “permanently

housed” 48,000 homeless veterans.

A VFW priority goal from 2024 seeks to increase funding for vouchers, as well as grant and per diem payments, and establish a pilot program to prevent veterans homelessness.

For assistance, visit <https://www.va.gov/homeless> or call 1-877-424-3838.



FOR MORE INFORMATION about specific legislation or VA benefits, contact VFW's Washington Office at vfw@vfw.org. A member of VFW's National Veterans Service staff will respond as soon as possible.

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VFW Calls for Passage of *TAP Promotion Act*

The VFW in October urged veterans and advocates via a VFW Action Corps alert to contact legislators and ask for the passage of the *TAP Promotion Act*.

The act, which is part of the *2025 National Defense Authorization Act (S. 4638)*, would mandate that VA-accredited representatives, such as those from the VFW, be present in TAP (Transition Assistance Program) sessions.

VFW believes the program will help ensure veterans receive VA benefits and health care as soon as they leave the military. It would facilitate a smooth transition and can also reduce the risk of homelessness, food insecurity and suicide, according to VFW.

In early 2024, VA began incorporating accredited service officers into the TAP program. However, the passage of the *TAP Promotion Act* would make these service officers a permanent part of TAP.

“Fortunately, since this is a current VA practice, codifying it into law would require no additional funding from taxpayers,” according to VFW.

As of *VFW* magazine’s print deadline, Congress had not yet approved the *National Defense Authorization Act of 2025*. To



NAVY PHOTO

Navy sailors attend a Transition Assistance Program (TAP) class on July 31, 2023, at Navy Support Facility Diego Garcia. If approved by Congress and President Joe Biden, the *TAP Promotion Act* would require VA-accredited service officers to be a part of TAP curriculum.

sign up for the VFW Action Corps Weekly newsletter, visit <https://www.vfw.org/advocacy/grassroots-efforts>.

VA Grants \$44.5 Million for State Cemeteries

VA announced in October that the department awarded more than \$44.5 million in grants to improve veterans cemeteries in 11 states across the country.

This funding supports the Veterans Cemetery Grants Program and helps extend VA burial services to veterans who live a far distance from a national cemetery. These grants now allow about 94 percent of veterans to be buried within 75 miles of their homes, according to VA.

These grants, which were given by the VA’s National Cemetery Administration, aim to enhance burial and memorial services at state veterans cemeteries in:

- California
- Georgia
- Maine
- Minnesota
- Missouri
- Montana
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- Rhode Island
- Tennessee
- Washington



NAVY PHOTO

Navy Senior Chief Clayton Duncan, of San Diego, uses a leaf blower to remove cut grass at the Washington State Veteran Home Cemetery during a community service project. VA in October awarded more than \$44.5 million in grants to improve state veterans cemeteries across the country.

The proper management of veterans cemeteries — state and national — is one of VFW’s priorities. VFW *Resolution 644* states that Congress should increase plot allowances for eligible veterans and “expand the eligibility for the plot allowance for all veterans who might be eligible for burial in a national cemetery, not just those who served during wartime.”

Learn more about VA burial benefits at <https://www.cem.va.gov/burial-benefits>. Also, find a nearby veterans cemetery at <https://www.cem.va.gov/find-cemetery>.

VA Helps with Other-Than-Honorable Discharges

VA in October announced a new program aimed at helping veterans with other-than-honorable discharges seek upgrades to their discharge status. The program was established after the signing of 2021’s *National Defense Authorization Act*.

This program provides funds to service organizations that assist veterans with applying for VA benefits, such as health care, education and disability. The grant is intended to remove barriers that have excluded veterans with those discharges from receiving VA benefits, according to the department.

VA in a press release claimed that over the past 10 years, it has granted eligibility to more than 57,000 individuals who are former service members with an other-than-honorable discharge.



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For more information on the VFW National Home or to schedule a visit — the Home also has a guest lodge for visitors — visit <https://www.vfwnationalhome.org>. Follow the Home on Facebook to see everything happening.

A child living at the VFW National Home in Eaton Rapids, Mich., plays in the sandbox at one of the playgrounds on the campus. This year marks the 100th anniversary of the Home.

‘Changing Lives’ At The VFW National Home

This month marks 100 years since the VFW National Home opened its doors. Its mission of helping veterans and families remains steadfast.

BY JANIE DYHOUSE

On March 2, 1925, in Halfway, Mich., WWI veteran Sgt. Edward Pollett left his home to go pick up his retirement pay at Fort Wayne, Mich. He was struck by a streetcar in Detroit and died. His wife, Annie, and their six children were left penniless.

The Halfway VFW Post intervened and contacted the VFW Department of Michigan Commander Dr. Clarence Candler to ask about placement for the Pollett family in a newly established home outside Eaton Rapids, Mich.

Annie and her six children — Lillian, Howard, Mary, Thomas, Woodrow, and Margaret — were the first family to move into the VFW National Home on March 9, 1925.

Thus, a century of serving the families of veterans began by providing a haven where children could thrive.

CREATED TO HELP FAMILIES

The Home’s origins began in the early 1920s when a young Michigan woman noticed the large number of veterans

wandering the streets of Detroit looking for work. In 1922, 23-year-old Amy Ross visited Candler to ask for his assistance.

He offered the VFW's resources to aid Ross' mission to help vets find employment. The Military Order of the Cootie, meanwhile, proposed at the 1923 VFW National Convention the idea of a home for the displaced children and families of veterans.

That is where Michigan cattleman Corey Spencer came in. A VFW member, Spencer gifted 472 acres near Eaton Rapids to the VFW to build a home for veterans' families.

On Jan. 7, 1925, the VFW National Home opened and celebrates its 100th anniversary this year.

The VFW National Home's mission has evolved over the past 100 years. Today, it finds success in assisting veterans and their families with children by creating a foundation of services and resources to achieve their personal and family goals to move forward in a positive, safe and healthy environment.

The National Home's community is open to the families of actively serving military personnel, veterans, and relatives of VFW and VFW Auxiliary members. The family can be one or both parents with one or more children.

'PATRIOTISM RUNS THICK HERE'

Leading the way in this idyllic community is Mike Wilson, executive director of the VFW National Home. A Gold Legacy Life member of VFW Post 1355 in Sturgis, Mich., Wilson is a retired Army command sergeant major. During his 27 years of military service, he served in 1991's Persian Gulf War and *Operation Iraqi Freedom*.

Wilson drives 160 miles round-trip to work each day because he believes in the purpose of the Home and understands it is one of a kind.

"There is no organization like the VFW National Home," Wilson said. "Patriotism runs thick here. I remind the residents regularly to take care of the house they are in and to be patriots."

There are 42 single-family homes in the community situated on wide, tree-lined streets. U.S. flags are prominent



VFW National Home Recreation Coordinator Nancy Bowers congratulates one of the National Home 4-H club members last summer at the Eaton County Fair in Michigan. Bowers has led the VFW National Home 4-H club for 37 years.

4-H OFFERS PIGS AND RABBITS AND MORE

For 37 years, Nancy Bowers has led the VFW National Home 4-H club, also known as the Dynamos. Last summer, 16 Home youth participated in the Eaton County Fair. Combined, they showed seven pigs, six rabbits and five art projects. Top honors were earned by two of the girls who showed rabbits, while others brought home other awards for rabbits and pigs.

Bowers said the kids work at the Montana Homestead on the south side of the campus. There, they tend to the pigs by cleaning out the pens and walking them. With rabbits, the participants must learn the 36-step process to present to county fair judges.

"It teaches the kids patience and teamwork," Bowers said. "They have to practice showing their animals, and everyone helps each other. Being a part of 4-H gets the kids away from their phones and computers and gets them outside."

As the recreation coordinator, Bowers also organizes field trips for the Home's youth. She has a girls group for those ages 11 and older where she illustrates to them the importance of what women have accomplished throughout history.

Bowers said being at the Home and working with the children is like having a big family. She recalled one resident who was, in her words, "the sweetest boy," who was developmentally disabled. He decided to name all of the pigs after his teachers.

"This is truly a fun job," said Bowers, who came to the National Home nearly four decades ago after graduating from college at Michigan State University in nearby Lansing. "Working directly with the kids, especially the teens who need people to talk to, is very rewarding."

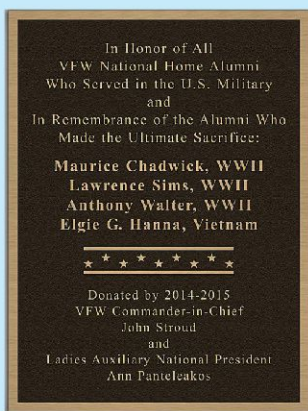


From left, VFW National Home employees Meghan Mitchell, Katie Darling and Brian Daniels take a break while giving visitors a tour of the Home's campus last May outside Eaton Rapids, Mich. Daniels, an Iraq War vet, was a resident of the home as a child and is the current director of Community Development and Alumni Engagement for the VFW National Home.

HEROES OF THE NATIONAL HOME

Children raised at VFW's National Home have always understood patriotism and learned responsibility to others. Not surprisingly, many of them have served, too.

Since the National Home opened in 1925, more than 250 residents have served in the nation's armed forces during wartime. Four of those lost their lives in combat:



Larry Sims survived the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941. That same day, he manned his radio operator's station aboard a Navy patrol bomber that went aloft to seek the Japanese fleet. The plane never returned.

In November 1944, Maurice Chadwick was killed fighting Germans in southern France with the U.S. Army. Three months later, Anthony Walter was killed by the Japanese during the bitter fighting on Luzon in the Philippines.

The fourth Home son to die in action was Pfc. Elgie Hanna. On March 20, 1968, Hanna was on patrol with B Co., 2nd Bn., 5th Cav, 1st Cav Div., near Quang Tri in Vietnam when a sniper's round found its mark. Hanna had been in country only 33 days.

throughout this picturesque campus.

A fitness center, gymnasium, game room, computer lab, library, fishing pond, four miles of hiking trails and five playgrounds also are located there.

The Tribute Garden greets visitors to the campus. Sculptures of children playing are surrounded by lush flowers and trees.

A gem of the community is the VFW Auxiliary Child Care and Early Education Center. There, military and veteran families living at the Home receive free child care while working or attending school.

The full-service, state-licensed child care facility has classrooms for infants, toddlers and preschool-aged children.

At the Veteran and Family Resource Center, case managers work with veterans and their families. Veteran employment specialists there help find employment.

"As vets, we are broken but not destroyed," said Brian Daniels, an Iraq War vet, former National Home resident and current director of Community Development and Alumni Engagement at the Home. "Vets previously were not the priority, but they are now. Mike has changed that."

CHILDREN FEEL SAFE

Wilson said that goal-setting is a priority for the veterans who come to the National Home with their families. He believes helping vets get on the right path leads to life successes.

"They don't always know what 'good' feels like," Wilson said. "When they leave the VFW National Home, they feel good."

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A LOOK BACK AT THE VFW NATIONAL HOME

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE VFW NATIONAL HOME





Left, VFW National Home Executive Director Mike Wilson, VFW Department of Michigan Senior Vice Commander Reinhold E. Yahnka and then-VFW Post 2406 Commander Dave Eddy gather last May outside Eaton Rapids, Mich., at the VFW National Home. Jan. 7 is the centennial anniversary for the Home, which has been a haven for hundreds of children since its founding.

CENTENNIAL EVENTS PLANNED

The VFW National Home will celebrate its 100th anniversary throughout the year. First up is the gala on Saturday, Feb. 8, at the DoubleTree by Hilton Lansing (Mich.) Ballroom. The cost is \$125 per person for this formal event, and reservations are required by Jan. 3.

Visit <https://vfnationalhome.org/news-and-events/events/100th-anniversary-celebration-gala> for more information and to register.

If you are unable to make the gala, mark your calendar for June 28 for the VFW National Home Community Celebration. From 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., there will be free carnival rides, a car show and family activities for all. Food trucks will arrive to ensure there is something for every palette.

There will also be live entertainment by The Bronk Brothers, who were recently inducted into Michigan's Country Hall of Fame. The night concludes with a laser light show.

Visit <https://vfnationalhome.org/news-and-events/events/community-celebration> for up-to-date information on the Community Celebration.

The 2025 Centennial Garden offers engraved bricks to honor a loved one, commemorate a special event, or to simply leave your mark on this historic occasion.

For a limited time, get an 8-inch-by-8-inch engraved brick for \$500. The number of bricks are limited. Order yours here: <https://vfnationalhome.org/centennial-brick>.

must be under 18 years old. Most families stay 3-4 years and about 8-10 families move out each year. Wilson said it takes roughly 30 days to get a house ready after it is vacated. Currently, residents represent 12 states.

