

ILLINOIS

COMMANDER'S LEADERSHIP MANUAL



ALL IN, ALL THE TIME

ROBERT BAILEY, STATE COMMANDER, 2026-2027

NATIONAL COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF 2026-2027

CORY GEISLER

“ONE TEAM, ONE MISSION, VETERANS FIRST”



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 Robert Bailey.

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 2026-2027 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 *All In, All The Time* 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

Springfield, Illinois 62711

Phone: (217) 529-6688 • Fax: (217) 546-3415

E-mail: vfwil@vfwil.org • State Website: <http://www.vfwil.org>

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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 and Leaders of the Department of Illinois,

Welcome to the 2026–2027 administrative year. As we stand on the threshold of a new chapter for the Department of Illinois Veterans of Foreign Wars, I am profoundly honored to serve alongside you. The manual you hold in your hands is more than a collection of rules, dates, and administrative guidelines—it is your roadmap to operational excellence, structural health, and impactful service.

Our mission this year is driven by a singular, unyielding focus: **“All In, All the Time.”** Leadership in the VFW is not a title; it is a continuous commitment to the veterans who rely on us, the communities that look to us for strength, and the legacy we are charged to protect. Being “All In” means looking at our Posts, Districts, and Department programs with a sharp eye for accountability, transparency, and growth.

To achieve this, our focus this year rests on three critical pillars:

- **Strict Operational Compliance:** True leadership begins with organizational integrity. We must ensure absolute adherence to the National Bylaws, the Manual of Procedure, and our statutory responsibilities. From timely Election Reports to sound financial reporting, our compliance is the bedrock that allows our advocacy to stand strong.
- **Decisive and Transparent Communication:** A leadership team is only as strong as its connection to the field. We are implementing structured internal communication protocols to ensure every leader is informed, aligned, and equipped to execute operational orders.
- **Aggressive Membership Recruitment and Engagement:** Growth is the lifeblood of our organization. We must be relentless in our recruitment and retention efforts, ensuring every eligible veteran knows they have a home, a purpose, and a voice in the Department of Illinois.

This manual provides the essential tools, program criteria, and award structures—from our youth scholarship deadlines to our community outreach initiatives—designed to help your Post and District thrive. Use it daily. Treat it as the foundational text for your leadership team.

The challenges ahead of us require steady hands and dedicated hearts. I challenge each of you to push past the status quo, demand excellence of yourselves and your officers, and approach every day of this ensuing year with an “All In, All the Time” mindset.

Thank you for your leadership, your dedication, and your unwavering service to our fellow veterans. Let’s get to work.



Robert Bailey
State Commander

3300 Constitution Drive
Springfield, IL 62791-3206

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Website: www.vfwil.org

STATE ADJUTANT



Scott Swinford
State Adjutant

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Website: www.vwil.org

Thank You to Commander Bailey 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.

We have made great strides the past year, both in audits and helping struggling Posts get back on their feet. Unfortunately, some of you still struggle with audits and we have lost a few more Posts. If you are struggling, please contact us, the earlier we get help to you the greater the odds of a positive outcome.

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 by being "All in, All the time". There continues to be challenges within our Department and the staff and I stand ready to assist you. I implore you to reach out to us if you have any questions or if you are considering making changes at the Post level, such as changes to meeting time/date/location, sale or purchase of property, updating By-Laws etc.

We are also making changes at State Headquarters to improve our communication with Posts and Districts. We need your help there! Please make sure that election reports contain accurate emails for all officers. Also please, if you are not currently receiving newsletters please contact Heather at admin@vwil.org, this is the best way for us to keep Posts and members "in the loop". We will be sending out information on who to contact for what after the National Convention.

We are very excited about the State website update project. More to come on that as well.

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 designed to 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. The instructions for Dashboard reporting have changed significantly, please read them. They are available on the State website.

We can't forget about membership; members accomplish our mission! Our goals for this year are bit different from recent years but are attainable. We lost over 1,300 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 Headquarters receives in per capita membership payments.

I look forward to working with each and every one of you to further our goal of "All In, All the Time"

CHIEF OF STAFF

First and foremost, I want to extend my sincere gratitude to Commander Bailey for the honor of serving as your Chief of Staff for the 2026-2027 term. I also want to offer my warmest congratulations to all the newly elected and appointed officers at the Department, District, and Post levels. I am incredibly eager to collaborate with each of you as we build the future of our Department.

