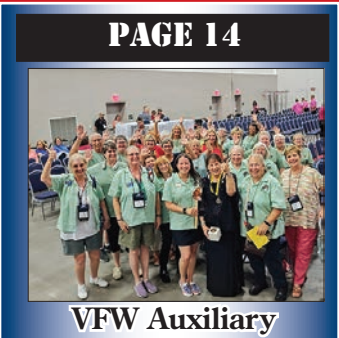
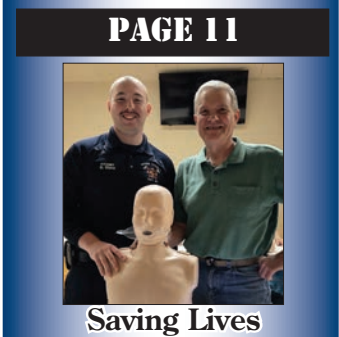


## Bridges, Watters elected to lead Illinois Veterans of Foreign Wars, Auxiliary at State Conventions



Maurice Bridges, of Fairview Heights, and Cindy Watters were elected as the 2024-25 State Commander and Auxiliary President respectively at the Illinois VFW 105th and Auxiliary 100th State Conventions in Springfield, June 8.

Other state officers elected during the VFW convention were:

State Senior Vice Commander - Eugene Blackwell - Post 311-16

State Junior Vice Commander - Robert Bailey, Post 7452-19

State Quartermaster - Joe Bartley - Post 10302-10

State Judge Advocate - Jayson Hoffman - Post 4763-10

State Surgeon - Ryan Higginbotham - Post 4226-13

State Chaplain - Gary Holmes - Post 2955-6

In addition, Bartley was appointed State Adjutant; Nancy O'Connell as Chief of Staff; and Cathy Stubbs was appointed as the State Inspector.

Other auxiliary officers elected during the Auxiliary convention were:

Auxiliary Senior Vice President - Diane Ahrens

Auxiliary Junior Vice President - Danielle Krull

Auxiliary Treasurer - Linda Lorenz

Auxiliary Chaplain - Terry Adams

Auxiliary Conductor - Michael Maruszak

Auxiliary Guard - Jennifer Hunter

In addition, Rhonda Borkgren was appointed Auxiliary Secretary and John Watters was appointed Auxiliary Chief of Staff.

**See additional photos of the Illinois VFW State Convention on Pages 7-10 and the Illinois VFW Auxiliary Convention on Page 16.**



Newly elected and appointed Illinois VFW officers recite the oath of office during the installation of officers at the 105th Illinois VFW State Convention in Springfield, June 8. Newly installed State Commander Maurice Bridges is a veteran of Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm and the Global War on Terrorism. He is a Gold Legacy life member of Scott Post 4183 at Scott Air Force Base, Belleville, Illinois.



Newly elected and appointed Illinois VFW Auxiliary officers recite the oath of office during the installation of officers at the 100th Illinois VFW Auxiliary State Convention in Springfield, June 8. Newly installed Department President Cindy Watters joined the auxiliary under the eligibility of her father, a World War II Army infantry veteran. She is a member of the Olney VFW Auxiliary Post 4226 in Olney, Illinois.

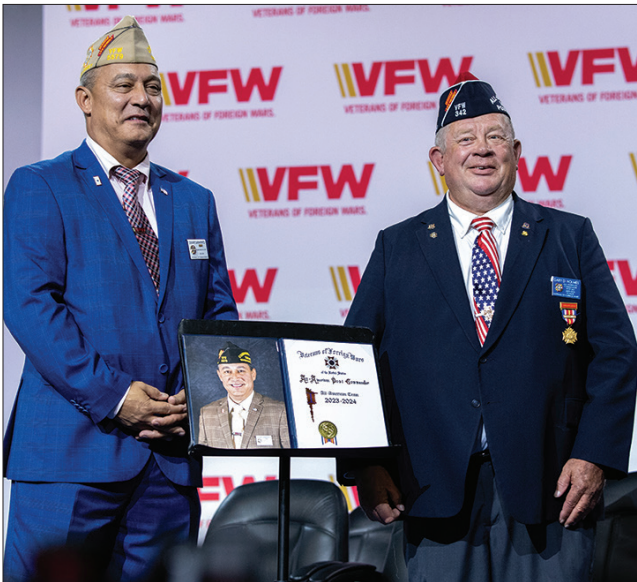
Postmaster: Send address changes to V.F.W. Circulation Department, 406 West 34th Street, Kansas City, MO 64111.



# Illinois Delegates Attend National Convention in Louisville



Several delegates from the Illinois VFW attended the VFW National Convention in Louisville, Kentucky. Delegates gathered following the committee meetings to discuss the results of the committees.



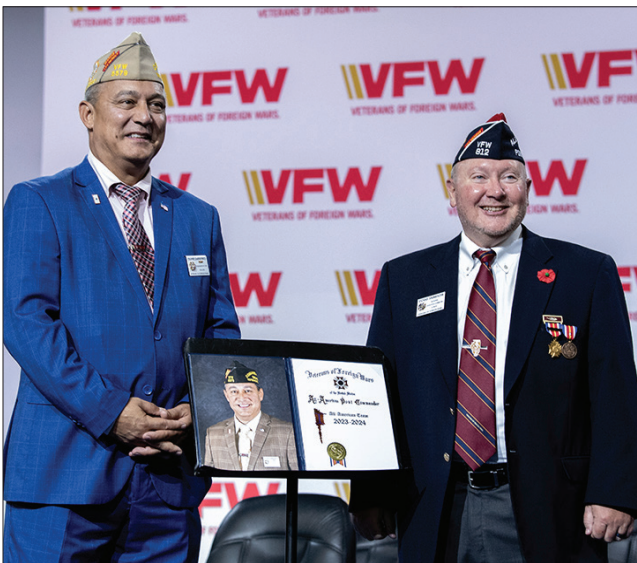
Gary Holmes, Commander of Col. Thomas G. Lawler Post 342, Rockford, was named an All-American Commander during the 2023-24 year.



Josh Seed, Commander of Lafore Lock Post 755, Springfield, was named an All-American Commander during the 2023-24 year.



The family of Josh Seed, Commander, Lafore Lock Post 755, Springfield, got in the patriotic spirit of the Patriotic Rally.



