

# **ILLINOIS**

## **COMMANDER'S LEADERSHIP MANUAL**



**SERVING OUR COMMUNITY WITH RESILIENCE**  
**EUGENE BLACKWELL, STATE COMMANDER, 2025-2026**

**NATIONAL COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF 2025-2026**  
**Carol Whitmore**  
**"FOR VETERANS - BY VETERANS"**



# YOU ARE THE LEADER

This book has been published to assist you and your Program Chairpersons during your term of office as the Post or District presiding officer. We have outlined all of our State VFW Programs and awards with words of encouragement from our State Commander Maurice Bridges.

As a District or Post leader, it is your responsibility to read this book carefully so you are aware of the contents of each program, especially the 2025-2026 Membership Program. You are asked to bring this book to each of your meetings so you can answer any questions which may come up regarding specific programs, program deadline dates and program awards. Remember, the Commander's Leadership Manual is available to all members. You are encouraged to share the contents of this book with all of your key people.

Make photocopies of each of the programs contained within the ***Serving Our Community With Resilience*** Manual so you can give each Program Chairperson a copy of his/ her program. Having this information at an early date will enable that person to start working on the program as soon as he/she receives the information. The Leadership Manual will be available online at <http://www.vfwil.org>. Check this site for updates to the Commander's Leadership Manual for any changes that have to be made. You will also be able to print out programs from the manual for distribution to your Program Chairperson.



## STATE HEADQUARTERS

3300 Constitution Drive

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# **THE VFW MISSION**

To foster camaraderie among United States veterans of overseas conflicts. To serve our veterans, the military, and our communities. To advocate on behalf of all veterans.

The Mission Statement is a concise description of our intention—derived from the purpose—that guides our activities by providing focus; it enables us to establish priorities and make decision on what we should and should not be doing. It helps us to put our purpose into action. It also creates a sense of identity for our members and for the public. The Mission Statement describes what we do.

# **THE VFW VISION**

Ensure that veterans are respected for their service, always receive their earned entitlements, and are recognized for the sacrifices they and their loved ones have made on behalf of this great country.

The Vision Statement is what we want the future to look like. It is the target on which we align our Mission Statement. The Vision describes where we want to be someday.

## **THE VFW CORE VALUES**

- Always put the interests of our members first
- Treat donors as partners in our cause
- Promote patriotism
- Honor military service
- Ensure the care of veterans and their families
- Serve our communities
- Promote a positive image of the VFW
- Respect the diversity of veteran opinions

Core Values are the principles of how we interact with each other and with our communities. They are a foundation for a healthy environment in our Posts, at our meetings, or anywhere in which we gather. They help to form the culture that we build in our Posts and Districts. Core Values are meant to shape where we work.

# **CONSTITUTION OF THE VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES SECTION 230102 - Purposes**

## **The VFW Purpose**

Per the Congressional Charter, the purposes of the corporation are fraternal, patriotic, historical, charitable, and educational, and are:

- (1) to preserve and strengthen comradeship among its members;
- (2) to assist worthy comrades;
- (3) to perpetuate the memory and history of our dead, and to assist their surviving spouses and orphans;
- (4) to maintain true allegiance to the Government of the United States, and fidelity to its Constitution and laws;
- (5) to foster true patriotism;
- (6) to maintain and extend the institutions of American freedom; and
- (7) to preserve and defend the United States from all enemies.

The Mission, Vision, and Core Values are all based upon the purpose of the VFW. Our purpose establishes why we exist.

Veterans of Foreign Wars Posts, just as individuals do, sometimes lose sight of their objectives. As individuals most of us take inventory now and then to make certain that we are staying on the track and heading toward our objectives. The good Veterans of Foreign Wars Post will follow this same practice to ascertain its current status.

# STATE COMMANDER

Comrades,

Congratulations to all the newly elected and appointed officers for the 2025–2026 term of the Illinois Department of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. You have been chosen to lead—an honor that carries both responsibility and opportunity.

Leadership is the ability to influence and guide others toward achieving a common goal. It involves empowering individuals, motivating members, making sound decisions, fostering collaboration, and encouraging growth. A true leader not only sets the direction but also inspires others to follow, as we continue our mission of advocating for fellow Veterans through service, community engagement, and fellowship.

This will be the longest year—with the shortest days. You will be tested more than you can imagine, and it will not always be easy. Throughout this journey, let us commit to doing what is right, improving what needs attention, and preserving what already works well. Change should not be made for its own sake, but only when it brings real and lasting improvement. Membership remains vital to our existence and effectiveness—but it is not our only focus. My priorities for the year will center on three foundational pillars: Veteran Advocacy, Service Officers, and our POW/MIA Mission. These principles reflect the very foundation upon which our organization was built. They directly impact on Veterans and their families. Be the change for a fellow Veteran. Honor those who came before us. If we champion these core missions, we will generate renewed interest and attract more members.

Part of our mission requires resources. That's why I plan to revitalize and activate the VFW Illinois Foundation, transforming it into a reliable and functional support arm to strengthen our efforts. Over the years, we've lost valuable opportunities for sponsor support. By restoring confidence and purpose in our Foundation, we will better serve Illinois Veterans and their families.

Each of our programs matters. The key to their success—of course—is membership. We need committed individuals at the post and district levels to carry out these initiatives. One person cannot do it all. There is no "I" in team. It takes collaboration, communication, and shared purpose. There are many eligible Veterans throughout Illinois. Our job is to find them, recruit them, and retain them.

Use this Leadership Manual not just as a guide—but as a recruiting tool. Many people don't know the full scope of what the VFW offers. If a new member connects with even one program, you may gain a lifelong supporter. Familiarize yourself with our membership tools—and remember, by Serving Our Community With Resilience, your post will grow stronger and more vibrant.

And do not overlook the power of the VFW Auxiliary. They are a force multiplier—enhancing engagement, promoting teamwork, and increasing our reach and impact.

Let us step into 2025–2026 with our objectives clearly defined and our energy focused on the continued growth and strength of our organization.