I believe an effective Chief of Staff brings deep experience and knowledge to the table, but more importantly, brings a willingness to continuously learn. None of us have all the answers, and having a growth mindset means never being afraid to say, "I don't know—but I will find out." I view my role as a dynamic asset for every Post and District in Illinois.

To truly maximize our impact, we must operate as a unified front. When we put aside trivial differences and personal politics, we unlock our true potential. We must work together seamlessly to be **All In All The Time**.

"Knowledge is power. Information is liberating. Education is the premise of progress in every society, in every family." – Kofi Annan

To keep the VFW thriving, we have a responsibility to actively mentor, counsel, and develop our peers for future leadership roles. Every member should have a strong grasp of both our veteran support programs and our operational logistics.

To proactively support this goal, we are launching targeted training breakout sessions this year for various elected and appointed positions. Additionally, we will host four regional Commanders Calls throughout the State.

I highly encourage **all** members to attend as many of these sessions as possible. This training is designed to sharpen our collective understanding of:

- VFW program guidelines and critical deadlines
- Navigating and utilizing the digital dashboard
- Accessing vital resources and identifying key points of contact

The VFW evolves every single year, and we have a collective obligation to evolve with it. Through continuous training and proactive mentorship, we will hold each other to a higher standard of accountability. The outdated mindsets of "I didn't know" or "That's how we've always done it" will no longer serve us.

Relying solely on how things were done in the past leaves our Posts vulnerable. When a Post struggles to pass an inspection, it is often due to overlooked details. A fundamental rule of thumb for this year is to **assume that everything matters**.

Inspections are not a tool for punishment; they are a health check for our success. We will prioritize completing inspections early in the year so we can immediately identify and correct deficiencies. Waiting until the final hour only hurts our comrades. For a Post to make a difference, it must first be healthy and stable.

Let's stop resisting the work that needs to be done. Instead, let's transform our Department into a massive, collaborative think tank, ensuring we remain the powerhouse Veteran Service Organization we have always been.

Lean on your comrades, your appointed officers, and your elected leaders. We all share the same goal: we want the absolute best for the VFW, and we want Illinois to lead the nation. As your Chief of Staff, my door is always open, and I am ready to support you in any way necessary.

I am incredibly excited to see what we will achieve together this year, and I look forward to the camaraderie and fun we will have while being **All In All The Time!**



David Long
Chief of Staff

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STATE INSPECTOR



Cathy Stubbs
Inspector

420 Stone River Rd
Belleville, IL 62221

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 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 five VA Accredited Assistant Department Service Officers. You can find two working in Chicago, one stationed at the Marion VAMC, one stationed at the Danville VAMC, and 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 Chicago VA Regional Office staff includes an Accredited Claims Consultant, who serves as our Regional Office Manager.

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 Benefits Advisors 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**
Director of Veterans Service

2122 West Taylor St.
Room 105
Chicago, IL 60612

Phone: 872-212-4502
E-mail: sean.conner@va.gov

Department Service Office Contact Information

VFW Service Office, Located in the Chicago VA Regional Office
2122 West Taylor St., Chicago, IL 60612
Room 105
Phone: 312-980-4284
Fax: 312-980-4680
Email: vso@vfwil.org
Website link: 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

Sean Conner
Marine Corps, Iraq
Department Service Officer
Chicago VA Regional Office
sean.conner@va.gov

Tyler Lybarger
Air Force, Iraq/Afghanistan
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Assistant Department Service Officer
Danville VA Medical Center
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Craig Koch
Marine Corps, Desert Storm
Assistant Department Service Officer
craig.koch@va.gov

Grabiela Salgado
Claims Consultant/Office Manager
Chicago Regional Office
grabiela.salgado@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
Every Friday
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.
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
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.



NO ONE DOES MORE FOR VETERANS.

The Department of Illinois VFW Veteran Service Office will be doing outreach at the following locations;

- **Benjamin O. Davis Post 311, VFW** EVERY MONDAY & TUESDAY and FIRST & SECOND WEDNESDAY 9am-4pm
 - 22341 Governors Hwy, Richton Park, IL

