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COVER IMAGE:
Members of VFW Post 1 come together on May 2 before the start of the First Friday Art Walk outside of their Post building in Denver's Santa Fe Art District. Each month, the Post opens its doors to thousands of art enthusiasts for the citywide Art Walk event, where they exhibit veteran art and connect with the community.
Photo by Ismael Rodriguez Jr.

Check out our digital version at www.vfw.org

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VFW's 10-year partnership with Student Veterans of America includes a fellowship that allows five veterans each year to study how to fight for veterans on Capitol Hill. Here is a look at what they learned. **By Danny Cook**

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A VFW Post senior vice commander in Nebraska applies his artistic skills to painting football helmets. The hobby that began while serving in Iraq now makes him an in-demand specialty artist for football programs. **By Danny Cook**

42 CROWNING AMERICA'S BEST YOUNG ESSAYISTS

This year's VFW Voice of Democracy (VOD) and Patriot's Pen winners gathered in Washington in March to receive awards. The \$2.4 million in prizes included a \$35,000 scholarship for the VOD winner. **By Janie Dyhouse**

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COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF
Al Lipphardt

Thanks to All for a Great Year

This has been a tremendously successful year for the VFW. As my term as VFW Commander-in-Chief nears its end, I thank all who have supported me. Together, we have accomplished a lot.

We have taken the fight directly to those who prey upon veterans looking to file a VA claim. We call these unscrupulous characters "claim sharks." I told Congress in March that we need real penalties reinstated on these unaccredited claims consultants who charge exorbitant fees. I urge all veterans to use the free service provided by VA-accredited VFW service officers.

We also have overseen the successful implementation of the *PACT Act*, the monumental toxic exposure legislation enacted in 2022 that compensates vets from the Vietnam to the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. This law will help guide the Presumption Decision Process, where we are currently focusing efforts, to help future veterans who are exposed to toxic substances.

When I spoke to Congress in March, I highlighted crucial VFW-supported legislation that must be approved. The *Major Richard Star Act* will provide concurrent receipt to wounded veterans who served less than 20 years. The *Guard and Reserve GI Bill Parity Act* would grant our citizen-soldiers the same eligibility for education benefits as active-duty troops. The *TAP Promotion Act* would improve the transition from the military to the civilian world for our young veterans.

These bills are priorities for the VFW and so is providing help for veterans dealing with PTSD. Congress and VA must fund research on alternative treatments that can break the cycle of dependency on medications.

To advocate for these priorities, the VFW must have a strong and vibrant membership. As of early May, my Department commanders were well on their way to hitting our recruiting goal of 102 percent, exceeding our total from last year. The effort by all our members is appreciated, but those who achieve or surpass those goals should be celebrated and rewarded.

As I traveled around the country and the world during my term as VFW Commander-in-Chief, I took every opportunity to remind the crowds I spoke to about the sacrifices of those who never came home from war and why the VFW works so passionately for surviving veterans and their families.

The most powerful method to communicate the message for me is to state the names of the men I served with who were killed in battle. I urge all veterans to tell the world who they served with who paid the ultimate sacrifice for the nation. They are not forgotten if their memories are alive, and our nation must never forget our warfighters.

Thanks to everyone who made this year successful, and good luck to all in the coming year.



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VFW OBJECTIVES

To ensure national security
through maximum military strength.

To speed the rehabilitation
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To assist the widows and orphans
and the dependents of disabled and needy veterans.

To promote Americanism through education in patriotism and constructive service to the communities in which we live.

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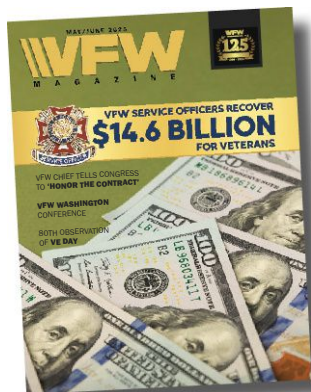


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VFW Service Officers in Action

I always enjoy *VFW* magazine but sometimes I find an article that touches me personally. Such is the case of the article “We Do This Daily, and We Always Do It for Free.” There are two things I want to comment on. First is my experience with the group of individuals that have helped me and so many others with the process of applying for my VA disability benefits. They have always been friendly, professional and knowledgeable, even with their blunt honesty about your aches and pains that qualify for disability benefits.

Secondly, we are seeing more and more advertisements on social media from various groups that will “help the vets apply for VA disability benefits.” These groups will promise the world and charge a significant fee for whatever benefits they may be able to get for you. There is no magic bullet. They cannot do more than is legally acceptable and no more than our own VA-accredited Veterans Service Officers already do for free.

JOHN HORNEY
DENTON, TEXAS

I think many Vietnam-era Veterans, who were not “injured” and “treated” inside of Vietnam, are not getting a fair

shake from the VA for effects of Agent Orange, other war chemicals and asbestos in the 1960s. I have submitted four disability claims under the *PACT Act* for exposures. All but one was denied, and the one approved was at a zero rating. I have used County VA navigators in Pima County, Ariz., and Jackson County, Ore. I also have spoken with a doctor at Tucson (Ariz.) VA hospital and White City VA Clinic in Oregon. All are sympathetic to my cause, but they universally say there is zero chance to reach the 30 percent disability threshold level (access to free medical care regardless of income) unless you were in-country Vietnam and were treated in-country for exactly what you are claiming.

I off-loaded Agent Orange, bombs, napalm and other war-related combat chemicals for a year from asbestos-filled WWII ships. My medical issues started 20 years after my service. My VA primary care physicians in two states all say, yes, I have four severe medical problems. The VA Review Board says I don’t because I was not treated while in the service.

ANDY GAUL
THE VILLAGES, FLA.

VFW Heads to Columbus

I was surprised that the article in the May/June issue about the convention in Columbus, Ohio, and things to do did not mention the National Veteran Memorial & Museum. This is an all-inclusive Memorial to all branches of military service. Also omitted was the best-known burger bar in Columbus, The Thurman Cafe. The burgers there are huge.

DAN GAPA
NORTH RIDGEVILLE, OHIO

In addition to the venues highlighted in the article, I’d suggest visitors take in the Columbus Zoo, one of the top-ranked zoos in the United States.

The Center for Science and Industry (COSI) was ranked the No. 1 science museum in the United States by *USA Today*’s Readers’ Choice awards.

KAREN J. HASTINGS
DELAWARE, OHIO

Final Salute

Please retract your listing of three soldiers in Jordan as non-hostile incidents. These three soldiers killed on Jan. 28, 2024, were killed in a drone attack conducted by an Iranian-backed militia. This was a military action by a military force.

BILL MAYNARD
CHESTERFIELD, N.H.

I think it’s great that you honor these service members. In Kuwait, you list Lt. Col. Troy E. Bartle. I believe it is Bartley.

ED TRBUZA
BETHLEHEM, PA.

On page 42, you have Master Sergeant Justin Sweat listed as being a member of the Air Force. This is incorrect. He was a soldier in the Army.

DAN BROWN
MONTPELIER, VT.

Command Post

Commander-In-Chief Al Lipphardt’s poignant remembrance of his platoon members killed in action is not the only way that they have been memorialized. Department of the Army General Order 5, 1969, confirmed the Valorous Unit Award conferred on them for the period Nov. 15, 1967, to Feb. 13, 1968. Those men also earned the Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross Unit Citation with Palm. We should strive to ensure that the full measure of the honors that they earned are conveyed to them and their families.

DOUGLAS WOMACK
GRASONVILLE, MD.

“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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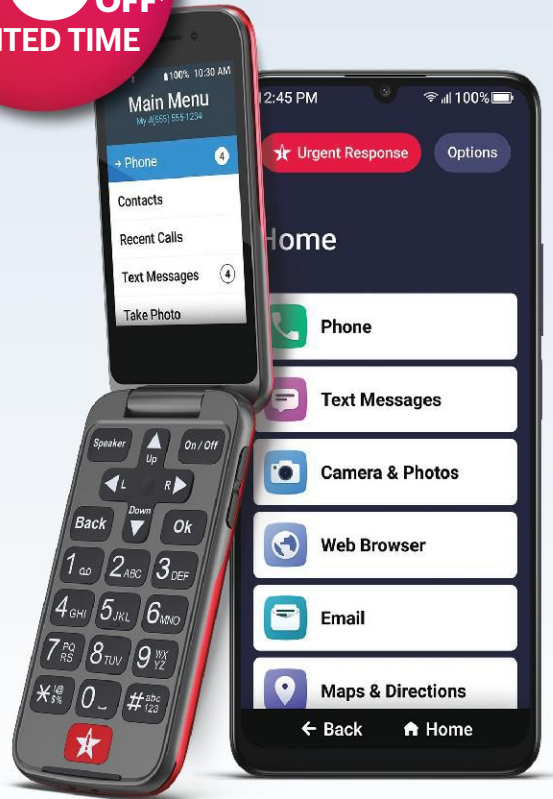
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Learn More

Airmen Receive Distinguished Flying Crosses

A total of 24 airmen received the Distinguished Flying Cross over the last year for helping to shoot down more than 80 drones and missiles fired by Iran targeting Israel in April 2024.

Six airmen from MacDill Air Force Base in Florida received their awards in July 2024, seven airmen from McConnell AFB in Kansas received their awards in August 2024 and 11 airmen from the Tennessee Air National Guard's 134th Air Refueling Wing received their awards in December 2024.

On April 13, 2024, Iran launched an estimated 300 ballistic and cruise missiles, as well as one-way attack drones, at Israel. U.S. F-15E Strike Eagle fighters and the supporting refueling aircraft scrambled to meet the threat.

"It was a constant dialogue between the tankers, fighters and [command and control] to make sure they got what they needed, and we were there to support them," Maj. Cody Gaby, a



Army National Guard Maj. Gen. Warner Ross II, Tennessee National Guard Adjutant General, left, congratulates recipients of the Distinguished Flying Cross during a ceremony on Dec. 7, 2024, at McGhee Tyson Air National Guard Base in Knoxville, Tenn. The airmen were among 24 recognized with the DFC for helping defend Israel against an Iranian missile and drone strike in April 2024.

pilot of one of the refueling aircraft, told *Air & Space Forces Magazine*.

The Distinguished Flying Cross is

awarded to individuals who display "heroism or extraordinary achievement while participating in an aerial flight."

VFW Launches 79th Annual Youth Scholarship Contests

The VFW is now accepting entries for its 79th annual Voice of Democracy (VOD) and Patriot's Pen essay contests. It allows middle school and high school students to compete for a share of awards totaling nearly \$2.4 million.

The theme for 2025-26 asks students "How Are You Showing Patriotism and Support for Our Country?"

The VOD audio essay competition is open to high school students in ninth through 12th grades and comes with a \$35,000 national first-place prize scholarship. More than 26,000 high school students compete in the VOD competition each year for a share of more than \$170,000 in awards.

First-place VOD Department, or state, winners also will receive an all-expenses-paid trip to attend a Founding Forward Spirit of America Youth Leadership program at Valley Forge, Pa.

The VFW's Patriot's Pen essay contest is open to eligible sixth-, seventh- and eighth-grade students, with middle-schoolers competing for their share of nearly \$1 million in local, state and national awards and prizes. The national first-place winner receives a \$5,000 award. More than 60,000 students participate annually in the competition.

Students can submit their entries (along with a completed entry form) to their local participating VFW Post. The deadline for both contests is Oct. 31, 2025.



A group of VFW Voice of Democracy (VOD) Department winners gather in March 2023 at George Washington's Mount Vernon home in Fairfax County, Va. More than 26,000 high schools student participated last year for VOD's \$35,000 top prize, with a total of \$2.4 million awarded to students in both the VOD and Patriot's Pen competitions.

To learn more about the contests, visit <https://www.vfw.org/youthscholarships>.

To find a local participating VFW Post in their area and submit their entries, students can visit www.vfw.org/findapost. Read more on the 2024-25 winners on p.42.