Doug Jameson, Commander of Belleville Post 1739, Belleville, was named an All-American Commander during the 2023-24 year.



Seth Floyd, Commander of Piatt County Post 5346, Monticello, was named an All-American Commander during the 2023-24 year.



Illinois VFW and Auxiliary members march in the VFW National Convention Patriotic Rally.



Led by State Commander Maruice Bridges and Auxiliary President Cindy Watters, Illinois VFW and Auxiliary members march in the VFW National Convention Patriotic Rally.



Illinois VFW and Auxiliary members march in the VFW National Convention Patriotic Rally.





I want to thank all the Comrades who elected me and have the faith in me to be your Illinois VFW State Commander.

As we continue to improve and make things better for Veterans and their Families, training and communications is one of the keys to success.

Speaking on success, I want to thank all the Posts in the State of Illinois that achieved the goal of All-American and All-State Post.

In addition, congratulations to District 14 for achieving All-American and All-State District. I would like to point out that achieving All-American and All-State is much more than achieving the membership requirement only, this year 102%. The All-American and All-State programs consist of numerous programs to include Community Service, Americanism, Youth Activities, Legislative, Homeless Veterans.

Speaking of Homeless Veterans, my special project this year is to support four Homeless Veterans Shelters in the State of

Illinois. They are New Horizons Transitional Living, Featherfist, Spring Street Veterans Renaissance and Eagles Nest of St. Claire County.

As you know the \$50.00 donation for the Commanders Special Project is the minimum amount you are required to donate. I'm asking that if you can donate more, it would be greatly appreciated.

Coming up in September and October there are four Commanders' Calls throughout the State. I highly encourage anyone to attend however, Posts must have a representation at a Commanders' Call. The purpose of this 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.

Supporting Veterans legislation is supporting Veterans and their families. We are the voice that represents veterans everywhere and defends their rights and benefits. Recently

Illinois Senate Bill 2751 was passed. It aimed at assisting disabled veterans by waiving building permit fees for home modifications necessary to accommodate their disabilities. This bill applies to veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces, National Guard, and Reserves, as well as their caretakers. The legislation is designed to ease the financial burden associated with making essential home modifications, ensuring veterans do not face additional costs from local government permit fees. Another bill, Illinois House bill 0612 Amends the Property Tax Code. In a Section granting a home-stead exemption to veterans with disabilities, provides that property that is used as a qualified residence by a veteran who was a member of the United States Armed Forces during World War II is exempt from taxation regardless of the veteran's level of disability and provides that a veteran who qualifies as a result of his or her service in World War II need not reapply for the exemption. You may say that there are not many World War II Veterans left however, there are approximately 6,000 World War II Veterans living in Illinois. Please support our legislative efforts on an ongoing basis. When the call goes out to support national legislation, please log on to VFW.org and

complete a call for action and for Illinois legislation please log on to VFWIL.org and create a Witness Slip.

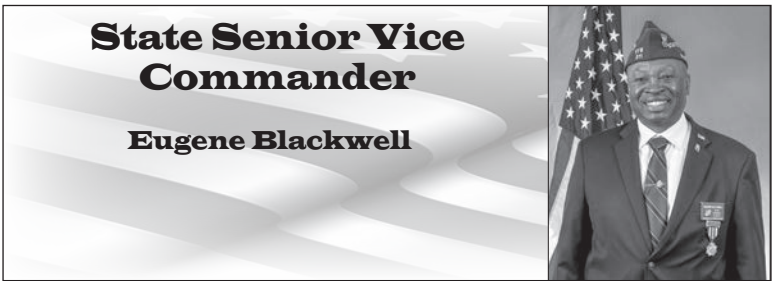
The Commander's Leadership Manual changes every year. This year's 2024-2025 Commander's Leadership Manual is out and can be viewed at VFWIL.org under the resources tab. The VFWIL Commander's Leadership Manual is a comprehensive guide provided by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of Illinois (VFWIL) organization to assist VFW Post Commanders in effectively leading and managing their posts. This manual is designed to provide guidance on a variety of topics crucial for successful leadership within the VFW. Some of the key areas typically covered in the manual are as follows: VFW mission and vision, VFW core values, the five pillars of VFW community service, Veteran's assistance, youth programs, legislative advocacy, Illinois specific programs, important dates and deadlines and other topics.

This past spring, Past State Commander Brett Nila, Quartermaster/Adjutant Joe Bartley and I visited The Chez Veterans Center located at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. I am highlighting this Veterans Center because I have never seen a facility that supports Vet-

eran like this center does. It is a state-of-the-art facility.

The center is a three-story building where on the third floor, the facility can house up to 14 residences. The facility is fully setup for disabled Veterans to include wheelchair access for bedrooms, bathrooms and elevators. On the second floor are meeting rooms some staff offices and a work out and gym room. On the first floor you have the kitchen / dining area for the residents and a large size area to hold a meeting and a classroom. Also, on the first floor you can find a kids play area with books and toys and most impressive to me is the computer lab. The computer lab computers have all of the software installed required by the university for a Veteran to complete their courses. Therefore, the veteran does not need to worry about purchasing software. Lastly, you know how much ink and paper costs? When using the lab at The Chez Veterans Center, ink and paper are free of charge to the Veterans. The Chez Veterans Center at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign offers a comprehensive array of services and programs to support veterans and their families. For more information, please visit "https://chezveteranscenter.ahs.illinois.edu/"

As I travel the State of Illinois in the coming months, I look forward to constructive conversation with all of you during my travels and remember VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES, WE GOT YOU!!!



Greetings Comrades,

I am honored to serve as your Senior Vice Commander for the 2024-2025 season. I would like to commend those comrades who attended the State Convention. However, for a state our size and with all the posts we have, our attendance was not as strong as it could have been. I realize that we all have other obligations, but I hope the next state convention will see a better turnout.

As we begin the new year, I want to congratulate all newly elected and appointed officers for the 2024-2025 term. It will

be a challenging year as we work to execute our national and state programs. Communication is a key element for a successful year, and we must stay connected and informed.

We all took an oath to faithfully discharge to the best of our ability the duties of the office to which we have been elected or appointed. We must continue to work hard for Veterans and their families. The VFW operates assistance programs aimed at addressing the unique needs of Veterans, such as those struggling with homelessness, mental health issues, or disabili-

ties. These programs provide financial assistance, counseling services, and referrals to other support organizations.