While Wilson said he is proud of every aspect of the National Home, experiencing the children living care-free means the most to him. He recalled seeing a 5- or 6-year-old boy running barefoot on the pavement during a gentle rain.

"He ran and jumped right into the sandbox," Wilson said. "To me it said, 'He feels safe, and he feels okay and doesn't have a worry in the world.' Children shouldn't have to struggle just because mom and dad do."

Daniels, who said growing up at the National Home was life-changing, agreed: "The VFW National Home is one of the only places in America where kids can just go out and run around without supervision." (See the September 2020 issue of *VFW* magazine for more on Daniels and other past residents of the Home.)

Children at the Home also can take piano lessons from long-time employee Rhonda Kennedy. An administrative assistant with the programs department, Kennedy has worked at the Home for 45 years.

In that time, she has provided 38,000 piano lessons. The only requirements are that the child is at least 8 years old and has an interest in music.

"To me, it is about more than just music," Kennedy said. "It is wonderful to be a part of something that changes people's lives. It just keeps getting better here."

GENEROSITY RUNS DEEP

Members of the VFW, Auxiliary and Military Order of the Cootie take pride in their National Home. Contributions from Departments, Districts, Posts, Auxiliaries and individual members provide for various needs at the Home.

Departments sponsor the individual houses in the community. Some Departments sponsor multiple houses.

Given its location, the Department of

A parade snakes through the streets of the VFW National Home last September outside Eaton Rapids, Mich. VFW Auxiliary members from around the U.S. met at the Home for the Auxiliary's Celebrating America's Freedom Event.



DID YOU KNOW ...

- Guitars for Vets has a chapter at the VFW National Home.
- The Heroes to Hives program is now in its second year at the Home.
- The fishing pond is named Lake Romanis after James Romanis, one of VFW's founding fathers.
- Once upon a time, the VFW National Home had its own fire department.
- The Home regularly hosts Cup-of-Joe, where veterans gather to drink coffee, eat doughnuts, talk and "basically accomplish nothing."

Michigan is especially active at the Home. VFW Department of Michigan Senior Vice Commander Reinhold E. Yahnka said he has played Santa Claus the last few years during the Christmas festivities.

Yahnka, a Vietnam vet who belongs to VFW Post 6056 in Springport, said Michigan's District 8 raises funds for the kids' Christmas wish lists.

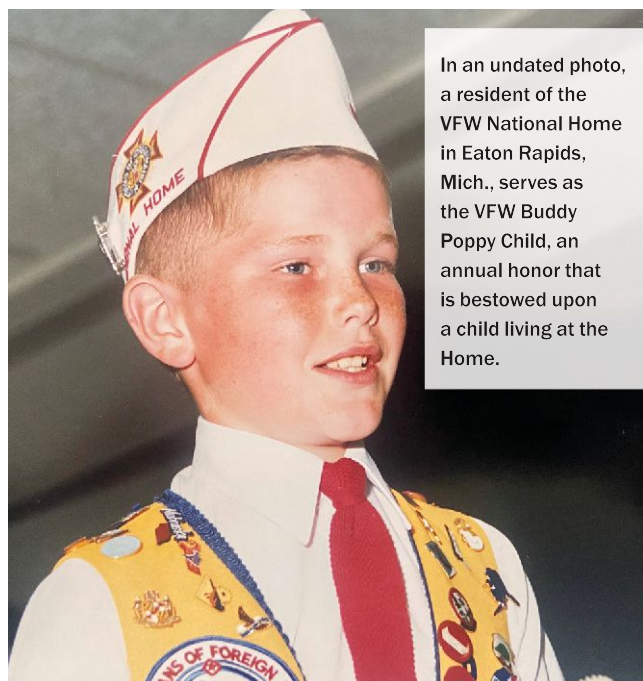
"I pass out everything from iPads to Legos," Yahnka said.

The Military Order of the Cootie Grand of Michigan and VFW Post 2529 in Sandusky annually send families from the Home to Cedar Point amusement park.

Groups of VFW members regularly visit the Home and are treated to guided tours. In September, VFW Auxiliary members from around the nation visited for the organization's Celebrating America's Freedom Event.

VFW "State" days are annual events residents look forward to. A recent example took place last year when the VFW Departments of Illinois and Indiana visited over one weekend. The Department members participated with Home residents in 1k races, pop-up petting zoos, crafts and picnics.

During the 2024 VFW Junior Vice Commander



In an undated photo, a resident of the VFW National Home in Eaton Rapids, Mich., serves as the VFW Buddy Poppy Child, an annual honor that is bestowed upon a child living at the Home.

Conference in Kansas City, Mo., last October, Department of Alabama Junior Vice Commander Colt Drouillard and VFW Department of Connecticut Junior Vice Commander John Kennedy presented Wilson with a donation to the Home.

As the VFW National Home enters its second century of service, Wilson and his staff are working to keep the Home on a pathway of success for those who will follow in their footsteps.

"This is a remarkable place that you have to see to believe," Wilson said. "No other VSO out there has anything like it. VFW did this."



EMAIL jdyhouse@vfw.org



CHECKPOINT

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'A Very Excellent Program'
Unmet Needs program aids Army veteran
October 25, 2019

Army Pfc. 1st Class Lynn Plur was honorably discharged in 2018 and currently is unable to...
Established in 2004, the program issues grants up to \$1,500 to assist active-duty...
Plur served in Afghanistan from May 2016 to February 2017 with the Army's 3rd...
Plur received a post-traumatic stress disorder diagnosis and currently is unable to work...
Plur received the program while researching online, and said he applied for the...
The grant, he said, "was a lot" in his time of need.
"It's very essential because getting out and transitioning back to civilian [life] is...
He added that the grant helped pay for food, utilities and "other necessities."
However, he said that it is important to have documentation in order when applying.
"Overall, it's a very excellent program," Plur said.
For more information about how... only for an Unmet Needs grant, visit vfw.org/unmetneeds.
December 2019 issue of VFW Checkpoint. If you're a PFC...
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DESTINATION RHODE ISLAND



The Ocean State may be the smallest in the U.S., but it offers a plethora of VFW Posts doing great things. Whether you are visiting Bristol, home to the oldest 4th of July celebration in the nation or attending the Newport Jazz Festival, keep your eyes out for VFW and Auxiliary members who are hard at work in the community.

BY JANIE DYHOUSE

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

If you have visited any of the Posts mentioned in this article, we want to hear from you, or let us hear from you after your visit. Email communications@vfw.org and tell us about your visit. We look forward to hearing from you, our valued readers.



DESTINATION POST SERIES



Members of VFW Post 406 in Newport, R.I., gather last October in front of the Newport Tower, believed to be the oldest structure in the state. Standing, from left, are: Sharon McGinnis, Bill Farrell, Joe Kaiser, Post Commander Anselm Richards, Department Commander Mark Turner and David Nicodemus; kneeling are Post Adjutant Paul Radion and Dean Fraioli.



PHOTO BY JANIE DYHOUSE/VFW

As VFW continues its year-long 125th anniversary celebration, *VFW* magazine visited Rhode Island in October to highlight four VFW Posts for the “Destination Post Series.” The four featured “Ocean State” VFW Posts were chosen because of the positive impact each has on the communities in which the Posts are located.

‘OUR FOCUS IS SERVICE’

On a Monday in October, members of VFW Post 406 gathered on a clear, crisp fall evening on the lawn of the Elks Lodge just steps from the famous Newport, R.I. mansions. That evening, Post Commander Anselm Richards was stopped by a Boy Scout who was heading inside to his meeting. The youth wanted to thank Richards for his service. In turn, Richards presented him with a challenge coin and chatted with

him for a few minutes. Turns out, the scout’s dad is a student at the nearby Naval War College.

“Our Post membership is younger and vibrant,” said Richards, an Army veteran who served in Ramadi, Iraq in 2005-2006. “We are [military] officer heavy because of the war college.”

Richards said Post 406 is comprised of former military officers and senior enlisted, making them natural self-starters.

“If I need something done, I turn to Joe, who is a Newport native,” Richards said of Post Junior Vice Commander Joe Kaiser.

Kaiser, a former Army command sergeant major, served in Baghdad from 2005-2006.

“Our focus is service,” Kaiser said. “I like to reinforce to veterans how much good they can still do.”



VFW Post 406 members meet in October on the patio of the Newport Elks Lodge in Newport, R.I. The members no longer have a Post home, opting instead to meet monthly at the Elks. Without a Post home, members are out in the community more.



VFW Post 5390 Auxiliary members take a break from packing homeless care items last October at the Post home in Portsmouth, R.I. Members of VFW Post 5390 say Auxiliary members are one of the reasons the Post is such an asset to the community.

In addition to the Post's participation in VFW programs, members keep an eye on veterans needing a hand up. For example, when one of the Post's two female vets lost her apartment to a fire, the Post provided her with funds and helped her sift through the remains of her apartment to gather her belongings.

A partnership which the Post is

proud of is its work with Gold Star Sailing camps for Gold Star teens. Gold Star Sailing was founded by retired Army colonel Patrick Powers.

In 2012, Powers started Gold Star Sailing to mentor Gold Star teenagers with a focus on leadership, teamwork and adventure.

VFW Department of Rhode Island

Commander Mark Turner, also a member of Post 406, said it means a lot to support the Gold Star teens.

"We know hard," Turner said. "We are talking with kids who know hard."

In support of the camp, the Post partners with the Newport Gulls, a collegiate summer baseball league, in a 50-50 raffle during the 7th inning stretch. Post members work the stands selling raffle chances.

Richards said the last winner donated the winnings back to the Gold Star Sailing Foundation.

'VFW IS A CALLING'

While Post 406 is a beacon in the Newport community, it has not always been so. Members sold the Post home in 1984. Then, in 2018, with a handful of members left on its roster, the Post experienced a rebirth. It helped sponsor the Vietnam Traveling Wall, which according to Turner, was a turning point for the Post.

"It was one of the most moving events I have ever seen," Turner said. "The Post was on its last leg. We went from like four members to 63 today."

Another community endeavor implemented by the Post involved Island Cemetery in the heart of Newport. Post Adjutant Paul Radion is credited with creating a map showing veterans' graves within the cemetery. The goal was to make flagging the graves on holidays more efficient and more inclusive.

Radion, an Army vet who served in Baghdad twice, said Post members went from placing 400 U.S. flags to now 1,300. He engages community youth groups to help with the placement of flags.

"To be successful, we have to integrate the community," Radion said. "Providing leadership in the community is a key component to VFW."

Incidentally, the cemetery is the resting place of two German soldiers whose bodies were recovered from a submarine sunk during WWII near Newport. Each year, those two soldiers are remembered.

According to Turner, each Memorial Day, the community comes together at



VFW Post 152 Commander David Ainslie, seated, and VFW Post 152 Judge Advocate Eric Dukat enjoy the Post's OktoberVets last October in historic Wickford Village in North Kingstown, R.I. The event brought in more than \$16,000 which will be used to support veterans and the community. Dukat also is the Department of Rhode Island adjutant and National Council of Administration representative for Rhode Island.

QUIRKY RHODE ISLAND FACTS

- The Providence-Warwick area has more donut shops per capita than any other place in the United States. There are 23.25 donut shops for every 100,000 Rhode Islanders.
- The first known circus in the United States took place in Newport in 1774.
- The oldest carousel is located in Westerly. The Watch Hill Merry-Go-Round is thought to have been left in Rhode Island by a traveling carnival in 1883.
- It is illegal to smoke a pipe after sunset in Newport.
- Mr. Potato Head earned the title of travel ambassador for Rhode Island in 2000.
- The diner was invented by Walter Scott in Rhode Island. Scott served food from his diner, which was a wagon.
- The house that inspired the movie "The Conjuring" is in Harrisville.

an area of Newport known as "The Point" neighborhood. The gathering commemorates those who have lost their lives at sea.

Those in attendance are given a flower to drop into the water, known as the "strewing of the flowers." Once the strewing is complete, a water cannonade occurs.

Post members agree that not having their own building is a bonus. They hold their monthly meetings and other events at the Elks Lodge in the center of Newport.

"It is a blessing we do not have our own Post home," said Dean Fraioli, a retired Army lieutenant colonel. "We are forced to go out in the community and engage."

Fraioli is charged with running the VFW Buddy Poppy program. He has static Poppy displays in about 10 locations around town — locations where veterans frequently visit, such as barber-shops. The displays have a history of the VFW Buddy Poppy and offer poppies with a place to request a donation.