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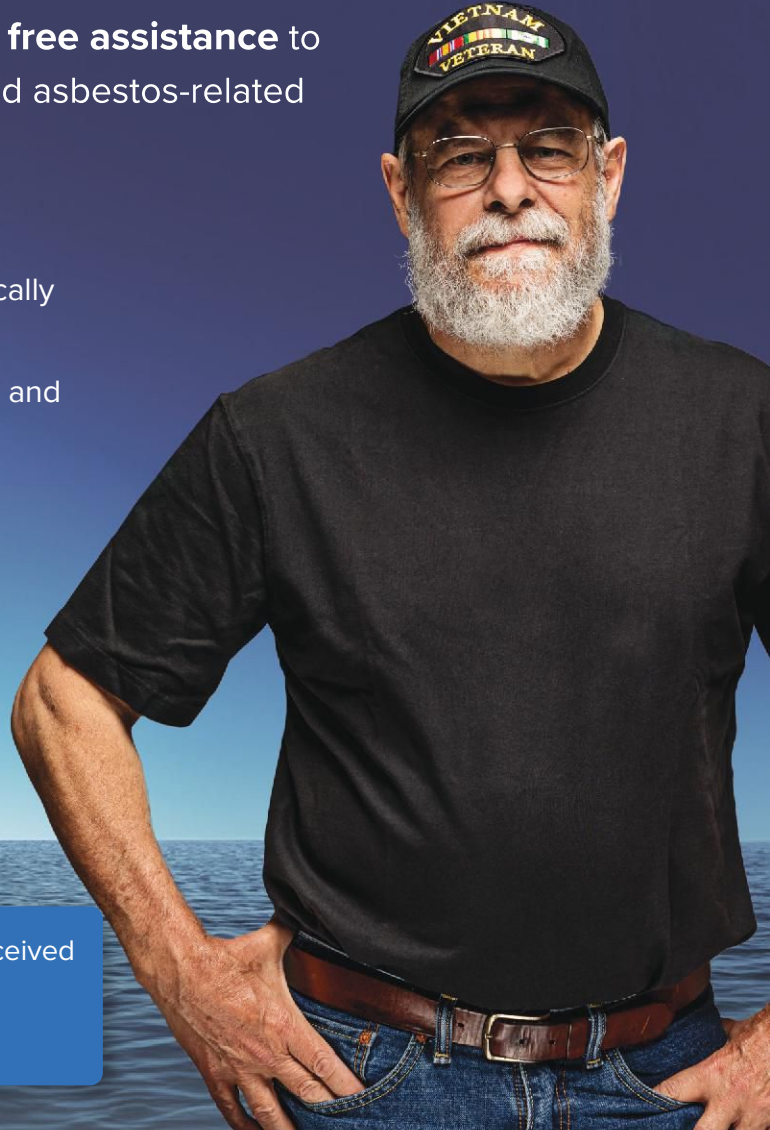
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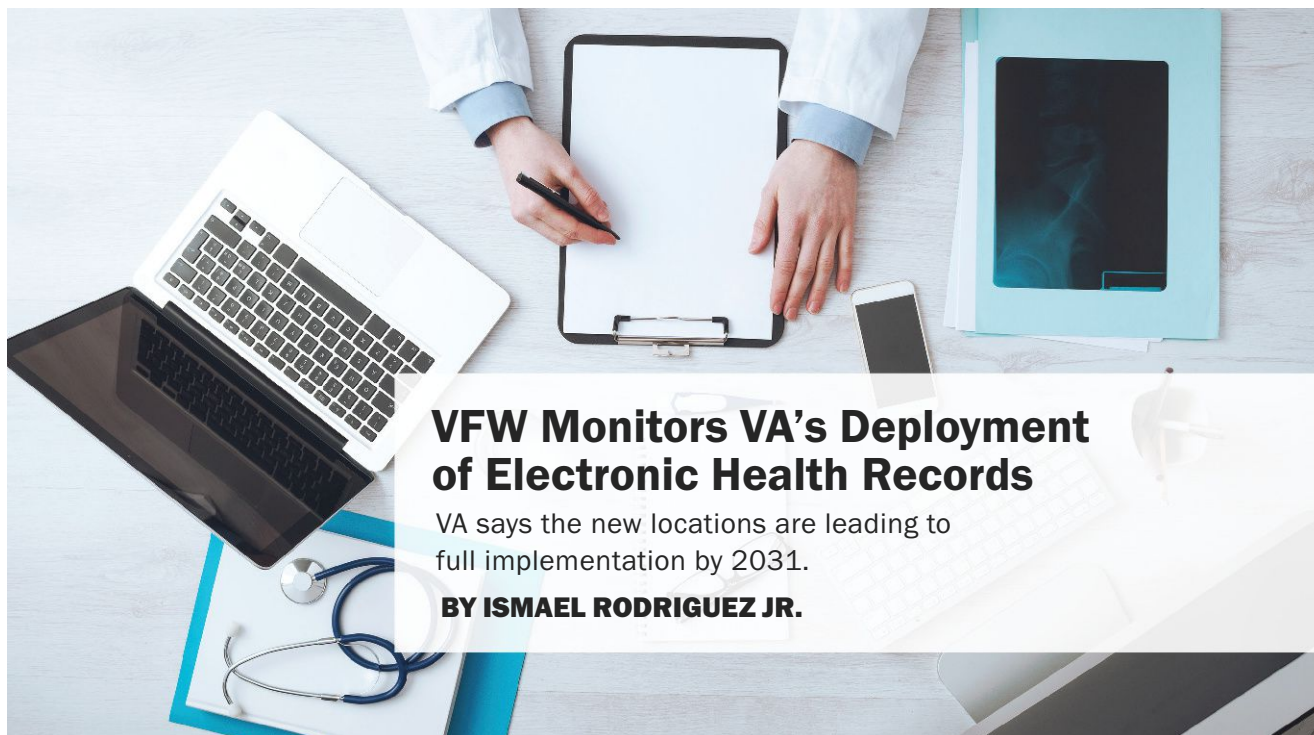
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VFW Monitors VA's Deployment of Electronic Health Records

VA says the new locations are leading to full implementation by 2031.

BY ISMAEL RODRIGUEZ JR.

In late March, VA officials announced that nine additional facilities will implement the new, state-of-the-art federal Electronic Health Record (EHR) system, increasing the total number of locations going live in 2026 to 13.

The announcement was issued after VA Secretary Doug Collins decided to move the process forward. Originally, the project was anticipated to resume in mid-2026, with an 18-month training period for implementation.

"America's veterans deserve a medical records system that is integrated across all VA and DOD components, and that is exactly what we will deliver," Collins said in a press release issued by VA. "We can and will move faster on this important priority."

With the new federal EHR system enhancing data exchange between the VA and the Department of Defense, veterans and VFW service officers in those states, which include Michigan, Ohio, Kentucky, Indiana and Alaska, hope for improved customer service and convenience.

For VFW National Veterans Service (NVS) Director Michael Figlioli, this is a

small step toward VFW's ultimate goal of an optimized system where every veteran's record is developed and maintained.

"We are encouraged to see the continued evolution of the EHR deployment," Figlioli said. "Veterans have earned the right not only to the best available health care but to corresponding support and administrative services that help deliver that care."

Amassing a network of about 2,000 service officers worldwide, NVS has helped more than 590,500 veterans recover \$14.62 billion in benefits last year. Figlioli says VFW remains adamant about its vision and will reinforce its stance until all veterans using the VA system reap the benefits.

"We will continue to insist that VA improve its governance and change management protocols of this critical program," Figlioli said. "Our goal is to continue to advocate for the successful development of every single record."

VA officials expect to fully implement the new EHR system at every VA facility by early 2031. ★

EMAIL irodriguez@vfw.org

13 NEW ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORDS LOCATIONS

Below is a list of the new VA sites that will join the original four in Michigan — VA Battle Creek Medical Center, VA Detroit Healthcare System, VA Ann Arbor Healthcare System, and VA Saginaw Healthcare System — in deploying the Electronic Health Record system:

- Cincinnati VAMC-Fort Thomas (Fort Thomas, Ky.)
- Chillicothe VAMC (Chillicothe, Ohio)
- Cincinnati VAMC (Cincinnati, Ohio)
- Dayton VAMC (Dayton, Ohio)
- Louis Stokes Cleveland VAMC (Cleveland, Ohio)
- Fort Wayne VAMC (Fort Wayne, Ind.)
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- Richard L. Roudebush VAMC (Indianapolis, Ind.)
- Alaska VA Healthcare System (Anchorage, Alaska)

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VFW Names First Woman Veteran to Lead National Legislative Efforts

In March, VFW appointed Kristina Keenan as its director of VFW's National Legislative Service (NLS), making her the first woman to hold the position.

A familiar face on Capitol Hill since joining NLS in 2018, Keenan's advocacy efforts contributed notably to the 2022 passing of the *PACT Act* — the most significant expansion of veterans' benefits since the Vietnam War.

"It is an absolute honor to serve veterans and the VFW," said Keenan, who helped with the passage of the *Global War on Terrorism Memorial Location Act* and the *Alexander Lofgren Veterans in Parks (VIP) Act*. "I am thrilled to be the organization's next legislative director."

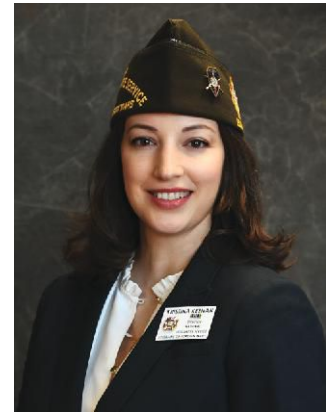
Keenan, a Minnesota Army National Guard veteran who gained VFW eligibility during a 2003 deployment to Bosnia, began volunteering with VFW in 2016, focusing on women veteran issues and the *Deborah Sampson Act*. By 2018, she had moved to Washington, D.C., and joined NLS as a full-time employee.

"This journey has been incredible, especially being part of efforts over the past several years to advance toxic exposure legislation and the success of the *PACT Act*," Keenan

said. "I have learned so much from outstanding VFW leaders, and I hope to continue the organization's century-long legacy of legislative achievements."

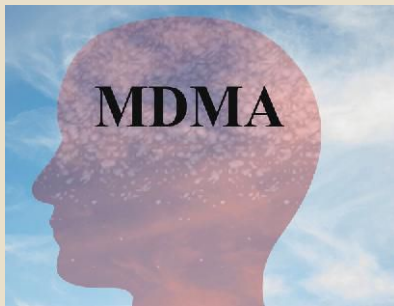
A legacy life member of VFW Post 605 in Paris, where she earned a master's degree in human rights and humanitarian action from the Paris Institute of Political Studies, Keenan's responsibilities as NLS director will include planning, coordinating and implementing VFW's national legislative agenda with members of Congress, their staff and various federal departments, agencies and organizations.

"Together," Keenan said, "I know we can successfully push forward the legislative priorities that are so important to VFW members, while also working to strengthen the VA system and fight for policies that uphold the dignity and well-being of those who have sacrificed so much for our country."



Kristina Keenan, Director of VFW's National Legislative Service

New Bill Funds Psychedelic Therapy Research



A bill that would study the efficacy of psychedelic drugs for treating PTSD and other conditions was introduced in the House on April 3.

Endorsed by VFW and other veteran organizations, the *Innovative Therapies Centers of Excellence Act of 2025* builds on the VA's announced funding for a study on MDMA-assisted therapy for PTSD and alcohol use disorder among veterans in December 2024. The legislation would designate at least five VA medical facilities as specialized locations to study alternative treatments for mental health conditions.

"Active research is critical in improving the well-being of veterans by looking at alternative therapies to enhance the healing process," VFW National Legislative Service Associate Director Meggan Coleman said.

The bill, *H.R. 2623*, also would:

- Direct the innovative therapy centers to manage education, clinical, and research involving MDMA, psilocybin, ketamine, ibogaine, and DMT to treat anxiety, bipolar disorder, chronic pain, depression, Parkinson's disease, PTSD and substance use disorder in veterans.
- Require VA to submit a report on findings and recommendations to improve the delivery of innovative therapies to veterans.



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 Better Transition Services

VFW National Legislative Service Associate Director Joy Craig delivered a clear message while testifying before a House Veterans' Affairs Committee's subpanel on March 25.

On the topic of economic opportunity, Craig advocated for improvements to the DoD's Transition Assistance Program (TAP), which included increased TAP participation and accountability, expanded access for Guard and Reserve members and earlier integration of transition services throughout military careers.

Steadfast on VFW's priority of ensuring every service member and veteran has the necessary resources for long-term success after their military service, Craig cited numbers to illustrate concerns with the current system.

- A DoD report found nearly 177,000 service members attended TAP classes in 2023. Of these, 65 percent began pre-separation counseling at least 365 days before separation or retirement, as required by law. However, 35 percent still failed to meet this requirement, leaving them less time to prepare for civilian life.
- According to the report, 74,000 transitioning service members did not attend the two-day TAP course in 2023. The report also found widespread use of waivers by commanding officers to exempt these transitioning service members from the required classes.
- Pentagon data shows that among the 200,000 service members who exit the military annually, approximately 80 percent separate from the military before reaching retirement eligibility.
- Research from The Veterans Metrics Initiative (TVMI) at Pennsylvania State University indicates that junior enlisted service members face disproportionately high rates of underemployment, financial instability, substance abuse, housing and food insecurity, as well as suicide.



VFW National Legislative Service Associate Director Joy Craig delivers testimony before a House Veterans' Affairs Committee's subpanel on March 25 in Washington, D.C.

- TVMI researchers also found that only 65 percent of veterans feel fully transitioned three years after separation, and 61 percent remain underemployed even 6½ years later. Up to 78 months after separation, veterans continue to experience difficulties with social connections, mental and physical health.

To combat these discrepancies, Craig spoke on behalf of VFW to urge Congress to pass the *TAP Promotion Act*, which would codify TAP 6.0 and ensure all service members have access to this essential assistance before leaving the military.

Launched in January 2024, TAP 6.0 has provided transitioning service members with direct, in-person guidance on navigating the VA benefits system. TAP 6.0 features accredited representatives who assist in filing claims, expediting disability ratings and ensuring continuity of essential care, including mental health services.

Since its inception, VFW has noted a 54 percent increase in contact with troops, briefing 13,000 more transitioning service members than in 2023. This effort resulted in 25 percent more troops seeking claims assistance, and a 26 percent increase in awards.

Major Richard Star Act Reintroduced

Members of Congress once again support legislation to grant medically retired veterans full access to their military retirement pay and disability compensation from the VA.

On March 13, a bipartisan coalition reintroduced the *Major Richard Star Act* (S. 1032/H.R. 2102) to rectify the current policy, which prevents more than 50,000 service members with combat-related injuries from receiving both retirement and disability benefits.

"The VFW strongly believes that military retirement pay and VA disability compensation are separate, distinct benefits earned for different reasons, and rejects any suggestion that their concurrent receipt is 'double-dipping,'" VFW

National Legislative Service Kristina Keenan said. "This legislation is one of the VFW's top priorities, and it is time for Congress to pass it into law."

As it stands, medically retired veterans with fewer than 20 years of service who receive retirement from the DoD have their pay reduced by a dollar for every dollar they receive from the VA. Those with a disability rating of less than 50 percent also have their retirement pay deducted by a dollar for each dollar provided by the VA.

The new stipulation would eliminate this offset, offering a concurrent receipt for these veterans.

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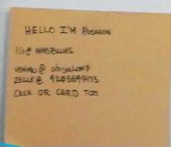
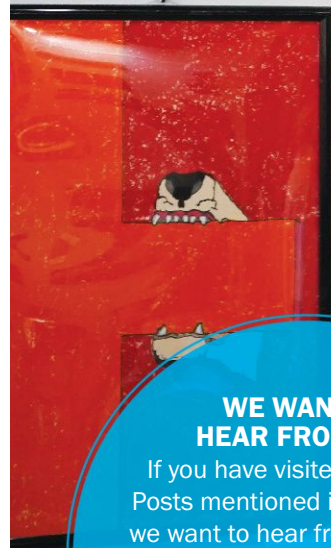
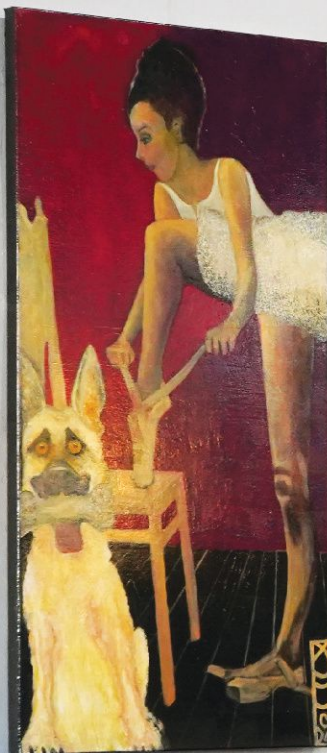
Skechers

'ART SAVES LIVES, AND IT SAVED THIS

Navy veteran Jimmy Martinez, left, speaks with VFW Post 1 member and fellow artist Brian Asbeck during First Friday Art Walk at Post 1 on May 2 in Denver. Asbeck and Martinez, whose art is displayed behind him, are members of Post 1's Veterans Art Council (VAC), which helps mentor, promote and sell veteran art.

