

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2025

VFW

M A G A Z I N E



IRAQ WAR VET LEADS VFW AS FIRST FEMALE COMMANDER- IN-CHIEF

**DESTINATION POST
SERIES VISITS
MISSOURI**

**100TH ID OF
KOREAN WAR MIAS**

**VFW DAY IS
SEPT. 29**



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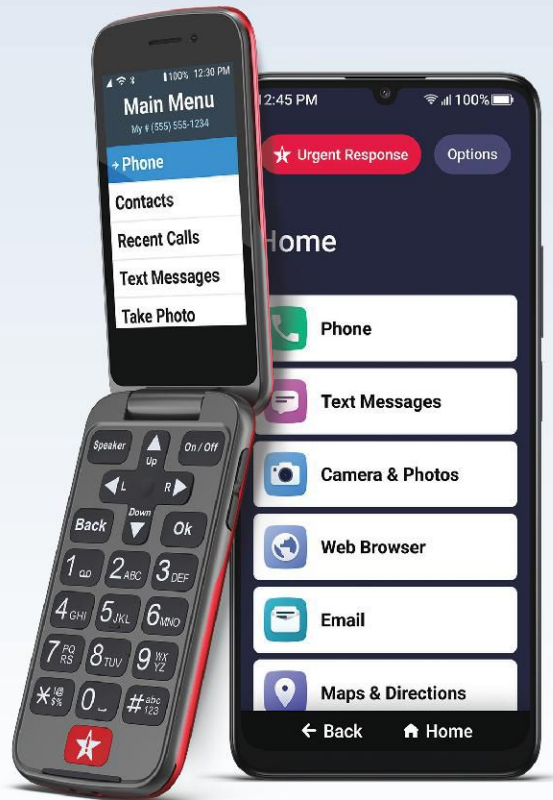
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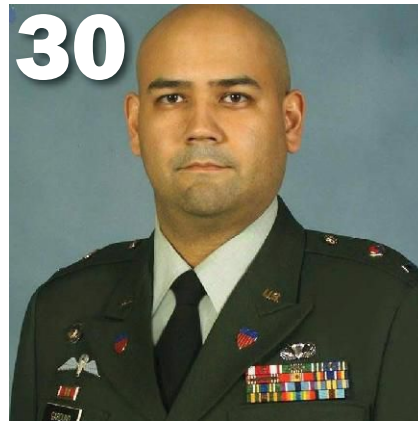
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COVER IMAGE: VFW's latest Commander-in-Chief, Carol Whitmore of Iowa, is photographed in May outside of VFW National Headquarters in Kansas City, Mo. She is a 36-year Army veteran who logged duty in the Iraq War. She also is VFW's first female Commander-in-Chief. *Photo by Mollie Reimer*

16 'A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE'

Carol Whitmore is VFW's new Commander-in-Chief and the first woman to hold that position. She says she is committed to focusing on VFW's core missions during her term. **By Janie Dyhouse**

20 SEPT. 19 IS POW/MIA DAY

Earlier this year, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced it had identified the 100th set of Korean War remains returned in 2018. Here is an update on VFW's efforts to help. **By Danny Cook**

22 'SHOW-ME STATE' POSTS BECKON VISITORS

VFW Posts located along the Missouri River in the state that gives the river its name provide important services to their communities and veterans. Their scenic locales also attract tourists. **By Janie Dyhouse**

30 VFW CELEBRATES HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH

National Hispanic Heritage Month runs from Sept. 15 to Oct. 15. VFW employees who are of Hispanic or Latino heritage explain what working for VFW means to them. **By Ismael Rodriguez Jr.**



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COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF
Carol Whitmore

Refocusing on VFW's Core Mission

As VFW enters its 126th year of service to our nation's veterans and their families, I plan to recommit our great organization to what has always made the VFW so influential and effective.

For the upcoming year, my main priorities will be focusing on our legislative advocacy, supporting our service officers and striving for a full accounting of all U.S. troops still listed as missing in action. This is the core mission of the VFW, and we need to honor those who served, along with their families.

VFW's legislative advocacy is the core reason the organization was created in 1899. Over the coming year, I plan to be in Washington, D.C., as much as possible, and we will ensure that our fellow veterans' voices are heard.

We will continue to fight for passage of the *Major Richard Star Act*, which would give veterans who were medically retired and served less than 20 years full VA compensation and benefits. This should have been approved years ago, and our Washington Office will focus on getting this passed this year.

We also will continue to take the fight to predatory consultation companies known as "claim sharks" who charge exorbitant fees to do what our trained and VA-accredited service officers do for free. We have and will continue to testify in front of Congress about these claim sharks who take the bulk of any claims settlement.

Our best tool in this fight against claim sharks is to promote the free assistance provided by VFW service officers. Over the course of this year, I want to make the public more aware of this incredibly valuable free service. We will re-energize our promotion of the work they do and redouble efforts to make sure this worldwide network of trained and VA-accredited service officers coordinated by our National Veterans Service is fully funded.

VFW service officers are often the first impression of our organization for young veterans. When service officers meet face-to-face with veterans and their families, they provide real help to navigate the complexities of filing a VA claim. Not only do they do this for free for any veteran, VFW service officers also offer some comfort and a smiling face.

Another major priority during this year will be refocusing on supporting a full accounting of U.S. troops still listed as missing in action. The work conducted by the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) is central to one of VFW's core missions. I want to ensure that DPAA is highlighted for the work its members do. This will bring more awareness to the public of the true cost of war, and those we have left behind.

"For veterans by veterans"

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THE VFW



SEE MEMBER
CORNER



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VFW magazine is the official publication of the
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VFW OBJECTIVES

To ensure national security
through maximum military strength.

To speed the rehabilitation
of the nation's disabled and needy veterans.

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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Medals of Honor Awarded

I have been a reader of *VFW* magazine since I was young man as my father was a WWII vet and a VFW member until he passed away. I am now a VFW member myself and always read your publication. I must say that your brief article regarding recipients of the Medal of Honor falls far short of the respect that those men deserve for their valor. I understand that it is always a balancing act to put together a publication, but these men at least deserved a few paragraphs each detailing their acts of valor. No doubt an extra two or three pages could have been added to your July/August edition to give them the respect they deserve.

TOM GETZ
WAST HAZLETON, PA.

Boothbay V.E.T.S.

I applaud the efforts of the volunteers at Boothbay Veterans Emergency Temporary Shelter, converting utility trailers into transitional shelter for homeless vets. What I don't understand is the fact that these homeless vets are not assisting in building these tiny homes. This program should be like Habitat for Humanity in which those getting these homes should volunteer hours



in building them. These homeless vets need to be involved in this mission and not just handed a tiny home.

Homeless vets need to contribute hours of sweat equity toward building these tiny homes. If a vet is unable to assist due to a medical condition, they could coordinate delivery of these homes or coordinate the delivery of supplies, such as insulation. There is always something for the homeless vet to do. And of course, the homeless vet needs to attend mandatory workshops to succeed in the future, such as preparing a resume, budgeting, job skill training ... the list is endless. In addition, homeless vets may learn a new skill in designing and building which would provide marketable skills. If incarcerated people can participate in this program, so can a homeless vet. It would be a hand up, not a hand out.

CHARLENE MIZNER
PEORIA, ARIZ.

Book Corner

I could not let the wording of the "Citizen Soldier" book review in the Book Corner section pass without comment. The assertion that we were fighting alongside the Vietnamese to save their "homeland" from "communist aggression" does not accord with the historical record of U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

Readers will recall that the U.S. supported the French colonial war in Indochina with vast sums of money and material in the early 1950s and assumed sole responsibility for the war following the French defeat in 1954. Not unlike our modern-day experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan, the American war in Vietnam was a misguided attempt at state building that ended in failure at untold cost in treasure and human lives.

I understand the desire, particularly among those of us who served there, to ascribe some higher noble purpose to that war. But perpetuating myths about the war does not alter the judgment of history or lead to healing and understanding for that matter.

TIM S. SMITH
MANSFIELD, OHIO

Korean War Recognition

Disappointed and saddened to see no mention of the 75th anniversary of the start of the Korean War. No ceremonies at Arlington National Cemetery or the Korean War Veterans Memorial. The Forgotten War remains forgotten — 36,574 KIA, 103,284 WIA — have we no shame?

KEVIN MASON
LOUDON, TENN.

"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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IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION

What is the most important information I should know about PLUVICTO?

Use of PLUVICTO involves exposure to radioactivity. Long-term, accruing radiation exposure is associated with an increased risk for cancer. Drink plenty of water and urinate as often as possible during the first hours after administration.

To minimize radiation exposure to others following administration of PLUVICTO, limit close contact (less than 3 feet) with household contacts for 2 days or with children and pregnant women for 7 days. Refrain from sexual activity for 7 days, and sleep in a separate bedroom from household contacts for 3 days, from children for 7 days, or from pregnant women for 15 days.

PLUVICTO may cause serious side effects, including:

Low level of blood cell counts. Tell your doctor right away if you develop any new or worsening symptoms, including:

- Tiredness or weakness
- Pale skin
- Shortness of breath
- Bleeding or bruising more easily than normal or difficulty stopping bleeding
- Frequent infections with signs such as fever, chills, sore throat, or mouth ulcers

Please see additional Important Safety Information on the next page and Brief Summary of Prescribing Information on the following page.

Every day without progression is a VICTORY.

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MONTHS
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VS

5.6
MONTHS
2nd hormone therapy
(234 men evaluated)

The PSMAfore clinical trial measured rPFS. Median rPFS is the time when half of the men in the study were still alive without their cancer spreading or getting worse.

In the trial, 468 men with PSMA+ prostate cancer that spread outside their prostate were evaluated. PLUVICTO was given once every 6 weeks for up to 6 doses to one of two groups evaluated.

mCRPC, metastatic castration-resistant prostate cancer; PSMA+, prostate-specific membrane antigen positive.

†Additional analysis conducted to learn more about rPFS in PLUVICTO patients.



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Kidney problems. You should stay well-hydrated before and after treatment. Tell your doctor right away if you develop any new or worsening urinary symptoms.

All radiopharmaceuticals, including PLUVICTO, have the potential to **cause harm to an unborn baby**.

- You should use effective contraception during treatment with PLUVICTO and for 14 weeks after your last dose

PLUVICTO may cause temporary or permanent **infertility**.

The most common side effects of PLUVICTO include:

- Decreased blood cell counts
- Tiredness
- Dry mouth

- Nausea
- Appetite loss
- Joint pain
- Constipation
- Back pain

These are not all of the possible side effects of PLUVICTO. Call your doctor for advice about side effects. You are encouraged to report negative side effects of prescription drugs to the FDA. Visit www.fda.gov/medwatch, or call 1-800-FDA-1088.

Please see Brief Summary of Prescribing Information on the following page.



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PLUVICTO Consumer Brief Summary March 2025

About PLUVICTO® (lutetium Lu 177 vipivotide tetraxetan)

PLUVICTO is a prescription treatment used to treat adults with prostate-specific membrane antigen–positive metastatic castration-resistant prostate cancer (PSMA-positive mCRPC) already treated with:

- hormone therapy or
- hormone therapy and chemotherapy

Warnings about PLUVICTO

Use of PLUVICTO involves exposure to radioactivity. Long-term, accruing radiation exposure is associated with an increased risk for cancer. Drink plenty of fluids and urinate as often as possible during the first hours after administration. To minimize radiation exposure to others following administration of PLUVICTO, limit close contact (less than 3 feet) with household contacts for 2 days or with children and pregnant women for 7 days. Refrain from sexual activity for 7 days, and sleep in a separate bedroom from household contacts for 3 days, from children for 7 days, or from pregnant women for 15 days.

PLUVICTO can cause low levels of blood cell counts that may be severe or life-threatening. Your doctor will monitor your blood counts before and during treatment. Tell your doctor right away if you develop any new or worsening symptoms, including tiredness or weakness, pale skin, shortness of breath, bleeding or bruising more easily than normal or difficulty stopping bleeding, or frequent infections with signs such as fever, chills, sore throat, or mouth ulcers.

PLUVICTO can cause severe kidney problems. You should stay well hydrated before and after treatment. Your doctor will monitor your kidney function before and during treatment. Tell your doctor right away if you develop any new or worsening symptoms, including passing urine less often or passing much smaller amounts of urine than usual.

Before starting PLUVICTO

Tell your health care provider if you:

- Have low levels of blood cell counts (hemoglobin, white blood cells, absolute neutrophil count, or platelets), or if you have or have had symptoms of low levels of blood cell counts
- Have or have had kidney problems
- Have or have had any other type of cancer or treatment for cancer
- Are sexually active

What you should know while taking PLUVICTO

PLUVICTO has not been studied in females and has the potential to cause harm to an unborn baby. Use effective contraception during treatment and for 14 weeks after your last dose. PLUVICTO may cause temporary or permanent infertility in males.