Vietnam War veteran Bill Farrell said the Post donates coats to veterans at the local senior center. He is a member of the Newport Artillery Company, which also has its own armory at which the Post has held past events.

"I joined the VFW in 1972," Farrell said. "We've done more here in the last five years than all my years before in the VFW."

The Post is especially proud of its speaker series. With the Naval War College in Newport, the speaker pool is deep. Topics range from the war in Ukraine and global warming to WWII-era Japanese internment camps in California. Local authors are often speakers, which proves popular within the community.

"The VFW is a calling," Kaiser said. "We have a huge impact on the community. And the opportunity to help families is the best recruiting tool."

'PEOPLE LOVE TO SUPPORT THE VFW'

Located in the small, eclectic neighborhood of Common Fence Point in

MUST-SEE RHODE ISLAND SITES



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Fort Adams State Park

90 Fort Adams Drive
Newport, RI 02840
<https://riparks.ri.gov/parks/fort-adams-state-park>

Seabee Museum and Memorial Park

21 Iafrate Way
North Kingstown, RI 02852
<https://seabeesmuseum.com>

Naval War College Museum

Luce Avenue
Newport, RI 02841
<https://usnwc.edu/nwc-museum>

Roger Williams Park Zoo

1000 Elmwood Avenue
Providence, RI 02907
<https://www.rwpzoo.org>

The Breakers

44 Ochre Point Avenue
Newport, RI 02840
<https://www.newportmansions.org/mansions-and-gardens/the-breakers>

Cliff Walk

34 Ocean Avenue
Newport, RI 02840
<https://www.discovernewport.org/things-to-do/cliff-walk>

Mohegan Bluffs

Spring Street
Block Island, RI 02807



SEABEE MUSEUM AND MEMORIAL PARK

Touro Synagogue National Historic Site

85 Touro Street
Newport, RI 02840
<https://touro synagogue.org>

First Baptist Church in America

75 North Main Street
Providence, RI 02903-1307
<https://www.firstbaptistchurchinamerica.org>

Old Slater Hill Mill National Historic Landmark

67 Roosevelt Avenue
Pawtucket, RI 02860
<https://www.nps.gov/places/slater-mill.htm>

TOURO SYNAGOGUE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE



NAVAL WAR COLLEGE MUSEUM



MOHEGAN BLUFFS

RHODE ISLAND POSTS

VFW Post 449

197 Providence Street
West Warwick, RI 02893
(401) 828-9715
Commander John Conway

VFW Post 916

155 High Street
Wakefield, RI 02879
(401) 789-0150
Commander Joe Patrick
<https://www.facebook.com/vfw916>

VFW Post 2812

1418 Plainfield Street
Cranston, RI 02920
(401) 942-9500
Commander David Lage
<https://www.facebook.com/p/Kelley-Gazzer-ro-VFW-2812-100063654845705>

VFW Post 5392

134 Shove Street
Tiverton, RI 02878
(401) 624-2697
Commander Charles Mulcahy
<https://www.facebook.com/p/Tiverton-VFW-5392-100075459957905>

VFW Post 6342

1 Main Street
Slatersville, RI 02876
(401) 617-1268
Commander Howard McMillan

VFW Post 8955

113 Beach Street
Westerly, RI 02891
(401) 596-0470
Commander Walter Fricke
<https://www.facebook.com/VFW-Post8955>

VFW Post 9447

6 West Street
Jamestown, RI 02835
Commander Brad Donnelly
<https://www.facebook.com/p/VFW-Post-9447-Jamestown-RI-100070880265230>



Members of VFW Post 5390 in Portsmouth, R.I., and one small supporter of the VFW hang out on the Post's front porch last October in the eclectic Common Fence Point neighborhood in Portsmouth. The Post underwent a recent revitalization, and members say there is always something happening now at Post 5390, including Pilates and Zumba classes.

Portsmouth, R.I., is the revitalized VFW Post 5390. Under the direction of Post Commander Ken Rutter, the Post is flourishing.

"We are the go-to place for residents in this neighborhood," Rutter said. "We have something going on here all the time, it seems."

Indeed, a visit to the Post revealed a packed house as members of the Post and its Auxiliary packed kits for homeless veterans. A bustling assembly line was working to place the essentials into bags. This was followed by trivia night, as the door was revolving with people stopping on their way home from work.

If member Louis DiCarlo happens to be at the Post, he will recite all the state's capitals for you and may name the motto of each state. He is a wealth of knowledge that surely comes in handy on those trivia nights.

"I really enjoy the people here the most," said DiCarlo, an Air Force vet who served in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. "And we always have something happening here."

Until 2023 when the Post had its grand reopening on Veterans Day, it was in a state of disrepair. According to Post Senior Vice Commander Vic Schaefer, the Post is now considered a community hub.

"A highlight of the rededication

was the renovation and rededication of the canteen in honor of Staff Sgt. Christopher Potts, a local Iraq War hero who sacrificed his life 20 years ago," Shaefer said. "This tribute ensures Staff Sgt. Potts' legacy is woven into the fabric of our community."

Quartermaster Tim Cathcart moved to the area in 2017 and quickly found a home.

"The VFW and Auxiliary treat special needs people very well," said Cathcart, whose daughter became disabled after a car accident when she was a child. "We are truly a community base."

Cathcart has been in conversations with Yoga for Vets, hoping to offer it at the Post. Currently, Pilates classes are held at the Post. Various groups rent out space at the Post for events to include Coast Guard certification.

The Auxiliary is a key component to the success of the Post, as most VFW members there will say. The Post Auxiliary president is Shauna Jamieson, and she is married to the Auxiliary's Department senior vice president, Scott Jamieson. The Department president, Stephen Doherty, also is a member of the Post.

The Jamiesons are believed to be the Post's first married Auxiliary couple. Scott is in charge of a partnership between the Post and Auxiliary and



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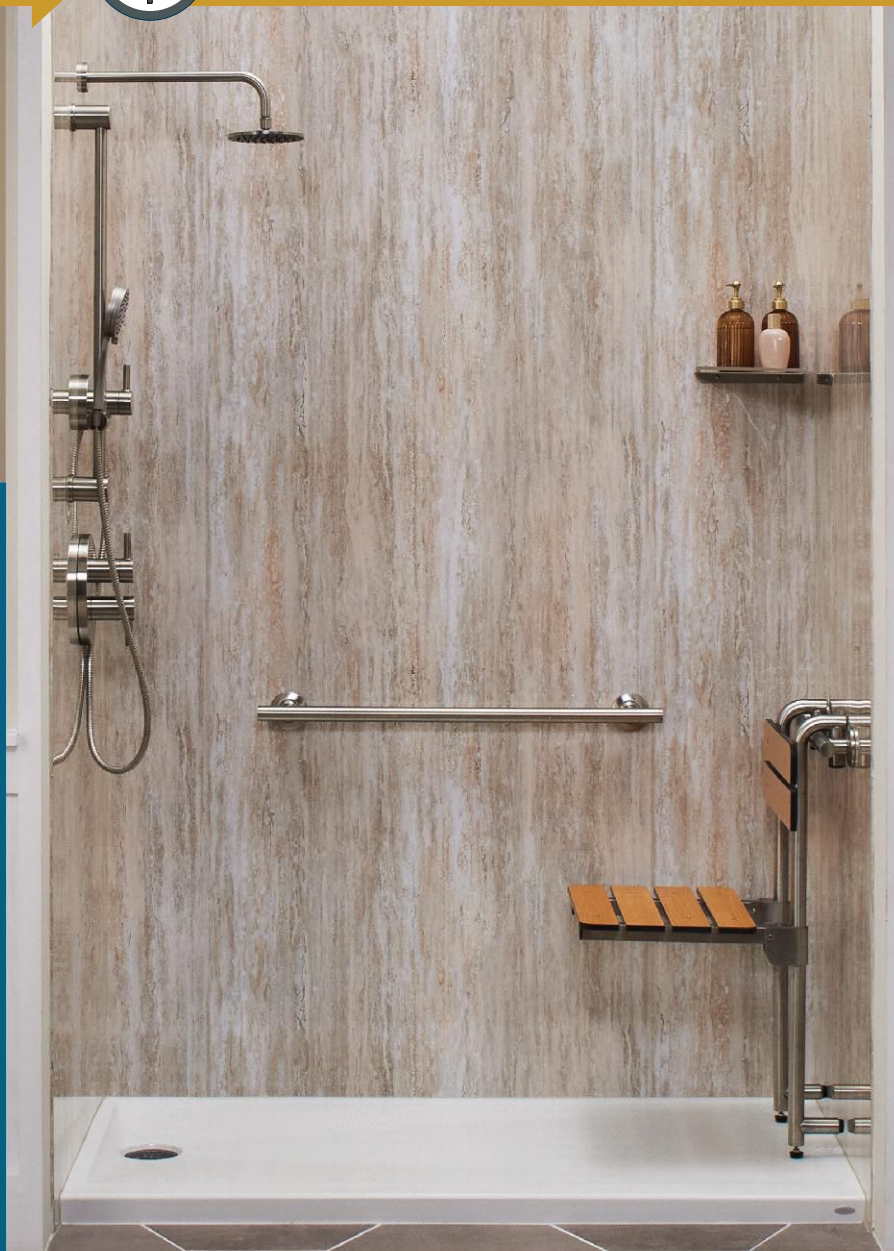
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St. Pauly Textile in New York. A shed placed on the Post's property is used to collect gently used clothing items to be recycled by St. Pauly.

Weekly, a truck comes to load up the clothes. Once a month, the Post receives a direct deposit from the organization averaging \$150-\$200.

"This is really something every VFW could be doing," Scott said. "This is truly one of the best partnerships. People love to support the VFW."

Schaefer concurs with the sentiment, adding that collaborative partnerships with local organizations is part of what makes Post 5390 special.

"These collaborations extend the Post's reach and impact on various community groups and open the doors to additional community support," Schaefer said.

"Veterans and civilians now gather at the Post to participate in a range of events and activities that build stronger community bonds. Alongside groups like the Girl Scouts and the James L. Maher Center, we are working together to foster relationships between veterans and civilians, encouraging collaboration and unity."

Rutter said the Post is currently facing a challenge. It needs a new

fire sprinkler system, and, if it is not installed by the end of 2025, the Post will be shut down. Rutter added that the Post membership is working to raise funds for this expensive endeavor.

"We are here for the community, but we couldn't do this without the community," Rutter said. "We do not want to lose the momentum we have going."

Member John Silvia is one of those community members. A Korean War vet, Silvia has been a VFW member since 1960.

"I like the location of this Post the best," Silvia said and laughed. "I live six blocks away, and it's always the place to stop when I'm coming and going. I love to dance and have a good time, and this is the place to do that."

HELPING PEOPLE 'THE BEST WE CAN'

The community of Bristol, R.I., is known as America's Most Patriotic town due its longstanding Independence Day celebration. It is considered the oldest, continuous such celebration in the U.S. The first was held in 1785. The center-line stripes on the main roads are painted red, white and blue.

Along the annual parade route is VFW Post 237. Post Commander Karl Antonevich said the Rhode Island Veterans Home transports its residents to the Post to view the Fourth of July parade from the lawn each year.

On Veterans Day, the Post hosted a food truck at the Veterans Home for residents' enjoyment, according to Post Senior Vice Commander Joseph Diniz. Also on Veterans Day, the Post annually serves breakfast following the ceremony at the Veterans Memorial in Bristol.

Diniz added that the Post is frequently called upon when there is a need for wheelchairs or walkers. Other VFW Posts in the area have contacted the Bristol Post for these mobility aids.

"We really do try to help people out the best we can," Diniz said. "We also have a good rapport with community businesses. The local grocery store donates 30-40 turkeys for our turkey drive. We are fortunate that people in Bristol and Warren are so generous."

PHOTO BY JANIE DYHOUSE/VFW



From left, Manny Almeida, Post 237 Commander Karl Antonevich, Wally Coelho, Post 237 Senior Vice Commander Joe Diniz and Ted Solasz meet at the memorial garden last October outside VFW Post 237 in Bristol, R.I. The memorial is for 1st Sgt. Peter Andrew McKenna, a Bristol native killed in Afghanistan. Post 237 has the reputation as the go-to organization in the community for help.

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Diniz noted that numerous businesses donate items for Post raffles as fundraisers. Post 237 was recently named as the most likeable organization in Bristol.

With its desirable location on Bristol's Hope Street, VFW Post 237 is a constant hub of activity. In December, a Sip-n-Shop was held at the Post. Vendors set up for the public to come in and shop, and there was a raffle to benefit the Post.