Additionally, the VFW is actively involved in local communities across the country, organizing events, fundraisers, and volunteer activities to support Veterans and promote patriotism. This includes initiatives such as Veteran outreach programs, scholarship programs, and youth education programs. It's also a good way to get younger members involved in the post.

Another way to engage younger members is to hold or sponsor gaming leagues. The VFW has a Combat Tested Gaming (CTG) initiative. CTG provides a new platform for service members and Veterans to hone their gaming skills while building camaraderie with other members of the Veteran community. Over three billion people globally play video games, and VFW has recognized the importance of providing diverse opportunities for Veterans to foster connections and combat isolation in an inclusive and supportive environment. CTG aims to fulfill this mission by bringing Veterans together through esports.

During the National Convention, Commander in Chief Duane Sarmiento indicated that CTG is more than gaming; it's about leveraging social engagement and skill development opportunities to build a strong community of support. "Veterans find strength in unity, and this bold, new initiative harnesses the power of technol-

ogy to connect them in a way that's both fun and therapeutic."

CTG featured leagues for popular competitive video games Call of Duty®: Warzone and Rocket League. League winners competed in the 2024 VFW National Gaming Championship during the 125th VFW National Convention.

Whether you game solo or have a brigade of battle buddies, service members and Veterans from all branches of the military are encouraged to join Combat Tested Gaming for the chance to connect with their fellow Veterans and experience the positive impact of esports.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs announced that after three quarters through this fiscal year, it has granted benefits to 1.1 million Veterans and their survivors, an all-time record. In total, VA has awarded \$137 billion in benefits, including \$127 billion in compensation and pension benefits, to Veterans and survivors this year. To reach this milestone, VA has processed more than 2 million claims in 2024 – another all-time record, on pace to surpass last year's record by more than 27%. The grant rate for these claims is 64.6%, and the average overall disability rating granted to Veterans this year to date is 70%, equating to over \$20,000 per year in disability compensation. My hat goes off to all our Veterans Service Officers who were instrumental in making this happen.

Let's make this year a successful one by working together and staying committed to our mission.

**Illinois VFW News Deadline**

**The deadline for the upcoming issues of the Illinois VFW News**

**December 2024 - Nov. 1, 2024**  
**March 2025 - Feb. 1, 2025**  
**May 2025 - April 1, 2025**

**Email items to: Barb Wilson - barb.wilson2@outlook.com**

**or mail items to:**  
 Barb Wilson, Editor • 802 N. 3rd St. • Riverton, IL 62561

**Items not received by the deadline may be held for the next issue**

**ILLINOIS VFW NEWS**  
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**Postmaster: Send address changes to V.F.W. Circulation Department, 406 West 34th Street, Kansas City, MO 64111.**

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 \$1.00 of the annual membership dues paid by each member to a Post of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States. Department of Illinois, is for a year's subscription to the Illinois VFW News. Subscription rates for non-members is \$2.00 per year, \$5.00 three years.

**NEWS COPY & PHOTOS:**  
 Send to Illinois VFW News, 3300 Constitution Dr., Springfield, Illinois 62711 or email to barb.wilson2@outlook.com  
 Deadline is the 1st of the month before above listed publishing months.

**NEWSPAPER COMMITTEE:**  
 Laurie Emmer, Chairman; Maurice Bridges; Joe Bartley; and Bobby Welch  
 Editor: Barbara Wilson  
 Printer: Berlin Journal Newspapers, Berlin, WI 54923



# Arlington Heights Post 981 Awards Annual \$3,000 Scholarships

Arlington Post 981 has awarded the 2024 Wally Luettschwager Memorial Scholarship Grant and the Bob Henderson Scholarship to Ava Harwood and Brian Cantieri respectively. Both scholarships were worth \$3,000 each.

Ava Harwood, a resident of Arlington Heights, graduated from Hersey High School this May. She is looking to major in business at university this fall. While at Hersey she played in three sports – basketball, lacrosse and volleyball – as well as participating in service opportunities like Peer Tutor and Service Over Self. She is also active in her Church, St. James, volunteering in 2023 on a summer mission trip to Puerto Rico. Both her grandfathers served in Vietnam, one in the Army and the other in the Navy.

Brian Cantieri is a resident of Mount Prospect and graduated in 2024 from Prospect

High School. He played 3 varsity sports there – golf, basketball and track - as well as other academic and leadership achievements like Peer Tutor and Knight's Way Leadership. He is an Eagle Scout. He will be attending university in the fall majoring in systems design and engineering. His grandfather served in the Army during World War II. Wally Luettschwager and Bob Henderson were Army Korean War veterans and Post 981 members. Bob received a Purple Heart for wounds received. Wally was a life-long resident of Arlington Heights, Illinois who came home and was an active member of Post 981 for over 60 years in many capacities including Commander. His bequest funds the annual award given in his honor. Lynn Munson, Bob's daughter, donates in Bob's memory to support his scholarship.



Brian Cantieri of Mount Prospect and a 2024 graduate of Prospect High School was one of two recipients awarded a \$3,000 scholarship from Arlington Heights Post 981.

# VFW Post 311 Awards Two \$1,000 Annual Scholarships

Benjamin O. Davis VFW Post 311 announced and held its annual scholarship awards competition from April 1, 2024, through June 15, 2024.

On Friday, July 5, 2024, two local area high school graduating students that are descendants of veterans were interviewed and awarded a \$1,000 scholarship.

Illinois VFW State Commander Maurice Bridges, Illinois State Senior Vice Commander Eugene Blackwell, VFW Post 311 Commander Aretha Spurlock, Post 311 Scholarship Chairperson Sharee Porter-Pearce, Scholarship Committee Member Arnold

Taylor were present to present the awards and take pictures.

Awards were presented to Justin Anderson, graduate of Southland College Preparatory Charter High School and Isaac Morrow, graduate of Homewood Flossmoor High School. Justin will be attending the University of Arkansas Pine Bluff and Isaac will be attending Southern Illinois University Edwardsville in the Fall of 2024.

Post 311 formally recognized these individuals, members of the post and auxiliary at its 2024 Commander's Ball and Scholarship Awards Dinner on July 19, 2024.