Possible side effects of PLUVICTO

The most common side effects of PLUVICTO include:

- Decreased blood cell counts
- Tiredness
- Dry mouth
- Nausea
- Appetite loss
- Joint pain
- Constipation
- Back pain

These are not all the possible effects of PLUVICTO. To learn more:

- Talk to your health care provider or pharmacist
- Visit www.us.pluvicto.com to obtain the FDA-approved product labeling

You are encouraged to report negative side effects of prescription drugs to the FDA. Visit www.fda.gov/medwatch, or call 1-800-FDA-1088.

Green Beret Receives Posthumous Silver Star

An Army Special Forces staff sergeant received a posthumous Silver Star on April 8 in Puyallup, Wash. The award was an upgrade from the Bronze Star, which the soldier received after being killed in action on Oct. 4, 2017, in southwest Niger.

On that day, Staff Sgt. Bryan C. Black was serving with A Co., 2nd Bn., 3rd Special Forces Group. As the medical sergeant, he was part of an 11-person Special Forces patrol, working with 30 Nigerien troops, near the village of Tongo Tongo. As the patrol headed back to their base, more than 100 Islamic militants ambushed them.

Black, along with Staff Sgt. Jeremiah W. Johnson and Staff Sgt. Dustin M. Wright, were cut off from the rest of

the patrol and soon surrounded. The Pentagon reviewed video footage of the ambush and found that Black, often while exposing himself to enemy fire, provided suppressing fire to cover his teammates. He was killed while moving to a new firing position to cover Wright and Johnson, who also died in the firefight.

“His selfless sacrifice bought precious time for the detachment to break free of the ambush as he stoically accepted the brunt of the enemy’s attention,” the Army wrote in a statement.

Also killed in the firefight was Sgt. La David T. Johnson. In 2019, he and Wright received the Silver Star. In 2022, Jeremiah Johnson’s original award of the Bronze Star also was upgraded to the Silver Star.



U.S. ARMY PHOTO

Army Staff Sgt. Bryan C. Black, who was killed in an Oct. 4, 2017, ambush in Niger, received a posthumous Silver Star earlier this year. Black was one of four soldiers killed in the ambush, all of whom have received the Silver Star, the nation’s third highest award for valor in combat.

VFW National Home Annual Meeting



V F W
NATIONAL HOME

The Annual Meeting of the VFW National Home located in Eaton Rapids, Mich., will be held at 9 a.m. E.S.T. on October 25. For more information, contact Lynn Bloomer, the Home’s Chief of Staff, at lbloomer@vfnationalhome.org or (517) 663-7023.

VFW Celebrates 126 Years of Service to Veterans

Sept. 29 marks the 126th anniversary of VFW’s founding in 1899. The painting (right), created by Jim Burke for VFW’s 100th anniversary in 1999, depicts the initial meeting of VFW’s 14 founders on Sept. 29, 1899, at a tailor’s shop in Columbus, Ohio. The men were veterans of the 17th U.S. Infantry who fought during the Spanish-American War.

Their original organization, called the American Veterans of Foreign Service, merged with two other Spanish-American War veterans groups — the Colorado Society of the Army of the Philippines based in Denver, Colo., and the Philippine War Veterans in Altoona, Pa. — in 1914 to form the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

Since then, the VFW has become known as the premier veterans advocate. From helping to pass vital legislation, such as the *PACT Act* in 2022, to offering free assistance in filing VA claims through its vast network of trained and VA-accredited service officers, VFW has proven for 126 years that it provides real help for veterans and their families.



In this painting by artist Jim Burke, James Romanis, who served as the commander-in-chief of the American Veterans of Foreign Service (AVFS) from 1902-05, speaks to the other founders of the AVFS on Sept. 29, 1899, in a tailor’s shop in Columbus, Ohio. The AVFS merged with two other Spanish-American War veterans groups in 1914 to form the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.



VA Processing Claims at a Faster Pace

VA reinstates mandatory overtime and reports a surge in completed claims.

BY ISMAEL RODRIGUEZ JR.

With more than one million disability claims filed since the spring, the VA is on pace to process 2.5 million of them by year's end. This surpasses VA's 2024 output by half a million, according to a VA press release.

The VA's Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), which handles the Department's disability compensation claims, announced in late February that it had reached the one million mark of completed claims two weeks earlier than in 2024. This also occurred while VA saw a 16 percent increase in filed applications.

"The VFW applauds any improvement in VA providing veterans, family members and survivors with their hard-earned benefits as quickly and accurately as possible," VFW National Veterans Service Director Michael Figlioli said.

Like many at VFW, Figlioli believes the steady rise in claims is inextricably linked to the *PACT Act* passing in 2022, which expanded health care and benefits for veterans exposed to burn pits and other toxic substances.

"The historic passage of the *PACT Act* has been life-saving for many veterans," Figlioli said, "whether that is submitting new or previously denied disability compensation claims, or allowing veterans access to VA health care systems and other VA benefits programs."

In May, the VA reinstated mandatory overtime for its VBA employees to reduce its backlog of 200,000 applications and maintain a record pace.

The American Federation of Government Employees reported that VA's Veterans Service Representatives

(VSRs) and Rating Veterans Service Representatives (RVSRs) are expected to log 25 hours of mandatory overtime each month. By comparison, its Rating Quality Review Specialists (RQRSs) are required to work 20 hours of overtime.

VFW URGES CAUTION

This VA decision followed another in which the sprawling agency has proposed trimming its workforce through natural attrition, a goal supported by the Trump Administration.

"VFW hopes that while the VA aims to process more claims than ever and further reduce the declining excess workload, any mandated overtime or additional workforce reductions must be implemented wisely and strategically," Figlioli said. ★

EMAIL irodriguez@vfw.org

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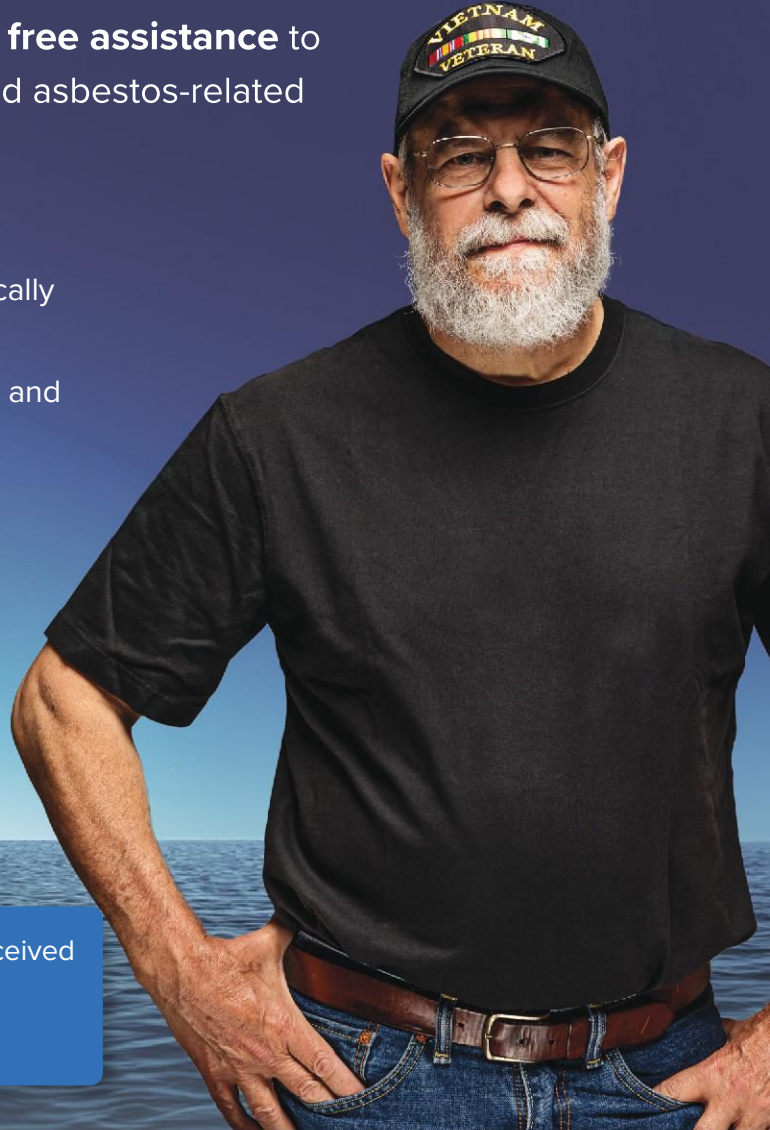
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VA Provides Faster Access to Community Care

In May, the VA incorporated provisions advocated for by VFW in the *Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act (P.L. 118-210)* to expedite veterans' access to non-VA providers at the department's expense.

The decision helped streamline the 2019 *MISSION Act* by removing its final step, which required a second VA doctor's approval. Now, VA-enrolled veterans can access care from non-VA providers quicker when it is in their best medical interest.

Then-VFW Commander-in-Chief Al Lipphardt applauded the decision.

"Under the old way of doing things, veterans would pay the price for delayed or denied referrals for care in the community, even when VA's doctors knew best," Lipphardt said. "This is exactly the pressure-relief valve that veterans and their providers expect in a patient-centric care system. The

VFW fought hard for this to stay in the *Dole Act*, and we commend (VA) Secretary (Doug) Collins for his expedient implementation of the law, placing veterans first when their VA doctors know that community care is the right call."

Before VA decided to eliminate this final hurdle, VFW representatives testified before Congress multiple times on the issue, sharing stories of veterans arbitrarily denied care that should have been granted under the *MISSION Act*.

"The VFW has always advocated for delivering timely care to veterans through all means available to VA, including its community partners," VFW Washington Office Executive Director Ryan Gallucci said. "We have gone to the mat for what is in the best medical interest of the veteran — allowing them to make those decisions with the doctor who is treating them, without having to get the 'OK' from an outsider."

Veterans Help Group and VFW Partner to Launch Innovative Social Security Disability Eligibility Screener

VFW and Veterans Help Group (VHG), a team of VA-accredited advocates, launched an online screening service in May for veterans navigating Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI).

The Social Security Disability Eligibility Screener, with a state-of-the-art, user-friendly online interface, aims to empower veterans by making it easier to determine eligibility for SSDI.

Leveraging VHG's expertise in Social Security disability and VFW's extensive network and dedication to supporting its members, the initiative offers veterans a straightforward, accessible resource to evaluate their eligibility for an often overlooked benefit.

"Veterans have earned the right to every benefit available to them, yet many struggle to understand how Social Security disability might couple and supplement their VA disability compensation," said Joe Waring, CEO of Veterans Help Group. "We commend VFW leadership for having the foresight to pursue solutions helping veterans bridge that gap."

For VFW National Veterans Service Director Michael Figlioli, the launch of the Social Security Disability Eligibility Screener builds on the ethos both organizations have of serving veterans.

"The VFW is committed to standing by our veterans at every stage of their journey," Figlioli said. "By partnering



with Veterans Help Group on this screening initiative, we are empowering our members and veterans nationwide with the knowledge and resources necessary to understand Social Security disability benefits, thereby enhancing their quality of life and financial stability."

The screener, which became available to VFW members in late April, includes educational workshops planned to help ensure widespread awareness and adoption.

VFW encourages veterans and their families to contact their local VSOs for more information.



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 Claims Accuracy

VFW providing statement the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs in late June.

VFW National Legislative Service Associate Director Nancy Springer affirmed VFW's position on 12 bills being reviewed during the hearing.

Springer's testimony provided feedback on burial and survivor benefits, an annual report on veterans' causes of death, enhanced access to benefits for rural veterans, as well as hiring preferences for veteran-law judges and improvements to the VA claims and appeals processes.

Springer also mentioned the VFW-supported bill, *Veterans Claims Quality Improvement Act of 2025 (H.R. 3983)*, which enhances the accuracy and effectiveness of the claims and appeals process.

"The legislation would direct the Board of Veterans Appeals (BVA) to establish comprehensive and mutually supportive data-driven training and quality assurance programs to improve the accurate adjudication of appeals," Springer said. "This is something the VFW has expressed a need for in previous testimony."

H.R. 3983 also would complement these training programs with a revised performance evaluation system. It would be geared toward annually reviewing the performance of BVA members instead of the current triennial evaluation. According to Springer, these new requirements would limit oversight and enhance results.

"This situation occurs when claims processors mistakenly think a claim needs additional evidence before adjudication, delaying decisions and wasting resources," Springer said. "Augmenting BVA's training and quality assurance regimen would be refined policies and procedures, and technology enhancements to reduce avoidable deferrals."



VFW National Legislative Associate Director Nancy Springer speaks at a press conference about the SAVES Act on June 12 at the VFW Washington Office in Washington, D.C.

PHOTO BY ROBERT COUTURE

'#StillServing: The VFW Podcast' Is the Source for All Things Washington

From the VFW Washington Office on Capitol Hill, VFW's own "#StillServing: The VFW Podcast" airs each month. The podcast is co-hosted by VFW Public Affairs and Strategic Outreach Director Rob Couture and Associate Director Brittany Dymond.