God bless our Veterans. God bless the Illinois VFW. And God bless America.

And remember our theme for the year: "Serving Our Community With Resilience."



**Eugene Blackwell**  
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## STATE ADJUTANT



**Scott Swinford**  
*State Adjutant*

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Thank You to Commander Blackwell for the appointment as Adjutant. Congratulations to all the incoming District and Post Officers. I look forward to working with you all to make the Department of Illinois the very best we can be. Additionally, a big Thank you to all the outgoing officers for the foundation they have laid for their successors to achieve new goals.

This past year was a year of challenges for the Department, with a change in the Adjutant position mid-year, the closing of Posts and trying to help Posts who have been struggling. The latter is going to be the focus of Department Headquarters this coming year.

Our mission is to support and assist Posts and Districts in overcoming the challenges posed by the strict requirements set in the By-Laws and to work our Programs. The Headquarters' staff is committed to aiding Posts and Districts with "Serving our Community with Resilience".

We are continuing to make changes, we hope for the good, to the State Convention. The hope is that we are making for a more beneficial event for Posts and members by providing the education tools needed to execute our Programs and requirements and recognize their achievements and excellence. Any recommendations for changes or additions are encouraged and welcome. It is, after all, your convention.

Our Programs are make our organization what it is. We serve our communities and fellow veterans, support our youth, support legislation that supports and benefits veterans and recognize outstanding achievements in these areas.

We can't forget about membership; members accomplish our mission! Our goal for this year is 101%, a number which is attainable for every level. We lost over 1500 members last year to the unavoidable. We owe it to those members who served our Posts to continue their mission, to do that we must replenish our ranks. Without members we don't exist! Membership numbers have a direct bearing to our ability to help veterans and to influence legislation that is a benefit to all veterans. It directly affects the amount of money that each Post and State HQ receives in per capita membership payments.

I look forward to working with each and everyone of you to further our goal of "Serving our Community with Resilience". Thank you for being part of the Department team for 2025-2026.



# CHIEF OF STAFF

## *"Serving Our Community with Resilience"*

Greetings Comrades,

I hope you are well, able, and willing to tackle this year with the same tenacity as we have in the past.

Illinois has been doing great things in the Veterans sphere of influence and the VFW has been leading the way in much of it. I have no doubts that through our joint efforts across the state that the Department of Illinois will be a leader amongst its peers this year and for years to come.

I would like to thank Commander Blackwell for this appointment, many of you may be wondering why a Past State Commander would be a Chief of Staff, the answer is simple... I have no political aspirations to move up in the Department, as the Commanders right hand I can provide just, fair, and unbiased feedback on situations that may arise, and I am able to give that feedback with the unique perspective of having sat in the "hot seat" before.

I look forward to serving you, our Department and as the Commander's motto states, our community with resilience.



**Robert Welch**  
*Chief of Staff*

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Post 2791-16

# STATE INSPECTOR



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*Inspector*

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Phone: 618-830-9142

Email:  
CStubbsVFW@gmail.com

Post 7710-14

Congratulations to all the new Commanders and Quartermasters serving at the District and Post levels.

As stated in the National Manual of Procedures, ARTICLE V - DEPARTMENTS, Section 518: "The Department Inspector shall ensure that each District, County Council (if applicable), and Post are inspected in accordance with Department and National guidelines."

Those responsibilities and requirements are as follows but not limited to:

- Books and records are inspected.
- That the National, Department, District, County Council and Post by-laws be enforced.
- That the opening and closing of meetings, the order of business and rules of order be followed and the initiation of recruits and other ceremonies are conducted as prescribed by the by-laws, Manual of Procedure and Ritual.
- A report on the decorum of meetings.
- Submission of a detailed report concerning the Post or District finances, records and property at time of inspection.
- Make sure that the District and Post has filed it's 990 Form direct with the IRS.
- Ensure the District and Post is bonded in an amount sufficient to cover it's liquid assets.

These are the guidelines and procedures in addition to those items listed on the Post Inspection Forms that will be followed with all inspections. When notified of a scheduled inspection, please be sure that all necessary records are prepared, up to date and readily available for your inspector. There should be no reason for the absence of any record on the day of your inspection. Ensure all Trustee audits are filed on time.

Commanders and Quartermasters should ensure that their Posts are incorporated under the laws of the State of Illinois. This removes the members and the Post Officers from the liabilities and debts of the post in unforeseen litigation.

Adjutants at all levels should ensure that proof of eligibility for all officers, both elected and appointed is on file pursuant to Section 216. Ensure all Ceremonial Rifle Deeds of Gift, Storage Certification, Notarized Annual Utilization Certification and Tri-Annual Inventories are current and accurate in accordance with National VFW Policy and Instructions for Conditional Donation of Ceremonial Rifles, Ammunition & Military Equipment and U.S. Army AR 700-131, Chapter 6, Loan, Lease, and Donation of Army Materiel.

Trustees should pay particular attention to their duties prescribe in Section 218 of the National By-laws.

## DISTRICT COMPENSATION AND INCENTIVE PROGRAM

Each District will be compensated at the time the District becomes 100 percent inspected and approved by the Department Inspector. If 100 percent completed by December 31, District will receive \$20 per Post. If 100 percent completed by April 30, District will receive \$10 per Post. District will receive no Compensation or Incentive if 100 percent complete after April 30.

## STATE SERVICE OFFICE

The State of Illinois VFW Department Service Office is headquartered at the VA Regional Office in Chicago. The Department Service Office is organized under the authority of the Department By-Laws and provides services under the supervision of the Department Veterans Service Committee. All Service Officers employed by the VFW of Illinois are members of the VFW. All Service Officers and Claims Consultants are accredited by the VA through the VFW and perform their duties in accordance with the National Policy and Procedure Manual of the VFW National Veterans Service.

The mission of the Department Service Office is to assist all veterans of Illinois, their dependents, and their survivors in the pursuit of all benefits administered by the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to which they may be entitled. This mission is pursued through the development of supportive relationships with County Veteran Assistance Commission (VAC) Offices, Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs (IDVA) Offices, VA Social Workers, and a state-wide network of volunteer VFW Post and District Service Officers. From these sources claims for benefits are received, prepared, and submitted to the VA.