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.



POST'

The Mile High City attracts millions of visitors each year. At the epicenter of its art scene is the oldest VFW charter in the world, ready to welcome veterans through its doors.

BY ISMAEL RODRIGUEZ JR.



DESTINATION POST SERIES



VFW magazine continues its "Destination Post Series." The series features 125 Posts located in sought-after tourist destinations. Featured VFW Posts make a real difference in the communities in which the Posts are located.

This month's segment takes *VFW* magazine readers to Denver, the Mile High City, where VFW Post 1, the oldest VFW charter in the world, has been at the heart of its eclectic art scene for more than a decade.

Located in Denver's vibrant Santa Fe Art District, VFW Post 1 attracts thousands of visitors on the first Friday of each month during First Friday Art Walks, a signature event that offers a chance for veterans and civilians to connect over art.

"First Friday is what appealed to Post leadership in 2014 to buy what was then a run-down building," said Jesse Eastburn, current VFW Post 1 Commander and VFW Department of Colorado adjutant. "They saw the potential it had to become what it is today."

Through its homegrown Veterans Arts Council (VAC), Post 1 uses the monthly event to showcase its members' unique personalities on studio walls alongside the charter's rich history, a contrast that creates a timeless depiction of the veteran experience.

"The more the neighborhood grows, the more our part in it grows," VFW Post 1 Senior Vice Commander David Bigelow said. "Our unique gallery allows veterans to heal invisible wounds through expression while also granting the community access to interact with us and break through the facade of who veterans are and how we live."

Founded by Jim Stevens, Rod Ford, Darren Schultz, Will Coukoulis, Kelsey Komarek and Eastburn, the VAC is a



ALL-AMERICAN VFW POSTS NEAR DENVER

The state of Colorado has 85 VFW Posts, all of which make a difference in the communities in which the Posts are located. Below are several All-American Posts near Denver.

VFW Post 6461

753 S. Santa Fe Ave., Fountain, CO 80817
Post Commander Aaron Himes
(719) 382-7957
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/VFW6461>

VFW Post 9644

2680 W. Hampden Ave., Sheridan, CO 80110
Post Commander Todd Van Sant
(303) 789-9733
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/vfw-post9644>

VFW Post 101

702 S. Tejon St., Colorado Springs, CO 80903
Post Commander Danielle Depaolis
(719) 632-2776
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/VfwPost101/photos/?_rdr

VFW Post 3917

4715 Clearview Dr., Colorado Springs, CO 80911
Post Commander Page Gilmore
(719) 392-8677
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Post3917>

VFW Post 41

305 S. Cleveland Ave., Loveland, CO 80537
Post Commander Mark Lyons
(970) 667-4722
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Post3917>

VFW Post 7829

P.O. Box 1512, Monument, CO 80132
Post Commander Rodney Fetterman
(719) 375-5464
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/p/VFW-Post-7829-Monument-Colorado-100063565061670>



Wanderers and art enthusiasts alike roam the gallery at VFW Post 1 during the Santa Fe Art District's First Friday Art Walk on May 2 in Denver. Each month, between 3,000-5,000 people visit Post 1 for this downtown art event, which helps promote veteran art and recruit VFW members through its enhanced visibility.

multifaceted program that, among other things, conducts outreach for veterans, provides mentorship and promotes their art in the community.

"The VAC attracts veterans who might not otherwise know or interact with the VFW, and as a result, it has helped grow our Post 1 membership and community awareness and involvement," said Stevens, a former Post 1 commander and current VAC Director.

'THE PROGRAM HAS CHANGED THE TRAJECTORY OF SO MANY LIVES'

Like Stevens, Eastburn has seen VAC blossom over the years. It has drawn national attention from news outlets such as *The New York Times* and served, most importantly, as a beacon for struggling veterans who have fallen through the cracks.

"Our VAC program is so special," Eastburn said. "The program has changed the trajectory of so many lives in our veteran community. I'm proud to say I don't know of one person who has been on our wall that has taken their own life, and I hope we can continue to say that for many years to come. Art saves lives, and it saved this Post."

After nearly a decade without a Post building and facing the risk of disbandment, members of Post 1 moved into their beige brick home at 841 Santa Fe Drive in 2014 and rode the wave of activity that flooded the Art District each month.

Since then, its membership has grown to more than 1,000 as of 2024, and members such as Stevens, Jerry Rael and Jason Reid have all achieved local and national notoriety for their art.

"First Friday is our most effective recruiting tool, attracting artists who become members (VFW or Auxiliary, depending on eligibility), but also among the 3,000-5,000 visitors who walk in every month," said John Keene, a former Post 1 and VFW Department of Colorado commander.

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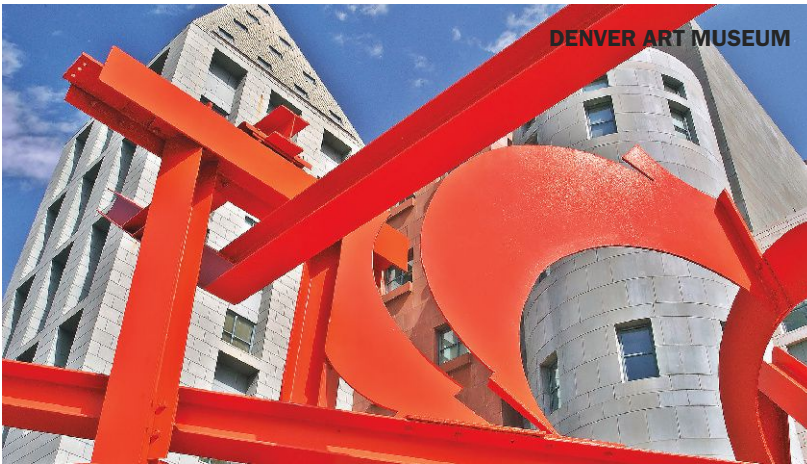
TOP: VFW Post 1 members and its Auxiliary gather at La Alma/Lincoln Park on May 3 in downtown Denver for their VFW Day of Service project. Post 1 and its Auxiliary have participated in VFW's Day of Service since its inception. Each year, they gather at a local park for a cleanup task.

BOTTOM LEFT: VFW Post 1 members and its Auxiliary go over their agenda on May 3 at La Alma/Lincoln Park in Denver for their VFW Day of Service project.

BOTTOM RIGHT: VFW Post 1 Adjutant/Quartermaster Darren Schultz picks up trash on May 3 at La Alma/Lincoln Park in Denver during VFW's Day of Service.



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<https://www.botanicgardens.org>

Denver Museum of Nature & Science

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Denver, CO 80205
(303) 370-6000
<https://www.dmns.org>

Denver Art Museum

100 W. 14th Ave. Pkwy.
Denver, CO 80204
(720) 865-5000
<https://www.denverartmuseum.org/en>

Red Rocks Park and Amphitheatre

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Morrison, CO 80465
(720) 865-2494
<https://www.redrocksonline.com>

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Denver, CO 80202
(303) 592-6712
<https://www.denverunionstation.com>

Wings Over the Rockies Air & Space Museum

7711 E. Academy Blvd.
Denver, CO 80202
(303) 360-5360
<https://wingsmuseum.org>

“This success has led to our Post hosting VA art competitions, allowing our artists to display and sell their work and hang it in the state capitol.”

The appeal, added Bigelow, is in the novelty that Post 1 presents to the younger generation of veterans.

“We offer a different angle on the veteran engagement through art and embedding ourselves in a city zone not traditionally known for a strong veteran presence,” Bigelow said. “This entices veterans of various age groups and war experiences.”

As a result, Bigelow said the Post often serves as the backdrop for local and state announcements impacting veterans, citing Denver Mayor Mike Johnston’s Dec. 19, 2024, address to end veteran homelessness.

“Many other local organizations also use our Post as the location for announcing their veteran-related information to the public,” Stevens said. “All of this has helped raise our awareness in the community, which, in turn, has led to Post 1 becoming a hub for veteran activity and is an often-used referral by other community organizations.”

‘WE ARE NOT AFRAID TO TRY NEW WAYS TO INTERACT’

To cater to this growing visibility and a diverse membership, Post 1 also offers a wide range of programming that supports wellness, creativity and camaraderie. From yoga classes to Healing Warrior sessions, music instruction and writing workshops, all veterans, regardless of their VFW membership status, are welcome to participate at no cost.

“Speaking from the perspective of the writer’s group, our classes are not only free but also accessible via Zoom for veterans across the country,” VFW Post 1 Jr. Vice Commander Rolando Rodriguez said. “We have built a space that honors tradition and innovation, making it not only a place of belonging for local veterans but also an inviting stop for traveling veterans seeking connection and healing through shared experience.”

This juxtaposition drew Rodriguez to Post 1, which he discovered a few

months before the COVID-19 pandemic shut down operations nationwide.

“I couldn’t believe it was a VFW Post,” Rodriguez said. “I saw veteran artists from all walks of life, real community and a sense of welcoming friendship. Getting involved took some time, but doing so felt natural because Post 1 embodies what service after service truly means. It’s a reservoir of tradition, but also a place that embraces new ideas, offering a path forward for veterans to heal, grow and connect through creativity and community.”

For Stevens, one of the oldest tenured life members of Post 1, this is achieved through the membership’s collective willingness to explore opportunities to extend VFW’s reach.

“We are not afraid to try new ways to interact with our veterans and the community,” Stevens said. “Not everything works, but we find things that do, and continuing that effort means we are not stagnated in the past and not afraid of the future.”

“This kind of action reflects the very spirit of the VFW’s founding — a community coming together to demand change in how the government treated veterans after war,” Rodriguez added. “It was a radical move then, and VFW Post 1 continues that legacy today by reimagining what it means to serve.”

As of the publication of this article, Post 1 has been working on an extensive renovation project to expand its reach and build on its success, again aiming for innovation.

“Our future upgrade plans will tie in additional veteran interest, such as small business incubators and a podcast booth,” Bigelow said. “Once in place, these will be open to all veterans for use and, in turn, expand the support offerings to veterans.”

Since VFW Post 1 does not operate under regular business hours, veterans traveling through Denver are encouraged to call in advance when planning their visit. First Friday Art Walks begin at 5:30 p.m. and run until about 10 p.m.

For more information, visit its Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/VFWPost1>. ★

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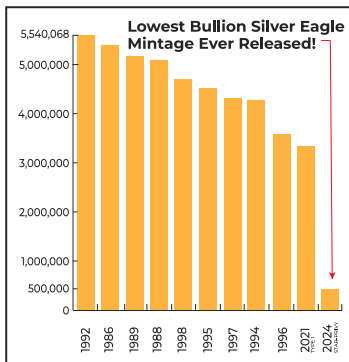
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MAINERS BUILD SHELTERS FOR HOMELESS VETERANS

A group of VFW members from the Pine Tree State convert utility trailers into tiny homes so Maine's vets don't sleep on "the cold, hard ground."

BY JANIE DYHOUSE

Boothbay V.E.T.S. President and member of VFW Post 2197 Ed Harman demonstrates the process of framing a window in October outside Boothbay, Maine. V.E.T.S. provides transitional shelter for homeless veterans in Maine. Volunteers convert utility trailers into living quarters and deliver the trailers to wherever there is a homeless veteran trying to get back on his or her feet.



Volunteers with Boothbay V.E.T.S. gather outside their headquarters in October near Boothbay, Maine. To date, volunteers have converted 50 utility trailers into transitional shelter for homeless veterans. Boothbay V.E.T.S. was the brainchild of Ed Harman. Fellow vets Arthur Richardson, John Hargreaves and Charles Sherman joined him early on.



Last October on a crisp, clear morning, volunteers gathered at the headquarters for Veterans Emergency Temporary Shelter (V.E.T.S.) nestled in the woods just outside Boothbay, Maine. They were there to work on and showcase utility trailers-turned temporary shelters for homeless veterans.

From as far north as Bridgewater, Maine, where snowfall averages 89 inches, south to Kittery, Maine, homeless vets have been provided warmth thanks to Boothbay V.E.T.S.

Vietnam Veteran Ed Harman was inspired to start up Boothbay V.E.T.S. after hearing of a homeless veteran in Maine who died from exposure due to a lack of warm shelter. He soon learned veterans experiencing homelessness in the Pine Tree State

was all too common. "We are veterans working for veterans," Harman said. "I don't care who you are, no one should have to sleep on the cold, hard ground."

V.E.T.S. volunteers convert utility

trailers into comfortable, warm living spaces for vets needing shelter as they look for employment and permanent housing.

Harman said he works with the Maine Bureau of Veterans Services to identify current needs. He also works with the VA in Maine.

"We do not turn any veteran in need of a shelter away," Harman said.

Each trailer is complete with a bed, microwave, mini refrigerator, table, chair and a portable toilet. Bottled water, non-perishable food items and linens also are provided. Seven quilting groups have partnered with V.E.T.S. to donate quilts for each trailer.

Harman, a member of VFW Post 2197 in Topsham,

Maine, said the best part of the trailers is the insulation which can withstand temperatures well below freezing.

The builders are proud that the insulation, which comes from Texas, will not burn, as it is

"We are touching everyone's lives."

Ed Harman, president of Boothbay V.E.T.S.

BOOTHBAY V.E.T.S. MISSION

- Conducting coordinated outreach to proactively seek out veterans in need of assistance.
- Connecting homeless and at-risk veterans with housing solutions, health care, community employment services and other required support.
- Collaborating with federal, state and local agencies; employers; housing providers; faith-based and community nonprofits; and others to expand employment and affordable housing options for veterans exiting homelessness.

completely fireproof. Small heaters are included in the trailers, as well.

When the group originally tested the first trailer, it was minus-10 degrees outside. The heat was turned on in the trailer, and in less than an hour, it was 70 degrees inside.

While the original model for the trailers was designed for single occupancy, V.E.T.S. volunteers have completed units for a family of four so that families do not have to be separated during uncertain times.