Those tuning in will hear voices from across the veteran community. From congressional leaders to VA and DoD officials as well as everyday veterans, each episode is a springboard to issues affecting veterans and their families.

"#StillServing: The VFW Podcast' is more than just stories," Couture said. "It is a platform where veterans' voices are heard, their challenges understood, and their continued service honored. It's also a vital source for those who care about legislative advocacy, VA policy and the work being done on Capitol Hill. Through the conversations we have with other VFW Washington Office staff about their interactions with lawmakers,



policy experts and the Administration, we shed light on how advocacy becomes action — and how that action impacts veterans' lives every day.

This podcast is billed as a program for veterans, by veterans, and the co-hosts do not take that lightly. Each show tackles critical issues, challenges and legislation affecting veterans, service members and their families.

Listen to '#StillServing: The Podcast' at <https://www.vfw.org/Podcast> or wherever you get your podcasts.

VFW Washington Office members discuss prominent issues in the veteran community during the '#StillServing: The VFW Podcast' in June. The podcast, which airs monthly, is co-hosted by VFW Public Affairs and Strategic Outreach Director Rob Couture and VFW Associate Director Brittany Dymond.

Spirituality Meets Artistry

"I never expected it to be so beautiful that it takes your breath away."

— Kaya C., on Stauer Opals

In a quaint village, nestled between rolling hills, lived a young woman with a deep appreciation for gemstones. Her grandmother gifted her a delicate cross pendant adorned with opals. The opals shimmered with a mesmerizing play of colors, reflecting hues of blues, greens, and fiery oranges. Her grandmother shared the legend of the opals, believed to bring hope, purity, and luck to those who wore them.

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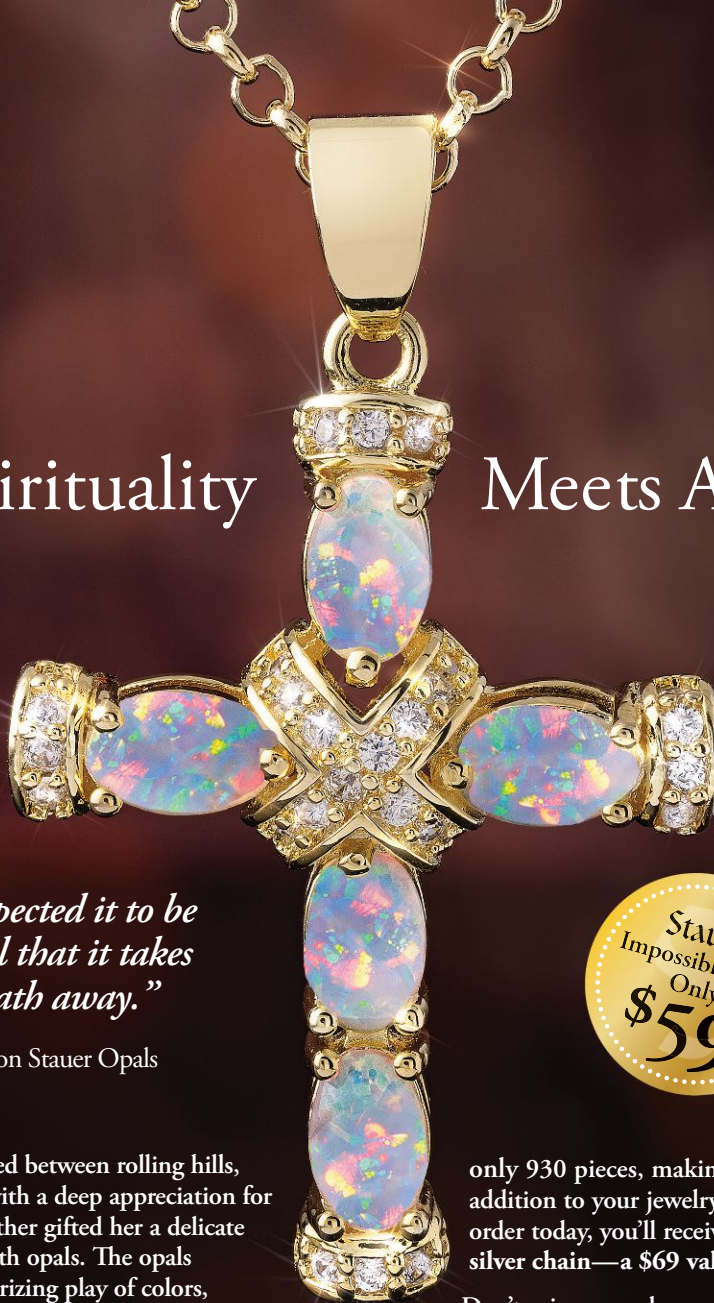
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VFW Elects First Female Commander-in-Chief

Iraq War vet says leading the VFW is about merit, not gender.

BY JANIE DYHOUSE

Carol Whitmore of Iowa made VFW history in August when she was elected as the first female VFW Commander-in-Chief. Incidentally, she also is the first Iowan to hold the top position.

A member of VFW Post 9127 in Des Moines, Iowa, Whitmore hopes her gender takes a backseat to the pressing needs of the nation's veterans — needs VFW prioritizes with regularity. With that in mind, it is little wonder Whitmore's slogan: "For Veterans, By Veterans," is meant for all veterans.

"I am a veteran who happens to be a female," Whitmore said. "The position of VFW Commander-in-Chief should always be about merit regardless of whether the person holding it is a man or a woman."

Whitmore said during her tenure as Chief that she wants to focus on carrying out the original mission of the VFW.

"It is what we should all be doing," she added. "And that is truly making a difference and an impact on our fellow veterans' lives."

'LITERALLY THE CAMARADERIE'

A spur-of-the-moment decision in 1977 started Whitmore on the path to her own veteran status. With one year of community college and two years at the University of Northern Iowa under her belt, Whitmore ran out of money for college.

"I did not want a big debt," she recalled. "So I walked into an Army recruiter's office. It was literally that quick of a decision for me. They said, 'You have three years of college, yes, come on in!' Joining was initially about college but became about country. It was literally the camaraderie and serving my country. That is what kept me in for 36 years."



VFW Commander-in-Chief Carol Whitmore hugs an Iraqi girl in 2010 at Balad Air Base in Iraq. Whitmore deployed to Iraq in 2010. She said Iraqi children visited the base once a week with the U.S. troops.

VFW Commander-in-Chief Carol Whitmore visits VFW's Centennial Plaza in May outside VFW National Headquarters in Kansas City, Mo. A 36-year Army retiree and Iraq War veteran, Whitmore is the first woman to lead VFW.

Whitmore will tell you that she followed in the footsteps of both her 6-foot-4-inch farmer father who was an Army MP in Germany during WWII, as well as her 5-foot-4-inch mother, who was a nurse.

While Whitmore did not intend on staying in the Army for so long, she did so with the hope of one day getting to deploy.

"It wasn't until I had more than 30 years that I got to deploy," she said. "My last hope of deployment finally happened. I turned 55 years old in Iraq."

The Chief said she did not feel like she had truly served until she was deployed to Balad Air Base in Iraq in 2010 with the 103rd Expeditionary Sustainment Command. While Whitmore had been mobilized quite a bit stateside and also in Central America, this deployment was a first, and for her, long overdue.

"I felt like I had not done my duty," she added. "This was a logistics type unit, something I had never done. They needed one medical person to go with them, and I was it."

In Iraq, Whitmore said she was "very fortunate," as it was toward the end of the war. Her responsibility was to process reports regarding disease and injuries within her command.

"It was not a lot of big medical care," she said. "However, keeping track of people is still important. I also consider myself fortunate to have been on an Air Force base because they take very good care of their people."

Whitmore returned home in 2011 and retired with 36 years of military service in 2013.

'THEY NEVER QUESTIONED THAT I WAS A VETERAN'

While Whitmore's husband, Brad, had long been a VFW life member, she did not know that much about the organization other than she was not eligible until her Iraq deployment.

That all changed when a fellow nurse invited Whitmore to stop in and check out Post 9127 in Des Moines.

"I became a life member immediately," Whitmore said. "It was such a good experience walking through those doors and the way people welcomed me. They never questioned that I was a veteran. To me, that was the pivotal moment of joining because they didn't assume that I had not served."

From that moment on, Whitmore was an active VFW member serving first as a Post trustee and then adjutant. For many years, she served as adjutant while Brad was the quartermaster.

Today, she maintains her Gold Legacy Life membership at the Post where she first began.

She held positions at VFW's District and Department levels, which put her on the road to becoming the first female commander in the history of the VFW Department of Iowa in 2018. As Department commander, she earned All-American honors.

On the national level, Whitmore has served on the Legislative Committee, the General Resolutions Committee and on the National Council of Administration from 2019 to 2023.

'BRING THEM ALL HOME'

Whitmore said that advocacy, the work of VFW service officers and the POW/MIA mission are the focus of her year as Chief.

"I think it is important to get back to what our original mission is," she said. "Programs are wonderful, and they keep us going, but we were not founded on programs. We were founded on advocacy, sitting on the D.C. steps. VFW's National Legislative Service is where we get our business done, and that is how we best take care of our fellow veterans."

Specifically, Whitmore noted VFW's ongoing fight against so-called "claim sharks," who make it a practice to rob veterans of their earned benefits.

Another priority is the *Major Richard Star Act*, which would benefit those medically retired with less than 20 years. Getting it approved is a legislative initiative that Whitmore said VFW will continue to put its full might behind.

"We need to continue our work on Capitol Hill to make sure veterans are not taken advantage of and that they are given the benefits that we were all promised and deserve," she said. "VFW makes one of the biggest impacts on Capitol Hill — more than any other organization."

Reflecting on her official VFW visit to Vietnam last year to observe the work of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, Whitmore said her eyes and heart were "re-opened" to what the families of the missing deserve.

"We need to bring everyone home," she said of the more than 83,000 Americans still unaccounted for. "I know it's been said many times, but let's bring them all home. These families need and deserve closure."

'A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE'

Whitmore reiterated that while her year as Chief should not be about gender, she does believe more female vets will take



VFW Commander-in-Chief Carol Whitmore prepares for .50 caliber range training in 2010 in Iraq. Whitmore served 36 years in the Army.

notice and join the VFW and vie for top leadership positions.

"Women need to feel they belong here if they are eligible," Whitmore said. "There are so many out there who feel undervalued and underappreciated and under voiced in a lot of different aspects. I am hopeful that they see that anybody who feels undervalued as a veteran should belong."

Whitmore said part of the reason she became a nurse is that she enjoys taking care of people. In her position at the helm of the organization, she will work to make sure her fellow veterans have the lives they deserve.

She also believes that her status as VFW's first female Commander-in-Chief is something the organization's founders would support.

"Getting to go back to the VFW National Convention in Columbus, Ohio, where it all began is pretty special," Whitmore concluded. "I hope the founders would say, 'Okay, this is a good change.' It should never be, 'It's about time there's a female commander-in-chief.' It should be about this is a change, a different perspective about what the VFW is and what the VFW looks like now and in the future." ★

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Then-VFW Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief Carol Whitmore listens to a dive supervisor while on a trip to a crash site in the Gulf of Thailand in March 2024. The diving squad hopes to recover remains from WWII-era sunken ships and aircraft.

‘It’s a Race Against Time’

Sept. 19 marks the Recognition of POW/MIA Day. This is a time to reflect on all those still unaccounted for.

BY DANNY COOK

On March 18, the remains of Army 1st Lt. William Hott were successfully identified nearly seven years after having been returned to the U.S. from North Korea, and nearly 70 years after having been deemed “non-recoverable” by the U.S. Army. Before being successfully identified, Hott was one of nearly 83,000 currently unaccounted for military personnel, dating back to WWII.

Hott marked the 100th successful identification from remains returned from North Korea in 2018, after President Trump reached an agreement with North Korean leader Kim Jung Un. A total of 55 boxes of remains were returned to the U.S. The identification of those remains is still in process.

The contents of the 55 boxes did not just include the remains of U.S. soldiers. Remains of unidentified Chinese and Korean soldiers were found inside as well, illustrating a complex problem all countries face: the pursuit of leaving no one behind.

National POW/MIA Recognition Day falls on the third Friday of September. Established in 1979 by former President Jimmy Carter, the day serves to recognize those who have been lost in combat as well as their families who are without answers.

VFW AND POW/MIA RECOVERY EFFORTS

As far back as 1920, the VFW has been involved in recovery efforts of unaccounted-for troops. The very first mission was the recovery of members of the 31st Infantry Regiment, also known as the “Polar Bears,” in Siberia during the Siberian Expedition between 1918 and 1922.

Today, the VFW works closely with the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) to assist in the recovery and documentation of troops who went missing in action through Joint Field Activities (JFA). VFW recently completed one with the DPAA in

Southeast Asia in March 2024.