There are regular Bingo nights, steak fry fundraisers and, around Halloween, Trunk or Treating for the kids.

On the Post's lawn is a memorial to 1st Sgt. Peter Andrew McKenna, a Bristol native who was killed on Aug. 7, 2015, in Kabul, Afghanistan. McKenna

was assigned to 1st Bn., 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne). Incidentally, the Bristol Post Office also is named after McKenna.

Diniz said that all materials for the memorial's garden area to McKenna was donated, including the stone wall.

Antonevich said the Post has been located at its current location, a former church, since 1963. Until about 10 years ago, smoking was a way of life in the Post's basement canteen.

That ended when Diniz's daughter asked if he had been smoking after returning from the Post. A nonsmoker, Diniz assured her he had not.

"That is when I decided to campaign for the Post to go non-smoking."

Diniz said. "It wasn't easy, but we got it accomplished."

Today, a smoker's area has been built outside the Post, complete with heat lamps.

"Thank God for Joe and these guys," Antonevich said. "We are now a non-smoking Post. We had four bucks in the bank when they came in."

Wally Coelho — former VFW Department of Rhode Island commander — recalled how the Post helped WWII vet Arthur Madeiras. During the vet's drive-by birthday celebration for his 101st birthday, his three Purple Hearts were stolen.

Madeiras had allowed some people into his home to use the bathroom. His Purple Hearts and other military honors were sitting in his living room.

Coelho, also the president of the Bristol Veterans Council, worked with Sen. Jack Reed's (D-R.I.) to get the Purple Hearts replaced and presented to Madeiras a year later.

"He is really quite a guy," Coelho said of Madeiras. "At 104, he still golfs three days a week and tells it like it is."

A 'WELCOMING AND INCLUSIVE' POST

In North Kingstown, R.I., members of VFW Post 152 are well-known in the community. Since they do not have a Post home, Post Commander David Ainslie said all proceeds from Post-sponsored events go back to veterans, the community and the Rhode Island National Guard.

"We are very much connected to the National Guard," Ainslie said. "We participate in Yellow Ribbon events for the Guard by providing coffee and doughnuts for the send-off events. And Christopher P. Callahan, the Adjutant General of the Rhode Island National Guard, is a member of the Post."

Post Judge Advocate Eric Dukat, who also is the Department Adjutant and National Council of Administration representative for Rhode Island, said he considers the Post to be "dismounted" from its facility and engaged with its community.

"Community engagement is what makes us who we are," Dukat said.

PHOTO BY JANIE DYHOUSE/VFW



Post 152 members gather for a bit of fun last October in the historic Wickford Village neighborhood in North Kingstown, R.I. Having no dedicated Post home frees up all funds to give back to veterans and the community. The Post has close ties to the Rhode Island National Guard and is a key supporter at various Guard events.



DID YOU KNOW?

- Newport has more than 400 miles of coastline.
- One of the original colonies, Rhode Island was the last to become a state.
- Connecticut, Massachusetts and New York surround Rhode Island. The border with New York is a water border.
- The oldest synagogue in the United States, Touro Synagogue, is located in Newport.
- Roger Williams founded Rhode Island after he was expelled from Massachusetts because of his religious beliefs. He started the state to provide religious freedom for all.
- Providence is home to the first Baptist church in the nation, founded in 1638.
- Rhode Island was the first state to abolish slavery.
- Rhode Island is known as the sailing capital of the world.
- There are 21 lighthouses in Rhode Island.
- Rhode Island is known as “the Ocean State,” but 59 percent of the state is covered in forest.
- The state motto is “Hope.”

“When we get new members, it is because they see us out in the community. We are very welcoming and inclusive.”

Dukat noted that during the Rhode Island National Guard’s annual Carnival for Heroes, the VFW has a school supply drive for the children of uniformed personnel.

“Our current Post adjutant was there with her children, and that is when she signed up to be a member,” said Dukat, who retired from the Navy in 2016 after 29 years of service.

In October, the Post held OktoberVets German Festival and a 5k and a .152k fun run through the historic and picturesque Wickford Village. In 2022, *USA Today* named Wickford Village the Best Historic Town in America.

Race participants ran by art galleries, antique shops, cafes, restaurants, historic churches, colonial homes and gardens. Each received a T-shirt with the race logo, medal and a swag bag.

Following the run, the festival featured live music, a beer garden, ven-

dors and activities for family members. Some of the VFW members donned traditional lederhosen for the event. All proceeds benefited veteran service programs and local community charities.

Ainslie said the event raised more than \$16,000 this year. Another fundraising event the Post endeavored to do was the “Have A Heart Softball” tournament in February.

“The idea was to play in the cold, so vets don’t have to live in the cold,” said Ainslie, an Iraq War vet. “Unfortunately, it was too warm, and we weren’t allowed to play on the fields. It is something we would like to try again.”

Food bank contributions, clothing drives, turkey donations, Buddy Poppy drives and a scholarship program in addition to the Voice of Democracy and Patriot’s pen programs are just some of the ways the Post supports the community, according to Ainslie.

“We are a small Post with 120 members, but we do a lot,” Ainslie said. “I took over as commander 10 years ago, and they keep voting me back in for some reason.”

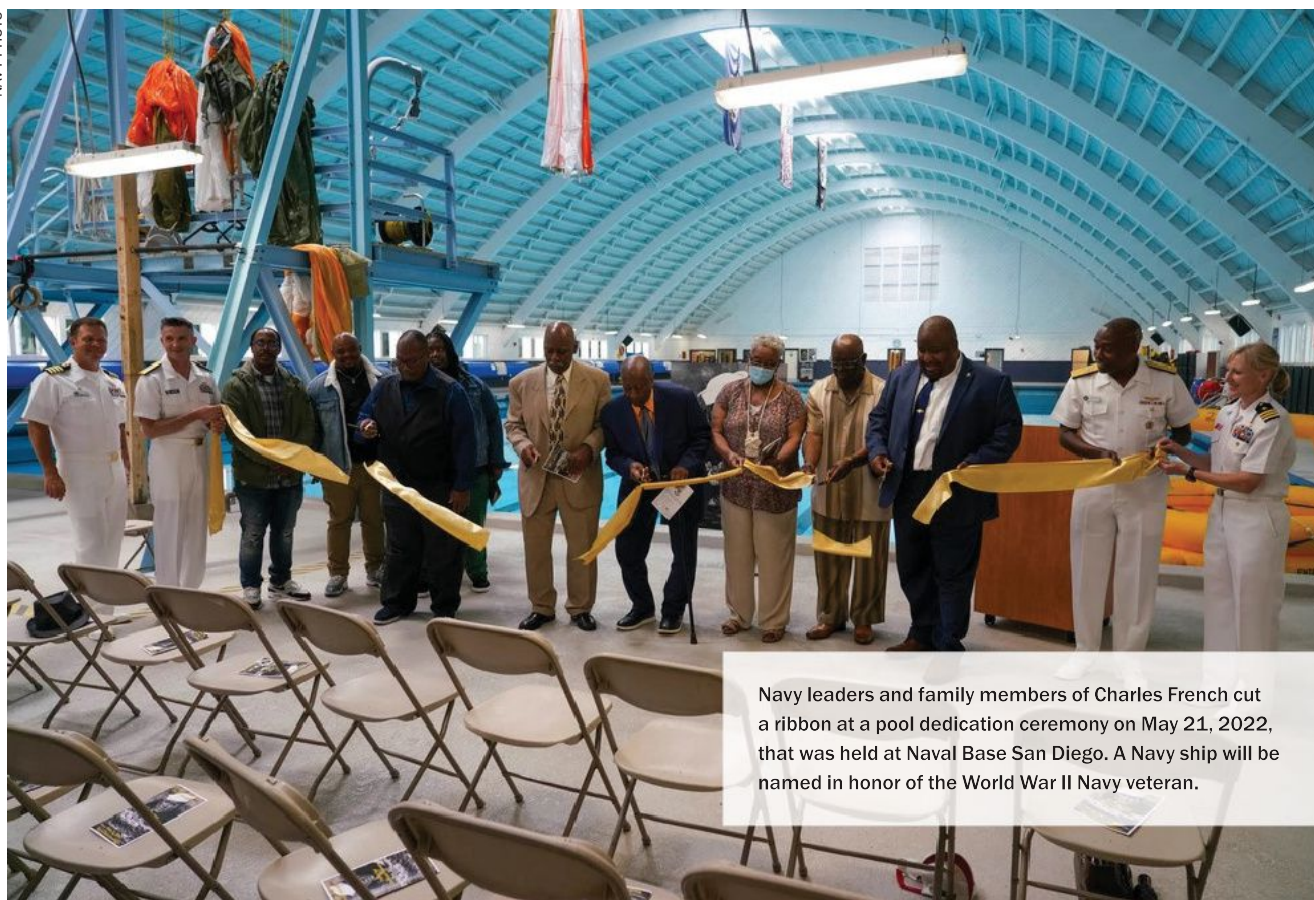
Ainslie said that at events Post 152 sponsors or is present, he doesn’t talk about membership with non-member vets because they see for themselves what the Post is all about. He added that there is a couple who lives in San Diego and belongs to Post 152. They join the monthly meetings via Zoom.

North Kingstown Post members seem to enjoy the camaraderie they share and are quick to credit one another for the Post’s successes. Ainslie and Dukat both work at the Naval War College just one floor apart. Dukat joked he can hear Ainslie talking on the phone just above his office throughout the day.

“David is like the Energizer bunny,” Dukat said. “He just keeps on going.”

Let us know if your Rhode Island travels take you to any of the Posts featured in this article, such as North Kingstown, which, incidentally, celebrated its 350th anniversary in 2024. Be on the lookout for VFW members helping out and having fun. ★

EMAIL jdyhouse@vfw.org



Navy leaders and family members of Charles French cut a ribbon at a pool dedication ceremony on May 21, 2022, that was held at Naval Base San Diego. A Navy ship will be named in honor of the World War II Navy veteran.

VFW Celebrates Black History Month

America's largest combat veterans organization commemorates black veterans for their service and contributions to military history.

BY DAVE SPIVA

NAVY NAMES NEW DESTROYER FOR WWII HERO

A Navy veteran who saved 15 of his shipmates during World War II's Guadalcanal campaign is set to have a Navy ship named in his honor. As of October 2024, the Navy had not given a timeline for the commissioning of the *USS Charles J. French (DDG-142)*.

Arkansas native Charles French was aboard the *USS Gregory (DD-82)* in September 1942 when the Japanese navy attacked the ship, which sank off the northern coast of Guadalcanal. After abandoning the ship, French

swam for hours through shark-infested waters while towing a raft of wounded sailors whom he brought to safety. French, known to his fellow sailors as the "Human Tugboat," died in 1956.

In May 2022, Naval Base San Diego honored French by naming a rescue swimmer training pool in his honor.

COAST GUARD PROMOTES FIRST BLACK WOMAN TO REAR ADMIRAL

Rear Admiral (Lower Half) Zeita Merchant was the first black woman in the Coast Guard's 234-year history to

achieve the rank.

In April 2024, the Mississippi native was promoted and in June 2024 took command of the Coast Guard Personnel Service Center in Washington, D.C. Merchant has held several leadership roles, including commanding Marine safety units in Chicago and New York, where she became the first black woman in those positions.

FIRST BLACK NASA CANDIDATE FINALLY GOES TO SPACE

Six decades after becoming the first African American to enter the Air

Force's Aerospace Research Pilot School, Ed Dwight became the oldest person to ever fly in space.

On May 19, 2024, Dwight took flight aboard the Blue Origin's New Shepard-25 capsule. Blue Origin, founded in 2000 by business tycoon Jeff Bezos, is a privately owned aerospace service company. After completing the first phase of the program in the early 1960s, Dwight — from Kansas City, Kan. — was not selected to be an astronaut.

NAVY COMMISSIONS SHIP NAMED FOR MEDAL OF HONOR RECIPIENT

The Navy commissioned the *USS John L. Canley (ESB-6)* on Feb. 17, 2024, in San Diego. The ship honors Marine Corps Sgt. Maj. John Canley, who earned the Medal of Honor during the January-February 1968 Battle of Hue in the Vietnam War.

Canley, of Arkansas, fought off multiple enemy attacks to relieve friendly forces who were surrounded in Hue. Despite

being wounded, Canley was able to carry several wounded Marines to safety. Canley, who died in 2022, was presented the Medal of Honor in October 2018, four decades after his actions.