(except 1st Monday & Tuesday)
- **Hines VA** EVERY THURSDAY & THIRD FRIDAY 9am-3pm
 - 5000 5th Ave, Bldg 1, Rm 109 Hines, IL
- **Frisbie Senior Center** THE FIRST MONDAY 9am-2pm
 - 52 E Northwest Hwy, Des Plaines, IL
- **Judd Kendall Post 3873, VFW** THE FIRST TUESDAY 10am-2pm
 - 908 W. Jackson Ave, Naperville, IL
- **Chicago Vet Center** THE FIRST FRIDAY 9am-3pm
 - 8658 S Sacramento Ave, Chicago, IL
- **Aurora Vet Center** THE SECOND & FOURTH FRIDAY 9am-2pm
 - 750 Shoreline Dr #150, Aurora, IL

During these outreach days we can provide;

- assistance in filing for disability compensation
- pension and death benefits assistance
- information on rehabilitation and education programs
- links to employment and training programs
- requests for hearings before the VA and the Board of Veterans Appeals to present oral arguments
- information on other benefits for eligible Veterans provided by local and state agencies

*Unless otherwise noted

*Closed all federal holidays

For further information or questions, please contact us at; VSO@VFWIL.ORG

Offices located at;

VA Regional Office, 2122 W. Taylor St., Rm 105, Chicago, IL 60612 ·Phone: (312)980-4284

Danville VAMC, 1900 E. Main St., Danville, IL 61832 ·Phone: (217)554-4502

Marion VAMC, 2401 W. Main St., Marion, IL 62959 ·Phone: (618)997-5311

Version 3.1.2024



The Department of Illinois VFW Veteran Service Office will be doing outreach at the following locations;

- **Mattoon VA Clinic** **EVERY FRIDAY**
 - 501 Lake Land Blvd., Mattoon IL from 0900-1400
- **Dow Stepp Memorial Post 5975, VFW** the **FIRST THURSDAY** of every month
 - 112 North 5th St., Marshall IL from 0900-1400
- **Crawford County Post 4549, VFW** the **SECOND TUESDAY** of every month
 - 712 E. Main St., Robinson, IL from 0900-1400
- **Decatur VA CBOC** the **SECOND THURSDAY** of every month
 - 792 North Sunnyside Rd., Decatur IL from 0900-1400
- **Busey-Fletcher-Stillwell Post 630, VFW** the **THIRD THURSDAY** of every month
 - 1303 E. Main St., Urbana, IL from 0900-1400
- **Bloomington VA Clinic** the **FOURTH TUESDAY** of every month
 - 207 Hamilton Rd., Bloomington IL from 0900-1400
- **Springfield VA Clinic** the **FOURTH THURSDAY** of every month
 - 5850 South 6th St., Springfield IL from 0900-1400

During these outreach days we can provide;

- assistance in filing for disability compensation
- pension and death benefits assistance
- information on rehabilitation and education programs
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Marion VAMC, 2401 W. Main St., Marion, IL 62959 ·Phone: (618)997-5311

Version 10.17.2025



The Department of Illinois VFW Veterans Service Office will be doing outreach at the following locations;

- **Sgt. Charles A. Fricke Post 805, VFW EVERY TUESDAY** from 11a-7p
 - 223 W. 1st Street, O'Fallon, IL

- **Metro East Vet Center EVERY WEDNESDAY** from 8a - 4p
 - 228 West Point Drive, Swansea, IL

During these outreach days we can provide;

- assistance in filing for disability compensation
- pension and death benefits assistance
- information on rehabilitation and education programs
- links to employment and training programs
- requests for hearings before the VA and the Board of Veterans Appeals to present oral arguments
- information on other benefits for eligible Veterans provided by local and state agencies

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Marion VAMC, 2401 W. Main St., Marion, IL 62959 ·Phone: (618)997-5311

Version 3.14.2024



The Department of Illinois VFW Veterans Service Office will be doing outreach at the following locations;

- **Veterans Services Center, Southern Illinois University – Carbondale**
 - **SECOND TUESDAY** and **FOURTH WEDNESDAY** from 9a - 2p
 - Woody Hall 381, MC 4727, 900 S. Normal Ave., Carbondale, IL

- **Jefferson County Courthouse – Mt. Vernon**
 - **SECOND FRIDAY** and **FOURTH FRIDAY** from 9a - 2p
 - County Board Office, 100 S. 10th St., Mt. Vernon, IL

During these outreach days we can provide;

- assistance in filing for disability compensation

- pension and death benefits assistance

- information on rehabilitation and education programs

- links to employment and training programs

- requests for hearings before the VA and the Board of Veterans Appeals to present oral arguments

- information on other benefits for eligible Veterans provided by local and state agencies

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Marion VAMC, 2401 W. Main St., Marion, IL 62959 ·Phone: (618)997-5311

Version 3.14.2024

MEMBERSHIP



Alonzo "Skip" Skipper
Chairman

1400 Waverly Dr
Collinsville, IL 62234

Phone: (618) 910-7936
Email: joetaraskipper@yahoo.com

Post 5691-12

things happening across the Department.