“Along with traveling with the DPAA, we also help to ensure that they’re fully funded every year,” said VFW Associate Director of Communications and Public Affairs Brittany Dymond.

Then-VFW Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief Carol Whitmore and VFW Director of Public Affairs and Strategic Outreach Robert Couture joined the DPAA on a JFA diving trip at the Samaesarn dive site in Thailand in March 2024. The mission included diving for and establishing recoverable remains from WWII-era sunken ships and aircraft. The group also had the chance to learn more about the processes behind recovering remains found above ground.

“We owe these recovery efforts to the families back home, to the veterans who gave their last full measure of devotion to our country,” Whitmore said.

This past March, Couture, along

VFW Assistant Adjutant General Brian Walker helps members of a Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) recovery team excavate a dig site in Thua Thien-Hue Province, Vietnam, on March 23, 2025. The group hopes to find any clues that could help in the identification of missing military personnel.

with VFW Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief Tim Peters and VFW Assistant Adjutant General Brian Walker, conducted a fact-finding mission in Thailand and Vietnam. Their goals included assessing the needs and impact of the DPAA, as well as strengthening ties with the international VFW community.

Peters' personal mission is to bring attention to the global efforts of locating and identifying the 83,000 missing American servicemembers. He has a strong relationship with DPAA director Kelly McKeague, and the two have coordinated volunteer teams for recovery missions in the past.

On July 11, during the 30th anniversary of reestablishing diplomatic ties between the U.S. and Vietnam and the 40th anniversary of the first American recovery mission for those missing in the Vietnam War, past VFW Commander-in-Chief Larry Rivers and VFW Washington Office Executive Director Ryan Gallucci attended events in Hanoi to strengthen the evolving relationship between the two countries.

While meeting with the Veterans Association of Vietnam, Rivers praised the efforts of VFW members who have turned in war artifacts that could help Vietnam identify their own missing military personnel.

"The VFW has a record of service and should be proud of our efforts, not only during times of war, but in times of bringing peace," Rivers said.

On July 15, Peters, alongside DPAA leadership, presided over a handoff of artifacts between the VFW and the Vietnam embassy in Washington, D.C. These artifacts will help aid Vietnam's recovery efforts for their missing.

YOU CAN HELP WITH RECOVERY EFFORTS

The process behind recovering and



PHOTO BY ROBERT COUTURE

identifying remains can be challenging. Organic material can break down quickly, and the more time that passes, the more difficult it is for DNA analysts to be accurate in their identification.

"It's a race against time," said Couture. "Depending on the soil composition, the ground may be so acidic that the organic material breaks down completely and is lost."

Memories also play a crucial role in the identification of those unaccounted for in combat. Stories and artifacts of war can help pinpoint when and where soldiers were last seen or heard. When there is little or no remains for accurate DNA analysis, these resources provide the next best solution for an accurate assessment.

VFW and the DPAA encourage the families of those who have gone missing to provide DNA samples to help in the recovery efforts and to help find an accurate match.

They also encourage service members to share their recollections of events to help further pinpoint the story of what happened to unaccounted troops whose remains have yet to be found.

"My father died tragically when his plane crashed during a simulated parachute operation in Fort Hood, Texas, on March 12, 1985," Couture said. "I know what happened to my dad. They

Would you like to donate DNA to help in the identification process? Please contact a military casualty officer for more information on how to submit DNA samples:

- United States Army: 1-800-892-2490
- United States Marine Corps: 1-866-210-3421
- United States Navy: 1-901-874-2438
- United States Air Force: 1-800-531-5501
- Department of State: 1-771-204-6068

If you have any information on a missing soldier, please visit the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) website at www.dpaa.mil.

Artifacts of war can be mailed to the VFW National Office at:
200 Maryland Avenue NE
Washington, D.C. 20002

recovered his remains. I have that closure. There are families out there who don't have that closure and don't know if they'll ever be able to bury their loved ones on home soil. It doesn't matter if you're 5, 20 or almost 100, you still want to know what happened to your loved one." ★

EMAIL dcook@vfw.org

Othmar Jasper, seated, is flanked by his fellow members of VFW Post 2661 in June outside the Post home in Washington, Mo. Jasper is 105 years old and served in France in the days following D-Day. He visits the Post as often as he can. Post 2661 members all agree they strive to be welcoming to everyone who stops in.

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.

VFW POSTS ON MISSOURI RIVER ATTRACT VISITORS



‘Show-Me State’ Posts are supporting community endeavors, partnering with like-minded organizations and making a real difference in the process.

BY JANIE DYHOUSE

VFW magazine is concluding its 125th Destination Post series in this issue. The series began in April 2024 with Posts in Maryland. Since then, Posts from Washington state to Rhode Island and areas in between have been featured.

This final story takes *VFW* magazine readers to the “Heart of America,” where two Missouri River town VFW Posts are located on opposite sides of the state.

On the western side of Missouri, mere minutes from VFW National Headquarters in Kansas City, Mo., is VFW Post 7356 in Parkville, Mo. Situated just steps from the banks of the “Big Muddy,” this Post is located in the middle of this vibrant, bustling small community.

The Post took possession of the historic location last fall. The former power plant for nearby Park University as well as residents of Parkville, the building maintains most of its original features from when it opened in 1918.

Restaurants, antiques shops and art galleries line Main Street where the Post is located, right next to the railroad tracks. Of all the things to do in downtown Parkville, there is nowhere to have breakfast on a Saturday morning after shopping at the farmer’s market or taking a walk along the Missouri Riverfront Trail.

Post 7356 members saw this as an opportunity and are open every Saturday for breakfast. According to Post Commander Joe Wolfgeher, it is a great way to show off the Post, introduce people to the VFW and to raise funds for veterans and community outreach.

“Our Post does not base itself around drinking, but around community service,” Wolfgeher said. “Some of these guys will give you the shirt off their back and the last dollar in their pocket if it will help.”

Wolfgeher said that welcoming feeling and spirit of camaraderie is why he joined the Post in 2017. He was driv-

ing by the old Post home on the outskirts of town and saw a couple of guys on the lawn. The Marine vet pulled in to check it out.

“They did not try to recruit me,” Wolfgeher said. “The conversation was about my well-being and my needs, not about signing me up. That is why I joined this Post.”

The Post supports Boy Scout Troop 393, one of the largest in the area, according to Wolfgeher. In May, the Scouts joined Post and Auxiliary members and walked English Landing Park, picking up trash as part of VFW’s Day of Service. Members also work with the South Platte Civil Air Patrol.

In April, the Parkville Parks and Recreation Department partnered with the Post and Auxiliary to bring the Easter Bunny to visit with the youngsters in the community.

Buddy Poppy distributions help drive member engagement. It was at one of these drives in 2020 that David Goday was introduced to Post 7356 and signed up on the spot.

Today, the Air Force veteran is the Post junior vice commander.

“When I first joined this Post, I had no idea what the Post did in the community,” he said. “Being here has made me really proud to be a part of it. Being prior Air Force, I really missed the camaraderie experienced by veterans.”

Brent Grooms, a newer member of the Parkville Post, said



VFW Post 7356 Auxiliary President Mary Helbock and VFW Post 7356 Commander Joe Wolfgeher stand outside the Post in June in Parkville, Mo. Located steps from the Missouri River, Post 7356 is active in its community.



PHOTO BY LAUREN GOLDMAN/VFW



HERMANN IS A TRAVELER'S DELIGHT

LEFT: Just off the main streets of historic downtown Hermann, Mo., is VFW Post 4182. Located at 108 State Highway 100W, the Post home is on the drive to the famous Stonehill Winery. Set against a picturesque backdrop of green rolling hills and large old trees, the Post is a hub for community activity. Members frequently cook up community dinners to raise funds for veterans causes. For the Freedom Fest parade on the Fourth of July, the Post color guard lead the parade through downtown Hermann. The Post service officer is at the Post on a regular basis to assist veterans with their VA benefits. Annually, the Post partners with Boy Scout Troops 116 and 3116 for a community food drive benefiting those facing food insecurity. Follow the Post on Facebook to keep up with the good work they are doing at Hermann VFW Post 4182.



BELOW: Long before the wineries of California's Napa Valley, there was what would become Stone Hill Winery in Hermann. It started in 1847 when German immigrant Michael Poeschel sold his first commercial barrel of wine. By 1870, Missouri was the largest wine-producing state. Today, Stone Hill is Missouri's oldest and most-awarded winery. People travel from around the world to visit the winery sitting atop the hill overlooking Hermann.

the stories he had heard about other VFW Posts from his friends were all negative. However, he said that that has not been his experience in Parkville.

Grooms has served 21 years in the Air Force and is hoping to reach 30 years of service before retiring.

'A LOT OF GOOD PEOPLE IN THIS POST'

Wolfgeher said the Post and Auxiliary work closely together, and there is mutual respect between the two groups.

VFW Post 7356 Auxiliary President Mary Helbock agrees, adding that Auxiliary members strive to be good partners with the VFW.

"Our members are so proud to honor veterans and family members," she said. "We are excited to have our Post home so that we can combine our traditions and become even more involved in our community. This location certainly opens up more opportunities for us."

An annual golf tournament, regular picnics in the park and the large presence the Post and Auxiliary has in the Fourth of July parade are just a few specific areas Helbock highlighted.

Kristiana Wolfgeher is the patriotic instructor for the Post Auxiliary. While she has been a member for six years, she started out as a babysitter during Post events before she was old enough to join.

She said she joined the Auxiliary as a way to be able to spend quality time with her dad (Joe, the Post commander) and have something they could do together.

"I really love the history of our new location," Kristiana said. "It is truly a special place in Parkville. The building holds roots in the community, which is very fitting for the VFW."

Auxiliary Treasurer Judith Green gave kudos to the Post members for lending a hand when needed. Her husband,



Members of VFW Post 2661 gather on the Post's front porch in June in Washington, Mo. Located in the heart of Missouri's wine country, the Post is an ideal place for travelers to visit.

Harold, is the oldest active member in the Post. He is now confined to a wheelchair.

"Members came over and built a ramp for Harold," Judith said. "I know I can call on them and they will really help."

Harold agreed, saying, "There are a lot of good people in this Post."

Member Rick Hamman, who transferred to the Post in 1996, said the best quality of Post 7356 is the close-knit community.

"I think we are special because of the closeness of this group," he said. "That, and the willingness of everyone to help anyone in need of a little help. I loved coming down and being a part of getting this building ready to open."

Wolfgeher said that while the Post will not have a bar, the space is available to rent, something members expect to profit from.

The second floor of the Post features a library which

members hope students from nearby Park University will benefit from, as well as veterans. Green velvet couches and military-themed books make for a nice reading experience.

At press time, the rooftop deck was under repair, but the future holds good things for that space as well, according to Wolfgeher.

"We have big dreams and big visions," he said.

If you are traveling to Kansas City, Mo., take the short drive to Two Main Street in Parkville.

A 'WELCOMING POST'

A three-hour drive east out of Kansas City across Interstate 70 will land you in Missouri's wine country, more specifically, the picturesque town of Washington overlooking the Missouri River. It is about a 30-minute drive to Hermann, Mo., known for its plethora of wineries.

FUN FACT

Washington, Mo., is considered the "Corncob Pipe Capital of the World." Since 1869, the Missouri Meerschaum Company has been producing corncob pipes. It is the world's oldest and largest manufacturer of corncob pipes. By 1925, more than a dozen other corncob producers cropped up in Washington's Franklin County. Most of those also were located in Washington. Today, Meerschaum is the sole manufacturer in Washington. The pipes are shipped to locations all over the world.





Members of VFW Post 7356 and its Auxiliary convene on a Wednesday evening in June in the front room of their Post in Parkville, Mo. While there, members learned more about a project they support benefiting homeless veterans in the Kansas City, Mo., area. A group of women use the Post's kitchen to cook meals for St. Michael's Veterans Center. The Post also gives a monthly donation to help offset expenses.

Missouri VFW Posts

The "Show-Me State" boasts 174 VFW Posts. Listed below is a small sampling of the many outstanding Posts in Missouri.

VFW Post 534 in Joplin

110 Veterans Way
Joplin, MO 64801
(417) 623-5174
Commander Richard Banks

VFW Post 2482 in St. Clair

1087 North Service Rd.
St. Clair, MO 63077
(636) 629-4880
Commander James Myers

VFW Post 4080 in Buffalo

419 Locust St.
Buffalo, MO 65622
(417) 455-3929
Commander John Spero

VFW Post 11290 in Branson-Hollister

(Meetings Held at Golden Corral)
3551 Shepard of the Hills Expressway
Branson, MO 65616
Commander Marie Voegel

VFW Post 2866 in St. Charles

66 VFW Lane
St. Charles, MO 63303
(636) 724-9612
Commander Robert Miller

VFW Post 4593 in Republic

129 Main Ave.
Republic, MO 65738
(417) 732-9231
Commander Victor Justice

VFW Post 1667 in Ridgedale

3332 Ridgedale Rd.
Ridgedale, MO 65739
(417) 336-6017
Commander Scott Rose

VFW Post 3118 in Pleasant Hill

1701 Country Club Drive
Pleasant Hill, MO 64080
(816) 987-5456
Commander Marvin Dotson

VFW Post 5077 in O'Fallon

8500 Veterans Memorial Pkwy.
O'Fallon, MO 63366
(636) 272-1945
Commander Paul Howard Petterson

VFW Post 2184 in St. Louis

6327 Lemay Ferry Rd.
St. Louis, MO 63129
Commander James Plymale

VFW Post 3174 in Sikeston

709 Smith Ave.
Sikeston, MO 63801
(573) 471-7575
Commander Mike Johnson

VFW Post 7822 in Puxico

E. Richardson Ave.
Puxico, MO 63960
(573) 625-0823
Commander Duane Martin

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How did Anna start to enjoy life to the fullest?