WWII NAVY VETERAN AWARDED CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL

Professional baseball player Larry Doby posthumously received the Congressional Gold Medal on Dec. 13, 2023, which would have been his 100th birthday.

The World War II Navy veteran was the first African American to play in Major League Baseball's American League in 1947. (Jackie Robinson was the first player in the National League.) Doby, originally from South Carolina, was the first player to go directly from the Negro Leagues to the majors. The Baseball Hall of Famer died in 2003.

HONORING BLACK CIVIL WAR VETERANS

In February 2024, 13 African-American Union soldiers were recognized for

their service during the U.S. Civil War. For decades, their remains were buried and described as "unknowns" at Mississippi's Vicksburg National Cemetery.

Historians later identified the men, who were soldiers a part of the 1st Mississippi Infantry (African Descent). Volunteers placed U.S. flags at each soldier's gravestone on Feb. 14, 2024, 160 years after they were killed by Confederate forces in an attack at Ross Landing, Ark.

TUSKEGEE AIRMAN HONORED WITH STREET SIGN

Army Air Forces 2nd Lt. Ferrier White, who died in World War II, was honored in April 2024 with a street sign in Elyria, Ohio, which was placed on the corner of Maple Street and Oberlin Road.

The Tuskegee Airman went missing over Europe's Adriatic Sea during a mission on April 5, 1945. White's remains were never recovered. ★

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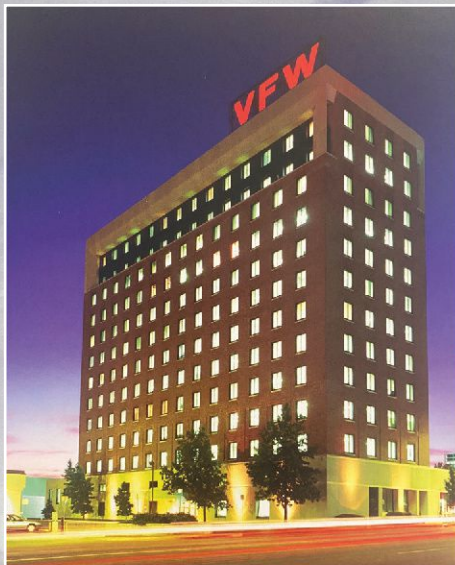
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JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2025 • WWW.VFW.ORG • 37



VFW NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS BUILDING REACHES CENTENNIAL MILESTONE

An undated illustration shows VFW National Headquarters, with the south-facing entrance on 34th Street. VFW moved into the building in 1930, leasing space in what was then known as the Medical Arts Building.

INSET: Following modernizing renovations in the 1970s, VFW National Headquarters is seen at night, its "VFW" letters lit by night and seen from miles away.



A fixture since its creation in 1925, the 12-story National Headquarters building in Kansas City has been the organization's command center since 1930.

BY ISMAEL RODRIGUEZ JR.



The Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Building in Kansas City, Kan., was home to the Veterans of Foreign Wars National Headquarters before the organization relocated to the Missouri side in 1930.



VFW National Headquarters staff pictured in 1924 in front of their office building in Kansas City, Kan., prior to moving into Memorial Building.

In a city filled with old, redbrick relics and modern towers alike, the VFW National Headquarters building in Kansas City, Mo., has stood as a symbol of permanence.

Seen from any point on Broadway Boulevard in Kansas City's midtown, the 12-story, 165,000-square-foot VFW Building celebrates its centennial birthday this year as the administrative home of the country's oldest combat veterans organization.

The two have coexisted in perpetuity since VFW moved its headquarters into the building, then called the Porter Building, in 1930 and purchased it in 1946.

For current VFW National Quartermaster Marc Garduno, purchasing the building in 1946 made strategic sense for the VFW, which had exceeded 1.5 million members and seen a 728 percent increase following World War II.

"I'm certain the reasons were many, but the one that makes the most sense is that we could serve veterans more easily through this centralized location and because Kansas City was easily accessible by rail," Garduno said.

Originally opened in 1925 as the Medical Arts Building to house physicians, surgeons and dentists, the building's location failed to attract as many medical users as planned and gradually evolved into a general office complex.

When VFW headquarters moved into the building in 1930, it occupied 45 percent of its office space. At the time, the building also housed the first FM radio station in Kansas City, as well as other local stores and private businesses.

To expand its manpower and cater to the needs of veterans returning home following WWII, the VFW purchased the building in 1946 for approximately \$500,000. This included four-and-a-half acres containing the 12-story building, a small building to the south that once housed the Ladies Auxiliary Supply Department, several tenants and parking for almost 500 cars. Among those tenants who rented from VFW in those years was the H&R Block tax preparation firm, whose world headquarters are now three miles away in downtown Kansas City.

Today, the building houses 60 percent of VFW's administrative functions and more than 34 tenants, such as a travel agency, law firms, an employment placement service, counseling practitioners, insurance companies, spas and estheticians, as well as a few non-profits.

For many of the tenants and in-house VFW employees who are Kansas City natives, the building's presence has remained a fixture in their memories of their hometown.

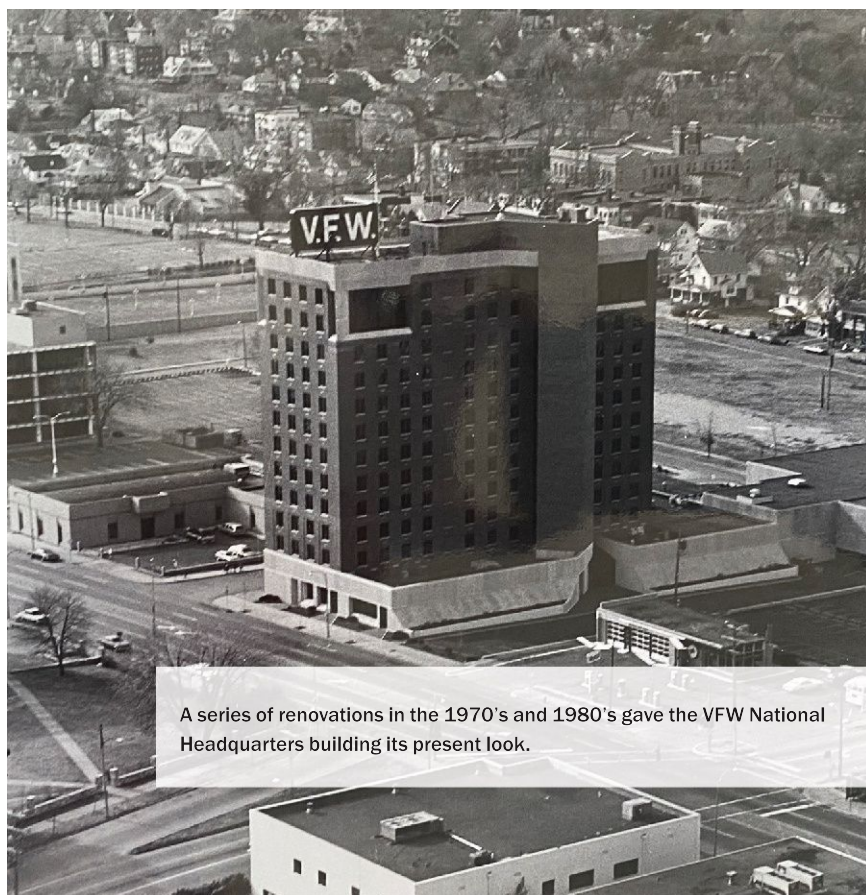
"I am a transplant to Kansas City, but I have had conversations with some who, as children, vividly recall passing by the building and seeing the huge light-up VFW sign on the roof, and that's how they learned about who we are, and what we do," Garduno said. "Sometimes, when aerial views of downtown KC are shot for televised sporting events, the sign is clearly visible. If nothing else, the sign is certainly a part of the Kansas City skyline."

Throughout their linked history, both VFW and its home have also continued to evolve to meet the needs and demands of the times, an unrelenting approach that, according to Garduno, includes constant renovations to maintain the integrity of VFW's headquarters.

"Many may not realize it, but it takes quite a lot of effort and resources to maintain a 100-year-old structure," Garduno said. "Some current plans include renovation of several restrooms on the first floor, renovation of the warehouse space we have across the street to make it suitable for a potential tenant, and some improvements to the mezzanine that have taken a backseat to a couple of urgent repairs that took priority."

Since purchasing the building in 1946, the VFW also has added to the facility by creating memorials that both educate and show the sacrifices made by its members and all veterans of the U.S. armed forces.

Among those projects is the Centennial Plaza, which sits beside the VFW building at the corner of Broadway and Linwood. Unveiled on Oct. 5, 2001, the monument serves as an axis for visitors and sightseers vis-



A series of renovations in the 1970's and 1980's gave the VFW National Headquarters building its present look.

iting landmarks around a city as rich with history as Kansas City.

The Plaza commemorates 100 years of "veterans helping veterans" and features a life-sized, two-figured bronze sculpture depicting a soldier transitioning into civilian life as a VFW member. Known as The Citizen-Soldier, the statue was created by the late sculptor Jim Brothers and depicts his friend, Vietnam War veteran and esteemed poet and memoirist John Musgrave, a life member of VFW Post 6240 in Russell, Kan.

"Centennial Plaza has become a point of interest for the public and visiting members who routinely visit to admire and photograph," Garduno said. "The flag poles and VFW monument at the base are clearly an eye-catching sight for anyone who stops at the light facing west at Linwood Ave. The bricks located all around the Citizen-Soldier statue also represent hundreds of endowment donations from our Gold Legacy Life Members."



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VFW National Headquarters shown here in February 1961, facing Broadway. The shops and apartments to the right of the building were eventually replaced with a larger parking lot and VFW Centennial Plaza.



VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS.

DAY OF SERVICE

The VFW Day of Service is part of the VFW's #StillServing campaign and unites VFW members in a common goal — to show the nation the meaningful impact we make in our communities.

The 2025 Day of Service kicks off May 3 with events taking place throughout the remainder of the month. Start planning today and visit vfw.org/DayofService to sign up, register your event and secure your place on our Day of Service map.

[VFWDAYOFSERVICE.ORG](https://vfw.org/DayofService)



#STILLSERVING

VFW Supports Disaster

VFW deployed its nationwide network of Posts to help those affected by *Hurricane Helene* in North Carolina and Tennessee. VFW members around the country answered the call for help.

BY DAVE SPIVA



VFW volunteers in October 2024 bring supplies to North Carolina residents affected by *Hurricane Helene* at VFW Post 1142 in North Wilkesboro, N.C. VFW members from across the nation assisted communities impacted by *Hurricane Helene* last year.

Relief Efforts



VFW members from across the nation sprang into action in October 2024 to help communities impacted by *Hurricane Helene*. From delivering supplies and clearing debris to organizing drop-off and pick-up points, VFW members were on the ground providing support where it was needed.

VFW Commander-in-Chief Al Lipphardt last October thanked members for their contributions and selflessness to provide a “hand up” to fellow members and their communities.

“My deepest gratitude goes out to all VFW and Auxiliary members, and our supporters for the time, supplies, financial contributions and forward efforts in assisting those whose lives were suddenly thrust into devastation and despair in the wake of this natural disaster,” Lipphardt said in a statement. “Your tireless efforts and support are not only providing ongoing, much-needed relief to so many, but serve as a meaningful contributor toward healing and eventually, rebuilding.”

Learn more about VFW’s relief efforts at <https://www.vfw.org/relief>.



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VFW Post 5202 and Auxiliary members clear out a tree in October 2024 in Waynesville, N.C. Members also helped repair a fence for a local veteran.



From left, VFW Post 1719 (Chandler, Okla.) Commander Bryan Vann; Post members AJ Knapp and Mark Hadix; volunteers from the 160th Field Arty Regt. Gunnar Pike and Indra Payden; Post Quartermaster Darrell Harp; Post Chaplain Darrell Martin; and Post Senior-Vice Commander Mark Rackley deliver donated supplies to help with disaster relief efforts in North Carolina in October 2024. The donations were given to VFW Post 5202, which served as a central hub for receiving donations.





Members of VFW Post 2252 in Kalispell, Mont., present a \$15,000 check in October 2024 to Post 6908 in Mountain City, Tenn. Funds were given to Post 6908 to help with recovery efforts as members serve residents affected by Hurricane Helene. Pictured from left: Post 6908 Sergeant-at-Arms Patrick Ward, Quartermaster Ryan Keeler, Senior Vice Commander Bill Miles, Lori Bryden, former Post Commander and Montana District 1 Commander Jonathan Pohlod, Commander Art Bielz, Randall Deffert and Ryan Schwegel.