The Department Service Office is under the direction of the Department Service Officer, Sean D. Conner, an Iraq War Veteran. Currently, the Service Office staff includes four Assistant Department Service Officers, two working in Chicago, one stationed at the Marion VAMC, and one stationed at the Danville VAMC. We also have a part-time Assistant Department Service Officer in the Metro St Louis area. Field service coverage is also provided at various locations as indicated in the schedule listed below. The Regional Office staff includes one Claims Consultant and one clerical support staff member.

Activities of the Service Office staff include case management of claims submitted to the VA from all state-wide sources to include representation for appeals pending at the Board of Veterans Appeals. Staff members provide training to Post and District Service Officers and participate in training seminars for IDVA and VAC staff and local volunteers. The staff also provides guest speakers on issues pertaining to VA benefits to VFW Posts and Districts, local civic groups, military Reserve and National Guard units, and college student organizations upon request.

The hours of operation and contact information for the Department Service Office are listed below. Members with questions about existing claims or requesting information about VA benefits are encouraged to contact the Department Service Office during hours of operation or by e-mail.



**Sean Conner  
and George**  
*State Service Officer*

1900 E Main St  
Bldg 98, Room 1012  
Danville, IL 61832

Phone: 217-554-4502

Fax: 217-554-4361

E-mail: [sean.conner@va.gov](mailto:sean.conner@va.gov)

**Department Service Office Contact Information**

VFW Service Office  
2122 West Taylor St., Chicago, IL 60612  
Room 105  
Phone: 312-980-4284  
Fax: 312-980-4680

Email: [vso@vfwil.org](mailto:vso@vfwil.org)  
Website link: [www.vfwilserviceoffice.com](http://www.vfwilserviceoffice.com)

Office Telephone Hours  
Monday - Thursday  
8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.  
Friday 8 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Office Walk-In Hours  
Monday - Thursday  
8 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.  
12:30 p.m. to 3 p.m.  
Friday 8 a.m. to 12 p.m.

**VFW Service Office Staff**

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Assistant Department Service Officer  
Danville VA Medical Center  
[richard.taylor16@va.gov](mailto:richard.taylor16@va.gov)

**Field Office/Outreach Locations**

**-Southern Illinois-**

**Marion VA Medical Center**  
AmVets Building, Room 110  
2401 W. Main St.,  
Marion, IL 62959  
Phone: 618-997-5311 ext. 158230  
FAX: 618-997-8219  
Monday-Friday, 8:00 am - 3:00 pm

**O'Fallon VFW Post 805**  
Every Tuesday  
223 West 1st St.  
O'Fallon, IL 62269  
618-624-6575  
11 a.m. to 7 p.m.

**Metro East Vet Center**  
Every Wednesday  
228 West Pointe Drive  
Swansea, IL  
8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

**-Central Illinois-**

**Illiana Health Care System**

Danville VA Medical Center  
Bldg 104, Room 127  
1900 E. Main St., Danville, IL 61832  
Phone: 217-554-4502  
FAX: 217-554-4361  
Monday-Friday, 8:00 am – 3:00 pm

**Mattoon VA Clinic**

First Tuesday of the month  
501 Lake Land Blvd., Mattoon IL  
9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

**Dow Stepp Memorial Post 5975**

First Thursday of the month  
112 North 5th, Marshall, IL  
9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

**Crawford County Post 4549**

Second Tuesday of the month  
712 E. Main St., Robinson, IL  
9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

**Decatur VA Clinic**

Second Thursday of the month  
792 North Sunnyside Rd., Decatur, IL  
9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

**Peoria VA Clinic**

Third Tuesday of the month  
7717 N Orange Prairie Rd., Peoria IL  
9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

**Busey-Fletcher-Stillwell Post 630**

Third Thursday of the month  
1303 E. Main St., Urbana, IL  
9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

**Bloomington VA Clinic**

Fourth Tuesday of the month  
207 Hamilton Rd, Bloomington IL  
9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

**Springfield VA Clinic**

Fourth Thursday of the month  
5850 South 6th St., Springfield, IL  
9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

**-Chicagoland-**

**Hines VA Medical Center**

Every Thursday & Third Friday of the month  
5000 S. 5th Ave., Hines, IL 60141  
Building 1, Room 109  
Phone: 708-202-2562  
9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

**Frisbie Senior Center**

First Monday of the month  
52 E. Northwest Hwy., Des Plaines, IL 60016  
9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

**Judd Kendall Post 3873**

First Tuesday of the month  
908 Jackson Ave., Naperville, IL 60540  
10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

**Benjamin O. Davis Post 311**

Every Monday & Tuesday and First & Second  
Wednesday of the month  
(except 1st Monday & Tuesday)  
22341 S. Governors Hwy., Richton Park, IL 60471  
Phone: 708-679-0995  
9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

**Chicago Vet Center**

First Friday of the month  
8658 S. Sacramento Ave., Chicago, IL 60652  
9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

**Aurora Vet Center**

Second & Fourth Friday of the month  
750 Shoreline Dr. #150, Aurora, IL 60504  
9 a.m. to 2 p.m.



# MEMBERSHIP



**Mathius Carter**  
*Chairman*

1113 Sagebrush Trail  
Cary, IL 60013

Phone: (847) 404-2668

Email: mathius.carter@yahoo.com

Post 12014-5

## 2025-2026 Membership Program: Building a Stronger VFW Together

### Department Membership Team (DMT) Mission:

The DMT is made up of all districts in the Department. Each District representative will be working with the Chairman throughout the year. The DMT is the vital bridge between our community and the VFW, serving as the welcoming face and primary point of contact for new and prospective members. We're dedicated to fostering growth and engagement within our ranks.

### DMT Responsibilities:

#### Communication & Collaboration:

- Establish and maintain clear communication channels between DMT members, Post Commanders, and community leaders.
- Serve as a liaison, ensuring seamless information flow and collaborative efforts.