The Department calendar will also reflect Department Membership events and recruitment activities throughout the year.

Membership Drives & Community Outreach

Department membership drives will continue throughout the year. Depending on the location, we will coordinate with the host District and local Posts for support and participation.

Successful membership events require teamwork. Districts 10 and 15 have consistently demonstrated what strong local support looks like during State Fair events, and we appreciate that continued involvement.

Department drives may include participation from:

- Department VFW Membership
- Department Auxiliary Membership
- Department Veterans Service Officers (VSO)

First, I would like to thank Department Commander, Robert Bailey, for the opportunity to serve as the 2026–2027 Department Membership Chairman.

I appreciate the trust placed in me and look forward to working alongside our Posts, Districts, Auxiliary members, and Department team this year under his theme:

"All In, All the Time."

Here is a quick snapshot of where we stand as a Department:

2016 — 53,900 Members

2025 — 34,150 Members

That is a 37% decline in membership over the last decade.

Two issues stand out immediately:

Retention and age.

If we want to strengthen the future of the VFW in Illinois, we must focus on keeping the members we already have while continuing to recruit the next generation of eligible veterans and family members.

What should you expect from the Department Membership Team this year?

- Consistency.
- Communication.
- Accountability.
- District, Post, and Auxiliary engagement
- Communication & Transparency

To minimize communication breakdowns, Posts will be copied on membership-related communication whenever possible. We will continue utilizing the Illinois VFW Membership Facebook page to highlight membership successes, recruitment efforts, and positive

Our VSOs are an incredible resource. The VFW fact sheet shows over \$16 billion recovered in benefits and compensation for veterans and their families. If schedules permit, I strongly encourage Posts and Districts to request VSO participation at local membership events whenever possible.

Department Membership Focus Areas

This year, Department Membership will focus on three major goals:

1. 80% Post Retention. Retention matters. We cannot continue replacing members at the rate we are losing them.
2. 100% Plus One. Every Post should strive to reach 100% and recruit at least one additional member beyond goal.
3. Buddy Checks. This is the most important initiative this year.

Every Post is asked to complete buddy checks on all members in good standing. This is not simply about membership numbers — it is about making sure our veterans are okay, staying connected, and knowing someone still cares enough to call.

Once completed, the Post Commander or District Commander should report completion to me for credit.

Any District achieving 100% completion of buddy checks will be recognized at the Department Convention.

District Visits & Support:

Department Membership, alongside our Auxiliary Membership team, plans to visit every District meeting at least once during the fiscal year.

We are here to help. You can reach me by calling, texting, or emailing.

If your Post needs assistance with membership drives, retention ideas, outreach, or recruiting support, reach out.

Additional Membership Initiatives

Additional programs planned for this year include:

- Sponsor-a-Veteran Program rollout
- Membership recognition and incentive programs
- Bragging Rights Trophy awarded to the top-performing District during Council of Administration meetings

Please remember:

All-State and All-American programs have separate criteria and requirements. I strongly encourage all Posts and Districts to review those requirements carefully throughout the year.

Finally, accountability goes both ways.

I expect Posts and Districts to work hard this year, but I also expect you to hold me accountable for this program and the commitments being made.

We all have a role in rebuilding and strengthening the Department of Illinois.

All In, All the Time.

#VFW #VFWIL #VFWILMEMBERSHIP26-27 #STILLSERVING #ALLINALLTHETIME



Illinois Membership Program

2026-2027

Robert Bailey

State Commander

"All In All the Time"

ILLINOIS MEMBERSHIP PROGRAM 2026-2027

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 that complements 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 secures a bright future for generations to come.

OUR GOAL THIS YEAR IS 100% plus One

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 posts or events to increase awareness of what we do in the community. Share information about our scholarship programs. Share what the Auxiliary is doing. Conduct Buddy Poppy and recruiting events in the community.

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:

- 25 new or reinstated members will receive a State Commander's coin
- 50 new or reinstated members will receive a State Commander's shirt
- 75 new or reinstated members will receive a State Commander's jacket
- 100 new or reinstated members by June 1, 2027, will be awarded \$500 to attend the 2027 National Convention. This award is non-transferable and will be presented to the winners at the National Convention.