State Senior Vice Commander Eugene Blackwell, Post 311 Scholarship Chairperson Sharee Porter-Pearce, Justin Anderson, graduate of Southland College Preparatory Charter High School and Isaac Morrow, graduate of Homewood Flossmoor High School, Post 311 Commander Aretha Spurlock and State Commander Maurice Bridges.



## Belvidere Post 1461 Donates to Local VAC

Commander Berni Bland and other members of the John Hugo Kaiser VFW Post 1461 donate \$1,500 to the Boone County Veterans Assistance Commission (VAC). VAC Superintendent Elizabeth Rose Carville thanked the Post for the donation. This donation will only be used for assisting local Veterans with food insecurities. The gift of money will allow the VAC to get food items for Veterans when there is a short fall in specific needs.



The VFW and Ace Hardware have been giving out 8 X 12 stick flags at Memorial Day for a number of years now. Bourbonnais Post 9961 Quartermaster Tom Nelson gave some flags to a neighbor who operates a small day care facility. The day care facility made a display of flags and asked students to bring in photos of veterans in their families. The photos were posted alongside the flags. As the day begins in the day care center, the students take their respective seats, followed by an opening prayer and then students recite the Pledge of Allegiance.





Veterans from Bremen Post 2791 in Tinley Park and Benjamin O. Davis Post 311 in Richton Park provided an honor guard for the headstone dedication ceremony honoring James Henry Cleggett at Lincoln Cemetery in Blue Island, Illinois.

## VFW Posts in District 16 Honor Legacy of James Henry Cleggett

On 23 June 2024, a memorial service was held to honor James Henry Cleggett, with members from Tinley Park VFW Post #2791 and Richton Park VFW Post 311 in attendance. My VFW comrades asked me to send pictures and an article to the VFW news to tell his story. These members also served as honor guards for the rifle salute. James Henry Cleggett was born on 24 June 1845 and was an active figure connected to the legacy of Black activists from Rochester, including Frederick Douglass.

James enlisted in the Union Navy at the age of sixteen on 12 March 1862, in New York. He served on the USS Morning Light as a Landsman, participating in blockading duties. On 18 January 1863, the Morning Light was ordered to blockade off Sabine Pass, TX. However, on 21 January 1863, the vessel was attacked by Confederate steamers Josiah A. Bell and Uncle Ben, along with Texas infantry artillery. Due to insufficient defenses and no means of escape, the Morning Light was

forced to surrender and was subsequently burnt. James and his crewmates were captured, with James being subjected to hard labor in Galveston as a POW.

After his release, James relocated to Chicago, where he became a hairdresser and wig maker. In 1869, he opened a shop in Janesville, WI, and continued his business in Chicago until 1900 before moving to Europe. He eventually returned to Chicago in 1921, living at 600 East 51st Street.

James fell ill with cancer and was admitted to Edward Hines Junior Hospital in Broadview, Chicago, on 6 June 1929. He passed away on 12 June 1929, at the age of eighty-six, as the last known survivor of the Morning Light crew. Initially buried in an unmarked grave at Lincoln Cemetery, Blue Island, IL, his story remained largely untold for nearly a century. On 23 June 2024, a headstone was placed on his grave, and Bobby Welch, past state VFW Commander, delivered an address on behalf of the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War.



Past State Commander Bobby Welch delivers an address on behalf of the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War during a headstone dedication ceremony for U.S. Navy veteran James Henry Cleggett at the Lincoln Cemetery, Blue Island, Illinois.



Newly elected State Commander Maurice Bridges, center, is presented a Certificate of Appreciation during the Marine Corps League state convention.



The newly erected headstone for U.S. Navy veteran James Henry Cleggett at the Lincoln Cemetery in Blue Island, Illinois.



# VFW Post 1461 and Auxiliary host third annual Freedom Festival

By Elizabeth Costa-Bland and Rob Bland  
John Hugo Kaiser Post 1461 and Auxiliary in Belvidere held their third annual Family Freedom Festival on April 27.

For three years the Post and Auxiliary have been reaching out to the community with a fun patriotic festival to bring awareness of our programs and to reach out to Veterans in the local community. This year the Boone County Veterans Assistance Commission saw 12 Veterans for assistance, bringing

the three-year total to 56. The Family Freedom Festival is a celebration of patriotism in our community and increased awareness of services available to veterans. Activities for kids included a Buddy Poppy Child contest, a bouncy house, a coloring page contest and patriotic activities for children. Service organizations for veterans who were on-site included the Boone County Veterans Assistance Commission and Rush Hospital Road Home Program. Craft vendors and a

food truck were on site to make sure there was something for the entire family to enjoy. Local residents had an opportunity to learn about the growth of the Oscar Mike Project nearby, to properly dispose of old flags, and to purchase new flags in preparing for the multiple upcoming patriotic holidays. Local news coverage further educated the community about the event and its

purpose. "The Family Freedom Festival was a great event, allowing the community to come together and learn about organizations they may not have heard of and to see what Belvidere has to offer," said Mathius Carter of the Road Home program. "We were happy to be invited and made some great connections." The Road Home Program at Rush is a national

nonprofit organization which helps service members (active duty, reserve, national guard, and veterans) and families with the invisible wounds of war and life (anxiety, depression, PTSD, and MST) at no cost. They help all eras and all discharge statuses, anywhere in the world, regardless of ability to pay. If you or someone you know is struggling with mental health, please

reach out to Road Home Program 312-942-8387 or roadhomeprogram.org. The Belvidere Combined Honor Guard had a flag folding demonstration. A volunteer was present to give tours of our Memorial Garden and show several historic military vehicles on display. A local military representative was also on site with a current military vehicle for viewing.



District 6 President Becky Coulson running children activities during the festival.



Mike Grenke and Levell Kepner demonstrated folding the flag during the festival.



Volunteers from Olney Post 4226 place American flags throughout the city, for a small donation. The group was running low on flag holders, which we place at the businesses. In May, Richland County High School shop classes volunteered to make and donate over a dozen new holders, made to our specification. Not only did they make them, they had them beautifully powder-coated! Pictured with Post Quartermaster Nancy O'Connell is students from Richland County High School.