#### Community Engagement & Outreach:

- Proactively identify and pursue community outreach opportunities to raise awareness of the VFW's mission.
- Cultivate and strengthen relationships with local businesses, schools, municipal agencies, and other key stakeholders.

#### Reporting & Accountability:

- Provide regular and detailed reports of all membership activities to the Department Membership Chairman.

#### Post Level Support:

- Provide guidance and support to posts on new and reinstated member integration.
- Answer questions such as "What is your responsibility at the Post level?" and "You got a new/reinstated member, now what?"

### New Member Integration Timeline: Turning Recruits into Engaged Members

#### Week 1: Welcome & Confirmation

- Contact the new member to confirm receipt of their VFW

membership ID.

- If yes: Congratulate them and extend a warm invitation to the next Post meeting for formal induction.
- If no: Verify the ID's status and follow up within 5 days.

#### Month 1: Building Connections

- Inquire about their first Post visit.
- If yes: Gather feedback and inform them about volunteer opportunities and upcoming events.
- If no: Schedule a personal meeting and highlight relevant community-focused events.
- Ensure they are receiving Post email updates and are engaged with Post social media.

#### Year 1: Celebrating Membership

- Solicit feedback on their first year in the VFW.
- Reinforce their value and importance to the organization.
- Provide them with their renewal date.
- Outline the benefits and purchase options for Life Membership.



**Strategic Membership Drives: "Membership PUSH"**

- Four times a year, Posts and Districts will participate in coordinated membership drives to maximize recruitment and engagement. These drives are designed to be cost-effective and community focused.

**Patriots Day Push (September 11th Weekend):**

- Engage in local Patriots Day events, such as presenting colors at high school football games.
- Utilize these events for recruitment and to reignite interest in the Post.

**Veterans Day Push (November 11th Weekend):**

- Leverage local media to share veterans' stories.
- Participate in parades and connect with new recruits.

**Christmas Push:**

- Promote Life and Legacy Memberships as meaningful gifts.
- Support local initiatives like Toys for Tots.

**April Open House:**

- Host a public event to showcase the VFW's contributions.
- Highlight programs like Patriots Pen/Voice of Democracy, Teacher of the Year, First Responder awards, and community service activities.
- Consider a community dinner.
- If you do not have a post home, work with other posts in the area, or find a community space.

**Important Note:** All membership activities should be documented in your monthly Activities Report. "One Team, One Mission!"

**Membership Program Awards: Recognizing Excellence**

- **101% Membership Achievement:** Posts achieving 101% membership receive a banner and entered into a \$200 drawing.

- **Top Recruiters:**

Top 10 recruiters receive a 2025-2026 Commanders Polo with Membership Team distinction.

- Top recruiter receives a 2025-2026 Commanders Polo with Membership Team Captain distinction.

**District Recruitment:**

- The District with the most recruiters (5+ recruits/reinstatements) receives a certificate from Commander.

**Post Recruitment (by Division):**

- The Post in each division with most recruiters (2+ recruits/reinstatements) receives a certificate from Commander.

**Membership Divisions (Based on June 30, 2025 National Membership Report):**

Division 1: 950+ members  
Division 2: 750-950 members  
Division 3: 356-749 members  
Division 4: 246-355 members  
Division 5: 185-245 members  
Division 6: 143-184 members  
Division 7: 112-142 members  
Division 8: 88-111members  
Division 9: 68-87 members  
Division 10: 51-67 members  
Division 11: Under 50 members

**Award Verification:**

- All awards are based on National Membership MemStats and National Membership Department records.
- To receive recruiter credit, include your NAME and VFW MEMBERSHIP ID NUMBER on the membership application.
- Post Quartermasters must accurately record recruiter information when submitting new and reinstated members.



## Illinois Membership Program 2025-2026

**Eugene Blackwell**  
State Commander

*"Serving Our Community With Resilience"*

### ILLINOIS MEMBERSHIP PROGRAM 2025-2026

**VFW MEMBERSHIP MISSION:** Our mission is to sustain and strengthen our organization for current and future Veterans well into the next century. To achieve this, Posts, Districts, and State leadership must collaborate effectively to retain existing members, recruit new ones, and reinstate those whose memberships have lapsed. District and State leaders should spearhead a well-coordinated membership campaign, complementing other vital VFW programs.

State Headquarters stands ready to provide the technical, logistical, and financial support necessary for successful retention and recruitment efforts. Additionally, our National organization offers valuable incentives to help us meet these objectives. It is our collective responsibility to leverage these resources and execute a robust Membership Program to ensure lasting success.

**VFW MEMBERSHIP VISION:** Our Membership Program starts with the foundation of last year's accomplishments. From this strong starting point, we aim to grow—if not in numbers, then in unity and purpose. Together, we must welcome Veterans and their families from all backgrounds and conflicts, creating a community that celebrates the diverse experiences and perspectives they bring. There is no room for bias or barriers here, if someone qualifies, let us embrace them as part of our family.

True and lasting success lies in our ability to retain members, reconnect with those we've lost, and continually bring new Veterans into our fold. The potential is immense, with Veterans of all ages still eligible to join. Yet, our focus must remain clear: Post-9/11 Veterans are the key to our future, and we must ensure they see a home within our ranks. Let us also shine a spotlight on our female Veterans, whose contributions are essential as they represent the fastest-growing membership group.

By working together, we can build a thriving, inviting organization that not only honors our past but also secure a bright future for generations to come.

**OUR GOAL THIS YEAR IS 101%**

Our membership numbers speak volumes when we advocate for Veterans' rights at the National or State level. Strong membership sends a powerful message: the VFW is a thriving, influential organization committed to making a difference. Each of us holds the key to that strength. By recruiting just one new member, we can see remarkable growth. Imagine the impact—if every member brings in one recruit, we will see significant progress within a single year. Repeating this effort year after year could lead us to surpass 50,000 members once again. Success starts at the Post level. Every one of us is a recruiter for our post and the organization. Tell other Veterans who are qualified to join the Veterans of Foreign Wars about us. Invite community members to our post or events to increase knowledge about what we do in the community. Share about our scholarship programs. Share what the Auxiliary is doing. Conduct Buddy Poppy and recruiting events in the community.