At the age of 56, a back operation left me dependent on a cane, significantly impacting my daily life. Simple tasks like going to the store or meeting friends became challenging, and I even had to cancel a long-awaited anniversary trip to Italy.

My husband purchased a scooter for me, but it was cumbersome and uncomfortable for everyday use, leaving me feeling more constrained than liberated. However, everything changed when I came across the ATTO SPORT. This remarkable scooter proved to be a game changer. Not only is it robust and reliable, but it also conveniently splits into two pieces, allowing me to effortlessly lift it into my car trunk on my own. I was even able to stow it in the overhead compartment on the plane, enabling us to finally take that trip to Italy! I am now independent once more, able to go wherever I please and do so with a striking sense of style. In fact, I now find that my husband struggles to keep up with me!



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- **Go anywhere:** Conquer any terrain with puncture-proof, shock-absorbing tires and a 4-inch ground clearance. Equipped with electronic stability control for added safety on descents and turns, it is also flight-approved, ideal for air travel and cruise ships. With a driving range of up to 12.5 miles (25 miles with the XL battery), a top speed of 6.2 MPH, and a maximum weight capacity of 300 pounds, this durable scooter is designed for longevity.
- **Top-Notch Engineering:** Guaranteeing both comfort and durability, this scooter offers ample legroom and a big comfortable seat. The ATTO is super portable and lightweight, and still rides like a heavy-duty scooter.
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Downtown Washington has well-preserved 19th century buildings styled in German architecture, as this is a community rooted in German heritage.

A short distance from downtown is VFW Post 2661. It is housed in a large Victorian-style home once owned by John B. Busch — older brother of Adolphus Busch, co-founder of the Anheuser-Busch Brewing Company.

A common feeling about the Post among the members *VFW* magazine spoke to was “welcoming.”

“Everyone here made me feel so welcome,” Post 2661 Commander Duane Harlan said. “I never wanted to go to any other place.”

Member Joe Lueckenhoff who lives in nearby New Haven, describes the VFW crowd as a “bunch of friendly people.”

He noted that there are people who got married at the Post home who now have children getting married there, as well.

“We have people asking when we are going to put up the Christmas lights each year so they can come take family photos,” he added. “In fact, the two guys who used to put up the Christmas lights for us, their sons now do it.”

When Post Junior Vice Commander DJ Elbert, also the Post service officer, got out of the Marines, he knew he wanted to be a part of Post 2661.

“When I came home, I saw these same people who were at my high school graduation posting the colors the year before,” Elbert said. “I wanted to join.”

That welcoming spirit extends to the community, as well. Post members are active in the Build a Bed program through Sleep in Heavenly Peace, an organization that aims to provide beds to children who may not otherwise have a bed to call their own. So far, Post members have built 50-55 beds.

The Post’s funeral detail performs about 250 funerals for veterans each year. Bingo is held every Tuesday night, and some 90-100 people show up to try their luck.

Senior Vice Commander Ben Strange said the Post has a good relationship with the Washington JROTC program.

“We work closely with the local JROTC,” he said. “We invite them to everything the Post does.”

Not surprisingly, some of the JROTC students are related to Post 2661 members. Such is the case with Will Riegel. He is the great-grandson of Othmar Jasper, a 105-year-old WWII veteran.

Jasper served in WWII from 1941-45 and earned two Purple Hearts. He landed in France just days after D-Day. When asked what he thought about that landing, he smiled and said, “I was just glad to get it over with.”

On June 29, the VFW hosted a drive-through birthday party for Jasper’s 105th.

STAYING CONNECTED IN THE COMMUNITY

Former Post 2661 Adjutant and Afghanistan War vet Amanda Todd said she enjoys the Post’s annual Celtic Festival, which draws from surrounding communities and introduces a lot of people to the friendly folks at the Post.

“It is a very innovative approach to stay connected to the



Some of the officers of VFW Post 7356 and its Auxiliary meet on the porch of their Post in June in Parkville, Mo. The Post is located in an old power plant, which supplied power to nearby Park University as well as to residents of Parkville. The Post moved to its current location late last year. Located in the downtown area, the Post is surrounded by antique shops and art galleries. It is open every Saturday morning serving breakfast to the public.

community,” she said. “This year’s festival is Sept. 6, and it’s going to be bigger and better than before, with dancing, historical items and live music.”

At last year’s Celtic Festival, VFW service officers Troy Williams and Kevin Scott helped 30 veterans with their VA benefits.

In April, the Post had its first golf tournament. It benefited the Missouri Veterans Home in St. James and special Post projects.

The Post also has been known to host mental health and wellness fairs open to the public.

On any given evening, the Post is abuzz with members and visitors convening or sitting on the grand front porch. Many establishments in Washington are not open early in the week, which makes the Post a popular place.

Another point making this Post attractive to visitors is the building itself. While updates have been made, members try to keep the historical integrity of the structure.

“We really try to do everything we can to preserve this building,” Senior Vice Commander Ben Strange said.

Quartermaster Chuck Wickes added with the unique history of the Post home, members are eager to preserve it.

Gary Watermann, who serves with the Post Honor Guard, noted the original fireplace in the billiard room, saying it is “the most beautiful room” in the Post.

If you find yourself in Missouri’s scenic wine country, you are going to want to visit Post 2661 located at 813 Jefferson Street. ★

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VFW RECOGNIZES HISPANIC HERIT

More than 1.5 million U.S. veterans claim Hispanic or Latino heritage and constitute 8 percent of the active U.S. military.

BY ISMAEL RODRIGUEZ JR.

In observance of Hispanic Heritage Month this September, *VFW* magazine profiled some of the organization's Hispanic and Latino veteran employees at VFW National Headquarters in Kansas City, Mo., VFW's Washington Office and abroad. We asked what the VFW means to them.

MARC GARDUNO, VFW QUARTERMASTER GENERAL



Service: Army; SPC, 2nd Bn., 503rd Inf., 2nd Inf. Div., Camp Hovey, Korea; May 1988 to May 1989. **VFW Membership:** Post 3238, Camden, Del.

Why did you join VFW?

It was roughly two years before retirement in 2005 when I realized the military does a great job of training us to be warfighters, but is not very good at teaching us to be veterans. My father was a VFW member, so I naturally gravitated to the VFW rather than a different veterans organization.

JOSE LOPEZ, VETERANS SERVICE OFFICER

Service: Marine Corps; Master Gunnery Sergeant, 1st Marine Expeditionary Force (1 MEF) G-4, Camp Pendleton; Iraq and Afghanistan, 2008-2011. **VFW Membership:** VFW Post 1003, Jefferson City, Mo.

Why did you join VFW?

I joined Post 1003 because it gives me a strong sense of camaraderie and connection with other veterans who've served in combat. It's a place where I feel understood and supported while continuing to serve in the community through volunteer work and events. The VFW Headquarters in Kansas City hired me as a veterans service officer in April 2025, where I now help veterans file VA claims and apply for benefits. I enjoy working alongside other veterans and appreciate that the VFW at large continues to work to protect veterans' rights. Personally, being both a member and an employee of the VFW is a way to stay part of something bigger than myself, even though my time in uniform is over.



AGE MONTH

ALEX ORTIZ, VFW-SVA STUDENT FELLOW

Service: U.S. Army; SGT/E5; 10th Combat Aviation Brigade, 6-6 Cavalry Squadron, Fort Drum, N.Y.; Iraq and Afghanistan, 2008-2011. **VFW Membership:** Post 11103, Añasco, Puerto Rico

Why did you join VFW?

I'll be honest: I joined for entirely selfish reasons. At 33, I assumed veteran service organizations were primarily for older, more seasoned veterans. My motivation was to qualify for the VFW-Student Veterans of America legislative fellowship. I wanted that credential, nothing more.

I was profoundly mistaken about everything. From my first interaction, VFW Department of Rhode Island Commander Dora Vazquez transformed my understanding of what veteran organizations represent. She did not simply welcome me; she equipped me with every tool necessary for success.

When I was selected as a 2022 legislative fellow and featured in the August issue of *VFW* magazine alongside my fellow veterans, something fundamental shifted. This was no longer about building my resume. That fellowship ignited a passion I had not known existed. I returned in 2023 as a mentor, witnessing other veterans experience the same awakening.

'I DISCOVERED MY CALLING'

But the real work began back home in Puerto Rico, where I discovered veterans being exploited by claim sharks who prey on those who served our nation. The VFW had given me a voice, and silence was no longer an option.

I channeled that voice into action. I drafted legislation, submitted citizen petitions, and advocated relentlessly.

Two house bills became law. The government of Puerto Rico now seeks my counsel on veteran affairs. My mentor, Tammy Barlet, encouraged me to apply for the inaugural Advisory Committee on U.S. Outlying Areas and Freely Associated States of the VA, where I now address the constitutional inequities facing territorial veterans.

This advocacy caught the attention of the White House Office of Public Engagement under the Biden Administration, leading to my invitation to speak on a panel about Latinos leading change in October 2024.



“From my first interaction, VFW Department of Rhode Island Commander Dora Vazquez transformed my understanding of what veteran organizations represent. She did not simply welcome me; she equipped me with every tool necessary for success.” — Alex Ortiz

Each milestone traces back to that pivotal moment when the VFW recognized potential I had not yet seen in myself.

The VFW provided more than opportunities — it offered purpose. I entered as a skeptical young veteran seeking professional advancement and emerged as an advocate committed to serving those who cannot advocate for themselves. I joined for a fellowship. I stayed because I discovered my calling.

SONIA COLEY
NATIONAL PRE-DISCHARGE CLAIMS REPRESENTATIVE

Service: U.S. Army; Staff Sergeant, 3rd Inf. Div., Fort Stewart; Iraq and Afghanistan, 2009 and 2012, respectively. **VFW Membership:** Post 7472, Ellicott City, Md.

Why did you join VFW?

I joined the VFW to help transitioning service members receive their earned benefits. I joined an organization that says, "No one does more for veterans." I wanted to be a part of an organization that fights for veterans, especially the ones unable to fight for themselves.



ERICK RUBIO ASERO
NATIONAL PRE-DISCHARGE CLAIMS REPRESENTATIVE

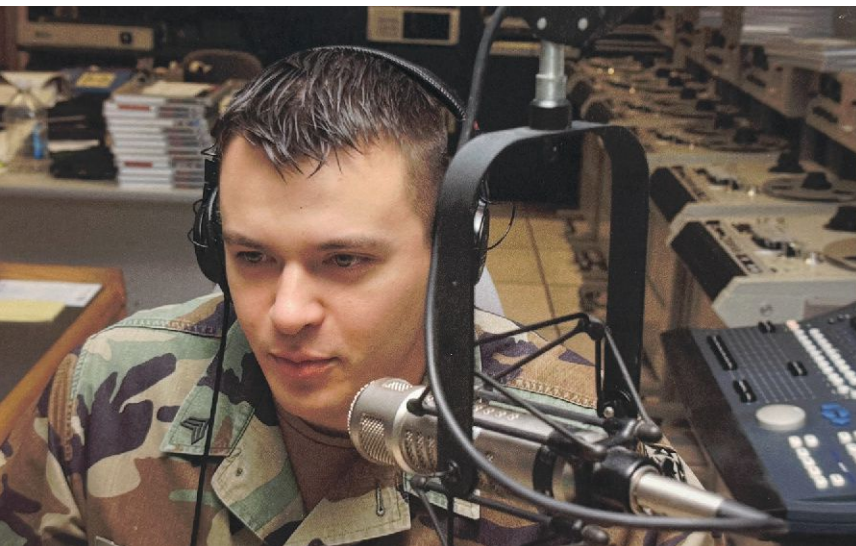


Service: U.S. Navy; Personnelman Second Class; USS O'Brien (DD-975), Naval Base San Diego, and Yokosuka, Japan; July 1989 to February 1995. **VFW Membership:** Post 3788, San Diego, Calif.

Why did you join VFW?

I wanted to serve. I have spent the past 12 years serving the homeless, seniors, people with disabilities and now military service people. Most recently, I entered Diaconate formation with the Catholic Diocese of San Diego.