MEMBERSHIP AWARDS

- Posts achieving at least 75% retention of their annual members by December 31, 2026, will receive a certificate and \$100
- Posts achieving 100% plus one-member by Feb. 28, 2027, will receive a certificate and \$150
- Posts achieving at least 100% membership by June 30, 2027, will receive 100% Membership Pennant
 - Should a post reach both goals by December 31, 2026, they will receive the higher dollar amount.

Membership Trophy – At each Council of Administration meeting, a traveling trophy will be awarded to the district with the highest membership percentage. It will be determined by the percentages on the morning of the Saturday meeting. The district with the highest membership percentage for the VFW year will keep the trophy until the next council meeting.

The Post with the highest membership percentage on 6/30/2027 will receive a Top Post 2026-2027 plaque for the post to commemorate the accomplishment.

POST AWARD

The Post having the largest increase in Legacy Life Membership, with a minimum of five (5) new Legacy Life Memberships by April 30, 2027, will receive a \$100 gift certificate from the National VFW Store.

DISTRICT AWARD

Districts who reach 75% in membership by February 1, 2027, will receive a \$200 cash award.

CRAMER-SODEN AWARD

The All-State District Commander who has the highest numerical increase from 2025-2026 to their 2026-2027 year and whose 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.

ALL-STATE AWARD PROGRAM

The 2026-2027 All-State Program is designed to recognize exceptional leadership and teamwork. Not only in Membership but in overall Post and 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 30, 2027.
- To receive All-State awards at the State Convention, the deadline for completion of All-State criteria is April 30, 2027.

ALL-STATE AWARD PROGRAM CRITERIA

To receive All State, a post must complete all the following tasks:

- Membership equal to or greater than 100% plus one member.
- Must retain 80% of the post annual membership from the previous year.
- Host one membership recruiting event and submit a report to the Program Reporting Dashboard.
- Be 100% reported on the Department Programs Reporting Dashboard.
 - Must host a fundraiser or partner with a nonprofit organization whose mission is to raise awareness for Veteran Suicide. Funds raised must go to that organization.
 - All four quarterly Trustee Audits must have been submitted and approved.
 - Must make all required \$50 donations except Service Officer Support is \$75.
 - Must have fully completed National and Department inspection forms, submitted and approved by the State Inspector.
 - Must purchase at least five (5) Buddy Poppies per member, with a minimum of 500.
 - Have representation at all properly called District meetings and Conventions.
 - Have representation at a minimum of one Commander's Town Hall meeting.
- Have an essay nomination for both Patriots' Pen and Voice of Democracy submitted to their respective District for judging. Donations in lieu of a submission will **NOT** be accepted.
- Must submit at minimum one nomination for one of the following programs: Teacher of the Year, Public Servant or Life Saving Award. Donations in lieu of a submission will **NOT** be accepted.
- 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

To receive All State, a district must complete all the following tasks:

- Membership equal to or greater than 100% plus one member.
- Must retain 80% of the districts' annual membership from the previous year.
- Be 100% reported on the Department Programs Reporting Dashboard.
- All four Trustee Quarterly Audits must have been submitted and approved.
- Must have 100% of posts inspected, approved by the State Inspector, and on file with HQ.
- Must submit a roll call showing attendance for Officers and Posts for each District meeting.
- Must have a minimum of 80% of Posts in the District attend a Commander's Town Hall.
- Host or participate in two membership recruiting events and submit a report to the Program Reporting Dashboard.
- Districts must host at least one School of Instruction and submit a report to State Headquarters.
- Districts must submit a nomination to the Department for each of the following programs:
 - o Patriot's Pen
 - o Voice of Democracy
 - o Teacher of the Year
 - o Public Servant

ALL-STATE DISTRICT AWARD

- There will be no limit 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.
- The District Commander, with the highest membership percentage increase, will receive an All-State Team Captain Cap. The deadline for this award is April 30, 2027.



Cory Geisler

Commander-in-Chief 2026-2027

NATIONAL MEMBERSHIP PROGRAM 2026-2027

Commander's Introduction

Cory Geisler was elected Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. on July 29th, 2026, at the 127th VFW National Convention in Reno, NV. Cory served in the U.S. Army from 2005 to 2012, earning his VFW eligibility by serving in Korea and Iraq.

He joined the VFW in 2008 as a member at large and then transferred to VFW Post #721 in Waukesha WI, where he maintains his Gold Legacy Life membership.