Let's take to heart the inspiring words of our National Commander in Chief:

Commanders, this will be the longest year, with the shortest days. It will test you in more ways than you can imagine. If it were easy, everyone would do it. Membership is tremendously important in our organization, but it is not the only thing. When you go through your year, change what you can, do the right things and leave the rest. Prioritize and organize.

I have three main focuses: Advocacy, service officers and our POW/MIA mission. They all tie together, and it is what the VFW was founded on. They impact fellow veterans and their families lives. Be the change for a fellow veteran. Honor those who came before us. If we promote these three things, I know we will evoke more interest, which will bring more members.

101 percent membership is our goal. The OIF/OEF community is ready to be involved. Let them know what we do, how we can change lives, and how they can feel a part of the military community again. Tell our story, tell your story!!!

Have no regrets, don't take anything personally, never assume anything....be the transformation to the future! Honor the dead, by helping the living!

This year, you'll find clear guidelines for hosting membership drives and events. From ordering brochures, posters, and other materials through the Membership Recruiting Brochure Order Form in OMS at [vfw.org](http://vfw.org), to accessing resources for Post Development, Membership Campaigns, and Mentorship in the Training & Support Section, we have all the tools needed to succeed.

Additionally, promotional assets like radio spots, advertisements, public service announcements, and media kits can be found in the Media Room on [vfw.org](http://vfw.org). Whether part of a standalone effort or in conjunction with other events, a membership drive is an invaluable opportunity to connect with potential members and guide them through the application process.

Remember, all awards are based on the official membership numbers posted in the National Membership Report the morning after the cut-off date—so let's aim high and make every effort count. Together, we can build a legacy of strength and support for Veterans, ensuring our VFW continues to thrive.

## **MEMBERSHIP CHALLENGES**

Throughout the membership year, exciting Membership Challenges will be announced and shared, complete with incentives to recognize and reward Posts or Members who rise to the occasion. These challenges will be communicated via email and featured in the General Orders for the corresponding months.

## RECRUITING AWARDS

All members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars who sign up:

- Each Quarter, any member that has recruited 5 new or reinstated members for the year will be recognized at the Post level, receive a certificate and receive \$20
- Each Quarter, any member that has recruited 10 new or reinstated members for the year will be recognized at the district level, receive a certificate and receive \$30
- Each Quarter, any member that has recruited 15 new or reinstated members for the year will be recognized on the Department website, receive a certificate and receive \$40
- Each Quarter, any member that has recruited 25 new or reinstated members will be recognized on the Department website, receive a certificate, a VFW coin, and free registration at Convention or Conference
- 50 new or reinstated members will receive a personalized engraved plaque
- 75 new or reinstated members will receive a \$100 gift certificate to VFW Store
- 100 new or reinstated members by June 1, 2026, will be awarded \$500 to attend the 2026 National Convention. This award is transferable and will be presented to the winners at the National Convention.
- TOP Recruiter Award – The Top Recruiter in the State will receive a specially engraved trophy.

**Membership Trophy** – During each Council of Administration meeting the membership trophy will go to the district which has the highest membership percentage. This will be a traveling trophy (It will be determined by the percentages of the morning of the meeting)

- The district with the highest membership percentage on 6/30/2026 will receive a Top District 2025-2026 trophy for the district to commemorate the accomplishment.
- The District Commander will also receive a plaque to commemorate the accomplishment.
- The Post with the highest membership percentage on 6/30/2026 will receive a Top Post 2025-2026 plaque for the post to commemorate the accomplishment.

### Golden Pen Award

Posts that have completed all required tasks on the All-American Dashboard and are at 95% membership by 12/31/2025 will have their Quartermaster entered into a drawing for the Golden Pen Award. This award is an engraved pen set. It will be presented at the Winter Conference in February along with a \$100 Gift Certificate to the VFW Store (this is only valid for posts who have turned their bonding paperwork in audits in correctly and on time)

## MEMBERSHIP AWARD

- Posts achieving at least 99% membership by Dec 31, 2025, will receive a special certificate from the State Commander \$100
- Posts achieving at least 101% membership by Feb 28, 2026, will receive \$150 check for a post membership celebration meal recognizing the posts efforts.
- Posts achieving at least 101% membership by June 30, 2026, will receive 100% Membership Pennant

## POST AWARD

The Post having the largest increase in Legacy Life Membership, with a minimum of 4 new Legacy Life Memberships by April 30, 2026, will receive a \$100 gift certificate from the National VFW Store.

## **DISTRICT AWARD**

Districts who are 99% in membership by February 1, 2026, will receive a \$250 cash award. Districts who are 101% in membership by April 1, 2026, will receive an additional \$250 cash award.

(Up to \$500 can be awarded to the district)

## **CRAMER-SODEN AWARD**

The District Commander who has the highest numerical increase from 2024-2025 year to their 2025- 2026 year and their membership is 100% or greater will be the recipient of the Cramer-Soden Award. This plaque is sponsored by our fellow Illinois Past National Commanders-in-Chief, George R. Cramer, and the late Ray R. Soden. The deadline for this award is April 30, 2026.

## **ALL-STATE AWARD PROGRAM**

The 2025-2026 All-State Program is designed to recognize exceptional leadership and teamwork. Not only in Membership but in overall Post/District development and VFW Programs. If a Post qualifies to be "All-state," ALL Post members will be recognized for this achievement because: **THEY ARE A TEAM!**

- The program runs through June 15, 2026
- To receive All-State awards at the State Convention, the deadline for completion of All-State criteria is April 30, 2026.

## **ALL-STATE AWARD PROGRAM CRITERIA**

Membership greater than 101%

Posts must hold 1 membership drive/event and submit report to Program Reporting Dashboard

Posts must be 100% reported on the Department Programs Reporting Dashboard ..

Posts must have submitted all 4 quarterly Trustees Audits and audits were approved.