ROB COUTURE, VFW NATIONAL DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS AND STRATEGIC OUTREACH



Service: U.S. Army; Master Sergeant; Public Affairs; Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq; served from 1996 to 2020. **VFW Membership:** Post 2462, Pasadena, Md.

Why did you join VFW?

After retiring from the Army in 2020, I became a VFW life member to connect with the greater community of veterans who also deployed in defense of our country. Serving those who serve, and are still serving, has given me the purpose, motivation and direction I was looking for after I hung up the uniform. ★

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Members of VFW Post 5867 and its Auxiliary gather for lunch in May 2018 at Burger King in Lakeside, Calif. The group, which included youth, turned out to thank the restaurant for its ongoing support of the VFW.

Burger King Donations Fund VFW Service Officers

Customers donated nearly \$350,000 in May to fund VFW's free VA claims assistance.

BY ISMAEL RODRIGUEZ JR.

For its 19th annual fundraiser in May, VFW's partnership with Burger King proved a success.

With 24 participating franchisees and 880 restaurants, this year's fundraiser raised \$348,559 for the VFW's National Veterans Service (NVS).

The campaign, which invites guests to donate \$1 or more with their purchased meals, helped provide free VA claims assistance through NVS for military and veteran families, ensuring they receive the benefits they have earned.

"NVS stands as a vital lifeline for our veterans, offering free, expert and accredited assistance in navigating the

complexities of VA claims," said Hal Roesch III, VFW Foundation executive director and past VFW Commander-in-Chief, 2020-2021. "This isn't just about paperwork. It's about ensuring veterans and their families receive their earned benefits and care. Supporting this program invests directly in those who sacrificed for our nation. They stood up for us. Now it's our turn."

Located in the nation's capital, NVS has served veterans, military members and their families for more than 100 years. NVS was built on helping these groups acquire their earned VA benefits at no cost.

TOP: North Kingstown, R.I., VFW Post 152 members visit their local Burger King restaurant in May 2018 to offer their thanks for Burger King's support of VFW's *Unmet Needs* program.

MIDDLE: Members of VFW Post 8761 and its Auxiliary eat "like kings" in May 2017 at the Burger King on East Craig Road in North Las Vegas, Nev., to show their support. The Post and Auxiliary members traveled 55 miles to visit the restaurant.

BOTTOM: Members of VFW Post 4443 and VFW Post 8787, both in Austin, Texas, show up to thank a local Burger King franchise in May 2019 for its support of the VFW.

Last year, VFW's National Veterans Service helped more than 590,500 veterans receive \$14.62 billion of VA disability benefits, including back pay. VFW's network of VA-accredited service officers has been helping veterans receive their earned pay.

VFW's NVS Director Michael Figlioli said that VFW is committed to a lifetime of advocacy for all veterans.

"Our representatives are assisting clients from the moment they file a disability claim through a review of the VA's decision," Figlioli said. "VFW also files any appeals necessary for the veteran or family member to receive the maximum benefit allowed."

Figlioli said the work of VFW service officers goes beyond VA disability claims. Service officers also must be knowledgeable about the GI Bill, VA health care, home loans and other VA benefits and services.

"It does not matter if you are a member of the VFW or not — we are here to help," Figlioli said. "VFW will never charge a fee for assisting a veteran, their spouse or family member in filing a claim."

Since 2007, Burger King franchisees have raised more than \$7.8 million in support of VFW programs.

EMAIL irodriguez@vfw.org



PHOTO COURTESY OF NORTH KINGSTOWN VFW POST 152



PHOTO COURTESY OF VFW POST 8761



VFW FILE PHOTO

Record-Breaking Year for DAY OF SERVICE



More than 2,300 Posts across the country — and the world — held Day of Service events in May of 2025.

ALABAMA

Post 96 Post 5180
Post 414 Post 5184
Post 668 Post 5228
Post 1054 Post 5355
Post 1349 Post 5377
Post 1762 Post 5658
Post 2214 Post 5850
Post 2702 Post 6073
Post 2952 Post 6226
Post 3117 Post 6683
Post 3128 Post 7055
Post 3568 Post 7061
Post 3701 Post 7222
Post 4328 Post 7320
Post 4388 Post 8577
Post 4543 Post 10840
Post 4572 Post 12185
Post 4588 Post 12231
Post 4765 Post 12241
Post 5162

ALASKA

Post 3629 Post 10041
Post 3836 Post 10046
Post 9365 Post 12151
Post 9785

ARIZONA

Post 40 Post 5990
Post 285 Post 6310
Post 541 Post 7061
Post 549 Post 7507
Post 720 Post 9399
Post 769 Post 9400
Post 836 Post 9907
Post 1433 Post 9972
Post 1709 Post 10227
Post 1796 Post 10254
Post 2066 Post 10726
Post 3513 Post 12098
Post 4903 Post 12210
Post 4911 Post 12222

ARKANSAS

Post 1316 Post 4501
Post 1322 Post 4548
Post 1674 Post 4562
Post 1991 Post 5225
Post 2242 Post 7514
Post 2256 Post 7769
Post 2278 Post 9095
Post 2330 Post 9777
Post 2586 Post 10007
Post 2952 Post 12233
Post 4451

CALIFORNIA

Post 52 Post 404
Post 75 Post 1051
Post 233 Post 1340
Post 275 Post 1351

Post 1512 Post 5867

Post 1513 Post 5868
Post 1525 Post 5869
Post 1555 Post 5948
Post 1622 Post 5985
Post 1649 Post 6024
Post 1679 Post 6025
Post 1747 Post 6298
Post 1924 Post 6309
Post 1932 Post 6311
Post 1956 Post 6604
Post 2043 Post 6747
Post 2075 Post 7041
Post 2082 Post 7216
Post 2266 Post 7243
Post 2323 Post 7264
Post 2333 Post 7265
Post 2381 Post 7420
Post 2487 Post 7816
Post 2727 Post 7907
Post 2814 Post 8063
Post 3000 Post 8070
Post 3010 Post 8180
Post 3173 Post 8254
Post 3208 Post 8327
Post 3327 Post 8547
Post 3670 Post 8737
Post 3699 Post 8743
Post 3758 Post 9148
Post 3783 Post 9305
Post 3787 Post 9327
Post 3788 Post 9375
Post 3825 Post 9650
Post 3834 Post 9896
Post 4084 Post 9934
Post 4089 Post 10110
Post 4095 Post 10125
Post 4103 Post 10218
Post 4218 Post 10859
Post 4379 Post 10965
Post 4647 Post 11012
Post 5057 Post 11387
Post 5394 Post 12034
Post 5477 Post 12215

COLORADO

Post 1 Post 4331
Post 101 Post 5221
Post 807 Post 6051
Post 899 Post 6461
Post 1781 Post 6624
Post 2601 Post 7305
Post 3471 Post 7829
Post 3541 Post 8898
Post 3641 Post 9058
Post 3917 Post 9644
Post 3981 Post 12063
Post 4051 Post 12189
Post 4266 Post 12227

CONNECTICUT

Post 149 Post 5157
Post 189 Post 5446
Post 201 Post 5849
Post 296 Post 6121
Post 308 Post 6851
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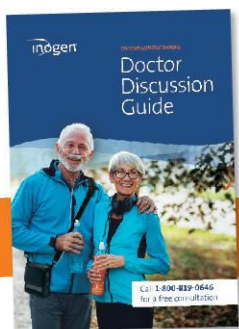
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'Seeking Treatment is Not Giving Up'

Substance abuse issues and PTSD frequently occur together. There are resources to assist veterans in recovery.

BY JANICE PHELAN

During her service in the Air Force, Carrin Perez witnessed and experienced traumatic events that still impact her today. Like numerous veterans, she found herself dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after returning home.

"I have tried many different types of treatment and medications," said Perez, who served in Saudi Arabia and Turkey. "Desperation for healing and relief is a dangerous combination for addiction. For me, I became dependent on pain medication and medical marijuana. I was trying to feel normal, to sleep without experiencing nightmares and numb my emotional pain."

Unfortunately, substance use problems and PTSD frequently co-occur, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs, with one in four Americans with post-traumatic stress disorder also having issues related to drugs or alcohol.

The use of alcohol and drugs can make PTSD symptoms worse, according to VA experts. For example, individuals may turn to alcohol to help with sleep, although using alcohol often has the reverse effect, resulting in less restful sleep.

"The next thing I know, the alcohol and drugs stopped working for me no matter how much I consumed," Perez said.

Veterans' exposure to traumatic experiences, which can result in PTSD, is frequently addressed by self-medication strategies using alcohol and drugs, said Mark Heather, managing director and founder of Miracles Asia, a residential addiction treatment center where Perez was successfully treated.

This combination can complicate both treatment and ongoing recovery.

"Unsuccessful management and treatment of PTSD symptoms often leads to increased levels of psycho-social difficulty, problems in relationships and home life, further decline in quality of life and increased attempts to manage the experience by more substance

Perez emphasized the importance of getting help. "Unhealed trauma doesn't fade," she added. "It hides in the body, and the survival skills we learned in the military can become self-destructive. Seeking treatment is not giving up. It's choosing to believe there's more than one way to heal and finding what works for you."



abuse," Heather said.

An integrated treatment model is crucial in the treatment of PTSD and substance abuse, he added, including using medication when required for symptoms and mental-health diagnoses, psychotherapy and eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR), as well as somatic approaches such as massage, hot/cold water therapy, yoga and mindfulness.

"They can develop an empowering understanding of what has been happening to them, learn effective new coping strategies to manage difficult symptoms, increase a sense of safe social connectedness and develop a route to a recovery plan for reintegration within their community," he said.

The VA provides two confidential tools to help individuals determine if they need treatment. A five-question self-screen for PTSD as well as a brief alcohol and substance use problem questionnaire are both available on the VA website. Each VA Medical Center also offers treatment resources, including a specialist trained to treat veterans with PTSD and substance-use problems.

"Veterans fought for their country," Perez said. "Now it's time for the veterans to fight for themselves." ★

EMAIL magazine@vfw.org

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

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•Harvard Study of Adult Development, as reported in the Harvard Gazette (April 11, 2017). The Zoomer Chair is a personal electric vehicle and is not a medical device nor a wheelchair. It is not intended for medical purposes to provide mobility to persons restricted to a sitting position. We accept all major forms of payment, but do not accept Medicare, Medicaid or other insurance. © 2025 Journey Health & Lifestyle - 606668

'We Really Enjoyed Collaborating'

VFW brings the local community together to recognize those who sacrificed in response to 9/11.

BY DANNY COOK

Nestled about a two-hour drive from New York City is the village of Brewster, the principal settlement of the town of Southeast, N.Y., and home to VFW Post 672. Last September, the Post and community came together to honor those who answered the call of duty after the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks.

Post 672 has held yearly 9/11 commemorations at Southeast Veteran's Park in Brewster, where they also have held annual Veterans Day and Memorial Day ceremonies. However, this year, to get the local community involved in the commemoration, the ceremony was held at the Brewster Fire Department, where a 9/11 memorial is open to the public.

"The significance of this year's 9/11 ceremony was really all about teaming up and collaborating with our community," said VFW Post 672 Commander Ron Whitehead. "Brewster is a small town in Putnam County, N.Y., and we often work together to support one another."

The ceremony was organized and led by VFW Post 672 Chaplain Andrew DeStefano, a retired New York City police officer who often takes the lead role at many of the events Post 672 holds.

Along with collaborating with Brewster firefighters and police officers to help set up the event, the departments were honored during the ceremony — both to recognize their continued service to the Brewster community, and to recognize the efforts of the New York City police and fire departments who responded to the attacks on the World Trade Center.

"It was an easy decision to team up with our local fire and police departments," Whitehead said. "Every year, they help run and support our Veterans



Brewster-Southeast Joint Fire District Commissioner Jerry Schramek, left, gives a commemorative speech at the Brewster Fire Department 9/11 memorial on Sept. 11, 2024. He is joined by VFW Post 672 Chaplain Andrew DeStefano, who helped organize the ceremony.

Day and Memorial Day ceremonies."

A JROTC color guard from Brewster High School also was invited to attend the ceremony.

"We really enjoyed collaborating with the Brewster High School [JROTC], and we know they have an excellent program there," Whitehead said. "The students told us that they were honored to be a part of the ceremony and that they hope they can be a part of it every year."

THE LAST PIECE OF STEEL

Placed between two support beams designed to resemble the Twin Towers at the Brewster Fire Department 9/11 Memorial is an original piece of steel from the World Trade Center. Obtained from the New York and New Jersey Port Authority, this relic was one of the last available pieces of steel from

the World Trade Center to be given out, with more than 1,200 pieces having been dispersed in the United States since 2008.

"The piece of steel represents a great many things to our Post membership," Whitehead said. "Several of our Post members signed up just after 9/11 and served in Iraq and Afghanistan. It also stands as a reminder that our freedom is not free and we are lucky to live in such a great country."