Harman said the family trailers have a murphy bed and two twin beds, along with the other amenities included in the single units.

During the October visit to Boothbay V.E.T.S., then-VFW Department of Maine Commander Anthony Kimble commended the work the volunteers are doing.

"This is such an important avenue for our homeless veterans, especially in central Maine," Kimble said. "Providing quick access to shelter and helping these vets get counseling, this is priceless."

In addition to providing emergency shelter, Harman works around the clock to help veterans get connected with their earned VA benefits. While he commends the VA system in Maine, he knows that there is a brief waiting period for homeless vets to get help, which is why he

The inside of one of the Boothbay V.E.T.S. converted trailers is shown here. The living space for a veteran and his family include all the amenities of home, but on a smaller scale. Volunteers with the organization convert the trailers with fireproof insulation that can withstand temperatures well below 0 degrees Fahrenheit.

said these trailers are vital.

VFW Post 2197 Commander Roger Stevens said seven members of his Post regularly volunteer.

"This whole thing is amazing," Stevens said. "Ed is on the go constantly. He works 24/7 on this."

Harman recalled the story of a couple who lived for more than three months in one of the trailers. They saved enough money for a deposit on an apartment and two months' rent.

V.E.T.S. delivered a trailer to Acadia National Park more than 100 miles from Boothbay. A vet had been living in the park for about 100 days.

Harman recalled the vet saying, "I just died and went to heaven," when he entered the trailer for the first time.

"These are the stories that get me right here," said Harman, touching his heart. "This is why we do what we do."

'A SECOND CHANCE AT LIFE'

The process of converting the trailers into what is essentially a tiny home is not an easy or inexpensive one. Harman said it takes two men about 16 weeks to build one. Window and insulation installation is not a quick task.

Last year, the Maine Department of Corrections offered to provide manpower to V.E.T.S. The commissioner for the state's Department of Corrections is Randall Liberty, who is a veteran.

Residents of Mountain View Corrections Center's apprentice carpenter program earn time off their sentence by participating in this endeavor of helping homeless vets.

Trailers are delivered to the corrections facility where the work is completed. Harman calls it a winning situation for everyone.

"With more people working on one trailer, it gets done much quicker," he said. "This also provides Mountain View residents a skill they can use when they get out. People deserve a second chance at life."

Corinne Bailey, the women's vocational instructor at the



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From left, then-VFW Department of Maine Commander Anthony Kimble, James Ewing, William Day and Ed Harman visit outside one of the Boothbay V.E.T.S. converted utility trailers in October outside Boothbay, Maine. Harman conceived the idea of turning the trailers into temporary shelter for veterans looking to escape the frigid Maine temperatures.



Maine Correctional Center, heard about this and called Harman.

Bailey thought the project could provide marketable skills for women as well. She brought a group from the Southern Maine Women's Reentry Center to Boothbay to learn.

One of those women is Victoria Scott. She is participating in the work on the trailer conversions.

"It immediately felt like coming home to extended family, because we got the warmest welcome, received with non-judgment and optimism and figuring it out with us," Scott told TV station News Center Maine.

Incidentally, Scott is completing a college degree while in the corrections system. She had been looking at ways to reduce homelessness in Maine when she heard about working on the mobile shelters.

"We are not just touching veterans lives here, we are touching everyone's lives," Harman said. "Most importantly, we are trying to save the lives of our brothers and sisters."

To learn more about Boothbay V.E.T.S., visit <https://www.boothbay-vets.com>, email boothbayvets@protonmail.com or write 752 Wiscasset Road, Boothbay, ME 04544. ★

EMAIL jdyhouse@vfw.org



Boothbay V.E.T.S. volunteer Brad Drummond shows one of the shelving units built for the temporary mobile housing units in October near Boothbay, Maine. The units — built for homeless veterans — are furnished with essential living amenities, including a microwave and a mini fridge.

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Members of the 2024/2025 VFW-SVA Fellowship gather in Washington, D.C., for the annual SVA Washington Week in March. From left to right: SVA Co-Founder Derek Blumke, Army veteran Polina Washington, Army veteran Ralph Figueroa, Air Force veteran Jennifer Ross, Army veteran Noah Sorseth and Marine Corps veteran Terry Traylor.

STUDENT VETS ADVOC.

The newest VFW-SVA fellows are ready to support veterans in any way they can.

BY DANNY COOK

The 2024-2025 VFW-SVA Fellowship has concluded, and another generation of talented student veterans are ready for change.

Since 2015, the VFW and Student Veterans of America Fellowship Program has helped student veterans better understand the process behind advocating for veteran-friendly legislation and allows for student veterans to work closely with lawmakers responsible for maintaining veteran's policy. Each year, VFW selects the fellows from SVA's ranks as part of the two groups' partnership.

The fellows get hands-on experience advocating for veteran legislation both at the national and local levels, get more involved with the VFW and make lasting connections with each other.

'THERE'S POWER IN NUMBERS'

Over the course of the nine-month schedule, the fellows learned more about policy, often focusing on the G.I. Bill, and how to develop grassroots advocacy in their local settings.

"We spend around six months just learning about policy, with an emphasis on local policy," said Terry Traylor, a Marine Corps veteran, VFW member of Post 7564 in West Fargo, N.D., and one of this year's fellows.

Each of the fellows worked in designated regions of the U.S., with Traylor being involved with the Midwest, specifically the Dakotas. There, Traylor worked closely with senators and other government officials, advocating for better policy for veterans.

To keep the VFW close by, Traylor often worked in town



ABOVE: VFW-SVA Fellowship member Casey Stege smiles for the camera while deployed in Diyala, Iraq, Nov. 2009.

ABOVE RIGHT: VFW-SVA Fellowship member Polina Washington attends a Veteran's Day assembly with her daughter Ludmilla (pictured right) at her elementary school in Nov. 2024. Each year, the school dedicates a wall to veterans by displaying their pictures, as well as hand-made signs honoring their service.

LOWER RIGHT: VFW-SVA Fellowship member Polina Washington (center) stands with VFW Legislative Committee Chairman Mitch Fuller (left) and Rep. Lloyd Doggett (right) during VFW's Conference in Washington, March 2025. The group has a quick chat before going to their respective meetings.



ATE ON CAPITOL HILL

halls so Posts could be more easily involved with the advocacy process.

While there was much vocal advocacy during the fellowship, Traylor also was involved with digital efforts such as building infographics that went into detail about certain policies, as well as creating a class that teaches how to advocate digitally.

Each year, the VFW-SVA fellows get the chance to participate in the Washington Conference— a time for student veterans to have their voices heard by elected officials in the nation's capital. The fellows, along with getting the chance to inform officials in D.C. of the student veteran experience, also get to show their size and influence.

"There's power in numbers," said Traylor. "Imagine shooting a small firearm, that would be me going by myself. When we're with the rest of the VFW, however, we're a whole artillery."

Traylor describes his approach to veterans as "guerilla" —

building close, interpersonal relationships. While being an active SVA member, he also plans on being an active VFW member, advocating for policy at the local level in North Dakota.

Through his experience with the fellowship, Traylor developed a 5k memorial fundraiser for 9/11 deployers and their families.

'A PHENOMENAL PROGRAM'

Jennifer Ross, an Air Force veteran who served for more than 20 years, also was a member of this year's fellowship. She is a member of VFW Post 1503 in Montclair, Va. Although she had been involved with the SVA since graduate school, she did not have much experience with the VFW. Now, after graduating from the fellowship, she's more than eager to get involved with her local VFW Post.

Having served as a Russian linguist and in human intelligence for the Air Force, Ross went on to collect multiple

VFW-SVA Fellowship members Polina Washington, Jennifer Ross and Noah Sorseth, pictured left, discuss G.I. Bill Parity Projects in U.S. Representative Mike Bost's office. Here, they share their suggestions and findings with government officials.



PHOTO COURTESY OF JENNIFER ROSS

master's degrees, including a master's in business administration. When she signed on to join the fellowship, she wasn't sure what to expect.

Through her time with the VFW-SVA fellowship, Ross learned that "There is a need for people to be in the federal government who keep organizations like the SVA and VFW active."

She was impressed with the VFW's initiative, and how both the VFW and SVA seamlessly combined their organizations.

"I was most grateful for the kind of dual nature of it," Ross said. "It wasn't just the SVA or the VFW. I liked how closely they worked to create a phenomenal program. Each piece offered such a unique viewpoint on how they individually handled policy."

Originally from Virginia, Ross now lives in Maryland and is excited to find her new VFW Post. She was impressed with how the VFW handled themselves in D.C. and hopes to support veterans alongside them.

"The legislative team at the VFW, I connected with them and thought they were all phenomenal people," she said. "I'm excited to work with them going forward."

Ross is currently enrolled in a master's program for pub-

Members of the Fellowship line up for a picture with other members of the meeting in Representative Mike Bost's office during Washington Week, March 2025.

lic policy at Georgetown University. She works closely with HillVets — a non-profit organization based in Washington, D.C. — that helps guide veterans to careers working in the government. She says she is passionate about education, specifically education for veterans.

'CHALLENGING, YET REWARDING'

Another VFW-SVA fellow, Army veteran Casey Stege, plans to use the experience he gained from the fellowship to inform his future career as an attorney.

"I was exposed to so many inspiring veterans and veteran-friendly businesses and organizations that are doing an incredible job of caring for our soldiers," said Stege, a member of VFW Post 2148 in Waco, Texas.

Through the fellowship, Stege gained a deeper appreciation

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SVA Fellowship member Terry Traylor (pictured center) listens in on the VFW Open Session with fellow VFW Members, March 3rd, 2025. Senior VFW Leadership had a back-and-forth discussion with Senators and Representatives about current PTSD initiatives and alternate treatments.



of veteran service organizations along with a deepened understanding of legislation that can go towards benefiting veterans.

“It was challenging for sure,” Stege said when asked about the process of advocating for veteran-friendly policy. “Knowing where to start, then putting yourself out there to try and get the importance of the legislation across was challenging yet rewarding. Thankfully, the VFW mentors were incredible and quite helpful.”

‘MY TIME IN D.C. WAS IMPACTFUL’

Last fall, while enrolled in the VFW-SVA Fellowship, Army veteran Polina Washington was taking a graduate course on language pedagogy. One of her assignments was to create an infographic on a topic of her choice. She used the fellowship as inspiration to create an informative, but accessible infographic about the *G.I. Bill Parity Act*.

“The process of creating (the infographic) also had me think of how I would ‘pitch’ this legislation to various people, just as those it does or doesn’t concern, to get everyone to support the act,” said Washington, an at-large VFW Member.

During her week in D.C. this past March, Washington had a chance to sharpen skills that are needed when advocating for policy. Getting to work with “the pros” as she says, Washington was paired up with VFW National Legislative Committee Chairman Mitch Fuller and got to see him in action.

“I had been to Washington, D.C., before, in the capacity of a tourist, but getting to walk the halls where decision makers can influence what may affect their towns, cities and states made me feel that my time in D.C. was truly impact-

ful,” Washington said.

Washington is still on active duty and was on track to graduate from the University of Texas with a master’s in Russian, East European and Eurasian studies in May 2025. Her next goal is to teach Russian at the United States Military Academy at West Point, and she hopes to maintain strong relationships with both the VFW and SVA.

‘PEOPLE ARE GOING TO LISTEN’

The Fellowship had a profound effect on Army Veteran Jose Ayon, who was able to work alongside the California VFW legislative team while in Washington, D.C. During his time in the nation’s capital, Ayon, a member of VFW Post 67 in Sacramento, Calif., was able to feel the influence his voice carried.

“When you’re in a room with your team, people are going to listen,” Ayon said when asked about his Washington Conference experience. “You feel the power of your voice.”

Ayon is currently pursuing a master’s of Public Administration degree at the University of Southern California and works for the California Department of Veteran Affairs.

“VFW is an amazing organization that does so much,” Ayon said. “It’s definitely something this fellowship and the team instilled in me.”

Feeling accomplished and experienced, each of the VFW-SVA Fellows are ready to assist veterans in any way they can. Whether it is at the local or at the federal level, they will make sure their voices, and the voices of all veterans, are heard. ★

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Former U.S. Army Specialist Fourth Class Kenneth J. David shakes hands with then-President Joe Biden after receiving the Medal of Honor during a ceremony at the White House on Jan. 3. David was the only living recipient among seven U.S. soldiers from the Korean and Vietnam wars to receive the Medal of Honor during the ceremony.

MEDALS OF HONOR PRESENTED TO SEVEN SOLDIERS

Veterans of the Korean and Vietnam wars received the nation's highest military decoration earlier this year.

BY TIM DYHOUSE

Five Korean War veterans and two Vietnam War veterans — all of whom served in the Army — received the Medal of Honor in January. Four of the recipients were killed in action, and all but one of the awards were presented posthumously.

In one of his last official acts, then-President Joe Biden presented the awards on Jan. 3 at the White House.

“These are heroes of different ranks, different positions and even different generations,” Biden said at the ceremony. “They are heroes who all went above and beyond the call of duty.”

To learn more about the individual Medal of Honor recipients, visit <https://www.army.mil/medalofhonor/jan2025>. ★

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GEN. RICHARD E. CAVAZOS

Unit: E Co., 2nd Bn., 65th Inf., 3rd Inf. Div.

Date and location: June 14-15, 1953; near Sagimak, Korea



SPEC. 4 KENNETH J. DAVID

Unit: D Co., 1st Bn., 506th Inf., 101st Abn. Div.

Date and location: May 7, 1970; Thua Thien Province, Republic of Vietnam

U.S. ARMY PHOTO



PFC. CHARLES R. JOHNSON

Unit: B Co., 15th Inf., 3rd Inf. Div.

Date and location: June 11-12, 1953;
Outpost Harry, Korean Peninsula



Army Medal of Honor

U.S. ARMY PHOTO



PFC. WATARU NAKAMURA

Unit: I Co., 38th Inf., 2nd Inf. Div.

Date and location: May 18, 1951; near
P'ungch'on-ni, Korea

U.S. ARMY IMAGE



CAPT. HUGH R. NELSON JR.

Unit: 114th Aviation Co.

Date and location: June 5, 1966; near
Moc Hoa, Republic of Vietnam

U.S. ARMY IMAGE



PVT. BRUNO R. ORIG

Unit: G Co., 2nd Bn., 23rd Inf., 2nd Inf.
Div.