### Combating Food Insecurity

Metzger-Crook Post 6504, Waterloo, and its Auxiliary donated checks totalling \$3,451 along with a significant amount of food to Forces for Food food pantry at Jefferson Barracks which serves veterans and active duty military experiencing food insecurity. Part of the money donated was raised during a joint effort between the post and auxiliary on the VFW National Day of Service where they collected food and monetary donations outside Walmart.





# Illinois VFW honors work of community members



State Commander Brett Nila presents Jill Metzger with the Smart/Maher VFW Citizenship Education Teacher award for grades K-5.



State Commander Brett Nila presents Katie Sommer with the Smart/Maher VFW Citizenship Education Teacher award for grades 6-8.



State Commander Brett Nila presents Paula Markman-West with the Smart/Maher VFW Citizenship Education Teacher award for grades 9-12.



State Commander Brett Nila presents Christopher Kenny with the Scout of the Year award.



State Commander Brett Nila presents Camden Lazenby with the News Media Print Professional of the Year.



State Commander Brett Nila presents Ricky Reed, Taylorville Post 4495 Auxiliary, the Clergy of the Year award.



State Commander Brett Nila presents Veterans Back to Work Boot Camp with the Hometown Heroes of the Year award.



State Commander Brett Nila presents State Sen. Mike Porfirio with the State Senator of the Year award.



## Clinton Power Station honored as Illinois VFW Employer of Year

The Clinton Power Station, Clinton, Illinois, was selected as the Employer of the Year by the Department of Illinois Veterans of Foreign Wars.

In honoring the employer, it was noted the Employee Resource Group (ERG) at Clinton Power Station is veteran focused at job fairs.

Clinton Power Station has an ERG Constellation Military Actively Connected (C-MAC) that works on veteran recruiting by going to veteran

recruiting events around the state.

They have roughly 250 veterans with a total of 700 employees, which means that roughly one third of their employees are veterans.

C-MAC works with the community by supporting veteran's events such as Wreaths Across America, Honor Flight, and Fold of Honor. They work with local schools to talk about veterans on Veterans Day and work with Scout groups to write Thank You letters to veterans.



State Commander Brett Nila presents State Rep. Daniel Swanson with the State Representative of the Year award.



State Commander Brett Nila presents John Spalding with the News Media Radio Professional of the Year.



State Commander Brett Nila presents Randall Tyner with the outstanding Governmental Service of the Year award.





Evamarie Duff, All-State Chairman, and State Commander Brett Nila present Post 342 Commander Gary Holmes All-State award.



Evamarie Duff, All-State Chairman, and State Commander Brett Nila present District 6 Commander Robert Coulter with All State awards for Post 2955 and Post 8739.



Evamarie Duff, All-State Chairman, and State Commander Brett Nila present Post 755 Commander Josh Seed All-State award.



Evamarie Duff, All-State Chairman, and State Commander Brett Nila present Post 11463 Quartermaster Larry Miller with the post's All-State award.



Evamarie Duff, All-State Chairman, and State Commander Brett Nila present District 11 Commander Scott Swinford with Post 5346's All-State award.



Evamarie Duff, All-State Chairman, and State Commander Brett Nila present Post 6190 Commander Stephen Sigler the All-State award.



Evamarie Duff, All-State Chairman, and State Commander Brett Nila present Past District 12 Commander Dustin Dixon with Post 1241's All-State award.



Evamarie Duff, All-State Chairman, and State Commander Brett Nila present District 14 Commander Clyde Rowold with Post 1117's All-State award.



Evamarie Duff, All-State Chairman, and State Commander Brett Nila present District 16 Commander Bill Browne with Post 1739 Commander Doug Jameson with the All-State award.



Evamarie Duff, All-State Chairman, and State Commander Brett Nila present District 16 Commander Bill Browne with Post 311's All-State award.

All-American District 2023-2024

Div.	District	Percent	Commander
3	14	102.02	Clyde P. Rowold

All-American Posts 2023-2024

Div.	Post	Percentage	Commander
3	755	116.62	Joshua Seed
3	4600	113.03	Ben Keefe
3	805	102.76	Karen R. Ridge
3	4183	102.33	Seth A. Miller
4	311	106.78	Aretha Spurlock
4	2955	103.38	Ruben Hernandez
4	1197	102.6	Steven L. Hunter
5	4308	106.17	Stephen D. Baker
5	4226	104.59	John D. Hubbard
5	8739	102.06	Brian A. Beckman
6	2298	120.69	Eric S. Piwowar
6	1117	106.04	Robert A. Wilson II
6	976	104.05	Anthony R. Avers
7	342	126.67	Gary D. Holmes
7	2978	111.27	Ray W. Doeksen
7	5422	107.83	Kenneth A. Piehl
7	6632	103.57	Clarence J. Nail
7	1337	102.34	Les W. Durov
7	2698	102.22	Kenneth L. Eddy
8	1739	128.57	Douglas S. Jameson
8	2245	105.66	Michael J. Magnetta
8	7539	104.76	Clifford D. Hall
8	5815	102.2	Thomas A. Zilla
9	5346	118.84	Seth E. Floyd
9	3480	111.84	Valerie E. Young
9	8821	105.8	Jonathan L. Cooper
11	11463	112.5	Kyle W. Blumhorst
11	5596	102.38	David W. Gladney

2023-2024 All State Team of District Commanders

District 14 Clyde Rowold, Commander

2023-2024 All State Team of Post Commanders and Quartermasters

Post	Commander	Quartermaster
<b>District 3</b>		
Post 2978	Ray Doeksen	Paul Zogg
Post 8821	Jonathan Cooper	Felix Grzelinski
<b>District 4</b>		
Post 1337	Les Durov	Charles Ohrn
<b>District 5</b>		
Post 4308	Stephen Baker	Patrick Dunham
Post 4600	Ben Keefe	Ronnie Reber
<b>District 6</b>		
Post 342	Gary Holmes	Lana McCants
Post 2955	Ruben Hernandez	Maurice Buffo
Post 8739	Brian Beckman	Stanley Asp
<b>District 10</b>		
Post 755	Josh Seed	Jim Carroll
Post 11463	Kyle Blumhorst	Larry Miller
<b>District 11</b>		
Post 4168	Joseph Swinford	David Levesque
Post 5346	Seth Floyd	Gordon Lawrence
Post 6190	Stephen Sigler	Lowell Spieker
<b>District 12</b>		
Post 1241	Bradley Lemke	Wayne Bruhn
<b>District 14</b>		
Post 805	Karen Ridge	James Stover
Post 1117	Robert Wilson	John Forister
Post 1739	Douglas Jameson	James Page
Post 2698	Kenneth Eddy	Elizabeth Sturgill
Post 3480	Valerie Young	Jeannen Flemings
Post 4183	Seth Miller	Terry Grime
Post 5596	David Gladney	Steven Elliott
Post 6632	Clarence Nail	Larry Ehlers
<b>District 16</b>		
Post 311	Aretha Spurlock	Arnold Taylor
<b>District 18</b>		
Post 5422	Ken Piehl	John Ericksen
<b>District 19</b>		
Post 1197	Steven Hunter	Bryan Kelsey
Post 5815	Thomas Zilla	Dennis Jensen
Post 7539	Clifford Hall	David Burdick