Cory has served at various levels in the post to include his election to Post Commander in 2012. Cory has served as the Post Commander for 12 of his 18 years and is a two-time All-State Post Commander and was an All-American Post Commander in 2019. At the district level Cory was the head of various committees and was the Chief of Staff for 3 different district commanders. Cory was elected the District 2 Commander for 2017 – 2019. During the 2018 – 2019 year District 2 was recognized as an All-State and All-American district. At the department level, Cory was the Department Safety Chairman for 5 years and the Youth Activities Chairman for 3 years. Cory was elected the Department of Wisconsin State Commander for the 2021 – 2022 year.

In 2023 he was elected to the National Council of Administration and in 2025 he was elected as the Senior Vice-Commander in Chief.

MEMBERSHIP MISSION

To strengthen the VFW by driving membership growth through comprehensive support for recruiting, retention, recruiter development, ensuring consistent dues processing, and member fulfillment. To empower our Post and Department leaders through specialized training programs that prioritize membership sustainability. To provide necessary insight and guide informed decision-making through data-driven reporting and analysis. To deliver exceptional customer support to our comrades and prospective members, fostering a culture of service and camaraderie that sustains the VFW legacy for future generations.

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

All Posts who have met the following criteria as of June 30th, 2027 will be named as All-American Posts:

- Must meet the Divisional Membership Quota as shown on the table at the end of this section
- At least 80% retention of prior year Annual members. Definition of retention can be found on page 12.
- Must have a Post election report submitted and be in good standing.
- Must meet the following Program Participation Criteria by January 31, 2027:
 - o Voice of Democracy – minimum of one entry advanced to District judging (Overseas Posts may donate \$125 to National in lieu of entry)
 - o Patriot's Pen – minimum of one entry advanced to District judging (Overseas Posts may donate \$125 to National in lieu of entry)
 - o National Citizenship Education Teachers Award –Post must advance a teacher to District; if no District judging applies then advance to Department for judging (Overseas Post donate \$100 to National in lieu of entry)
 - o Entries must be submitted via the Programs Dashboard by January 31, 2027 in order to be recognized.
- National Veterans Service Programs – must donate \$125 via the Programs Dashboard NVS Donation link. Donations will be designated to support the VFW National Veteran Service operations.
- Must make a restricted donation, minimum of \$75, to National in support of DPAA (Defense Personnel POW/MIA Accounting Agency). Donations must be processed through the Programs Dashboard.
- Must meet the following Community Service Requirements:
 - o Participation in the VFW Day of Service event held during the month of May. This event may be counted for a Post's quarterly community service activity.
 - o 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. Please see page 12 for further details.
 - o A Post must show an increase in total Community Service of at least 5% from the previous year.
- Must purchase at least 5 Buddy Poppies per member, with a minimum of 500.
- Must have been chartered for at least a full calendar year as of July 1st, 2026. Posts that were chartered between July 1st, 2025 and June 30th, 2026 will not be eligible for All-American awards, but may be recognized under the New Post Growth Grant.

ALL-AMERICAN POST AWARD

All Posts that meet the listed criteria will receive: An All-American Post Streamer, a Post Home Citation, and will be recognized in the VFW Magazine.

In addition, the top 20 Posts in each membership 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 20 Posts will be presented on stage at the 128th National Convention. All All-American Post Awards will be distributed at the 128th National Convention. Department Quartermasters will be directed to collect and distribute awards for All-American Posts not in attendance.

The Top five Post Commanders in each division will receive a \$1,000 award to recognize their leadership. Commanders must attend the 128th National Convention in order to receive this award.

Division	Minimum Membership	Maximum Membership	Membership Quota
1	501	---	103%
2	351	500	104%
3	246	350	105%
4	190	245	106%
5	150	189	107%
6	125	149	108%
7	105	124	109%
8	90	104	110%
9	70	89	111%
10	50	69	112%
11	10	49	113%

ALL-AMERICAN DISTRICT CRITERIA

All Districts that have met the following criteria as of June 30th, 2027 will be named as All-American Districts:

- Must exceed prior year's membership, based on June 30th, 2026 totals. (100%+1)
- Must finish in the top 20 Districts in their division, based on membership percentage as of June 30th, 2027.
- Must make a restricted donation, minimum of \$100, to National in support of DPAA (Defense Personnel POW/MIA Accounting Agency). **Donations must be processed through the Programs Dashboard.**
- Must have a District election report submitted and be in good standing.
- Must meet the following Program Participation Criteria by January 31, 2027:
 - o Voice of Democracy – minimum of one entry advanced to Department judging (Overseas Districts may donate \$125 to National in lieu of entry)
 - o Patriot's Pen – minimum of one entry advanced to Department judging (Overseas Districts may donate \$125 to National in lieu of entry)
 - o National Citizenship Education Teachers Award – one entry advanced to Department judging (Overseas District donate \$100 to National in lieu of entry)
 - o Entries **must be submitted via the Programs Dashboard by January 31, 2027 in order to be recognized.**

ALL-AMERICAN DISTRICT AWARD

All Districts that meet the listed criteria will receive an All-American District Streamer, an 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 128th National Convention. All All-American District Awards will be distributed at the 128th National Convention. Department Quartermasters will be directed to collect and distribute awards for All-American Districts not in attendance.

The top two District Commanders in each division will receive a \$1,000 award to recognize their leadership. Commanders must attend the 128th National Convention in order to receive this award.

ALL-AMERICAN DEPARTMENT CRITERIA

All Departments that have met the following criteria as of June 30th, 2027 will be named as All-American Departments:

- Must exceed prior year's membership, based on June 30th, 2026 totals. (100%+1)
- Department must submit Department legislative chairman reports monthly through the Program dashboard tool.
- Must make a restricted donation, minimum of \$200, to National in support of DPAA (Defense Personnel POW/MIA Accounting Agency). **Donations must be processed through the Programs Dashboard.**
- Must meet the following Program Participation Criteria by January 31, 2027:
 - Voice of Democracy – an entry advanced to National judging
 - Patriot's Pen – an entry advanced to National judging
 - Teacher of the Year – an entry advanced to National judging
 - Entries **must be submitted via the Programs Dashboard by January 31, 2027 in order to be recognized.**
- National Veterans Service fundraiser – must complete State/Department fundraiser with proceeds donated to the National Veterans Service fund via the Programs Dashboard.

ALL-AMERICAN DEPARTMENT AWARD

All Departments that meet the listed criteria will receive the following:

- All-American Department streamer
- All-American Department Commander's Citation
- All-American Department Commander's Cap
- All-American Department Commander's Badge
- All-American Department Commander's lapel pin
- \$1,000 award to recognize leadership

These awards will be presented on stage at the 128th National Convention.

TRIPLE CROWN

The Triple Crown is one of the most prestigious membership awards that an individual can achieve. It requires being named as an All-American Commander at Post, District, and Department level. Leaders who attain this level of excellence will be recognized at the 128th National Convention with a special Triple Crown pin.

For Departments without Districts, any individual who achieves All-American Commander status twice as a Post Commander and once as Department Commander, or once as a Post Commander and twice as Department Commander will receive this honor as well.

INDIVIDUAL RECRUITING AWARDS

- 5/10/15 members recruited: corresponding recruiter pin
- 25 members recruited: Commander-in-Chief's Coin
- 50 members recruited: 40oz Insulated Tumbler w/CIC Logo
- 75 members recruited: Commander-in-Chief's Medallion Set
- 100 members recruited: Century Cap and Citation. Recruiters may opt to receive a \$50 credit to the VFW Store in lieu of a Century Cap.

Individual Recruiting Awards will be sent out regularly during the membership year to the Post, to be given out at a Post meeting to recognize those members who have helped achieve the membership mission.

EARLY BIRD AWARD

The top two Posts in each division as of January 1, 2027 will receive reimbursement of up to \$1,000 for a representative of the Post to attend the 2027 VFW Washington Conference.

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, 2027, their commander or Post representative will be reimbursed up to \$1,000 for travel / lodging for the National Convention, reserved seating at the 128th VFW National Convention joint opening session and a Legacy Society Post Proclamation presented at the National Convention.

100+% MEMBERSHIP STREAMER

All Posts, Districts, and Departments that exceed their prior year membership total on or before June 30th, 2027 will receive a distinctive streamer.

NEW POST GROWTH GRANT

Any Post chartered in the previous membership year (between July 1, 2025 and June 30th, 2026) that exceeds their prior year membership total (100%+1) and has over 50 members as of June 30th, 2027 will receive a grant of up to \$50 per new member (up to \$1,000) between July 1st, 2026 and June 30th, 2027.