Date and location: Feb. 15, 1951; near
Chipyeong-Ni, Korea

U.S. ARMY PHOTO



CPL. FRED B. MCGEE

Unit: K Co., 3rd Bn., 17th Inf., 7th Inf. Div.

Date and location: June 16, 1952; Tang-
Wan-Ni, Korea



VFW Post 4442 Commander Gerald McMasters, center, donates a Purple Heart parking sign on Sept. 4, 2024, to an employee of the Washington County VA Clinic and Valor Healthcare Center in Washington, Pa. McMasters said his Post's Purple Heart Parking Project is now spreading to other states.

'THE SUCCESS HAS BEEN OVERWHELMING'

A VFW Post in West Virginia created a project to facilitate parking for Purple Heart recipients.

BY ISMAEL RODRIGUEZ JR.

The idea hit VFW Post 4442 Commander Gerald McMasters on a summer's day in 2022.

McMasters was out on a routine grocery run to the local Walmart in Triadelphia, W.Va., when an interaction with a Purple Heart Vietnam War veteran led to a realization.

"I noticed the elderly gentleman walking across the parking lot had a Purple Heart license plate on his truck," McMasters said. "I asked him why he did not have a handicap permit, and he told me he was not handicapped, that his old war wounds were just catching up to him."

Like most of the other wounded veterans McMasters had met that day, many of them offered a similar response, some admitting that "They are much too proud to use a handicap permit," according to the Post 4442 commander.

"I felt sorry for the man and got to thinking," McMasters said. "We have special parking for other special needs.

Why not our wounded veterans, our Purple Heart recipients?"

McMasters brought the concern to his Post 4442 membership in Elm Grove, W.Va., and by mid-July, the first Purple Heart parking designations appeared at the Triadelphia Walmart, a couple of miles east of the Post.

By December 2023, Post 4442's Purple Heart Parking Project has accounted for more than 50 Purple Heart parking signs across the Mountain State, at prominent locations such as hospitals, restaurants, grocery stores, sports complexes, social clubs, funeral homes and DMVs.

The implementation, according to McMasters, was a joint effort that included support from local businesses in and around Wheeling, W.Va., about five miles northwest of Elm Grove.

Post members would supply the Purple Heart parking signs, and businesses would agree to install them on their premises.

AN IDEA FOR OTHER POSTS

"The success has been overwhelming," McMasters said. "Every business we have approached has welcomed the idea, and we have never been denied."

With Post 4442 located in the northern part of West Virginia, near Ohio to the west and Pennsylvania to the east, McMasters added that their Purple Heart Parking Project has since spread to these neighboring states.

For their efforts in continuing to grow the project, Post 4442 has received numerous awards and news coverage. McMasters said the Post's efforts received an award from the Military Order of the Purple Heart.

"As the project continues to grow," McMasters said, "we are hoping that other folks will pick up the idea and continue the Purple Heart Parking Project in their area." ★

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Armando Villarreal adds the final touches to a football helmet in tribute to Red Grange of the University of Illinois football program in 2024. Celebrating the 100-year anniversary of Grange's six-touchdown performance, the helmets have a throwback leather look made to resemble football helmets of the 1920s.



“I WAS TRYING TO FIND
SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL

From designing football helmets to championship murals, one VFW senior vice commander brings his artistic prowess to the world of sports.

BY DANNY COOK

Ever since he was in kindergarten, Armando Villarreal knew he was an artist. In the first grade, he began submitting his works to a state art show in Nebraska. Now, serving as the senior vice commander at VFW Post 4688 in Imperial, Neb., Villarreal is asked to design helmets for entire college football programs.

While on active duty 25 years ago, Villarreal found time to create art. Between 2000 and 2001, during his time at Camp Bondsteel in southeastern Kosovo, Villarreal worked as a supply sergeant for one of the hospitals on

camp. It was here he witnessed several mass casualty patients from a bus explosion being transported into the camp and treated. Villarreal would go on to create a painting inspired by this experience.

“I guess looking back on it, it was therapy,” Villarreal said. “I was trying to find something beautiful, in a way, from something that was not so great.”

After serving with the 855th Quartermaster Company in Iraq, Villarreal would later go on to create a convoy painting inspired by 14 different photographs taken in Iraq.



LEFT: Armando Villarreal and his wife, Lora, hold up their Emmy Award and a contributing plaque at their home in November 2023. Villarreal received the award for tribute helmets he created for Ty Jordan and Aaron Lowe of the Utah Utes football team.

BELOW: A collection of Villarreal's football helmets sit in his art studio. Among these helmets include the Mississippi State University helmet dedicated to former U.S. Rep. Gillespie V. "Sonny" Montgomery, pictured on the right, and the tribute helmet to college football players Ty Jordan and Aaron Lowe, pictured in the forefront.

AN AIRBRUSH MAESTRO

In 2018, Villarreal began his first project using an airbrush to paint football helmets. He worked closely with Mississippi State's football program to design helmets in tribute to former U.S. Rep. Gillespie V. "Sonny" Montgomery. With a sleek, metallic look, the helmets look like they were made straight from a plane's hull.

Other schools began to reach out to Villarreal, and soon he had to switch over to painting full-time.

"Eight months out of the year became dedicated to helmets and football teams," Villarreal said. "The rest of the time is reserved more for personal art and stuff I like to create."

In 2020, he created a "moon helmet" for the University of Central Florida and a tribute helmet for the *USS Salt Lake City* for the University of Utah. This design is special for Villarreal, as it reminds him of his grandfather, a VFW life member who served in World War II.

The University of Utah would again reach out to Villarreal in 2022 and ask him to design another helmet for the team. After the passing of Utah Utes players Ty Jordan and Aaron Lowe, the

university wanted to honor their memories with their portraits painted on each side of the helmet. A job requiring much finer airbrush detail, Villarreal knew it would be a daunting task. He accepted.

With help from his wife, Lora, and their kids, the helmets became a massive success. A short documentary titled "Good Enough" was done on Villarreal and his process painting the tribute helmets to Jordan and Lowe. The documentary would go on to win a Rocky Mountain Regional Emmy award. He and his family also were later brought out onto the Utah Utes football field during a game to be recognized.

Villarreal still paints helmets for college football programs today. Currently, he is coming up with concepts for "snowmobile helmets" to honor a search and rescue team from Wasatch County, Utah. He also designs concepts for shoes and T-shirts for Warrior Rising, a non-profit organization for veterans with whom he's affiliated.

His love for sports does not end with college football. Villarreal has also painted murals for the Kansas City Royals' 2015 World Series win, as well as a mural for Derek Jeter's retirement in 2014.

As the Senior Vice Commander of Post 4688, Villarreal is involved with color guards, assists with funerals and acts as a representative of the VFW for public events such as parades and baseball games. His favorite works that he has done are one of a helicopter and the convoy painting he created from the 14 photographs. ★

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Caring for Skin is Critical for Diabetics

Wounds from diabetes can be dangerous while presenting challenges when it comes to prevention and healing.

BY JANICE PHELAN

Among the approximately 38 million Americans living with diabetes, roughly 20 percent will develop a foot ulcer in their lifetime, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). This serious complication can be difficult to heal and results in a lower limb amputation for around one in five patients dealing with these open wounds.

“Unfortunately, diabetic wounds are some of the most complex because of how diabetes works, impacting the immune system, blood flow and the nerves that let us know we’re hurt,” said Miles Clark, a co-founder of Bluewave Technologies, a company focused on improving the quality of life and limiting infections for amputees and diabetic wound patients. “An infected wound is much more likely to lead to amputation and put a patient into a fast downward spiral.”

Diabetes and diabetic wounds are more prevalent among veterans. According to the Veterans Administration, nearly 25 percent of veterans have diabetes, compared to just under 12 percent of the general population.

Patients should talk to their doctor about their specific condition and any concerns, Clark said.

“But diabetic patients, especially those with peripheral neuropathy, should always try to look for skin breakdown, especially on their feet,” he said. “The bottoms of feet are particularly susceptible, so if you can’t do it yourself, have someone help look.”

CDC recommendations including washing your feet and checking them daily, wearing well-fitting shoes, avoid-

ing going barefoot, trimming toenails straight across, putting your feet up when sitting and wiggling your toes for a few minutes several times each day.

In addition, patients with diabetes are encouraged to quit smoking, follow a healthy diet, consistently take medications prescribed by their doctor and stay physically active with a focus on feet-friendly activities such as walking, bike riding or swimming.

Treatment for foot ulcers often includes offloading by using a special boot or shoe, said Justin Zhou, Bluewave Technologies co-founder.

“Unfortunately, these devices are perfect homes for bacteria and fungi which can cause major problems for wound healing,” he said. “Often, these microbes also make the devices smell terrible, which can lead to major quality-of-life issues.”

Keeping the environment around the wound as clean as possible will give diabetic wounds the opportunity to heal, Clark added.

“That especially includes the devices that you wear close around the wound — things like offloading boots, diabetic shoes, walkers and of course prosthetic liners,” he said.

Clark said his company sees several

veterans with amputations and diabetic wounds with Bluewave Technologies’ goal to help manage their skin issues and quality of life.

David Stewart, an Army veteran and VFW member, said the odor of his prosthetic liner and ankle-foot orthosis can result in him falling into a depression.

“The negative connotation of a putrid stench makes me spiral into a realization of the amputation and lack of self-care,” Stewart said. “When I use Bluewave as directed, I do not have the spiral depression that used to occur.”

VFW life member Steve Whipple had issues similar to Stewart. He had a constant odor and skin issues due to his prosthetic liner. That changed once he started using Bluewave.

“After using the Bluewave, I have not had any issues and strongly recommend it to all amputees or anyone who’s had to wear a brace,” said Whipple, a Navy vet. “It just makes my life so much better and manageable.” For more information about preventing and caring for diabetic wounds, contact your health-care professional. ★

EMAIL magazine@vfw.org

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





BLUEWAVE Disinfection and Deodorization Device

- ✓ **Kills >99.9999% of MRSA***
- ✓ **Patented technology** offers powerful disinfection on both hard and soft surfaces
- ✓ **No skin irritating residues and dry process** - devices can be put back on patient immediately
- ✓ **Mobile**, easy to use (~23 lbs.)
- ✓ **Odor-free** in as little as 6 minutes and disinfected in under 30 minutes

*Disinfection testing was conducted on Super Cycle setting (<30 mins) on Stainless Steel Carriers and 2-Ply Polyester

One cycle in the BLUEWAVE, and the odor is gone. Also skin irritations disappear. Would highly recommend this product to anyone with an amputation.

- Eric F., Veteran

I can't speak highly enough of this device and how it has helped improve my quality of life.

- Daniel G., Veteran



What does the BLUEWAVE system treat?

The BLUEWAVE can treat a broad range of Prosthetic and Orthotic devices such as prosthetic liners, shoes and boots, offloading walkers, inserts and more.



BLUEWAVE Veteran Case Studies**



Patient A | Age 63, M, Caucasian, Type-2 Diabetic

Patient B | Age 76, M, Caucasian, Type-2 Diabetic

Patient C | Age 51, M, Caucasian, Type-2 Diabetic

Patient D | Age 66, M, Latino, Type-2 Diabetic

**Case study data only. Bluewave makes no claims regarding health outcomes pending clinical trial data.

Contact us for info on how you can get a Bluewave from your VA.

☎ 352-389-1897

✉ info@mybluewave.com

🌐 www.mybluewave.com

📺 Scan for video



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Stay covered by asking your doctor about Attends[®]. With your VA benefits, you can get incontinence products delivered straight to your door through CMOP.



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go to attends.com/veterans, scan QR code, call 1-919-237-4082 or email veterans@attindas.com

Phone support is available for samples and resources; orders cannot be placed by phone.

2024 VOICE OF DEMOCRACY WINNERS

Listed below are the winners of the 2024 National Voice of Democracy (VOD) contest. All 53 VFW Department winners were honored during the VFW's Washington Conference in March in Washington, D.C. Each year, VFW provides high school students from across the country and other parts of the world the opportunity to express themselves through a democratic- and patriotic-themed recorded essay.

This year, nearly 27,000 students from grades nine through 12 participated in the contest. Tri Vu, a senior, won this year's VOD contest. Vu, sponsored by VFW Post 8214 in Manchester, N.H., received the top prize, the \$35,000 T.C. Selman Memorial Scholarship provided by VFW. Vu, pictured at right, was unable to attend the ceremony but accepted the award via video message.