Past National President Jan Owens served as the national representative to the Auxiliary's 100th Convention in Springfield.



Brig. Gen. Kevin Jacobs, Chief of Staff - Air, Illinois Air National Guard, talks about how the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the Illinois National Guard can work together on behalf of veterans and service members. Jacobs is a life member of Scott Post 4183 at Scott Air Force Base.



Past Commander-in-Chief Paul Spera served as the national representative to the VFW's 105th State Convention.



Lt. Col. Brad Leighton is presented the VFW National Grand Award - Best Feature of the Year Category.



Barb Wilson, Editor, Illinois VFW News, is presented the VFW National Grand Award for small frequency publications.



State Commander Brett Nila receives the Distinguished Service Award from the Military Order of Foreign Wars of the United States.



Rebecca Ropp receives the Firefighter of the Year award on behalf of Lt. Jasson Pech, Bolingbrook Fire Department.



State Commander Brett Nila presents Elizabeth Conroy with the Citizen of the Year award for her work as site coordinator for Wreaths Across America at Camp Butler National Cemetery.



Scott Swinford accepts Nick Nichols' Member of the Year award from State Commander Brett Nila. Nichols is a member of Piatt County Post 5346.



Juan Huerta, the Director of Public Engagement, Illinois Secretary of State office, presents special license plates to Department President Lynn Smith and State Commander Brett Nila.



District 5 Commander Marie Honeywell accepts a plaque to Ronald Hill Memorial Post 2245 for sponsoring the 2023-24 Patriot's Pen champion from Youth Activities Chairman John Davin and State Commander Brett Nila.



State Safety Chairman Les Durov and State Commander Brett Nila present the VFW National Law Enforcement Award for School Resource Officer Germaine Yancy. Post 3480 nominated Yancy for the award and will present the award to Yancy.



At left, State Safety Chairman Les Durov and State Commander Brett Nila present Royal Woolfolk with Addison Post 7446's first place safety award.





State Homeless Veterans Chairman Paul Bezzazian and State Commander Brett Nila present Homeless Veterans program award to Floyd J. Tilton Post 3878 in Rochelle.



State Homeless Veterans Chairman Paul Bezzazian and State Commander Brett Nila present Homeless Veterans program award to Kahokian Memorial Post 5691 in Collinsville.



State Homeless Veterans Chairman Paul Bezzazian and State Commander Brett Nila present Homeless Veterans program award to Judd Kendall Post 3873 in Naperville.



State National Home Chairman Kyna Simpson and State Commander Brett Nila present the National Home award to Stage Depot Post 976, Troy.



State National Home Chairman Kyna Simpson and State Commander Brett Nila present the National Home award to Fox River Post 4600, McHenry.



State National Home Chairman Kyna Simpson and State Commander Brett Nila present the National Home award to Judd Kendall Post 3873, Naperville.



State National Home Chairman Kyna Simpson and State Commander Brett Nila present a National Home certificate to District 13 Commander Deana Hiltibidal.



State National Home Chairman Kyna Simpson and State Commander Brett Nila present a National Home certificate to District 14 Commander Clyde Rowold.



Clarence Caraker, POW-MIA chairman, and State Commander Brett Nila present the Dennis Nelson Memorial Award for Most Outstanding POW-MIA Recognition Program to Post 5036, St. Charles.



The VFW Auxiliary conducts the altar cloth ceremony during the memorial service at the State Convention.



Isaac Rieke sings the national anthem during the VFW and Auxiliary Memorial Service conducted during the State Convention in Springfield.



State Commander Brett Nila and Department President Lynn Smith light the Armed Forces candle during the Illinois VFW 105th Convention Memorial Service in Springfield. The memorial service honored the VFW members and Auxiliary members from Illinois who died during the previous year.



At left, Evamarie Duff and Eric Morales place roses in memory of VFW and Auxiliary members from District 4 who have died in the past year.





Firefighter EMT Rob Bland and Bill Zangs at CPR training. (Photo by Robert B. Bland III)

### Boone County Joint Honor Guard Attends CPR Training with Local Firefighters

Bill Zangs President of Auxiliary 1461 and Honor Guard member suffered a heart attack in his home, Oct. 27. His wife called 911 and started Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR). Firefighter/EMT Robert O. Bland, member of Auxiliary 1461 was one of the responders. When he arrived, he took over CPR. Bill was transported to the hospital and when he arrived another member of Auxiliary 1461, Rachel Isham, was there to treat him. Bill recovered and is still a member of the Honor Guard and still serving as the Auxiliary President.

On May 9, Firefighter/EMT Bland was an assistant instructor to train many members of the Honor Guard, to include Bill, on CPR and First Aid. John Darley, Service Officer for Post 1461 organized the CPR training and NARCAN training. We

came close to losing a member and because of CPR, Bill is still around to still serve the Veteran community in Boone County. Posts or other interested groups should reach out to their local fire department to see if it is a training they offer. Most times, it is just a matter of a small fee to cover the cost of materials. This seems a small price to pay to save a life in a critical moment.

According to American Heart Association:

“During cardiac arrest, immediate CPR can double or triple a person’s chance for survival.

Every minute counts; survival rates without CPR, decrease by 10% as each minute passes.”

That Oct. 27, immediate CPR allowed time for first responders to arrive and get Bill to the hospital where he survived a “Widow Maker” heart attack and continues to still serve.