Supplies for Hurricane Helene victims are shown at VFW Post 1142 in October 2024.

PHOTO BY BRITTANY DYMOND/VFW



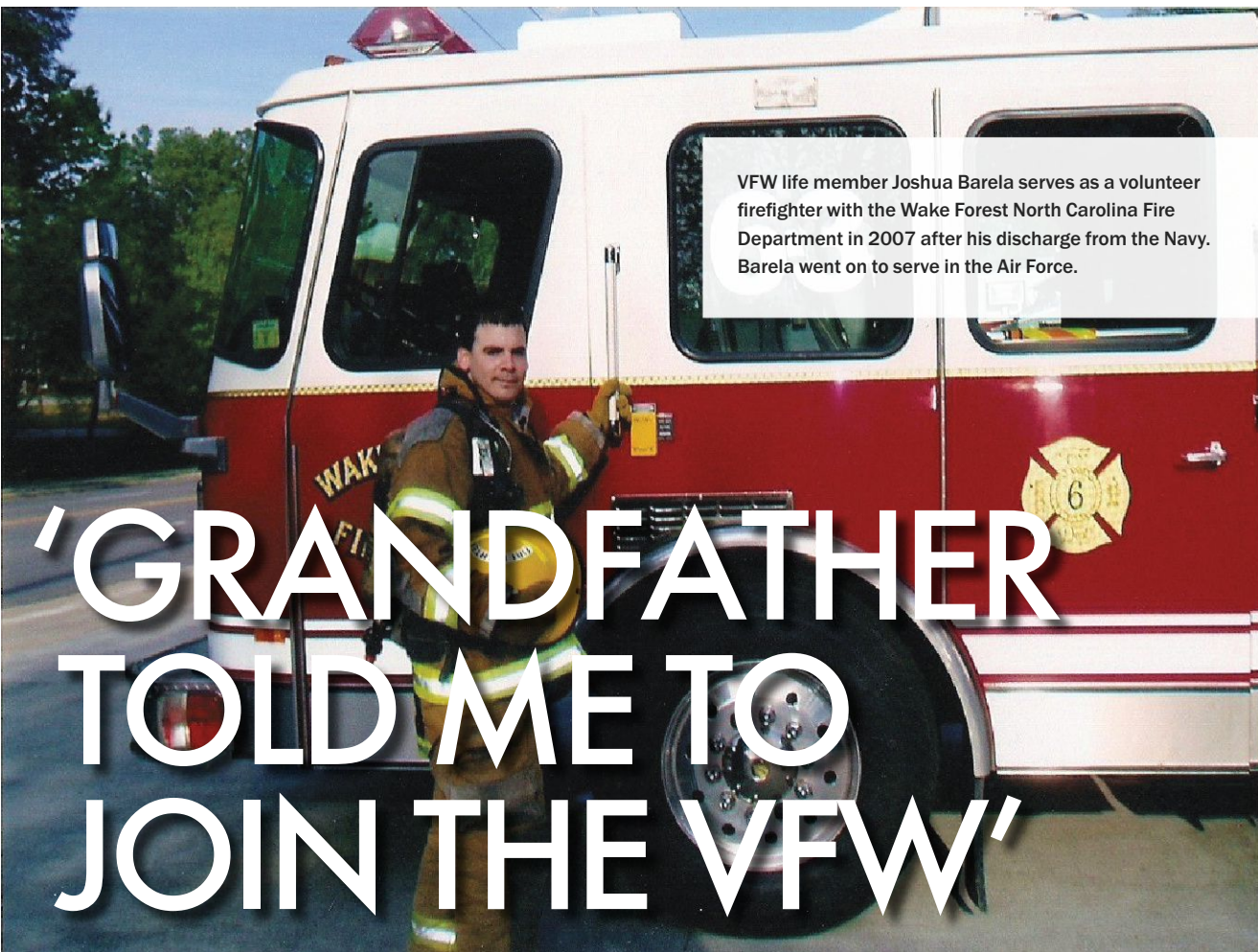
From left, VFW Quartermaster General Marc Garduno, VFW Post 5202 (Waynesville, N.C.) Commander Sam Cahill, VFW Department of North Carolina District 17 President Niki Paganelli and Joel Gill, of VFW Post 5202, show off donated shirts from San Antonio-based Grunt Style in October 2024 while volunteering during Hurricane Helene relief efforts in North Carolina.

VFW PHOTO



VFW Quartermaster General Marc Garduno helps lead disaster relief supplies last October at VFW Post 1142 in North Wilkesboro, N.C. Garduno was just one of many VFW members from around the country who volunteered to help victims of Hurricane Helene.

PHOTO BY BRITTANY DYMOND/VFW



VFW life member Joshua Barela serves as a volunteer firefighter with the Wake Forest North Carolina Fire Department in 2007 after his discharge from the Navy. Barela went on to serve in the Air Force.

'GRANDFATHER TOLD ME TO JOIN THE VFW'

Military service strengthens the bond between great-grandfather and his great-grandson, a veteran of *Operation Southern Watch*.

BY JANE BLUMENTHAL MARTIN

Within moments of meeting Joshua Barela, it is evident how vital family is to him. His life path, marked by service in the U.S. Navy and Air Force, has deepened his connection to his great-grandfather, Julian Barela.

Living in a different state and enduring many hardships during his childhood, Joshua visited his great-grandfather only a handful of times. With a college scholarship awaiting him in Florida, Joshua chose to delay college to serve in the Navy, a decision that ultimately brought him closer to his great-grandparents.

He entered the Navy at 18 years old. He later deployed to the Persian Gulf during *Operation Southern Watch* with the Airborne Command & Control Squadron (VAW) 116, also known as the Sun Kings, aboard the *USS Constellation*. When he returned to the U.S., he was stationed within driving distance of his great-grandparents.

"Upon return from my first deployment, I was stationed closer to my grandparents and drove several hours to visit them at their home," Joshua said. "Whenever I would leave their house, I told them, 'I love you,' and they would always say, 'Mijo, we love you more.'"

These visits provided Joshua and Julian the chance to forge a bond that continues to inspire Joshua's own family stories.

Before these encounters, the Barela family was unaware of the extent of Julian's WWII military service. During his time on the *USS Hansford (APA-106)*, Julian participated in significant battles, including Iwo Jima and Okinawa, and was present in Tokyo Bay on V-J Day for the surrender ceremony on the *USS Missouri (BB-63)*. He also took part in *Operation Magic Carpet*, caring for liberated Allied prisoners.

"For the first time, grandfather shared his testimony about his WWII Navy combat service experiences, including the Battle of Iwo Jima, where he witnessed the historic raising of



ABOVE LEFT: WWII veteran Julian Barela shown here in 1945 after V-J Day. A Navy vet, Julian fought on Iwo Jima and Okinawa. He came home and joined VFW Post 10005 in Bullhead City, Ariz.

ABOVE RIGHT: Joshua Barela, left, visits with his great-grandfather, Julian Barela, at Christmas in 1999 at Julian's home in Arizona. The elder Barela encouraged his great-grandson to join the VFW when he presented him with a copy of VFW magazine. Joshua is a VFW member-at-large with the Department of Florida.

our American Flag on Mt. Suribachi,” Joshua said. “I could tell in his facial expressions as he shared about his combat deployments that grandfather felt very blessed to be alive.

“As a peaceful, humble, quiet, and resilient man of action, grandfather Barela never talked about his heroic service and WWII combat tours with anyone. After my first deployment to a combat zone, my grandfather explained for the first time the extent of his military service and war experiences.”

Joshua credits his military service with opening the door to his great-grandfather’s historic accounts. Their mutual understanding fostered a connection that encouraged the elder Barela to open up about his military combat experiences. At the same time, it gave Joshua the background to dig deeper into the stories.

Their discussions opened a new chapter in the family’s history, instilling great pride in Joshua as he was able to share this treasured story with other family members. It also started Joshua on his own path to becoming a VFW Life Member.

“Grandfather, a VFW Life Member [Colorado River Valley Post 10005 in Bullhead City, Ariz.], also presented me with my first *VFW* magazine and told me to join the VFW,” Joshua said. “He explained that the VFW does much good work for military service members, veterans, their families, and communities. Through leading by example, grandfather still served at his local VFW Post after the age of 90.”

During that conversation, Joshua was yet to finish his military service. After several deployments in the Navy, he returned to his educational track, becoming the first in his family to graduate from college. In just two years, he completed a four-year bachelor’s degree with honors. Then, after earning his first master’s degree, he applied for the U.S. Air Force officer program and became the first commissioned officer in his family.

While in the Air Force, Joshua led hundreds of airmen in aircraft flight operations, aviation maintenance, logistics, engineering and deployments, managed billions of dollars in vital national assets and set up a new nuclear command.

In his final military post as captain, Joshua taught the next generation of military officers as assistant professor in Aerospace Studies at North Carolina State University.

Since his discharge from the Air Force, Joshua has earned three more degrees: an MBA, Ed.S., and a Ph.D., in education with high distinction. He and his wife, Bernice, are co-founders and leaders of Christian Academy & Lighthouse Inc. (CAL), a charitable nonprofit organization that “serves impoverished children, orphans, and widows around the world with God’s love (John 3:16).”

CAL works with populations in unreached areas of Asia to provide quality education for children, launch schools and churches, and grant children educational scholarships to improve their lives. The organization also supports widows and orphans with needed assistance.

Joshua is proud to be a part of Julian’s lineage and is grateful for all he learned from his great-grandfather, including living a life of service.

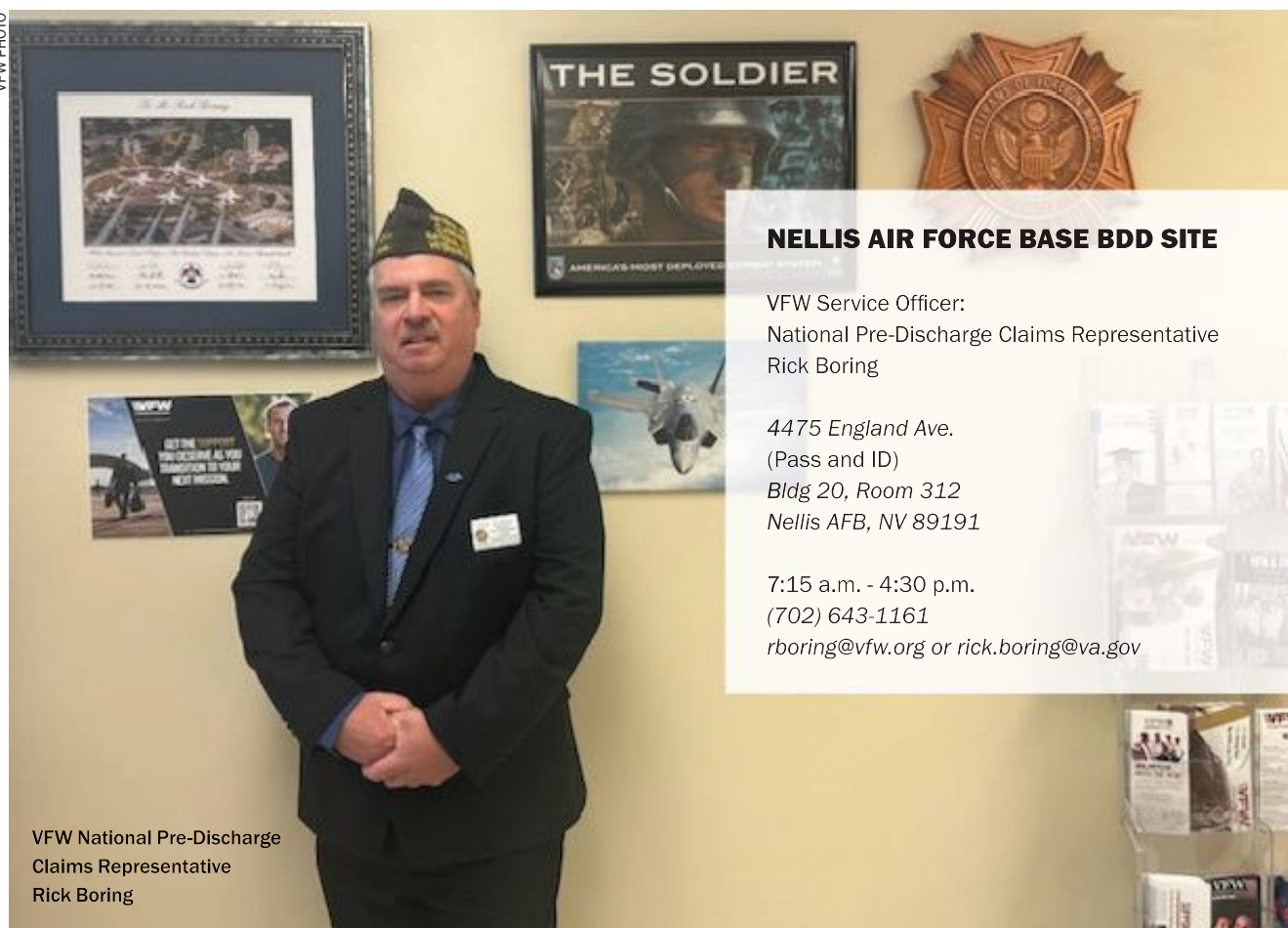
“When he told his story [about watching the flag being raised on Mount Suribachi], his face looked like he went back in time,” Joshua recalled. “He said, ‘I feel so blessed just to be alive.’ His life was thankfulness and grace and being a good grandparent and example for us. He maximized his time on earth.”