Posts must be in compliance with all questions on the National and Department Inspection Sheets (for example: a post that is not incorporated shall not be eligible until proof is provided that they are complying)

Posts must order at least 3 poppies per member with a minimum of 1,000 poppies.

Posts must have one nomination for each of the programs of Patriot's Pen and Voice of Democracy submitted to District for judging. Donations to Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen as stated in this manual will be accepted if a Post does not have a nomination.

Posts must have one nomination in any of the following programs: Teacher of the Year or Public Safety (police, fire, EMT, dispatcher, EOD). Donations to any of these programs DO NOT receive credit towards All State Awards.

Posts must have representations at all properly called District Conventions or meetings.

Posts must have representation at least one of the town hall meetings. (Roll Call will be taken)

Posts must make a \$50 donation to the Service Office Support Program (SOS). This is separate from the Red, White, and Blue Program donations.

New Posts need a minimum of 35 members to achieve All State.

## **ALL-STATE POST AWARDS**

There will be no limits on the number of Posts that can achieve All-State status.

All-State Post Commanders will receive: All-State Post Commander's Cap and a Distinguished Service Lapel Pin.

All-State Post Quartermasters may purchase an All-State Post Quartermaster's Cap and will receive a Distinguished Service Lapel Pin.

All-State Post Members may purchase an All-State Team Post Member Cap.

## **ALL-STATE DISTRICT CRITERIA**

- Membership greater than 101%
- Districts must have 100% of Posts inspected and the inspections must be cleared up by the State Inspector by April 30, 2026
- Districts must hold a minimum of one School of Instruction and submit a report to State Headquarters.
- Districts must hold or participate in 1 membership drive/event and submit report to Programs Reporting Dashboard
- Districts must submit 1 of the following to Department Headquarters for judging.
  - Patriot's Pen
  - Voice of Democracy
  - Teacher of the Year
  - Public Safety of the Year (Police, Firefighter, EMT, Dispatcher, EOD)
- Districts must forward a record of the Roll Call of Officers and Posts of each District meeting to State Headquarters

## **ALL-STATE DISTRICT AWARD**

There will be no limits on the number of Districts that can achieve All-State status.

All-State District Commanders will receive: All-State Commander's Cap and a Distinguished Service Lapel Pin.





**Carol Whitmore**

Commander-in-Chief 2025-2026

## **NATIONAL MEMBERSHIP PROGRAM 2025-2026**

### Commander's Introduction

Carol Whitmore was elected Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. on Aug. 1, 2024, at the 125th VFW National Convention in Louisville, Kentucky.

Carol served in the U.S. Army from 1977 to 2013, earning her VFW eligibility by serving in Iraq. In recognition of her service, she received the Legion of Merit Medal, Bronze Star Medal, Army Commendation Medal (six), Army Achievement Medal, Good Conduct Medal, among many others.

She joined the VFW in 2012 at Post 9127 in Des Moines, Iowa, where she maintains her Gold Legacy Life membership. In 2022, she was elected as designee for National VFW Commander-in-Chief for the year 2025, becoming the first woman and first Iowan to hold the position.

## **MEMBERSHIP MISSION**

To build a strong organization through recruiting new members while retaining our current membership, building a solid foundation for the future. To assist in mentoring our leadership and members, coordinate programs to support our Posts, Districts, and Departments in their membership efforts, and to provide training for all levels of VFW membership.

## **ALL-AMERICAN PROGRAM**

The All-American program exists to recognize exceptional leadership and teamwork, authentic accomplishment in membership growth and VFW core programs.

## **ALL-AMERICAN POST CRITERIA**

- Membership must be at least 101%, based on adjusted prior year totals
- Post-Election Report must be submitted to National Headquarters and be in good standing
- Meet all the following Program Participation Criteria by Jan. 31, 2026:
  - Voice of Democracy - minimum of one entry advanced to District judging (Overseas Post can donate \$125 to National in lieu of entry)
  - Patriots Pen - minimum of one entry advanced to District judging (Overseas Post can donate \$125 to National in lieu of entry)
  - Donate to Veterans & Military Support Programs Services, minimum of \$125.
- Must participate in the VFW Day of Service event held during the month of May and registered at [todaysvfw.org/day-of-service/](https://todaysvfw.org/day-of-service/) no later than May 15. Participation may count as community service for All-American quarterly requirements. The event must meet certain criteria aimed at making a meaningful difference in the community. The criteria and more information can be found here: <https://todaysvfw.org/vfw-day-of-service-faq/>
- A Post must submit a community service report quarterly to their department for submission to the All-American Dashboard. The quarters are July-Sept, Oct-Dec, Jan-March, and April-June.
- Must purchase a minimum of 500 Buddy Poppies

## **ALL-AMERICAN POST AWARD**

All Posts that meet the listed criteria will receive an All-American Post Citation, Post Streamer and be recognized in the VFW magazine.

The Top 15 Posts in each Division will receive:

- All-American Post Commander's citation
- All-American Post Commander's Cap
- All-American Post Commander's badge
- All-American Post Commander's lapel pin

These awards for the top 15 Posts will be presented on stage at the 127th National Convention

The top five Post Commanders in each division will also be reimbursed for up to \$1,000 of travel/ lodging expenses for the 127th National Convention. The top two Post Commanders in each division will be named as Captain and Co-Captain of the All-American Team, and their caps will bear a special designation

## ALL-AMERICAN DISTRICT CRITERIA

- Membership must be at least 101%
- District Election Report must be submitted to National Headquarters.
- Meet all the following Program Participation criteria by Jan. 31, 2026:
  - o Voice of Democracy - minimum of one entry advanced to Department judging (Overseas Districts may donate \$125 to National in lieu of entry)
  - o Patriots Pen - minimum of one entry advanced to Department judging (Overseas Districts may donate \$125 to National in lieu of entry)

## ALL-AMERICAN DISTRICT AWARD

All Districts that meet the listed criteria will receive an All-American District Streamer, and All-American District Commander's Citation, and recognition in the VFW magazine.