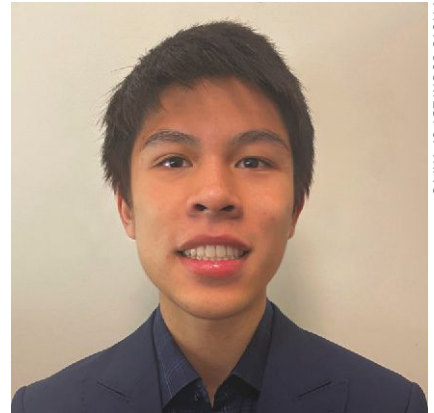


PHOTO COURTESY OF TRI VU

SPONSOR

POST	WINNER	LOCATION	AWARD AMOUNT
8214	Tri Vu	Manchester, NH	\$35,000
304	Caleb Smith	Annapolis, MD	\$21,000
1874	Della Phillips	Fargo, ND	\$15,000
2571	Ben Hourdequin	Hanover, NH	\$9,500
9639	Benjamin Ferster	Harrisburg, PA	\$5,000
1540	Makoa Arnett-Cook	Honolulu, HI	\$5,000
12061	Aingleah Ford	Salem, Utah	\$4,000
8164	Amelia Borawski	Reading, MA	\$4,000
3048	Ashlyn Dalton	Baker City, OR	\$3,500
5126	Evelyn Ernst	Glenham, SD	\$3,500
7339	Michael McMahan	Topton, NC	\$3,000
12057	Shanti Isaac	Guaynabo, PR	\$3,000
12186	Jackson Settle	Oldsmar, FL	\$2,500
475	Prishu Gaire	Bear, DE	\$2,500
3982	Michael Hu	San Jose, CA	\$2,500
9342	Meredith Maxwell	AP0, AE	\$2,000
3128	Julianne Davis	Rainsville, AL	\$2,000
5408	Rebecca Davis	Acworth, GA	\$2,000
3757	Kaydence Monti	Buckhamon, WV	\$2,000
5717	Katelyn Wright	Kearney, MO	\$2,000
3750	Ashlyn Rogers	Luling, LA	\$2,000
379	Elijah Sauer	Wapato, WA	\$2,000
4171	Noah Lorenz	Littleton, CO	\$2,000
7333	Joy Trief	Randolph, NJ	\$2,000
6364	Chris Qian	Richmond, VA	\$2,000
9834	Catelyn Stearman	Gravette, AR	\$2,000
1282	Samuel Dusek	Hagerston, IN	\$2,000
406	Grace Rochelle	Newport, RI	\$2,000
12197	Bailey Hodge	Benton, KY	\$2,000
5220	Joseph Martinez	Chicago, IL	\$2,000
1004	Antoine Taylor	Rigby, ID	\$2,000
7788	Nolan Howe	Easton, CT	\$1,500
1509	Hailey Pangelinan	Yigo, Guam	\$1,500
1641	Daisy Sweatt	Peru, ME	\$1,500
4906	Lydia Bal	Toledo, OH	\$1,500
1642	Ashton Jenzen	Waseca, MN	\$1,500
2064	Joseph Burke	Walden, NY	\$1,000
12112	Laszlo Baumgardner	Bozeman, MT	\$1,000
736	Madison Gompert	Albion, NE	\$1,000
2642	Emmett Juergens	Carroll, IA	\$1,000
4471	Jacey Clark	Guernsey, WY	\$1,000
3937	Jose Garcia	Long Beach, MS	\$1,000
4938	Lydia Kent	Edmond, OK	\$1,000
8846	Marissa Zonnebelt	North Muskegon, MI	\$1,000
1389	Maria Garcia	Albuquerque, NM	\$1,000
1254	Connor Commerford	Oxford, KS	\$1,000
10376	Addison Taylor	Burnet, TX	\$1,000
8807	Madison Plante	Star Valley, AZ	\$1,000
12101	Gwendolyn Cressman	Las Vegas, NV	\$1,000
12207	Kaylee Hannon	Inman, SC	\$1,000
1291	Addysen Peery	Antioch, TN	\$1,000
10682	Andrew Gallt	Glennallen, AK	\$1,000
1465	Grace Kreklow	Wauwatosa, WI	\$1,000

NATIONAL SCHOLARSHIP

T.C. Selman Memorial Scholarship
 Charles Kuralt Memorial Scholarship
 VFW Scholarship
 LeRoy Moorhead Memorial and Troy and Sandy Rothbart Memorial Scholarship (NY)
 Floyd County VFW Post 3281, New Albany Indiana Scholarship
 Rehoboth Beach Post 7447 and Auxiliary Dept. of Delaware Scholarship
 Department of Indiana and Auxiliary Scholarship & Department of New Jersey Howard E. Vander Clute Scholarship (combined)
 Department of Minnesota William F. Halsey Memorial
 Department of New York and Auxiliary, Rev. Albert G. Salmon Memorial Scholarship
 Class 122 Commanders and Department of Illinois and Auxiliary Scholarship (Combined)
 Joseph and Irene Hansen Memorial Scholarship (MD)
 Jesse A. Lewis Memorial Scholarship (CA) and Stephen and Elsie Riordan Memorial Scholarship (NJ)
 Daniel Sean Wallace Memorial Scholarships (NJ)
 Past Commander-in-Chief Tim Borland, Past National President Jane Reape and Class of 2022-2023 Scholarship (Combined)
 Department of New Hampshire Scholarship and the South Carolina Auxiliary, Jan Owens Past National President Scholarship (combined)
 Silver Spring Memorial Post 2562 Scholarship (MD)
 Department of Arizona and Auxiliary Harry A. Kosht Memorial Scholarship
 Department of California and Auxiliary Scholarship
 Department of Illinois VFW - Ray Soden/George Cramer Scholarship
 Department of Wisconsin Wally Hogan/Tom Tradewell Commanders-in-Chief Scholarship
 Department of Kentucky and Auxiliary Brian Duffy and Marion Watson Scholarship
 Francis J. Tallman Memorial Scholarship & Robert A. Stock Memorial Scholarship (NY) (combined)
 Walter and Doris Marshall Memorial Scholarship (MT) & Southern Conference Scholarship (combined)
 Mr. and Mrs. James H. Black Scholarship (NC) & Jane Young Memorial Scholarship (OH) (combined)
 Department of Alabama Scholarship & Department of Georgia James H. "Sloppy" Floyd Memorial Scholarship (combined)
 Department of Georgia R.D. "Bulldog" Smith, Jr. Scholarship & Department of Ohio Chester J. Koch Memorial Scholarship (combined)
 Larry W. Rivers Scholarship (LA) & Department of Illinois Scott Post 4183 Scholarship (combined)
 All American Post 284 Scholarship (D.C.) & Bernard J. Michels, Post 9610 and Auxiliary Scholarship (combined)
 Juanita Crowe-Durbino, Department of Tennessee Scholarship & Ervin and Lorraine Rothenbuhler Scholarship (MD) (combined)
 Fridley VFW Post 363 and Auxiliary Scholarship (MN) & Department of Michigan and Auxiliary Scholarship (combined)
 Department of Connecticut and Auxiliary Scholarship
 Department of Missouri and Auxiliary Scholarship
 Department of New Mexico and Auxiliary Scholarship
 Department of Massachusetts Edward A. Nardi Scholarship
 Department of Colorado and Auxiliary Scholarship
 Department of Arkansas and Auxiliary Les Thone Memorial Scholarship
 Department of Wyoming and Auxiliary Scholarship
 Roy Chandler VFW Post 762 and Auxiliary Scholarship (ND)
 Arthur W. Jones VFW Post 7564 and Auxiliary Scholarship (ND)
 Department of Pennsylvania Joseph L. Vicites Memorial Scholarship
 Department of Maine Scholarship "to Remember the U.S.S. Maine"
 Gilbert N. Nelson - Post 1326 and their Auxiliary - Bismarck, North Dakota Scholarship
 Department of Kansas and Auxiliary Robert R. Whipple Memorial Scholarship
 Department of Nevada and Auxiliary Scholarship
 Department of Florida John M. "Jack" Carney Scholarship
 Department of Hawaii and Auxiliary Scholarship
 Department of Idaho and Auxiliary Scholarship
 Department of Mississippi VFW and Auxiliary Bernard McClelland Memorial Scholarship
 Ray Sisk Memorial Scholarship (CA)
 Department of Tennessee Cooper T. Holt - John Furgess Scholarship
 Department of Mississippi Toxie K. Stapleton Post 6473 Luther J. Cox Memorial Scholarship
 Commander-in-Chief Richard L. Eubank and 2010-2011 Department Commanders Scholarship (CA)
 Mr. and Mrs. John Biedrzycki and the 2015 Homecoming Committee Scholarship (PA)

2024 PATRIOT'S PEN WINNERS

Listed below are the winners of the 2024 Patriot's Pen youth essay contest. Nearly 62,000 students in grades six through eight from across the country, as well as the Pacific areas, Europe and the Panama Canal, entered VFW's Patriot's Pen contest for a chance to win part of the \$55,500 distributed to the top performers. Each year, students from all 53 VFW Departments compete in the youth essay contest.

This year's top winner is Evelyn Newbigging, an eighth-grade student from Lancaster, S.C., who was sponsored by VFW Post 12136 in Indian Land, S.C. She earned a \$5,000 award and a trip to the VFW Washington Conference in Washington, D.C., for writing the winning essay. Newbigging is pictured at right with VFW Auxiliary National President Brenda Bryant and VFW Commander-in-Chief Al Lipphardt.



PHOTO BY BOB KNUDSEN

SPONSOR POST	WINNER	LOCATION	AWARD AMOUNT	NATIONAL SCHOLARSHIP
12136	Evelyn Newbigging	Lancaster, SC	\$5,000	North End Post 144, Paul A. Spera Past Commander-in-Chief Award
1741	Laila Kamin	Auburn, WA	\$4,000	VFW Award
758	Canaan Ly	Tempe, AZ	\$3,500	VFW Award
5376	Alayna Gossett	Tunnell Hill, GA	\$2,750	Alaine Benson Memorial Award
4903	Jack Kelly	Vail, AZ	\$2,500	Rehoboth Beach Post 7447 and Auxiliary (Dept. of Delaware) Award
7721	Torin Kelly	Naples, FL	\$2,000	Clyde A. Lewis Department of New York and Auxiliary Award
735	Angela Zhu	Pocatello, ID	\$1,750	Dept. of New Hampshire George J. Maxfield Post 1772 and Auxiliary John A. Knapper Memorial Award
9612	Quinn Wagner	AP0, AP	\$1,500	John F. Gwizdak Award
11119	Trinitee Mitchell	New Bern, NC	\$1,500	VFW and James R. and Pat Mueller Award
879	Lanie Kolisak	Cranberry Twp, PA	\$1,500	VFW Award
12064	Montgomery Wunker	San Juan, PR	\$1,250	VFW Award
75	Siddharth Chaudhry	San Ramon, CA	\$1,250	Grace Minnix Memorial Award
3978	Anna Lucile Eddleman	Oxford, MS	\$1,000	Golden Valley VFW Post 7051 (Golden Valley, Minnesota) Award
12106	Nicholas Tolnay	East Haven, CT	\$1,000	Louis W. Oppenheim VFW Post #1019 Award
6208	Zimal Khan	Prior Lake, MN	\$1,000	Veterans of Foreign Wars, Department of Colorado Award
1838	Charlie Thomas	Spring Lake, NJ	\$1,000	John V. Daniels Jr. Post 2813 and Auxiliary (Dept. of New York) Award & John E. (Jack) Bales Post 10581 (Dept. of Colorado) Award (combined)
1827	Lillie Kenney	Covesville, VA	\$1,000	Silver Spring Memorial Post 2562 (Dept. of Maryland) Award & Department of Utah Award (combined)
109	Kyle Neleski	Sorrento, ME	\$1,000	Department of Michigan Award & Warren A. Tressler Memorial (Dept. of Minnesota) Award (combined)
983	Jaedi Guillette	Las Vegas, NV	\$1,000	Department of Nevada Award & Chaplain Lyman Rollins Post 2005, Marblehead, Massachusetts Award (combined)
9644	Avi Novotny	Greenwood Village, CO	\$1,000	Charlie H. Adamson, Jr. Memorial Award & Joseph A. Scerra Memorial (Dept. of Massachusetts) Award (combined)
9317	Hunter Welch	Fairmount, ND	\$1,000	James L. Keeley Award & Department of Ohio Award (combined)
2245	Georgia Roscoe	Grayslake, IL	\$1,000	Department of South Dakota VFW and Auxiliary Award & Department of Idaho and Auxiliary Award (combined)
5156	Riley Mills	Dunlap, TN	\$1,000	Department of Georgia and Auxiliary Award
5491	Alex Zywochenko	Lincolndale, NY	\$1,000	Department of Connecticut and Auxiliary Award
	Lev Leontev	Nahariya, Israel	\$750	Department of Kansas VFW and Auxiliary Award & Department of Iowa Award (combined)
6873	Noah Rolerson	Abilene, TX	\$750	VFW Department of Washington and Auxiliary Eric G. Sandstrom Memorial Award
12212	James Arias	Santa Clara, NM	\$500	Glenn D. Raney Memorial (Louisiana) Award
8532	Elijah Chauffe	Clarksville, AR	\$500	Mary Margaret Romano Memorial (Dept. of Connecticut) Award
6125	Martin McKinley	Encampment, WY	\$500	VFW Southern Conference Award
Unknown	Chloe Simon	Mansfield, MA	\$500	Edward S. Banas, Sr. Award
293	Londyn Targa-Stephen	Eugene, OR	\$500	Deering Memorial Post 6859, Portland Maine Award
10682	Wyatt McGinnis	Glennallen, AK	\$500	Department of Tennessee John Furgess Award
7035	Reese Goodman	Avon, OH	\$500	Department of Missouri VFW and Auxiliary Award
8672	Elliana Hammonds	Havre De Grace, MD	\$500	The Robin V. Fell Memorial Award
1631	Nathan Sewade	Epsom, NH	\$500	Deering Memorial Post 6859, Auxiliary Portland Maine Award
2875	Lariah Trevenen-Ferreira	Kailua, HI	\$500	Department of South Carolina and Auxiliary Award
6342	Brooke Perron	Norfolk, MA	\$500	Sanford-Springvale Memorial VFW Post 9935 Award
3304	Makenna Miller	Tekamah, NE	\$500	Department of California Award
8879	Peyton Giles	Adel, IA	\$500	Department of Arkansas, "Dewayne Fletcher Memorial" Award
8384	Silas Wilkerson	Muldrow, OK	\$500	Frederick H. Smalley Department of New Mexico Award
	Rozlyn Adamson	Yankton, SD	\$500	VFW Department of Pacific Areas Award
5153	Caleb Barron	Arnaudville, LA	\$500	VFW Department of New Jersey Award
7478	Jenée St. Pierre	Harrington, DE	\$500	Veterans of Foreign Wars of Ohio Charities Award
10900	Izalah Avila	Magna, UT	\$500	Department of Wyoming and Auxiliary Award
2508	Addilyn Thornhill	Kirksville, MO	\$500	The Veterans of Foreign Wars, Department of Mississippi and Auxiliary Award
497	Aurora Terry	Havre, MT	\$500	Commander-in-Chief John Biedrzycki and 2015-2016 Department Commanders Award
6705	Mollie Goral	Greenleaf, WI	\$500	National President Francisca Guilford and 2015-2016 Auxiliaries Award
9809	Autumn Gillis	Freeland, MI	\$500	Department of New Mexico and Auxiliary Award
5578	Brantley Larch	Seth, WV	\$500	Department of Nevada Award
3115	Grace Fenwick	Wichita, KS	\$500	Department of Pennsylvania 2015-16 "LDRSHIP" Award
7016	Kendrick Williams	Mobile, AL	\$500	Peter J. Mascetti Jr. & Department of Europe Award
673	Corde Leinenbach	Jasper, IN	\$500	VFW and Auxiliary members of Southern Charles County Memorial Post 10081, Dept. of Maryland Award
3769	Chloe SESCO	Pikeville, KY	\$500	Gilbert N. Nelson Post 1326 and their Auxiliary, Bismarck, ND Award

'WE SEAMLESSLY WORK TOGETHER'



VFW members are encouraged to sign up family members for membership in the VFW Auxiliary. Incentives are offered for those recruiting at least five members.