Andrew Gordon, a local Eagle Scout, designed and built the 9/11 memorial in 2013, which included a reflection garden alongside the Twin Towers replica.

Whitehead, along with the rest of Post 672, invites other VFW members to visit the Brewster Fire Department 9/11 Memorial the next time they're in New York.

PHOTO COURTESY OF RON WHITEHEAD

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'A True Sense of Belonging'

Effective membership recruiting starts at the Post level, which is most often a veteran's first exposure to the VFW.

BY DAVID PROHASKA

Since its inception, the VFW has proudly served generations of veterans, supporting them through advocacy, camaraderie and community service. For this organization to thrive, it must continue to grow — and that means recruiting new members. While national and Department levels play crucial roles in supporting the organization's mission, the reality is simple:

Recruiting starts — and succeeds — at the Post level.

Here's why:

1. The Post is the front line of engagement.

At its core, the VFW is a grassroots organization. It is not through a national ad campaign or a state-level meeting that veterans first experience the VFW. They experience it at their local Post. This is where they meet fellow veterans, participate in meaningful events and see the VFW's impact in real time. It is these face-to-face connections that make the decision to join feel personal and worthwhile.

2. Relationships drive recruitment.

Recruitment is about more than eligibility — it is about trust. Veterans are more likely to join when invited by someone they relate to. That does not happen from a website or flyer alone. Instead, it happens in conversations at Post meetings, local events or one-on-one outreach. The Post is where these relationships are built, and that makes it the natural hub for recruitment.

3. Community visibility begins with the Post.

Local Posts are the VFW's most visible presence in communities across the country. From hosting Memorial Day ceremonies to supporting local schools and sponsoring community clean-ups,



PHOTO BY JANIE DYHOUSE/VFW

Members of VFW Post 5390 in Portsmouth, R.I., gather on the front porch of the Post home last October in the Common Fence Point neighborhood in Portsmouth. VFW believes that connections made at the Post level is the best method in membership recruiting.

Posts are actively engaged where it counts. Every one of these events is an opportunity to show potential members what the VFW stands for and why they should be a part of it.

4. Only Posts can offer a true sense of belonging.

When a veteran visits a local Post, they are not just visiting a building, but stepping into a community. That welcoming environment, that sense of "this is my place," is something no national recruitment strategy can replicate. It is the Post — its members, its atmosphere, its engagement — that gives veterans a reason to not only join, but stay.

5. National provides the tools, while Posts put the tools to work.

National and Department levels offer incredible resources: recruitment materials, digital campaigns, training and incentives. But those tools do not

recruit members by themselves. It is the Posts that bring them to life. This can be in the form of distributing flyers, having conversations, following up with leads and inviting veterans to join events. Without active Post involvement, those tools are underused.

The VFW's strength lies in its people, and its people are found at the Post level. Recruiting new members is not just a task for leadership or a national strategy. It is a shared responsibility that begins with every Post member shaking a hand, sharing a story or inviting a fellow veteran to stop by.

Want to grow the VFW? Start at the Post. That is where the mission begins and where the future is built. ★

EMAIL magazine@vfw.org

David Prohaska is senior director, VFW Membership & Member Services.

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Your mouth is a mirror to your overall health. Dental check-ups can reveal early signs of systemic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, chronic kidney disease and cardiovascular conditions. Dentists are skilled at detecting oral symptoms, ensuring you receive timely care and treatment.

Dental insurance is a smart way to budget for routine dental care and unexpected dental emergencies. It not only helps you maintain healthy teeth and a beautiful smile but also contributes to your overall physical health and well-being.

UNDERSTANDING DENTAL COVERAGE

While coverage offerings vary by insurance provider, most plans are designed to cover preventative care, basic restorative services, major restorative services or a combination of these. Choose your plan based on your age, family status



and budget to ensure you get the best coverage for your needs.

Preventative care often includes:

- Cleanings
- Fluoride
- X-rays
- Emergency pain treatment and more

Basic restorative services often include:

- Fillings
- Non-surgical extractions
- Sealants
- Scaling and root planning

Periodontal maintenance cleanings
Major restorative services often include:

- Root canals
- Oral Surgery
- Crown and restorations
- Prosthodontics, like bridges and dentures
- General anesthesia

For more information about affordable dental care, call the VFW Member Benefits Department at *1-833-VFW-VETS (1-833-839-8387)*.

Protect Your Family During a Cancer Diagnosis

A cancer diagnosis changes everything. It impacts your health, your family and your finances — often all at once. Cancer coverage may help alleviate and reduce stress from medical bills when you are focusing on healing.

Cancer insurance may help ease the burden of treatment costs and everyday bills. Nearly half of cancer patients carry more than \$5,000 in medical debt, and some treatments can exceed \$1 million. Cancer coverage may help you face these costs with one less worry.

Benefits may be paid directly to you, giving you some freedom to use them where it matters most — hospital stays, chemotherapy, surgeries, doctor visits,

prescriptions, or even mortgage and car payments. Your focus should be on getting better, not wondering how you will pay for care.

Early detection can make all the difference, which is why cancer screenings are important, helping you take proactive steps for your health.

You cannot predict a cancer diagnosis, but you can be prepared. With cancer insurance, you gain financial support



so you can focus on what truly matters: Your health and your family.

For more information, contact the VFW Member Benefits Department at *1-833-VFW-VETS (1-833-839-8387)*, option 2.

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Doctor urges seniors to carry medical alert device

Seniors snap up new medical alert device that comes with no monthly bills

People don't always do what their doctor says, but when seasoned veteran emergency room physician, Dr. Philip B. Howren, says every senior should have a medical alert device, you better listen up.

"Seniors are just one fall away from being put in a nursing home," Dr. Howren said. "With a medical alert device, seniors are never alone. So it keeps them living independently in their own home. That's why seniors and their family members are snapping up a sleek new medical alert device that comes with no monthly bills ever," he said.

Many seniors refuse to wear old style help buttons because they make them look old. But even worse, those medical alert systems come with monthly bills.

To solve these problems

Universal Physicians, a U.S. company went to work to develop a new, modern, state-of-the-art medical alert device. It's called "FastHelp™" and it instantly connects you to free unlimited nationwide help everywhere cell service is available with no contracts, no deposits and no monthly bills ever.

"This slick new little device is designed to look like the pagers doctors wear every day. Seniors love them because it actually makes them look important, not old," Dr. Howren said.

FastHelp is expected to hit store shelves later this year. But special newspaper promotional giveaways are slated for seniors in select areas. ■



■ **NO MONTHLY BILLS:** "My wife had an old style help button that came with hefty bills every month and she was embarrassed to wear it because it made her look old," said Frank McDonald, Canton, Ohio. "Now, we both have FastHelp™, the sleek new medical alert device that our grandkids say makes us look 'cool' not old," he said. With FastHelp, seniors never have to worry about being alone and the best part is there are no monthly bills ever.

Seniors born before 1961 get new medical alert device with no monthly bills ever

It's just what seniors have been waiting for; a sleek new medical alert device with no contracts, no deposits and no monthly bills that instantly connects you to free unlimited nationwide help with just the push of a button for a one-time \$149 price tag that's a real steal after today's instant rebate

The phone lines are ringing off the hook.

That's because for seniors born before 1961, it's a deal too good to pass up.

Starting at precisely 8:30am this morning the Pre-Store Release begins for the sleek new medical alert device that comes with the exclusive FastHelp™ One-Touch E 911 Button that instantly connects you to unlimited nationwide help everywhere cell service is available with no contracts, no deposits and no monthly bills ever.

"It's not like old style monitored help buttons that make you talk to a call center and only work when you're at home and come with hefty bills every month. FastHelp comes with state-of-the-art cellular embedded technology. That means it works at home or anywhere, anytime cell service is available



■ **FLYING OUT THE DOOR:** Trucks are being loaded with the new medical alert devices called FastHelp. They are now being delivered to lucky seniors who call the National Rebate Center Hotline at 1-800-330-4294 DEPT. HELP8716 today. Everyone is calling to get FastHelp, the sleek new medical alert device because it instantly connects you to unlimited nationwide help everywhere cell service is available with no contracts, no deposits and no monthly bills ever.

(Continued on next page)

whether you're out watering the garden, driving in a car, at church or even hundreds of miles away on a tour or at a casino. You are never alone. With just a single push of the One-Touch E Button you instantly get connected to free unlimited help nationwide with no monthly bills ever," said Jack Lawrence, Executive Director of Product Development for U.S. based Universal Physicians.

"We've never seen anything like it. Consumers absolutely love the sleek new modern design and most of all, the instant rebate that practically pays for it and no monthly bills ever," Lawrence said.

FastHelp is the sleek new medical alert device with the best of combinations: a quality, high-tech engineered device that's also an extremely great value because there are no monthly bills ever.

Better still, it comes with no contracts, no deposits and no monthly bills ever – which makes FastHelp a great choice for seniors, students and professionals because it connects to one of the largest nationwide networks everywhere cell service is available for free.

And here's the best part. All those who already have an old style monitored medical alert button can immediately eliminate those monthly bills, which is why Universal Physicians is widely advertising this announcement nationwide.

"So if you've ever felt a medical alert device was too complicated or expensive, you'll want to get FastHelp, the sleek new medical alert device with no monthly bills," said Lawrence.

The medical alert device slugfest was dominated by two main combatants who both offer old style monitored help buttons that come with a hefty bill every month. But now Universal Physicians, the U.S. based heavyweight, just delivered a knockout blow sending the top rated contenders to the mat with the unveiling of FastHelp. It's the sleek

new cellular embedded medical alert device that cuts out the middleman by instantly connecting you directly to highly trained 911 operators all across the U.S. There's absolutely nothing to hook-up or install. You don't need a land line and you don't need a cell phone. Everything is done for you.

"FastHelp is a state of the art medical alert device designed to make you look

important, not old. Old style monitored help buttons you wear around your neck, or require expensive base station equipment or a landline are the equivalent of a horse and buggy," Lawrence says. "It's just outdated."

Millions of seniors fall every year and spend hours lying on the floor helpless and all alone with no help.

But seniors who fall and get immediate help are

much more likely to avoid getting sent to a nursing home and get to STAY living in their own home independently.

Yet millions of seniors are still risking their safety by not having a medical alert device. That's because seniors just can't afford to pay the monthly bills that come with old style medical alert devices.

That's why seniors born before 1961 are rushing to

cash in the whopping \$150 instant rebate before the 32 day deadline ends.

So there's no need to wait for FastHelp to hit store shelves later this year because seniors born before 1961 can get it now just by using the \$150 instant rebate coupon printed in today's newspaper before the 32 day deadline ends. If lines are busy keep trying, all calls will be answered. ■

HOW TO GET IT:

► **IF BORN BEFORE 1961:** Use the rebate coupon below and call this Toll-Free Hotline: 1-800-330-4294 DEPT. HELP8716

► **IF BORN AFTER 1961:** You cannot use the rebate coupon below and must pay \$299 Call: 1-800-330-9423 DEPT. HELP8716

THE BOTTOM LINE: You don't need to shop around. We've done all the leg work, this deal is too good to pass up. FastHelp with the instant rebate is a real steal at just \$149 and shipping and there are no monthly bills ever.

PROS: It's the sleek new medical alert device that comes with the exclusive FastHelp One-Touch E 911 Button that instantly connects you to free unlimited nationwide help everywhere cell service is available with no contracts or deposits. It connects you to the vast available network of cellular towers for free and saves seniors a ton of money because there are no monthly bills ever making this deal irresistible. Plus it's the only medical alert device that makes seniors look important, not old.

CONS: Consumers can't get FastHelp in stores until later this year. That's why it's so important for seniors born before 1961 to call the National Rebate Center Hotline within the next 32 days. For those who miss that deadline, the sleek little medical alert device will set you back over \$300 bucks.



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USE THIS COUPON: To get \$150 off FastHelp you must be born before 1961 and call the National Rebate Center Hotline at 1-800-330-4294 DEPT. HELP8716 before the 32 day rebate deadline ends.

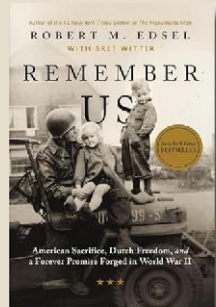
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With no monthly bills ever.



STAFF PICK



Remember Us: American Sacrifice, Dutch Freedom, and A Forever Promise Forged in World War II

By Robert Edsel

"Remember Us," by Robert Edsel — a *New York Times* bestselling author of "The Monuments Men" — begins in the pre-dawn hours of Hitler's invasion of western Europe on May 10, 1940, when his forces rolled into the small rural province of Limburg in the Netherlands, shattering more than 100 years of peace.

"Remember Us" is an ensemble piece that follows 12 main characters over a six-year span, zeroing in on Lt. Col. Robert Cole, the first member of the 101st Airborne to receive the Medal of Honor, and Sgt. Jeff Wiggins of the 960th Quartermaster Service Company, who escaped the poverty and racism of Alabama for yet another indignity — digging graves.