In addition, the Top 10 Districts in each membership division will receive:

- All-American District Commander's Cap
- All-American District Commander's Badge
- All-American District Commander's lapel pin

These awards for the top 10 District Commanders will be presented on stage at the 127th National Convention

The top two District commanders in each division will also be reimbursed for up to \$1,000 of travel/ lodging expenses for the 127th VFW National Convention. The top two District Commanders in each division will be named as Captain and Co-Captain of the All-American Team, and their caps will bear a special designation.

## ALL-AMERICAN DEPARTMENT CRITERIA

- Membership must be at least 101%.
- Department must submit Department legislative chairman reports monthly through the Program dashboard tool.
- Must conduct two Membership recruiting events, report of these events must be submitted through the Program dashboard tool.
- Meet all the following Program Participation criteria by Jan. 31, 2026:
  - Voice of Democracy - An entry advanced to National judging
  - Patriots Pen - An entry advanced to National judging
  - Veterans & Military Support Programs - Must complete State/Department fundraiser and proceeds donated to Veterans & Military Support Programs, Kansas City, Mo.

## ALL-AMERICAN DEPARTMENT AWARD

- All-American Department streamer
- All-American Department Commander's citation
- All-American Department Commander's badge
- All-American Department Commander's cap
- All-American Department Commander's lapel pin
- Reimbursement for up to \$1,000 of travel/lodging expenses for the 127th National Convention

These awards will be presented on stage at the 127th National Convention

### All-American Notes:

Any member of a Post that is named as an All-American Post may purchase a All-American Post Member cap from the VFW Store after the 127th National Convention.

Post, District, and Department Quartermasters and Adjutants may purchase an All-American Post Member cap bearing their title. Quartermasters may also purchase an All-American Quartermaster pin from the VFW Store.

Donations made to replace Program Participation by eligible overseas Posts, Districts, or Departments as well as fundraising donations must be made through the All-American Dashboard, not through any other means.

## INDIVIDUAL RECRUITING AWARDS

- 1, 5, 10, 15 members recruited: recruiting pin
- 25 members recruited: Commander-in-Chief's Coin
- 50 members recruited: Commander-in-Chief backpack
- 75 members recruited: Commander-in-Chief's Medallion Set
- 100 members recruited: Century cap **or** \$50 VFW Store credit & Citation

Recruiting Awards will be sent out five times during the year to the Post, to be given out at a Post meeting to those members who have recruited new members. Mailings will take place near the end of October, January, March, May, and then after the end of the membership year.

## EARLY BIRD AWARD

The top two Posts in each division on Jan. 1, 2026, will each be awarded a \$1,000 gift certificate to the VFW Store.

## LEGACY LIFE MEMBERSHIP ACQUISITION

Each Post that achieves the cumulative benchmarks of 25, 50 and 75 Legacy Life Members will be awarded a Legacy Society Post Proclamation. Proclamations will be sent out to the Post along with recruiting awards throughout the year.

For each Post that achieves the distinctive benchmark of 100, 250, or 500 Legacy Life members by June 30th, 2026, their commander or Post representative will be reimbursed up to \$1,000 for travel / lodging for the National Convention, reserved seating at the 127th VFW National Convention joint opening session and a Legacy Society Post Proclamation presented at the National Convention.

## 101% MEMBERSHIP STREAMER

All Posts, Districts, and Departments that reach the goal of 101% membership based on adjusted prior year totals by June 30, 2026 or before will receive a distinctive streamer.

## DIVISIONAL RECRUITING CHALLENGE

The top two Posts in each membership division based on new and reinstated members according to the table below will receive a \$1,000 membership grant deposited into the Post's account.

| Division | Size     | New Member Quota                    |
|----------|----------|-------------------------------------|
| 1        | 951+     | At least 125 new/reinstated members |
| 2        | 750-950  | At least 120 new/reinstated members |
| 3        | 356-749  | At least 100 new/reinstated members |
| 4        | 246-355  | At least 75 new/reinstated members  |
| 5        | 185-245  | At least 60 new/reinstated members  |
| 6        | 143-184  | At least 50 new/reinstated members  |
| 7        | 112-142  | At least 40 new/reinstated members  |
| 8        | 88-111   | At least 30 new/reinstated members  |
| 9        | 68-87    | At least 20 new/reinstated members  |
| 10       | 51-67    | At least 15 new/reinstated members  |
| 11       | Under 50 | At least 10 new/reinstated members  |

## **DEPARTMENT ABOVE & BEYOND AWARD**

Each Department that exceeds the membership goal and reaches 102% membership on June 30, 2026 will receive a \$2,000 award deposited into the Department account. If the Department reaches 103% membership, the award will increase to \$4,000. If the Department reaches 104% or above in membership, the award will increase to \$7,500.

## **TOP DEPARTMENT RECRUITER**

The top recruiter in every Department as of June 30th, 2026 will receive a Commander's Medical Bag. A minimum of 25 new/reinstated members is required to win this award.

## **ELITE RECRUITER**

Any VFW member who signs up 250 or more new and/or reinstated members as of June 30th, 2026 will also be reimbursed for up to \$1,000 of travel/lodging expenses for the 127th VFW National Convention as well as a distinctive cap, citation, and name badge. In the event that an Elite Recruiter is already being reimbursed for travel/lodging from another award, a \$1,000 stipend will be issued at the 127th National Convention.

## **RECRUITER OF THE YEAR**

The Elite Recruiter who signs up the greatest number of new and/or reinstated members greater than 250 as of June 30th, 2026, will receive an additional \$1,000 stipend, reserved seating at the 127th VFW National Convention joint opening session, a distinctive cap, citation, and name badge, and the Commander-in-Chief's Crystal Eagle trophy.

## **LIFE MEMBER RECRUITER AWARD**

Any VFW member who recruits at least 50 new and/or reinstated Life members by June 30th, 2026 or before will receive a special citation from the Commander-in-Chief and a Recruiter Satchel with the Commander-in-Chief's logo.