BY JANIE DYHOUSE

For more than 100 years, VFW and the VFW Auxiliary have partnered to work on behalf of veterans and their families at home and abroad. Together, the two organizations are a powerful force.

"We seamlessly work together for a greater good," VFW Auxiliary National Secretary-Treasurer Ann Panteleakos said. "The more members we have collectively, the better it is for veterans and their families."

While the Auxiliary has nearly half a million members, Panteleakos noted it could be significantly larger given the eligibility parameters for membership in the VFW Auxiliary.

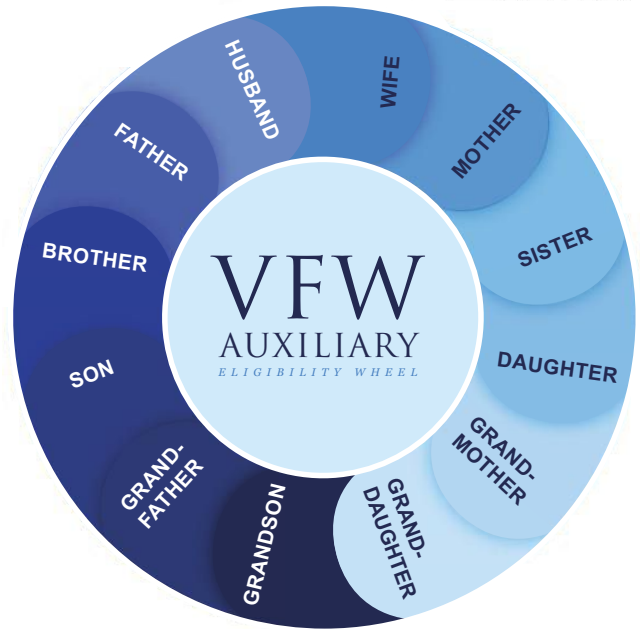
"As a veteran, chances are you have multiple family members eligible for membership in the VFW Auxiliary," she added. "Step- and adopted parents, children, siblings (and half-siblings), grandparents and grandchildren are considered the same as biological and may join under their VFW-eligible veteran."

Promoting membership in both organizations is one of many ways the VFW and the Auxiliary work in tandem.

During the 2025-2026 membership year, multiple incentives will be offered to both VFW and Auxiliary members recruiting new members.

Here is a breakdown of those membership awards:

- **Five Member Recruiter Pin.** Each VFW and VFW Auxiliary member who recruits five new and/or rejoined members to the VFW Auxiliary will receive a Five Member Recruiter Pin. The pin is mailed directly to the recruiter.
- **Five Member Recruiter Drawing.** Each VFW and VFW Auxiliary member who recruits five new and/or rejoined members to the VFW Auxiliary will be entered into the Five Member Recruiter Drawing to receive a \$100 Visa gift card.
- **"National Membership Achievement" Recruiter Award.** Each VFW and VFW Auxiliary member who recruits 20 new and/or rejoined members to the VFW Auxiliary will receive a "National Membership Achievement" Recruiter Award. Please note, VFW Auxiliary treasurers on all levels are not eligible for this award.



- **"National Membership Achievement" Recruiter Drawing.** Each VFW and VFW Auxiliary member who recruits 20 new and/or rejoined members to the VFW Auxiliary will be entered in the "National Membership Achievement" Recruiter Drawing to receive a \$400 Visa gift card. Please note, VFW Auxiliary treasurers on all levels are not eligible for this award.

As a VFW member, if you have someone in your family who would like to join the Auxiliary, there are four ways to do so:

- If your VFW Post has an Auxiliary, go directly to it and ask for a membership application to fill out. No proof of eligibility is needed in this case.
- If no Auxiliary is available at your Post, go to the Department Auxiliary treasurer. This option would make the individual a Department at-large member. Or the treasurer may suggest another Auxiliary in your area.
- Visit <https://www.vfwauxiliary.org> and click on "Join Us" to learn more about becoming a member.
- To be a national at-large Auxiliary member, go directly to the Auxiliary's National Headquarters in Kansas City, Mo.

Scan the QR code seen on this page to be directed to a VFW Auxiliary membership application. For more information on the VFW Auxiliary, visit <https://www.vfwauxiliary.org>. ★

EMAIL jdyhouse@vfw.org

VFW AUXILIARY MEMBERSHIP / MEMBER TRANSFER APPLICATION

An incomplete application could delay your membership start date.

Applicant completes sections A, B, C or D and F. Auxiliaries/Departments complete section E.

A Recruited/Recommended by: Recruiter Member ID
Auxiliary No. City State Member ID (If already a member)
☐ Annual Membership ☐ Rejoin
☐ Life Membership ☐ Transfer
☐ Member at Large in Department of ☐ Member at Large - VFW Auxiliary National Headquarters
(If not a transfer, skip to B.)
☐ **LIFE MEMBER TRANSFER** Previous Auxiliary
☐ **ANNUAL TRANSFER** ☐ Previous Auxiliary ☐ Paying ☐ Nonpaying
☐ **ANNUAL TRANSFER CONVERTING TO LIFE** (Fill out Life Membership information below.) Previous Auxiliary

THESE FIELDS REQUIRED

B Name Date of Birth
Address ☐ Female ☐ Male
City State ZIP Phone Email

C ☐ **POST-AFFILIATED** (*Must be a current member of the VFW Post affiliated with the Auxiliary to which you are applying.)
Relationship to Eligible Veteran* VFW Membership ID

THESE FIELDS REQUIRED

D ☐ **NON-AFFILIATED** (*Veteran is not a current member of the VFW Post affiliated with the Auxiliary to which you are applying.)
Relationship to Eligible Veteran* VFW Post (If applicable)
Name of campaign ribbons or medals:
Dates of Service: to Location:

E Investigating Committee Signatures
1 ☒ 2 ☒ 3 ☒
Per Section 102 of the National Bylaws. ☐ Rejected ☐ Accepted Meeting Date Obligated Date

F OBLIGATION In the presence of Almighty God and the members of this organization here assembled, I do of my own free will and accord, solemnly promise that I will never wrong or defraud this organization nor a member thereof nor permit either to be wronged if in my power to prevent it. I will never propose for membership any person not eligible, according to our Bylaws. I further state that I believe in God. I will be faithful to the United States of America, obedient to the laws and loyal to the Flag. Should my membership with this organization cease in any way, I will consider this obligation as binding outside of the organization as though I had remained a member. I do so promise. I attest that I am at least 16 years of age. I pledge to comply with the National Bylaws of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States Auxiliary. I attest I am not eligible for membership in the VFW. I further attest that the above is true and correct to the best of my knowledge, including my stated relationship to the Veteran.

Signature ☒ Date
(Must be signed by all members.)

LIFE MEMBERSHIP ONLY ☐ Check here if this is a gift.

Credit cards may **NOT** be used for initial payment of Annual Dues.

☐ Cash ☐ Check ☐ Visa ☐ MasterCard ☐ Discover ☐ AMEX Life Membership Fee

Name on credit card

Billing address for card

City State ZIP

Credit Card No. CVV Code

Exp. Date Date Signature ☒

By signing this, I agree to the stated charges for a Life Membership fee.

LIFE MEMBERSHIP FEES

Life Membership fees are not refundable.

Attained age at 12/31 of year applying for Life Membership.

Through 20	\$253
21-25	\$242
26-30	\$230
31-35	\$219
36-40	\$213
41-45	\$201
46-50	\$196
51-55	\$184
56-60	\$173
61-65	\$161
66-70	\$150
71-75	\$132
76-80	\$109
81-85	\$86
86-90	\$69
91 and over	\$58

Revised February 2024



“We want to give our Posts the tools they need to be successful in recruiting.”

VFW Membership Department
Associate Director Matt Nute

Prepare Now for Recruiting Success in the Coming Year

The VFW Membership Department offers a large selection of recruitment materials, most of which are free.

BY JANIE DYHOUSE

As the new membership year kicks off, it is time for Posts to prepare to ramp up recruiting efforts. VFW Membership Associate Director Matt Nute said now is the time to order recruiting materials.

“We have so many products to ensure a positive recruiting experience,” Nute said. “Almost everything is free. You just pay shipping and handling. We also offer a digital option for many of our materials so that members can print those things themselves.”

Some of the items include recruitment and benefits brochures, posters

and a recruiter success pocket guide.

Nute said to access these items, log into <https://www.vfw.org>, then go to the Membership Recruiting Brochures Order Form link.

Once the boxes of recruitment products arrive, there may be uncertainty of how to display the items at a recruiting table. The VFW Membership Department can help with that, as well, Nute said.

VFW offers an online training video demonstrating the best way to set up a recruiting booth. The link to the video can be found here: <https://>

www.facebook.com/VFWMembership/videos/1203001840793031

For those attending the 126th VFW National Convention in Columbus, Ohio, in August, be sure to visit the VFW Membership booth in the exhibit hall. At the booth, samples of available recruiting materials will be on hand to review.

“We want to give our Posts the tools they need to be successful in recruiting,” Nute said. “Come see us in Columbus, and we will get you set up for excellent recruiting practices.”



EMAIL jdyhouse@vfw.org

Travel Accident Insurance is a Must for Vacation

Planning a trip? Whether you are embarking on a cross-country road trip, exploring a new destination or just heading out for the holidays, a travel checklist is essential to keep your plans on track.

Key items on your checklist should include:

- Clothes and toiletries
- Electronics
- Auto insurance and gas
- Weather conditions
- Passports and licenses
- Travel accident insurance — an often-overlooked necessity

No matter how careful you are, accidents can happen anywhere at any time. Travel accident insurance provides financial protection for you and your family in case of injury or death due to a travel-related accident — whether you are driving your own car or using public transportation.



Travel accident insurance plans vary, but the best coverage is “everyday/ everywhere,” offering protection whether you are at home or away. Depending on the plan, benefits may help cover expenses other insurance may not, such as co-pays, deductibles, emergency travel for loved ones or even everyday bills

such as your mortgage and utilities.

Give your family extra security and peace of mind by exploring a travel accident insurance plan. For more information, call the VFW Member Benefits Department at 1-833-839-8387 (1-833-VFW-VETS).



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.

Simply open the camera app on your smartphone, hold it over the QR code and wait for the yellow line reading “oms.vfw.org” to appear. Tap the link in the yellow line, and you will be taken to the VFW membership application.

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

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20th Airlift Sqdn., MATS/MAS/ALS Sqdn.:
Richard Wallace; admin@20thairlift.org
20th Fighter Wing Assn.: Ron Obemier;
baloo1000@yahoo.com or 20th Fighter Wing
Association - Preserving military history
366th Gunfighters: Paul Jacob; https://
www.366thgunfighters.org
6594th Test Grp., Hawaii: Bob Westbrook
(708) 220-5252

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513-8320; feldun@msn.com
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III (570) 279-6647; bill@crosscutters.com
3-4 Cavalry Assn, Dave Cox (830) 895-1172;
cox.a.34cav@gmail.com
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668-8685; wolfhound2014@gmail.com or
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191st Assault Helicopter: Harrel Guidry (409)
626-1480
249th Eng. Bn. Assn.: Robin Wandell (660)
815-1166; firewoodfriends@hotmail.com
407th Radio Research Detachment, Quang
Tri and FSB Con Thien: Bob Holmes (310)
545-8318; bob@crholmes.com
577th Eng. Bn.: Tammy Beene (615) 293-5422
Americal Div.: Roger Gilmore (214) 497-6543;
gilmores@aol.com
Bravo Co., 1/26, 1st Inf. Div., Vietnam,
1965-71: Patrick Guy (636) 947-8521;
pguysmile@aol.com
Delta Co., 2/14th Inf. Div., Vietnam, 1969-70:
Tom Monahan (609) 923-6131

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evcraig552@gmail.com
1/5 Marines and Corpsman, 1985-92: Scott
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(Continued on page 57)

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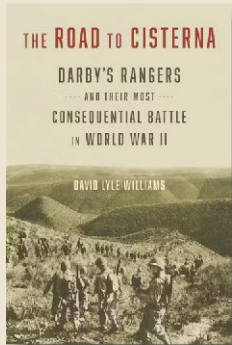
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STAFF PICK



***The Road to Cisterna:
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By David Lyle Williams

The Road to Cisterna is the story of Darby's Rangers, an elite American Army unit in World War II, selected for toughness and specially trained in beach landings and lightning raids deep behind enemy lines. Commanded by Colonel William Orlando Darby, the 1st Ranger Battalion spearheaded landings in North Africa and helped defeat German general Erwin Rommel — the Desert Fox — in Tunisia. Its success inspired the creation of two more battalions led by Darby in the invasions of Sicily and the Italian mainland. The Rangers' record of victories ended in central Italy at the Battle of Cisterna, where a force of almost 60,000 Germans wiped them out. The German forces captured all but a few of the survivors, but many Rangers made daring escapes from prisoner-of-war camps. Of the Rangers who fought that battle, 46 tell their stories in this book.