Today, Joshua is a VFW Legacy life member of VFW Post 15010 in Florida. He has visited VFW Posts in other states with Bernice and their five children, and the family completed a VFW Day of Service this year at a local nursing facility in Virginia. His children also recently entered an essay for the VFW Patriot’s Pen youth scholarship contest.

“Grandfather’s heroic life is the greatest example and life lesson for me,” Joshua said. “Today, I still treasure and share his heroic life testimony with my children.” ★

EMAIL magazine@vfw.org

Jane Blumenthal Martin is a Kansas City, Mo.-based writer and educator.



NELLIS AIR FORCE BASE BDD SITE

VFW Service Officer:
National Pre-Discharge Claims Representative
Rick Boring

4475 England Ave.
(Pass and ID)
Bldg 20, Room 312
Nellis AFB, NV 89191

7:15 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
(702) 643-1161
rboring@vfw.org or rick.boring@va.gov

VFW National Pre-Discharge
Claims Representative
Rick Boring

VFW Showcases Benefits Delivery at Discharge Program

VFW service officers at Benefits Delivery at Discharge (BDD) sites provide a simplified process for service members who are separating from the military. The BDD site at Nevada's Nellis Air Force Base provides important resources free of charge to all military members.

BY DAVE SPIVA

With many Air Force Reserve, Air National Guard and active-duty units based in southern Nevada, VFW's Benefits Delivery at Discharge site at Nellis Air Force Base strives to meet with as many separating service members as possible and at least 180 days before the end of their service.

However, VFW National Pre-Discharge Claims Representative Rick Boring said that a common issue he is seeing is that troops are not given

enough time before their separation to visit the BDD site. Boring added that many military members, mostly younger service members, don't even get the opportunity to visit his office 90 days before separation.

"A lot of service members say that they wish they knew about filing their claim at least 180 days out from separation or retirement," said Boring, a life member of VFW Post 12119 in Las Vegas. "That way, they can have their claim filed as a BDD claim to ensure medical exams are

completed in service."

Each service member who visits a VFW BDD site is first introduced to the VFW and its services during Transition Assistance Program (TAP) classes.

"I explain to those separating from the military that VFW provides services free of charge," Boring said. "I let them know that the VFW is here to take care of them and make sure their claim is filed correctly. We are here for the service members and their families." ★

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'A Proactive View of the VFW in Our Community'

A VFW Post in South Carolina conducts trash cleanups around roads and highways to foster goodwill with its community.

BY ISMAEL RODRIGUEZ JR.

For the past two decades, members of VFW Post 3746 have conducted monthly cleanups around their community in Rock Hill, S.C.

They are often seen hauling trash bags along the sides of roads and highways in their VFW gear, infrared vests and smiles, joined by dozens of children and adults recruited to help beautify their city of more than 75,000 residents.

"This is important to us because the VFW is about assisting veterans and their families, but also assisting its community," VFW Post 3746 Commander John Thorne said. "This helps maintain a proactive view of the VFW in our community."

Post 3746 volunteers have collected tons of trash along the roads and highways since beginning this initiative in 2005. They devote a weekend each month to gathering trash for a minimum of two hours and two miles, which sometimes runs longer and farther.

According to Post Quartermaster Grady Meeks, these cleanups are often coordinated with Rock Hill sanitation services, which pick up stockpiles of trash rounded together by Post 3746 members along the road.

"When doing community pickup in the city, we put the trash in bags and leave them for the city to pick up," Meeks said. "If we are working in the county, our members will collect the trash and take it to the city dumpsters ourselves."

To achieve this task each month, Post 3746 members recruit volunteers from local schools and JROTC programs near and around Rock Hill, as well as through word of mouth around the city.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF GRADY MECKS

VFW Post 3746 members stand outside their Post on Sept. 29 in preparation for a day of collecting trash along the roads and highways in their hometown of Rock Hill, S.C.



VFW Post 3746 members and other volunteers gather last August outside the Post before setting out for a road cleanup in Rock Hill, S.C.

This proactivity in recruiting and working closely with the community bodes well for Post 3746 and the image it continues cultivating within its community. According to Post Trustee Willie Williams, these efforts by his fellow Post members never go unnoticed.

"The community always responds by helping with the cleanups," Williams said. "They also always let us know how much we mean to them through their continued support of our programs and activities."



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LIFE INSURANCE 101

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Help protect your loved ones by looking into plans available in the insurance market. Each product is meant to protect you and your family through all stages of your life. Whether you are still employed

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COMPARING PLANS

Researching what each product has to offer is the first step toward helping to protect your loved ones.

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For more information, please call the VFW Member Benefits Department at 1-800-821-2606.

Protecting Your Pets is Easier Than Ever

For most, pets are part of the family. It does not matter if you are strictly a dog person, a cat person, or love them both the same. Having insurance to help care for them is critical for both you and your beloved pets.

You would do anything for your pets if they were sick or injured. But sometimes, trips to the veterinarian can be pricey. With the average cost of quality, routine pet care increasing year-over-year, it can be expensive to care for your furry friends.

For example, an X-ray, spaying or neutering may cost you hundreds of dollars, while hip and knee replacements and cancer care for your pet may cost thousands.

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Just like health insurance for you and your family, pet insurance can help you budget for routine and unforeseen medical expenses. Rather than having to deal with an unwelcome expense, pet

insurance helps you save and plan for care for your pets.

LEARN WHAT PET INSURANCE MAY COVER

When pets are young, pet insurance can cover routine vaccinations and spaying or neutering. Coverage might include unforeseen accidents and illnesses that will happen throughout their lives from allergies to sprains.

As your pets age, they will have different needs — perhaps arthritis medication or cancer treatment — and pet insurance may cover that, too.

Pet insurance makes it easier to be prepared and care for your pets. It often covers these conditions and more:

- Accidents and injuries, such as poisons and sprains
- Common ailments, such as vomiting and diarrhea
- Serious illnesses, such as cancer and diabetes
- Chronic illnesses, such as allergies and arthritis
- Hereditary conditions, such as



hip dysplasia and blood disorders

- Testing and diagnostics, such as ultrasounds and blood tests
- Procedures, such as surgeries and chemotherapy
- Holistic and alternative methods, like acupuncture
- Wellness procedures, such as vaccinations and spay/neuter

For more information about caring for your pets, call the VFW Member Benefits Department at 1-800-821-2606.

WINTER WEATHER WARM UP

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VFW Sees Membership Boost at Sturgis

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ED STEFANAK JR.



From left, then-Interim VFW Membership Director Corey Hunt, Department of South Dakota Senior Vice Commander Martin "Doc" Christensen, VFW recruiter from the Department of Washington Steve Woodward and VFW Membership Eligibility Coordinator Ed Stefanak Jr. man a VFW booth last August at the armory in Sturgis, S.D., during the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally.



From left, Corey Hunt, VFW Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief Carol Whitmore and Ed Stefanak Jr. snap a selfie last August during Military Appreciation Day in Sturgis, S.D. VFW is the title sponsor of that day during the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally.

During the 84th Annual Sturgis Motorcycle Rally, visitors got a chance to see VFW at work on behalf of veterans.

BY JANIE DYHOUSE

As thousands of bikers converged in Sturgis, S.D., Aug. 2-11 for the 84th Annual Sturgis Motorcycle Rally, VFW was front and center.

According to the South Dakota Department of Transportation, the total number of vehicles entering Sturgis during the rally's 10-day event reached nearly 471,000, reflecting an almost 3 percent increase from the 458,161 vehicles counted in 2023.

With booths at the armory in Sturgis and at the Full Throttle Saloon, owned by VFW partner Jesse James Dupree of the band Jackyl, VFW was well represented.

According to VFW Membership Eligibility Coordinator Ed Stefanak Jr., 135 new VFW members were recruited, representing 30 different states.

"We definitely saw more Afghanistan and Iraq veterans this year," he said. "We recruited 35-40 women, and 13 of those signed up as life members."

During the Military Appreciation Day event, of which VFW is the title sponsor, VFW Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief Carol Whitmore rallied the cheering crowd from her position on a platform high above the masses of bikers below.

Stefanak noted the service officers on hand at the armory were an asset for veterans, particularly the younger ones.

"The younger generation of veterans don't really utilize the VA unless they are pressured to do so," he said. "That is why this service is so important."

Volunteers from the VFW Department of South Dakota work hard to make this event successful, Stefanak added.

"Next year for the 85th, we will only get better, especially with the help of the Department of South Dakota," Stefanak said. "There will be more of a focus on VA claims."



EMAIL jdyhouse@vfw.org



RECRUITING MADE EASY

You have likely noticed QR codes on VFW brochures, advertisements and other materials. QR codes are all about convenience and up-to-date information with a scan of the code from a smartphone.

The QR code shown here is linked to a VFW membership application.

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With the use of QR codes, recruiting has never been easier.



Veterans More Likely to Suffer from Arthritis-Related Knee Pain

Keys to managing arthritis-related knee pain include staying active and maintaining a healthy weight.

BY JANICE PHELAN

Knee pain related to arthritis is a common issue for many Americans, with veterans significantly more apt to have this chronic inflammatory condition when compared to non-veterans.

Close to one-third of veterans reported being diagnosed with arthritis during 2017-2021, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Among men from 18 to 44 years old, the number of veterans with arthritis was double that of non-veterans. For women in the same age group, the prevalence of arthritis among veterans was 60 percent higher.

There are a number of ways to better manage knee pain related to arthritis, although the underlying disease process cannot be reversed, according to the Mayo Clinic.

These include staying active and maintaining a healthy weight, as well as over-the-counter pain relievers such as anti-inflammatories or acetaminophen, heat or ice for the affected area, physical therapy and knee braces, according to Mayo experts.

“Knee pain resulting from knee osteoarthritis is debilitating, and it takes years off of our lives by robbing us of our mobility and overall health,” said Dave Johnson of Icarus Medical Innovations. “It prevents us from doing the things we love, whether that’s sports, hiking or playing with kids or grandkids.”

Johnson is the inventor of the Icarus Ascender brace and calls himself “patient zero” for the unique knee



brace, which is designed to redirect pressure away from the knee into the brace while assisting patients with bending.

Arthritis challenges our health since it is difficult to maintain a healthy weight with knee pain and poor mobility, Johnson added.

“When our mobility declines, so does our metabolic rate. This is the downward spiral of osteoarthritis,” he said. “It is really important to find ways to break this cycle and to reduce pain and swelling and to stay active.”

When conservative treatments are inadequate, a knee joint injection with corticosteroid or hyaluronate (lubricant) may be recommended, according to the Mayo Clinic, as well as surgery including osteotomy — realigning of the bones, partial joint replacement or a total knee replacement.

“A joint replacement will remove pain, but this is not always the best option for most people,” Johnson said. “Many people want to delay a knee replacement or avoid this altogether.”

In addition, the recovery from a knee replacement can be challenging.

“Knee replacements can wear out, and so people should wait until the right time and age,” he added. “And in

some cases, patients are not eligible due to a heart condition or other issue.”

Based on these factors, it is important to maximize the use of conservative care options, Johnson said. In terms of knee braces, a brace that takes significant weight off your knee when bending is especially helpful.

Icarus Medical has seen significant pain reduction (60 percent on a 1 to 10 pain scale) and increased mobility among its clients — which include 25 percent through the Veterans Administration — with their multi-compartment brace, which unloads up to 40 pounds off the front of the knee and behind the kneecap to help with both pain and mobility.

“The keys to longevity with knee arthritis at any stage are these,” he shared. “Do everything you can to reduce inflammation, stay active and maintain your leg strength through activity and exercise.”