## **NEW POST DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT GRANT**

For each new Post chartered the Department Quartermaster will receive a \$250 credit from the VFW Store to be used towards necessary materials for the new Post. Department Commanders and Quartermasters may apply for this grant directly through the National Membership Department.



## COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF'S CHALLENGE

To emphasize the importance of Life Membership as the backbone of our membership strength, the Commander-in-Chief is issuing the following challenge to all VFW Posts. Each quarter (July-September, October-December, January-March, April-June), Posts will accumulate points as follows:

- New Annual Member: 1 point
- Annual or Lapsed Member converts to Life Member: 5 points
- New Life Member: 10 points

Each quarter, the Post that leads their membership division in points will receive a special award designated by the Commander-in-Chief. In addition, at the end of the year every Post who has led their division in the challenges will be recognized at the 127th National Convention for their achievements.

## MEMBERSHIP NOTES AND RESOURCES

- Awards given to a Post may be transferred to any member of that Post.
- No more than one stipend will be awarded to an individual for a given event.
- Posts, Districts, and Departments must reach a minimum of 101% membership to qualify for any award. This does not apply to the Early Bird Award.
- NOTE: Cash stipends paid by the VFW will be reported to the Internal Revenue Service on Form 1099 if the total of payments made to you during any calendar year equals \$600.00 or more. The reimbursement you receive from the VFW will be deemed by the IRS to be taxable income. Since the circumstances of each individual are different, it is recommended that you consult your tax advisor to determine the effect these payments may have on your personal tax situation. It is your responsibility to keep receipts and other records as you and your accountant and/or tax advisor deem necessary in order to document your expenditures.
- Employees and officers of the VFW National Headquarters are excluded from receiving stipends or awards in this program unless otherwise authorized by the Adjutant General and/or Quartermaster General.
- Awardees receiving reimbursement for travel and lodging costs for the 127th National Convention must provide receipts to the VFW Membership Department no later than August 31st, 2026 in order to receive reimbursement. Reimbursements shall be made by ACH deposit.

## PUBLIC RELATIONS/ILLINOIS VFW NEWS



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Post 3455-15

One of the best kept secrets of the Veterans of Foreign Wars is the great works our Posts, Districts and the Department does in support of the communities in which we live and work and on behalf of our military service members, veterans and families.

How our Posts and Districts market themselves within their communities and with local media organizations could set the stage for success in the years to come.

Media Advisories, Calendar Notices, Social Media posts and News Releases can serve to communicate the message of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, promoting the good work of our Posts, Districts and Departments, and engaging the communities in which we live and work.

Public Relations not only works to improve our credibility and accessibility, but also aids in marketing our organization to potential members, donors and supporters. Today, Public Relations is much more than just distributing press releases. It's about taking advantage of a number of ways to best engage, educate and influence our audience.

When developing your Public Relations program, you will need to define your objectives and decide what you want to accomplish.

- Determine your audience. Who do you want to reach with your message? Different VFW activities appeal to different segments of the community.
- Define your message. Sticking to one message is essential. However, your message may be presented in several ways through various outlets. Determine the best way to present your message for the various outlets.
- Develop a strategy. How can you best accomplish your goals? Look at the dynamics of your community. Build a relationship with the media in your area. Keep an up-to-date list of contacts for each outlet. You may have better results if you have one person at each news media outlet as your go to contact. Become the best source of information in your community on patriotic and veterans' issues.
- Make your Post, District and Department visible and active on social media.

From time to time you may need to evaluate your strategy. Listen carefully to feedback from members and officers, members of the community and the media. Take this information and fine tune your strategy, if necessary. Just remember developing a good public relations takes time and commitment.

There ways to promote your Post, District and the Department within the community. Media advisories, News Releases, and Social Media Posts are some of the most important ways you can promote what the organization is doing within your community. If you need help in developing a Media Advisory or writing a News Release, please contact me. I will be glad to answer questions or offer suggestions.

**The Illinois VFW News** is the official publication of the Illinois Veterans of Foreign Wars. In its current printed format, the Illinois VFW News is printed and mailed in September, December, March and June. The Illinois VFW News is also uploaded on our website.

Articles, news, and other items for the *Illinois VFW News* can be submitted via e-mail. If you do not have access to a computer, you can also mail the information to the editor at the above address. If sending via U.S. mail, please include name and telephone number of the person submitting the item; type or print news item legibly; and send original photographs. The deadline for submitting items will be the 1st of the Month preceding publication, but is subject to change.

### 2025-2026 State Publications Contest

Editors of District and Post newsletters are invited to enter one issue of their publication in the 2025-2026 State of Illinois Publications Contest. All entries must be provided as a paper copy and mailed to either the editor at the above address, or to State Headquarters. The entry must have been published between January 1, 2025 and December 31, 2025.

Publications will be judged using the following categories:

- Post Publications published 1-4 times per year
- Post Publications published 5 or more times per year
- District Publications published 1-4 times per year
- District Publications published 5 or more times per year

Editors of post and district publications are responsible for submitting their own entry to the National Publications Contest.

State Publications Contest first place winners will receive a beautifully engraved plaque. Awards will be given out at the State Convention in June 2026.

An independent panel will judge all entries in the Publication Contest. Publications sent to State Headquarters for inclusion on the website will not be considered entered into the State Publications Contest. It is the responsibility of the newsletter editors to choose, and submit, one publication into the contest.

All entries **must** include the following:

- Name of Newsletter
- Editor's name, mailing address, email address, and telephone number
- Frequency of publication (1-4 times per year or 5 or more times per year).

All entries must be received not later than **February 28, 2026**.

### Media Professional of the Year

Posts and Districts are invited to nominate a Media Professional in your community for the State of Illinois News Media Professional of the Year competition. There is no entry form - please type a one-page nomination letter highlighting how your nominee has best told the VFW story or your Post's or District's work in your community. There are three categories - print, radio, and television. You may also include newspaper clippings and/or weblinks with your nomination. The deadline for nominations is **April 30, 2026**. The Media Professional of the Year will be recognized at the Illinois State Convention in June. All nominations should be mailed to State Headquarters.

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