RECRUITING & RETENTION CHALLENGE

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

Division	Size	New Member Quota	Retention Percentage
1	501+	At least 125 new/reinstated members	103%
2	351-500	At least 100 new/reinstated members	104%
3	246-350	At least 75 new/reinstated members	105%
4	190-245	At least 60 new/reinstated members	106%
5	150-189	At least 50 new/reinstated members	107%
6	125-149	At least 40 new/reinstated members	108%
7	105-124	At least 30 new/reinstated members	109%
8	90-104	At least 20 new/reinstated members	110%
9	70-89	At least 15 new/reinstated members	111%
10	50-69	At least 12 new/reinstated members	112%
11	10-49	At least 10 new/reinstated members	113%

DEPARTMENT ABOVE & BEYOND AWARD

Any Department that exceeds their prior year membership total and has at least 75% of the Posts in the Department also exceed their prior year membership total will receive a membership grant as follows:

Small Departments (10,000 and below): \$2,500

Medium Departments (10,001-20,000): \$5,000

Large Departments (20,000 and up): \$7,500

ELITE RECRUITER

Any VFW member who signs up 250 or more new and/or reinstated members as of June 30th, 2027 will receive a \$1,000 award for their achievement, as well as a distinctive cap, citation, and name badge. Awards will be presented at the 128th National Convention.

ELITE RECRUITER

The VFW member who signs up the greatest number of new and/or reinstated members greater than 250 as of June 30th, 2027 will receive a \$1,000 award for their achievement as well as a distinctive cap, citation, and name badge and the Recruiter Of The Year trophy. Awards will be presented at the 128th National Convention.

LIFE MEMBER RECRUITER AWARD

Any VFW member who recruits at least 50 new and/or reinstated Life members by June 30th, 2027 or before will receive a special citation from the Commander-in-Chief and a CIC logo travel bag.

NEW POSTS STARTUP GRANT

New Posts chartered between July 1st, 2026 and June 30th, 2027 will receive a \$250 credit from the VFW Store to be used towards necessary materials for the new Post. This credit will come in the form of a gift certificate sent out to the Post once a charter has been issued. The Commanders of all Posts chartered during the membership year will also receive an invitation to the 128th VFW National Convention.

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 128th National Convention for their achievements.

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 128th National Convention for their achievements.

Post Division Breakdown		
Division	Minimum Membership	Maximum Membership
1	501	---
2	351	500
3	246	350
4	190	245
5	150	189
6	125	149
7	105	124
8	90	104
9	70	89
10	50	69
11	10	49

District Division Breakdown		
Division	Minimum Membership	Maximum Membership
1	2400	---
2	1680	2399
3	1290	1679
4	880	1289
5	600	879
6	10	599

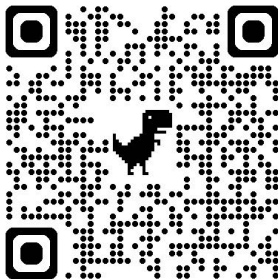
MEMBERSHIP NOTES AND RESOURCES:

- Awards given to a Post may be transferred to any member of that Post.
- Must participate in the VFW Day of Service event held during the month of May and registered at todaysvfw.org/day-of-service/ no later than May 15th. 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/>
- Community Service quarterly reports must be submitted via the All-American Dashboard or via the state's Community Service Reporting Portal and must be approved by the Department Adjutant/Quartermaster. Reports must detail individual events, roll-up or summary reports will not be accepted. Posts must be able to provide verifiable documentation of their community service activities. Reports must meet the IRS 990 standards for organizations operating under 501©(19) status.
- **RETENTION DEFINITION: (Prior Year Annual Members In Good Standing – Expired Members) / (Prior Year Annual Members In Good Standing)**
- Posts, Districts, and Departments must show growth in membership to qualify for any award. This does not apply to the Early Bird Award.
- Awards, stipends, and reimbursements 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 \$2000.00 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.

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 128th 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 Programs Dashboard, not through any other means.

For information on how to use the Programs Dashboard, scan the QR code below:



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. It is published digitally in a magazine-format six times per year - July, September, November, January, March, and May.

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 10th of the Month preceding publication, but is subject to change.

2026-2027 State Publications Contest

Editors of District and Post newsletters are invited to enter one issue of their publication in the 2026-2027 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, 2026 and December 31, 2026.

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 2027.

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, 2027**.

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, 2027**. The Media Professional of the Year will be recognized at the Illinois State Convention in June. All nominations should be mailed to State Headquarters.