Past State VFW-Auxiliary President Maureen Heyden and Past Commander-in-Chief George Cramer place a Memorial Day wreath at gravesite of Past Commander-in-Chief Ray Soden.

## Post 4226 conducts Memorial Day program



VFW Post Sr. Vice Commander Trevor Goodrum conducts the roll call of deceased veterans while Department Auxiliary Senior Vice President Cindy Watters rings the bell for each name read .



## Post 3480 Places Flags at Gravesites



Members of Capt. Horace G. Burke Post 3480, East St. Louis, braved the early Spring weather to place flags at the graves of veterans buried at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery.



Rows upon rows of headstones of veterans buried at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery was decorated with a small flag in honor of Memorial Day by Capt. Horace G. Burke Post 3480.



Members of Capt. Horace G. Burke Post 3480, East St. Louis, ensured the grave of each veteran buried at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery received a flag.



# Highway 40 through Casey honors fallen Soldier, Hometown Hero

By Barbara Wilson

Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office

U.S. Highway 40 through Casey, Illinois, is now the "Army Spc. Charles Lamb Memorial Highway" after a ceremony on June 26 at the Casey Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 5762 nearly 20 years after the Illinois Army National Guard Soldier was killed during a mortar attack on a logistical base southwest of Baghdad, Iraq.

Lamb was assigned to the Illinois Army National Guard's 1544th Transportation Company, based in Paris, Illinois, which deployed to Iraq in 2004 in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. The 2004 deployment was among the toughest in modern history for the Illinois National Guard with five Soldiers killed in action and several others wounded.

"As we gather here today, let us not only remember and honor Specialist Charles Lamb, but also all the brave men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice in service to our country," said 1st Sgt. (ret.) Tyler Heleine, who grew up with Lamb in Casey and deployed with him to Iraq. "We had five heroes who were killed in action during the 1544th's 2004 deployment. Their families, friends, and fellow Soldiers, know we remember them and continue to say their names."

Heleine said some in attendance at the ceremony knew the five – Shawna Morrison, who died with Lamb on Sept. 5, 2004, Jeremy Ridlen, Ivory Phipps, and Jessica Cawvey. "For those who did not, know each of them were special and the world is less without them in it," he said. "We must never forget the debt of gratitude we owe them, and we must strive to live our lives in a way that honors their memory and upholds the values they fought to protect."

Illinois Army National Guard Spc. (ret.) Aaron Wernz, who was wounded in the same mortar attack which claimed Lamb's life, said it was proper to dedicate this highway in honor of Lamb.

"As a fellow Soldier, we

shared a battlefield with Charlie at the time of his passing," he said. "I, as I would imagine like most fellow Soldiers who experience the loss of a fellow Soldier, hope that such a loss would be for the greater good. As a combat veteran, I know that Soldiers do not choose battles or wars. That is usually reserved by people far from where the actual fighting takes place."

Wernz said it becomes apparent very quickly you, as a Soldier in combat, ultimately end up fighting for each other.

He recalled the last time he saw Lamb.

"We were both in a small room, together after both being wounded at the same time," he said. "As our fellow Soldiers fought desperately to save our lives, I remember looking over at Charlie as he looked over at me. I imagined by the looks we exchanged we had the same mutual concern for each other's situation and worry for each other's condition."

Wernz said he does not know what Lamb's last thoughts or words were.

"I do know that when I started to regain consciousness at the Baghdad Hospital and even though I could not yet speak, one of my first thoughts were of Charlie," he said. "And although I couldn't speak, I wrote down on a piece of paper Lamb's name and a question mark."

Wernz said it was at that moment he learned of Lamb's death.

"Although I will never know the final thoughts Charlie had on this earth, I imagine they were not all that different from mine that day," he said. "The concern of the condition of a fellow Soldier, a friend, that I knew was also injured and the desire that my family knew I loved them and always would."

Wernz said, as survivors, Soldiers must show respect to the sacrifice of our fallen Soldiers by standing watch over their memory and continuing on, as hard as that might be.

"Those of us who shared the



Illinois Army National Guard Soldiers who served in the 1544th Transportation Company's 2004 deployment to Iraq unveil the road sign designating Highway 40 through Casey as the Army Specialist Charles Lamb Memorial Highway at a ceremony June 26 at Casey Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 5762 in Casey. Lamb, who grew up in Casey, was killed Sept. 5, 2004 during a mortar attack in Baghdad, Iraq. (U.S. Army photo by Barbara Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office)

battlefield that our friends gave their lives on and the family and friends they left behind, must go on and live the best life we can as a tribute to the lives our fellow Soldiers were denied the opportunity to live," he said. "Maybe someday if we can give the good life as a tribute to our fallen, maybe we will get to see that mischievous Charlie Lamb smile and he'll be there to greet us as a friend."

Sgt. 1st Class (ret.) Tony Edwards, who retired from the 1544th Transportation Company after 24 years of service, said Lamb deserves the recognition.

"I never served as Lambchop's platoon sergeant, but I remember him," he said. "It probably doesn't feel like it's been 20 years for a lot of people. They say time heals all – but it never completely heals."

Heleine, who knew Lamb and his family since he was a child, said Lamb was a hero.

"The definition of a hero is a person who is admired or idealized for courage, outstanding achievements or noble qualities," he said. "We can easily insert Charles "Chuck" Lamb into that description."

Heleine said Lamb had a calmness about him with a smile that would light up a room and a presence that was always comforting to those around him.

"When I joined the 1544th in 2001, it was Chuck who made me feel comfortable right away," he said. "When we deployed to Iraq, I was a nervous 18-year-old kid who wasn't sure what I was getting myself into. But, again, it was Chuck who through his smile, confidence, calmness and short conversations made an uncomfortable situation a little easier for me."

Heleine said Lamb left a lasting mark on all who knew him, whether it was a friend, a brother-in-arms, or a loved one.

Heleine said the dedication of the Specialist Charles Lamb Memorial Highway must serve as a symbol of eternal gratitude, respect and remembrance for his sacrifice. "Thank you, Chuck for your service, your sacrifice, and your legacy," he said. "You will never be forgotten."

"There are no words to convey the immense appreciation and gratitude this state and nation owes Charles and his family members," said State Sen. Chapin Rose, who represents Illinois' 51st Senate District. "It is poignant House Joint Resolution 50 passed on Memorial Day weekend. This is some small way to honor Charles' sacrifice to this country."