David Lyle Williams spent more than two decades collecting the memories of Darby Rangers, enabling him to compile an unprecedentedly thorough history of the unit. Unlike previous accounts, more than 160 Rangers speak here in their own words and voices, providing an intimate picture of their combat experiences and allowing the reader to get to know them as individuals. *LSU Press*

Citizen Soldier

By Brian Walrath, VFW Department of Ohio

In 1970, as part of the “Vietnamization” during the Vietnam War, a young Army lieutenant was assigned to lead a Mobile Advisory Team. An underreported and undervalued aspect of the war, these small teams lived and worked alongside local Vietnamese units in their fight to save their homeland from communist aggression. Despite the rising anti-war opposition in America, the U.S. troops assisted their Vietnamese allies in “taking the fight to the enemy,” slogging through thick jungles, leech-filled swamps, torrential rains and oppressive heat — while facing a skilled and dangerous enemy. Walrath takes the reader on his journey from joining the Army, to the fear, frustration, loneliness, confusion and doubt of Vietnam. Often humorous and sometimes deadly serious, his skillfully written personal account will engage readers from veterans to youths with no military background. *Self-Published*

The Portland 2020 Riots: A Fight Against Domestic Terrorism

By Tommy Clark, life member, VFW Post 27, Wiesbaden, Germany

This memoir recounts author Tommy Clark's experiences as a police officer in Portland, Ore., during the violent demonstrations that erupted worldwide following George Floyd's death in 2020. For more than 100 days, extremist groups besieged the community of Portland through crimes such as arson, vandalism and looting. This book follows Clark and other members of the Portland Police Bureau who risked their lives to prevent the destruction of their city. *McHenry Press*

Giving Back! Life and Leadership from the Farm to The Combat Zone and Beyond

By David Nordel, VFW Department of Montana

This compilation of a life lived in rural America and more than 30 years of military service encapsulates the lessons from those times that shaped Dave Nordel into a leader and mentor. The intimate stories are Nordel's way of giving back, just as those people and experiences once gave to him. *Giving Back!* illustrates lessons on effectively navigating life, family and friendships. It features real-life learning that covers trusting your instincts, identifying opportunities, preparing for change, understanding the importance of listening and recognizing the value in others. *Balboa Press*

A Soldier's Heart: The Three Wars of Vietnam

By Raynold Gauvin, VFW Department of Maine

A Soldier's Heart is a poignant and sweeping memoir by Vietnam veteran Ray Gauvin. The story takes us from the French Ghetto of Presque Isle, Maine, and the descendants of the Acadians, to military bases across the country, and to Vietnam and back. Gauvin offers a candid look at life on the ground in Saigon and the horrors of the unusual and classified duties of troops assigned to Wound Data and Munitions Effectiveness Teams. The ingenuity and work ethic he developed to help support his family as a child carried him through both the loss of his father and the war. However, afterwards, pushing himself to the brink with striving and responsibility became a compulsion that kept the nightmares at bay. *Friesen Press*

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.

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ABOUT MARK J. QUANN



Mark J. Quann is the creator, founder, and CEO of The Perfect Portfolio, a division of REMii Group, Inc. He is the Amazon bestselling author and a lifelong serial entrepreneur with a passion for financial education.

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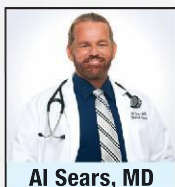
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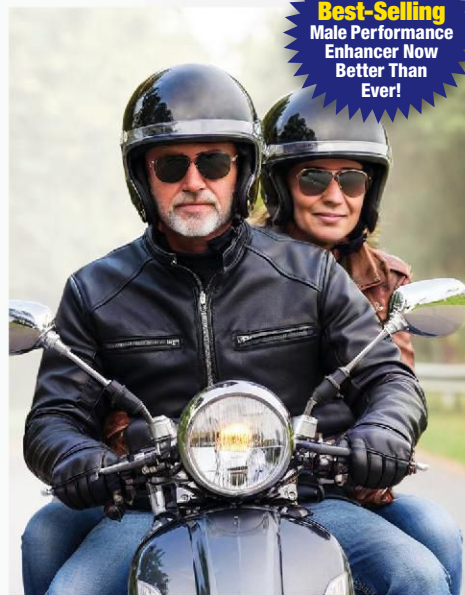


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A VFW Post in Texas worked with its hometown university during a football game to help spread the mission of the VFW and recruit among the many veterans in attendance.

BY ISMAEL RODRIGUEZ JR.

Members of VFW Post 2205 in Denton, Texas, seized an ideal opportunity to share the gospel of the VFW with thousands of college football fans when the University of North Texas hosted the Army Black Knights on Nov. 9 in Denton.

Positioned at the heart of the tailgate festivities, Post 2205 members sought and engaged with a confluence of football fans, veterans and alumni migrating toward DATCU Stadium for the American Athletic Conference matchup against the undefeated Black Knights.

“The Post’s presence was made possible by UNT’s support, emphasizing its commitment to honoring those who have served,” said VFW Post 2205 Commander Tim Middleton. “Given that North Texas is home to the largest West Point alumni group in the nation, our tent became a hub for camaraderie, recruitment and advocacy.”

Post 2205 capitalized on the opportunity by recruiting 40 new members through its proactive approach, which included giveaways and educational material on the VFW’s legislative priorities, as well as fostering conversations about veteran issues and support.

“A highlight of the day came when UNT’s mascot made a special visit to the table, snapping a memorable photo with the VFW’s 125th anniversary logo — an image that encapsulated the day’s spirit of unity and celebration,” Middleton said.

Post 2205 members were later hon-



Members of VFW Post 2205 hold court at their tent during a college football game between their hometown University of North Texas and the Army Black Knights on Nov. 9 in Denton, Texas. Through their engagement with passing fans, the Post was able to recruit 40 new VFW members.

ored before kickoff, joining several other veterans in a line on the field to be recognized by thousands of spectators for their service to the country. This preceded the Eagles charging out of the tunnel and flanked by UNT’s Army ROTC cadets, who carried the flags of each branch of the military.

“The game-day festivities were steeped in military tradition and honor,” Middleton said of the game, which ended 14-3 in favor of the Black Knights. “There was even a dramatic flyover of three attack helicopters, a powerful reminder of the service and sacrifice

made by America’s armed forces.”

Middleton believes this relationship between the university and his VFW Post demonstrates the vital role each entity can have in supporting the other.

“By hosting events like these, UNT not only energizes its football fans but also strengthens its ties to the veteran community, providing an invaluable platform for connection and collaboration,” Middleton said. “It was not just a football memory, but serves as a testament to the enduring bond between UNT, its alumni and its veterans.” ★

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PHOTO COURTESY OF TIM MIDDLETON

Scientific Discovery Stuns Doctors

Biblical Bush Relieves Joint Discomfort in as Little as 5 Days

Legendary “special herb” gives new life to old joints without clobbering you. So safe you can take it every day without worry.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 54 million Americans are suffering from joint discomfort.

This epidemic rise in aching joints has led to a search for alternative treatments—as many sufferers want relief without the harmful side effects of conventional “solutions.”

Leading the way from nature’s pharmacy is the new “King of Oils” that pioneering Florida MD and anti-aging specialist Dr. Al Sears calls “the most significant breakthrough I’ve ever found for easing joint discomfort.”

Biblical scholars treasured this “holy oil.” Ancient healers valued it more than gold for its medicinal properties. Marco Polo prized it as he blazed the Silk Road. And Ayurvedic practitioners, to this day, rely on it for healing and detoxification.

Yet what really caught Dr. Sears’ attention is how modern medical findings now prove this “King of Oils” can powerfully...

Deactivate 400 Agony-Causing Genes

If you want genuine, long-lasting relief for joint discomfort, you must address inflammation. Too much inflammation will wreak havoc on joints, break down cartilage and cause unending discomfort. This is why so many natural joint relief solutions try to stop one of the main inflammatory genes called COX-2.

But the truth is, there are hundreds of agony-causing genes like COX-2, 5-LOX, iNOS, TNK, Interleukin 1,6,8 and many more—and stopping just one of them won’t give you all the relief you need.

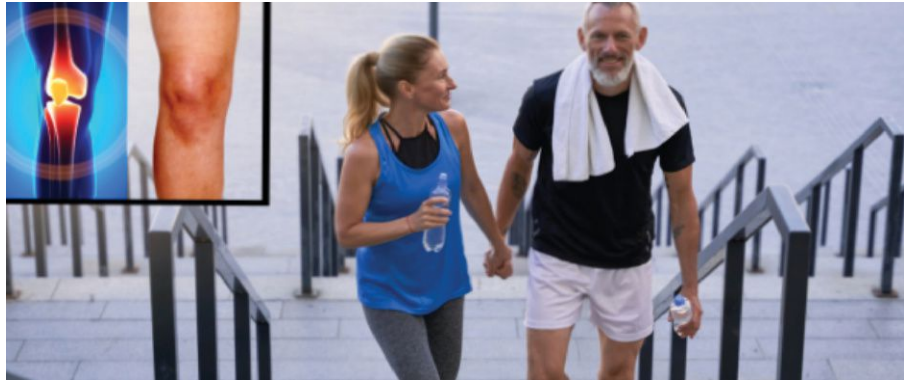
Doctors and scientists now confirm the “King of Oils”—Indian Frankincense—deactivates not one but 400 agony-causing genes. It does so by shutting down the inflammation command center called Nuclear Factor Kappa Beta.

NK-Kappa B is like a switch that can turn 400 inflammatory genes “on” or “off.” A study in Journal of Food Lipids reports that Indian Frankincense powerfully deactivates NF-Kappa B. This journal adds that Indian Frankincense is “so powerful it shuts down the pathway triggering aching joints.”

Relief That’s 10 Times Faster... and in Just 5 Days

Many joint sufferers prefer natural solutions but say they work too slowly. Take the best-seller glucosamine. Good as it is, the National Institutes of Health reports that glucosamine takes as long as eight weeks to work.

Yet in a study published in the International Journal of Medical Sciences, 60 patients with stiff knees took 100 mg of Indian Frankincense or a placebo daily for 30 days. Remarkably, Indian Frank-



*The active ingredient in **Mobilify** soothes aching joints in as little as 5 days*

incense “significantly improved joint function and relieved discomfort in as early as five days.” That’s relief that is 10 times faster than glucosamine.

78% Better Relief Than the Most Popular Joint Solution

In another study, people suffering from discomfort took a formula containing Indian Frankincense and another natural substance or a popular man-made joint solution every day for 12 weeks.

The results? Stunning! At the end of the study, 64% of those taking the Indian Frankincense formula saw their joint discomfort go from moderate or severe to mild or no discomfort. Only 28% of those taking the placebo got the relief they wanted. So Indian Frankincense delivered relief at a 78% better clip than the popular man-made formula.

In addition, in a randomized, double blind, placebo controlled study, patients suffering from knee discomfort took Indian Frankincense or a placebo daily for eight weeks. Then the groups switched and got the opposite intervention. Every one of the patients taking Indian Frankincense got relief. That’s a 100% success rate—numbers unseen by typical solutions.

In addition, BMJ (formerly the British Medical Journal) reports that Indian Frankincense is safe for joint relief — so safe and natural you can take it every day.

Because of clinically proven results like this, Dr. Sears has made Indian Frankincense the centerpiece of a new natural joint relief formula called **Mobilify**.

Great Results for Knees, Hips, Shoulders and Joints

Joni D. says, “**Mobilify** really helps with sore-

ness, stiffness and mild temporary pain. The day after taking it, I was completely back to normal—so fast.” Shirley M. adds, “Two weeks after taking **Mobilify**, I had no knee discomfort and could go up and down the staircase.” Larry M. says, “After a week and a half of taking **Mobilify**, the discomfort, stiffness and minor aches went away... it’s almost like being reborn.” And avid golfer Dennis H. says, “I can attest to **Mobilify** easing discomfort to enable me to pursue my golfing days. Definitely one pill that works for me out of the many I have tried.”

How to Get Mobilify

Right now, the only way to get this powerful, unique formula that clobbers creaking joints in as little as five days without clobbering you is with Dr. Sears’ breakthrough **Mobilify** formula. It is not available in stores.

To secure your bottle of this breakthrough natural joint discomfort reliever, buyers should call with Sears Health Hotline at **1-888-358-6747**. “The Hotline allows us to ship the product directly to customers.”

Dr. Sears believes in this product so much, he offers a 100% money-back guarantee on ever order. “Just send me back the bottle and any unused product within 90 days, and I’ll send you your money back,” said Dr. Sears.

The Hotline will be taking orders for the next 48 hours. After that, the phone number may be shut down to allow them to restock. Call **1-888-358-6747** to secure your limited supply of Mobilify. If you are not able to get through due to extremely high call volume, please try again! Call NOW to qualify for this limited time offer provided at a significant discount. To take advantage of this exclusive offer use Promo Code: **VETMB625** when you call.

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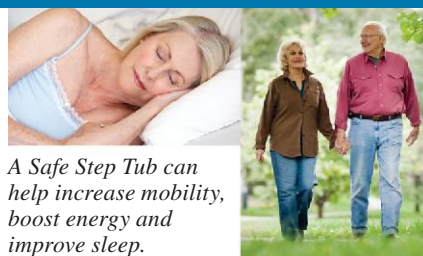
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Insomnia | <input type="checkbox"/> Anxiety |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Diabetes | <input type="checkbox"/> Mobility Issues |
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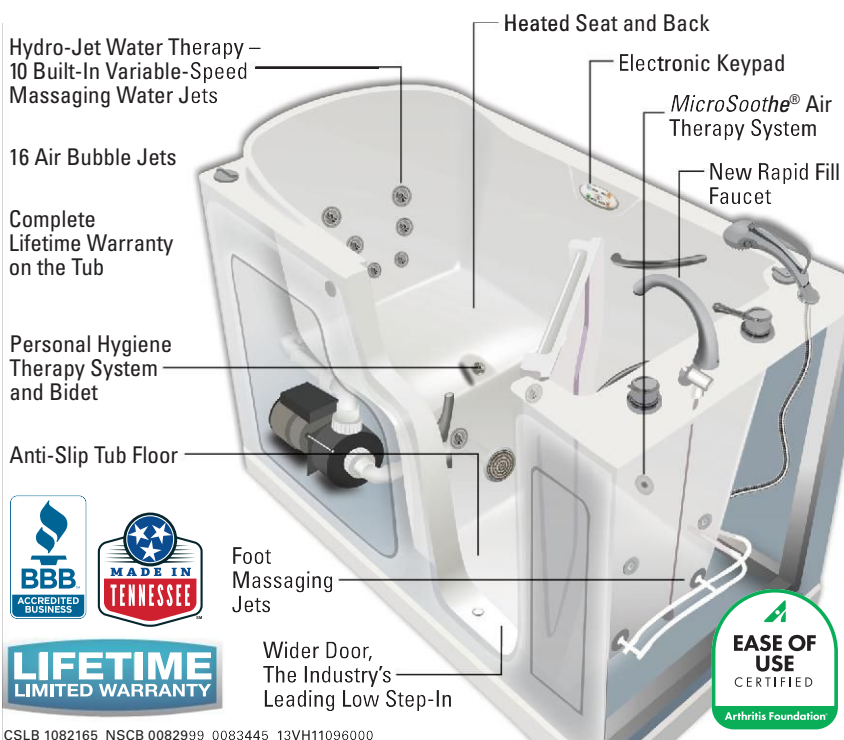
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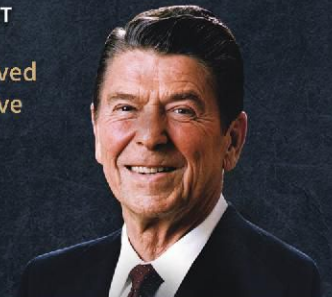
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