



Happy Holidays! I hope all had a very wonderful Thanksgiving and hope all have a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

This is the season where some Veterans and their families may need support. We must keep in mind as veterans, not all veterans and their families are thriving during this time of the year. Some veterans and their families have financial hardships and other veterans may suffer from PTSD, anxiety, or depression. As you are aware, holidays often bring greater attention to the needs of veterans. Therefore, please be very vigilant and if you see or know a veteran and their family experiencing difficulties you can refer or recommend them to a VET Center in Illinois. Vet Centers are community-based counseling centers providing a range of services to veterans, active-duty service members, and their families. Most are part of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and are designed to offer support helping veterans after experiencing the stress and trauma of combat or military service.

Since the September Illinois VFW Newspaper edition, I have attended the August Council of Administration (CofA) meeting

held in Fairview Heights, Illinois Day at the National Home in Eaton Rapids, Michigan, four Commanders Calls, the Big Ten Conference in Indianapolis, Veterans Day Speaker for District 18, Veterans Day Speaker for the City of Hazel Crest, Illinois, and more.

I truly thank all the VFW and Auxiliary members who attended my Homecoming weekend. It was a pleasure to be the host in my local area in Fairview Heights and Scott AFB. Post 4183 had an awesome mixer and the Post was very appreciative to all of our guests supporting the Post.

The 126th Air Refueling Wing provided a tour of the KC-135 Aircraft and all I heard were great reviews from all who attended the aircraft tour. The conclusion of the Homecoming weekend was the Saturday evening dinner and entertainment. Thanks all who attended the Saturday evening event. You truly made my weekend special and memorable.

This year, the Illinois Day at the National Home in Eaton Rapids was held on Sept. 21. On that Saturday, Comrades and their families from the State of Illinois visited the VFW National Home. The State donated

more than \$55,000 to the National Home. Outstanding job again this year!!

The VFW National Home assists military servicemembers or veterans and their families facing a wide variety of challenges, such as reintegration after military discharge, post-traumatic stress, homelessness, rehabilitation from battlefield injuries, and unemployment. If you know any military servicemember or veteran with children who may need a new start in life, please have them contact the VFW National Home at 800-313-4200.

During this quarter, the Department has had four Commanders' Calls. These Commanders' Calls were hosted by the Centralia Post 2024, Caseyville Post 1117, East Peoria Post 2078 and the Brookfield Post 2868. The purpose of the Commanders' Call is to educate, train and have a question-and-answer session. Feedback from Comrades who attended Commanders' Calls in the past have provided positive feedback from these meetings.

Last year's attendance was the greatest in and around the District 14 area. However, the turnout this year was the greatest in the Chicago and western suburban areas which was held at the Brookfield Post 2868. Thanks to all who attended the Commanders' Calls and I sincerely hope all learned a thing or two. Thanks to all the Posts and their Commanders who hosted the Commanders' Call. Reminder, in order for a Post to make All State, Posts must have representation at any of the Commanders'

Calls. The final Commanders' Call will be at the Decatur Post 99 on April 12, 2025.

I and many from the Department attended the Big Ten Conference in Indianapolis, Indiana. The Big Ten is one of the four VFW conferences nationally that serve as an informal intermediary between VFW National and the Departments around the country. A primary function of these conferences is to be a mechanism for selection and nominations for National Officers, streamlining the election process at the National Convention in an organized and clear way.

There are four conferences that divide up the VFW nationwide. They are the Western, Eastern, Southern and Big Ten Conferences. The Big Ten is made up of the following VFW Departments: Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Nebraska, Iowa, Minnesota, South Dakota and Wisconsin.

Every autumn, the four VFW conferences gather separately to elect their conference leadership, and educate Department leadership of VFW National programs. Each conference will nominate a leader to serve in a position at VFW National, either at their annual conference or at the VFW National Convention. Four National positions for nomination rotate between the conferences every four years, allowing each conference to nominate a new position yearly. Positions on this rotation are VFW National Surgeon, Judge Advocate, Chaplain, and Junior Vice Commander.

Lastly, I would like to inform you about a manual that all veterans and their families should be aware of and, at minimum, have a hard copy or electronic copy. This manual is called "Benefits for Illinois Veterans" and is produced by the Illinois Attorney General office. This manual provides a comprehensive guide to the various state and federal benefits available to veterans who live in Illinois. These benefits cover areas such as healthcare, education, employment, housing, burial benefits, benefits for disabled veterans and certain active service, i.e., eye glasses, benefits for caregivers, survivors and dependents and much more. This manual can also be downloaded from the Illinois Attorney General website at "<https://illinoisattorneygeneral.gov/>". Once on the website, select "Rights of the People" tab. Then on the next page, you will see another tab named "Rights of the People". Select it and there will be a drop-down list. Select "Military and Veterans Rights". At the bottom of that page, you will see options to "Downloadable Resources" and that's where you can download the Benefits for Illinois Veterans 2022 Manual.

In closing, I am truly honored to serve as the Department of Illinois State Commander and as I continue to travel the State of Illinois in the coming months, I look forward to constructive conversations with all of you during my travels to District meetings and other events and remember VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES, WE GOT YOU!!!

## Bloomington Post conducts annual clothing drive



**Bloomington VFW Post 7539 had its annual October clothing drive in the village and collected many items that will be used by our homeless veterans. This was accomplished with the help of the Village of Bloomington, Library, Park District, Fire Department, and our post. Jesse Brown VA was good enough to come to the village and pick up all the donations.**



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