Drawing on never-before-seen letters, diaries and other historical records, Edsel shows the painful price of freedom on the battlefields and inside American homes. In this rich, dramatic and suspenseful story, he captures both the horrors of war and the transcendent power of gratitude, showing the extraordinary measures the Dutch have taken to thank their liberators. "Remember Us" is a reminder that grief is universal, that humanity knows no national or racial boundaries, and that we all want to be remembered, somehow, someday, by somebody. *Harper Horizon*

Discarded: A true account of how abandonment, abuse, and control became a journey of finding purpose

By Kitchi Feenix, VFW Department of California

This memoir, written with a pen name to keep her identity private, focuses on the many forms of trauma experienced by the author. She notes that stories in this memoir are woven together to create a tapestry of humanity where readers can all find a common thread. The author believes readers might find many of her deeply touching experiences will resonate with them on an emotional level.

Do Good Get Good Publishing

Moments, Memories, and Men

By Pascual Goicoechea, VFW Department of North Carolina

This book is an account of a young man whose mother died in Havana, Cuba, in 1956 and was raised by his father in the pre-revolution turbulence of the time. Fleeing communism, they arrived in Texas in May 1960, where the author comes of age. He soon assimilates into America and graduates from high school.

Lacking academic direction, he joins the Navy and falls in love with the rigors, discipline and culture of military life. After an eight-year enlistment, he earned an infantry officer commission in the Army and retired 41 years later. At his father's deathbed, the father asked him to pen the memoirs he kept of his long military career, as well as those he kept of his own life in Havana and those of his father, a diplomat for the Republic of Cuba for 36 years. The book thematically chronicles the written narratives of the three men and ends in present-day America. *WestBow Press*

Good Medicine, Hard Times: Memoir of a Combat Physician in Iraq

By Dr. Edward P. Horvath, VFW Department of Ohio

"Good Medicine," *Hard Times* is the moving memoir of one of the most senior-ranking combat physicians to have served on the battlefields of the Iraq War. Former Army Col. Edward Horvath brings readers through the intricacies of war as he relates stories of working to save the lives of soldiers, enemies and civilians alike and shares the moral dilemmas medical professionals face during war. *The Ohio State University Press*

Combat to Conservation

By F.J. Fitzgerald, VFW Post 2717, Ely, Minn.

In 1970, after growing up in the woods and fields of southeast Minnesota, Francis Fitzgerald was a young Marine in the middle of one of the longest and bloodiest conflicts his country has ever fought. Thoughts of college and becoming a game warden are gone as daily life becomes a battle of survival. Hot jungle sun, monsoon rains, snakes and leeches, and the ever-present threat of enemy ambushes take a toll on a 19-year-old's mind and body.

How does one heal the body and soul after living in that unimaginable world? No one is ever the same. Is anything worth the fight anymore? In "Combat to Conservation," Fitzgerald explains how the wilderness became his closest ally, his medicine and his only hope. *Koehler Books*

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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Palm Beach M.D.’s new breakthrough joint-comfort formula starts working on creaky, stiff joints in just 7 days...

PALM BEACH, FL – For many Americans, just putting on a pair of socks can be a demoralizing task. And they’re not alone. According to one nation-wide poll, more than 60 percent of U.S. adults over 50 are living with occasional joint discomfort.

For many, this off-and-on “locked up” feeling makes even the most mundane tasks feel like a chore.

According to anti-aging pioneer Dr. Al Sears, a little-known Indian “miracle resin” formula can support the comfort, flexibility, and range of motion you need to face the day with confidence – and it starts working in just one week.

“Our joints are meant to stay active and comfortable,” Dr. Sears said. “Keeping your body mobile and flexible is one of the best ways to avoid giving in to ‘getting old.’ My patient Bob is a perfect example.”

Before Bob came to Dr. Sears, he spent his lifetime working in construction, raising a family, and enjoying the outdoors. But at 77, “getting things done” wasn’t as easy. He felt the occasional stiffness and discomfort could hold him back many things he loved to do. “I told Bob about the miracle resin that outperforms everything else I’ve seen on the market,” Dr. Sears added. “Not long after that, there he was – sitting in my office with a big smile saying, ‘it’s like WD-40 for my joints!’”

A Miracle for Your Joints

Dr. Sears often travels the world in search of the best natural alternatives to help his patients. For joints that feel past their prime, he says nothing worked better than a resinous gum from the Indian subcontinent.

“On my first trip to India nearly 30 years ago, I saw for myself how it works wonders to help rural villagers stay at their best,” Dr. Sears said. The resin, known locally as “guggulu,” has been used in India’s rich Ayurvedic health system for centuries to support healthy joint function, promote flexible mobility, and ease occasional stiffness and discomfort.

Here in the West, scientists know it as Indian Frankincense – and jaw dropping studies reveal just how ahead of their time Ayurvedic practitioners were.

In a trial involving 75 volunteers living with occasional knee discomfort, those who received Indian Frankincense extract daily quickly noticed a difference. Their discomfort became less frequent and less annoying. After 90 days, it was obvious their knees were getting the support they craved.

Additional trials revealed the extract starts working in as little as 7 days – and not just for the knees.

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Indian Frankincense is among thousands of herbs powered by chondroprotective polyphenols – unique compounds that fight off discomfort by supporting healthy cartilage.

While scientists have identified more than 8,000 sources, only a tiny fraction show a strong affinity for our joints.

And Dr. Sears combined Frankincense with the world’s strongest “chondroprotectors” to create his new groundbreaking formula, *Mobilify*. “Frankincense is powerful enough to stand on its own, but we wanted to take joint comfort to the next level,” Dr. Sears explained.

Meadowsweet, a traditional medicine in Europe and parts of Asia, reinforces the formula’s joint-protecting power. In a 4-week study on 20 adults, participants reported improved comfort after receiving a daily drink containing meadowsweet and other extracts.

Bromelain, an enzyme extracted from pineapple, finishes the job by acting like a “clean up crew” for your joints.

“When your joints naturally repair themselves, they produce protein-based debris that can build up like a pebble in a shoe,” Dr. Sears explained. “Bromelain breaks down these proteins and helps flush them out of the picture.”



“Joint Power” you can count on — get around the house with ease, enjoy family outings, and finish strong on the 18th.

In a British university study involving 77 participants experiencing mild knee discomfort, those that received bromelain for three months reported improved comfort across the board. Everything from getting out of bed to going up and down the stairs became easier.

How to Get Mobilify

Right now, the only way to get *Mobilify* is directly through Dr. Sears.

“It isn’t available in stores yet, and I don’t see any reason to make anyone wait,” Dr. Sears said. “You can start supporting the comfort, range of motion, and flexibility you deserve right away.”

Dr. Sears believes so strongly in *Mobilify* that his team is offering a risk-free, satisfaction guarantee.

“If you aren’t completely satisfied with how you feel with *Mobilify*, just send back the bottle and any unused product, and I’ll get you your money back,” Dr. Sears added.

To place an order, you can call Dr. Sears’ dedicated hotline at 1-888-358-3076 and use promo code **VETMB825**. Due to recent media exposure, the hotline may be busy. Dr. Sears assures all calls will be answered.

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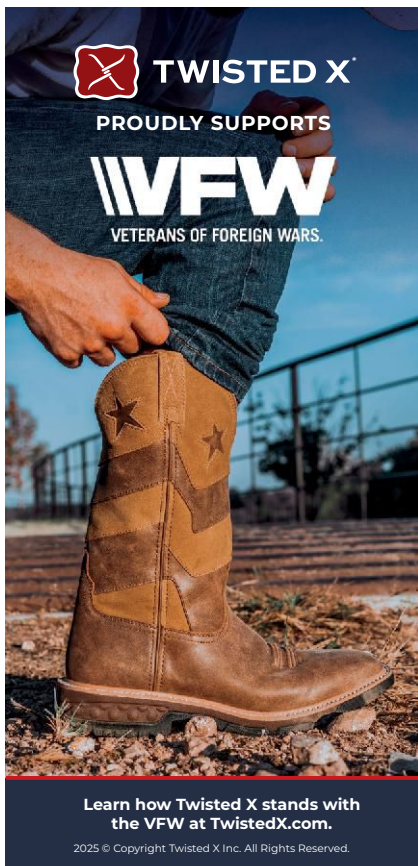
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'It's a Special Feeling'

After refurbishing several local veterans' memorials, one VFW member is awarded "Man of the Year."

BY DANNY COOK

Located about 35 miles north of the Oregon border in Washington state and home to about 85,000 is the city of Kennewick, a vibrant residential and banking community. This past February, VFW Post 5785 member and Marine vet Kevin Veleke was recognized as the "Kennewick Man of the Year" after having restored four local veteran memorial sites.

The organization behind the award, the Kennewick Man & Woman of the Year, has been recognizing exceptional public service since 1946. The honor is given to individuals who have provided service to the Kennewick community where no compensation was given and is only applicable to those who live and/or work in Kennewick.

Born and raised in the Seattle area, Veleke attended Washington State University and graduated in 1968 with a B.A. degree in marketing. He began his service in the Marines shortly thereafter, and in the fall of 1969, was stationed in Phu Bai, South Vietnam, as an aviation supply officer for Marine Base Squadron-36.

After returning home, Veleke lived and worked in several areas of the country before settling back in Washington. He worked as an insurance broker for an independent insurance agency in Richland, Wash., while living in Kennewick.

A COMMITMENT TO REMEMBRANCE

Over the years, several veterans' memorials in Kennewick had become overgrown, neglected and even vandalized, with some having gone without maintenance for decades. Looking to honor the sites and the memory of all those who served, Veleke took it upon himself to refurbish the memorials.



ABOVE: Kevin Veleke, left of center, celebrates his achievement with fellow VFW Post 5785 members in Kennewick, Wash., in February 2025. Veleke was awarded the "Kennewick Man of the Year" award for his many contributions to refurbishing veterans' memorials.

RIGHT: The monument at the Regional Veterans Memorial in Kennewick, Wash., shines bright. VFW Post 5785 member Kevin Veleke coordinated efforts to refurbish four veterans memorials in the Kennewick area. This was one of the four memorials that he helped to refurbish.

Last year, he began his restoration efforts at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Park in Kennewick, where he pruned overgrown flowers around the memorial and helped replace the flagpole, which had been vandalized a few years prior. Veleke reached out to a friend with the proper equipment and other citizens of Kennewick to successfully install the new flagpole.

Veleke then turned his attention to the Regional Veteran's Memorial, located at Kennewick's Columbia Park. Centered at the memorial is a tall monument dedicated to each of the military



services surrounded by 18 in-ground lights — 16 of which hadn't been working. Veleke took the initiative to raise the money needed to buy and install new lights at the memorial, allowing for the monument to be lit up in the eve-

PHOTO COURTESY OF CHUCK FORESTER

PHOTO COURTESY OF KEVIN VELEKE

"I hope I can inspire others to engage with other young Marines in their area."

Kevin Veleke, "Kennewick Man of the Year" and Marine Corps vet

ning once again.

Marine Cpl. Gerald Carmichael, the first man from Kennewick to have been killed in Vietnam, had a commemorative pyramid and street named after him. According to Veleke, the pyramid hadn't been refurbished in more than 60 years. A total of \$30,000, raised by Veleke, went into the equipment and labor costs needed to lay the concrete necessary to restore the pyramid, as well as add a wall behind the memorial.

Veleke's most recent project involved restoring an American Auxiliary pyramid, which had been installed in 1968, as well as a VFW wall monument,

which was installed in 1985.

"Neither of these memorials were being maintained by anyone," Veleke said.

He was able to raise \$25,000 to help restore both memorial sites.

'IT'S SPECIAL TO BE ASSOCIATED WITH VERY GOOD PEOPLE'

The award came as a surprise to him, when his wife informed him one day that they were invited to the Kennewick Man of the Year ceremony.

"I had no knowledge why," Veleke said. "The award was a complete surprise."

At the ceremony, when Veleke was announced as the winner, 200 attendees came out of an adjacent room to congratulate him, including past Kennewick Man and Woman of the Year recipients, members of his church, employees of the Kennewick school district, members of VFW Post 5785 and an honor guard dressed in uniform.

"It was a sight to see," Veleke added.

He was nominated for the Kennewick Man of the Year award by past recipi-

ents Kirk Williamson, who had won it in 2000, and Bob Kelly, an Army veteran who had won it in 2015.

"It's a special feeling to be associated with very good people," Veleke said when asked about his feelings toward the award.

Veleke's fellow Post members also are active in the community. They help perform flag ceremonies for Kennewick, attend parades, provide military funeral honors at veteran funerals, provide emergency assistance to veterans and support the local JROTC program.

Veleke serves as the liaison at his Post for young Marines in the area. He was able to work with a group of Marines to help restore the 62 names engraved on one of the veterans' monuments in Kennewick.

"It's very rewarding for me to see young men and women doing this kind of volunteer work," Veleke said. "I hope I can inspire others to engage with other young Marines in their area." ★

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