For more information on the brace offered by Icarus Medical, visit <https://www.icarusmedical.com>.

✉ EMAIL_magazine@vfw.org

Janice Phelan is a freelance writer based in Lee's Summit, Mo.

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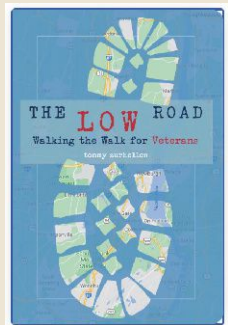


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STAFF PICK



The Low Road: Walking the Walk for Veterans

By Tommy Zurhellen, legacy life member, VFW Post 170, Poughkeepsie, N.Y.

In the summer of 2019, Navy veteran and VFW Post 170 Commander Tommy Zurhellen walked 2,866 miles across America to raise awareness for veteran suicide and homelessness. Now everyone can follow his epic journey in *The Low Road: Walking the Walk for Veterans*, experiencing the challenges and triumphs of being a homeless veteran on the road for five months. Can one person change the world? Find out in this humbling and humorous adventure across America. *Epigraph Books*

In Repose: Diving on the USS Arizona with the National Park Service

By Brian O'Connor, life member, VFW Post 4108, Redmond, Ore.

In this nonfiction story, Brian O'Connor, a retired Navy diver and National Park Service volunteer, takes the reader on a detailed underwater journey to explore the shattered remains of the *USS Arizona*, which was sunk during the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941. O'Connor sets out to write with the intent of taking the reader along for the ride, swimming alongside and experiencing the adventure with senses heightened, as he shares the history, emotion and profound effects of his dive on a national icon that was the rallying cry of the nation in 1941. *Bootin Annie Publishing*

Somebody's Catching Hell

By Peter Smith, VFW Post 609, Alexandria, Va.

Somebody's Catching Hell is a war novel about a team of Marine aerial photo interpreters during the Vietnam War in the months leading up to the *Tet Offensive* of January 1968. The novel carries the team through a steamy summer and monsoon winter as it searches for an elusive enemy on glossy aerial photographs of rice paddies, mountains and jungles. Smith sets out to capture the team's crazy stunts around Da Nang — brazenly exploring the off-limits South Vietnamese city, visiting brothels, getting shot at on fabled China Beach, as well as executing a panty raid during a Bob Hope show. *Prospect Publishing LLC*

Saga of a Lesser War

By Emmett E. Slake, life member, VFW Department of North Carolina

This novel provides an intense account of the early stages of the Korean War, candidly presented without pretense or heroic embellishment. The novel adds a unique fictional journey that traces the lives of two young American soldiers, who from a common beginning diverge to their separate fates: one heroic and the other treasonous. Involved in the course of action is a diverse cast of related characters, military and civilian, foreign and native, each confronting a range of moral issues. The tragic drama evolves over a realm that extends from the backstreets of Yokohama, the power center of Japan, as well as the treacherous landscape of Korea. *Gatekeeper Press*

The Brooklyn Kid

By Domenick Scarlato, life member, VFW Post 10066, Jensen Beach, Fla.

This memoir by Domenick Scarlato captures as the writer comes of age in the slums of Brooklyn, N.Y., during the Great Depression. The story leads to his 16th birthday, when he enlists in the Navy to join the fight in World War II. Scarlato goes on to volunteer for the Underwater Demolition Team and is trained as a "frogman." Within his prose, the writer indulges the reader with vivid, candid and informative descriptions during his service in Normandy, France. *Createspace*

BOOK CORNER SUBMISSIONS

VFW magazine's "Book Corner" features select books written by VFW members. If you have written a book or an e-book bearing an ISBN or ASIN, contact the magazine for guidelines at magazine@vfw.org or by mail at: VFW magazine, Book Corner, 406 W. 34th Street, Suite 523, Kansas City, MO, 64111. The subject of the book must relate to the military or veterans. VFW does not sell books featured in "Book Corner." Contact the book's publisher for more information.

REUNIONS AND CLAIMS



To publicize your unit's reunion, email magazine@vfw.org. Submit at least four months in advance of reunion date. VFW members only.

AIR FORCE

6594 Test Group, Hawaii: Bob Westbrook (708) 220-5252

ARMY

1st Air Cav, Co. A, 2/12: Doyle "Cowboy" Miller (405) 258-3660; rachellesouth@sbcglobal.net

1st Trans. Corps Bn., USS Albemarle, and USNS Corpus Christi Bay: Steven Nye (508) 372-9024; sm820@verizon.net

COAST GUARD

Coast Guard Combat Veterans Association: MCPO (ret) Michael Placencia (661) 401-0609; mwplacencia@hotmail.com or <https://www.coastguardcombatvets.org>.

NAVY

Naval Support Activity, Da Nang, Vietnam: Bernie Uhrinek (724) 353-9627
USS Albemarle, 1st Trans. Corps Bn., and USNS Corpus Christi Bay: Steven Nye (508) 372-9024; sm820@verizon.net

USS Bordelon DD/DDR-881: Bob Evans (415) 302-1912; bobinspects@sbcglobal.net

USS Downes 1070: Gary Court (320) 493-9775

USS Tutuila: Guy Veni (910) 295-1045; uss-tutuila@gmail.com

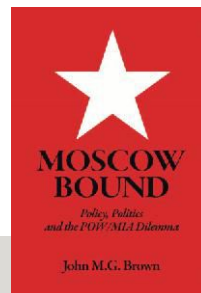
CLAIMS

Readers are urged to help these vets seeking claim substantiation statements. Respond directly to the person listed at the end of the claim assistance request. This service is provided for VFW members who are in the process of filing a VA claim. Please email your claim to magazine@vfw.org.

VF-21 Ordinance, CAG 14 en route to CV64, July 1987 — Anyone who may have been on a CH46 that lifted off from Masirah headed to USS Constellation. The CH46 developed broken strut problems during flight and was diverted, crash landing on USS Niagara Falls. Another CH46 arrived the next day to transport us to CV64, but there is no record of it. Seeking anyone who served with me to substantiate a claim for severe back issues resulting from the event. Dan; Huntemup21@comcast.net

Moscow Bound is an expose of the US Government's actions, and inactions, on behalf of American POWs and MIAs between 1918 and 1993. It's findings have been cited by the US Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs, American Legion, Vietnam Veterans of America, General William Westmoreland, VFW, the Oregonian, Washington Post, and the US National Archives.

It's the result of a seven year investigation by Vietnam veterans John M. G. Brown and Thomas V. Ashworth into missing American military personnel in Soviet and other Communist captivity after WW I, WW II, Korea and Vietnam.



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Karen James is a noted journalist and expert in relationships.

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A Secret Any Man Can Use...

This month I got a letter from a reader in Texas about a "little secret" that's made here love life with her husband absolutely explosive!

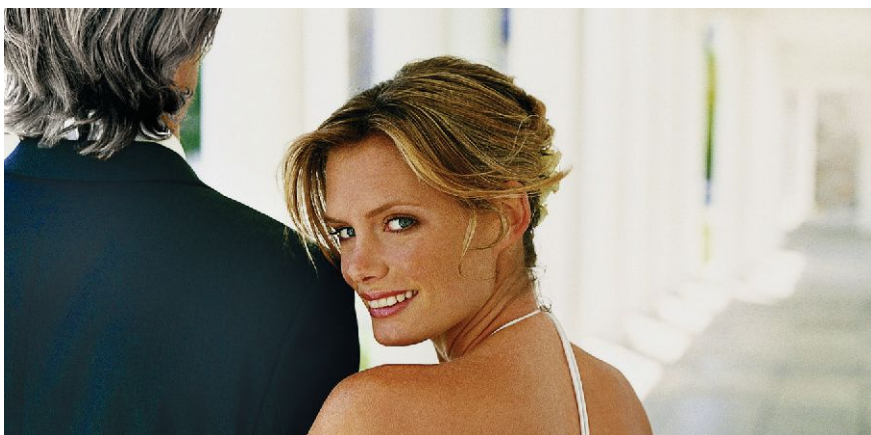
Tina writes: Dear Karen,

For years my husband and I had a great love life, but when he reached his 50s, he lost his old spark, especially in the bedroom. He tried every product available, but nothing worked. For the past few years, it's felt like we were roommates, not husband and wife.

Well, last month he came home from a business trip in Europe and shocked me with more energy and passion than he's had in years. He took me in the bedroom like newlyweds and we had a night I'll never forget. It was incredible, and our love life has been like that ever since. So here we are, closer and more intimate than ever... in our late 50s!

On his trip, he stayed next to an Italian couple. Through the walls, he heard them passionately making love every night... and sometimes again in the morning! He figured they must be in their twenties, but one morning he saw them in the hallway, and it turns out they were in their 70s!

Instead of being embarrassed that they'd been found out, they were positively glowing and happy to share their "secret." The man pulled a small pack of tablets from his satchel, gave it to my husband and said "These come from a small village north of my town. They're made from naturally pure extracts, packed with rich sexual nutrients. Believe me, they will give you powerful erections and you will perform in the bedroom even better than you did as a young man." Then he laughed "You will become an 'Italian Stallion' - like me!"



"My husband shocked me with more energy and passion than he's had in years. He took me in the bedroom like newlyweds and we had a night I'll never forget!"

Karen, that Italian man was right! My husband is full of energy, beaming with confidence, and his desire for me is through the roof - I love it! But now the pack is almost empty and we desperately want more. Do you know about these European tablets and how we get them in the States?

Sincerely,

Tina D., Fort Worth, TX

Tina, you're in luck! Ever wonder why older men from Italy are famous for staying passionate and sexually active well into their 80s? For years they've relied on a pure blossom seed extract to enhance their libido and bedroom performance.

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Velotal is surprisingly inexpensive, but as far as finding in the States, I only know of one importer. A spokesman told me they were proud to produce the highest quality product for men and went on to say if any of my readers call and mention this article, they'll get a one-time double-discount, plus free shipping and 2 bonus packs **ABSOLUTELY FREE!**

Wow, so there you go, Tina - and the rest of you readers! The offer is only good while supplies last so just give them a call today. The number is **1-800-204-7047.**

Aren't you glad you asked?

Karen

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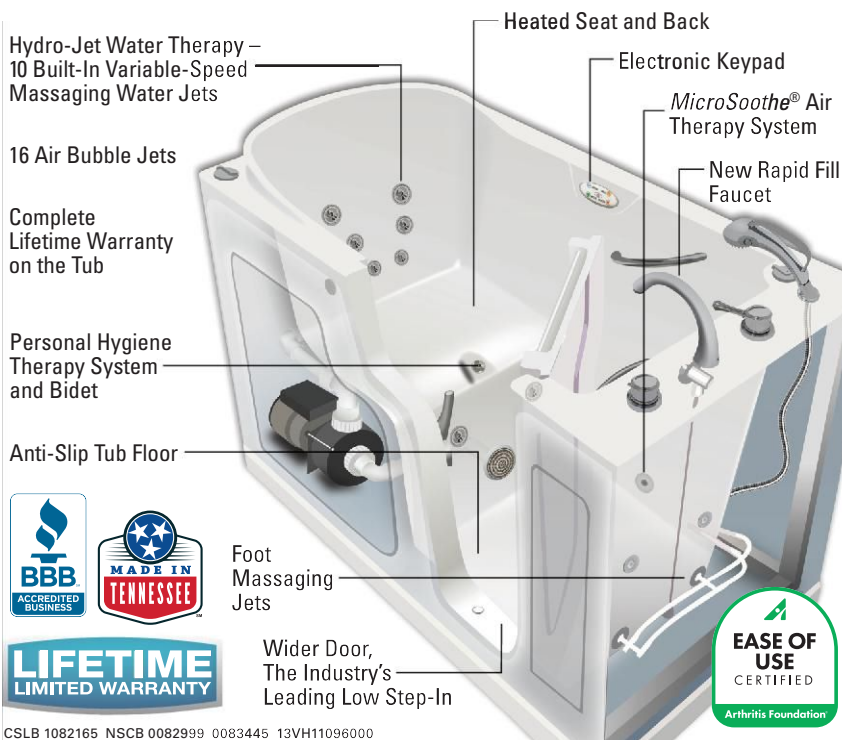
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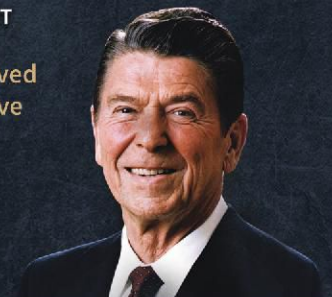
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