State Rep. Adam Niemerg, who represents the 102nd Illinois Legislative District, said it was an honor and privilege to pass Joint House Resolution 50, renaming the road in honor of Lamb.

"I'm passionate about veterans and sacrifices they make on a daily basis for freedom and liberty, so I can live in a free country and pursue my dreams," he said. "It's all because of you guys. It's because of the men and women in uniform who serve our country."

Lamb's family described him as a fun-loving person with a mischievous smile.

"When Uncle Charlie passed, I was three years old, Ambrosia was four, and Macy was one year old," said Boston Ridgley, Lamb's niece. "Our memories are very vague, but the ones we have, we continue to cherish. When we were little our Uncle Charlie loved to hide our most precious items on top of a curio cabinet in our house. One of our favorite items was our little Mickey Mouse watches."

Ambrosia Branson, Ridgley's sister and Lamb's niece," continued with the memory.

"We would jump for what seemed like hours to get our watches, and all the while our Uncle Charlie laughed and laughed and thought it was the funniest thing in the world," she said.

"It is memories like these that are the most precious to us," said Ridgley's and Branson's sister Macy Roberts.

The three sisters thanked several people who made the ceremony possible.

"Thank you to Aunt Dixie (Clark) for being so persistent and getting a highway named in memory of Charlie, to Adam (Niemerg) and Chapin (Rose) for making this dream a reality, to our mamie and grandpa for raising such a great and selfless person," Ridgley said. "Thank you especially to Uncle Charlie for making the ultimate sacrifice for our country and all of us. Although he can't be here today, we extend a thank you to all of you for always remembering him and sharing all the memories you have of our Uncle Charlie."

The three also read a special note from Lamb's aunt, Dixie Clark.

"Thank you to all who helped along this journey," Ridgley read. "Thank you to all who made this possible and to all who are in attendance today to honor Charlie's memory. Thank you to the Casey VFW and its Auxiliary for all they have done to make this day memorable."



Current and former Soldiers serving in the 1544th Transportation Company, based in Paris, gather for a group photo during a ceremony June 26 redesignating Highway 40 through Casey as the Army Specialist Charles Lamb Memorial Highway. Lamb, who grew up in Casey, was killed Sept. 5, 2004 during a mortar attack in Baghdad, Iraq. During the deployment, the unit lost five service members. (U.S. Army photo by Barbara Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office)



# Highway 133 through Oakland honors fallen Soldier

Highway 133 through Oakland, Illinois, is now the 1st Lt. Jared W. Southworth Memorial Highway after a dedication ceremony, July 6, in the small downstate town with his family and friends, including more than a dozen of those who served with Jared in the Illinois Army National Guard's 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment, 33d Infantry Brigade Combat Team.

Jared, who was also an Oakland Police officer, was killed in action on Feb. 8, 2009 in Afghanistan. Jared lived his life by the motto "God, family, and country." He was a member of the Oakland Christian Church, and a devoted husband, father, son, and brother.

"This is an example of how small-town America honors one of our own," said Kim Southworth, Jared's mother. "Jared loved this community."

Kim recalled how people lined the streets all the way from the airport to the cemetery on the cold winter day when Jared came home.

"Thank you for the love and compassion you showed to our family."

The highway was dedicated to Jared after State Rep. Adam Niemerg, State Rep. Chris Miller, and State Sen. Chapin Rose

sponsored legislation that was passed near Memorial Day.

A friend and neighbor of the Southworths, Linda Tabor, helped push for the legislation and made arrangements for the dedication ceremony.

An Illinois National Guard Military Funeral Honors provided a 21-rifle salute, U.S. Rep. Mary Miller led the community in the Pledge of Allegiance; and three grade-schoolers, Braelyn Lee, Adlee McQueen, and Joey Goodacre, sang the National Anthem. Sgt. 1st Class Heath Clark, Jared's platoon sergeant, talked about Jared as a dedicated platoon leader who did everything in his power to prepare the Soldiers to go to war. Brad Reineke, the Senior Pastor of Oakland Christian Church, gave both the invocation and benediction.

The keynote speaker was Tony Crouch, the Senior Minister of the First Christian Church of Tuscola, who spoke of sacrifice and the Army Values - Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity and Personal Courage.

"Jared epitomized each of those values," he said. "Now there will be a reminder to whoever travels this section of road."



Above, Kim and Bob Southworth unveil the highway sign honoring their son with family during a dedication ceremony on July 6 as a section of State Highway 133 through Oakland, Illinois, was named the 1st Lt. Jared W. Southworth Highway.



At right, Kim Southworth talks about her son's love of the community during the dedication ceremony on July 6.

# VFW Member takes command of Illinois National Guard

In a ceremony steeped in military tradition, Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, of Springfield, relinquished command of the Illinois National Guard to Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, of Naperville, during a change of command May 4 at Glenwood High School in Chatham. Following the change of command ceremony, Neely retired after 40 years of service in the Illinois National Guard.

Both are life members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars in Illinois.

With Boyd's assumption of command, he becomes the first Black officer and person of color to lead the 13,000 Soldiers and Airmen in the Illinois National Guard as the Adjutant General. Boyd will also serve on the governor's cabinet as the Director of the Department of Military Affairs.

"Major General Neely is leaving some very big shoes to fill, but I could not be more confident in Major General Rodney Boyd's ability to do so," said Governor JB Pritzker. "Today, he will become the first Black officer and person of color to assume command as Adjutant General and Director of Military Affairs. I chose you for this position because you are an outstanding commander and leader. Though the challenges of tomorrow are unknown, it gives me great comfort knowing you will be with us to face them. I look forward to working together with you to promote security,

safety, and freedom for the people of Illinois and our nation."

Boyd is a combat veteran who has served in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Kuwait; and has been the Assistant Adjutant General-Army and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard since July 2021.

"We're also here to honor a man who has given so much to our state, our nation, and to the troops under his command over his 40 years of service," Pritzker said. "General Neely was an outstanding leader of our forces, guiding us through unprecedented times with a poise and decisiveness honed through a storied career in the Armed Forces. From historic floods to civil unrest to a global pandemic, General Neely has helped us face some of our toughest challenges, leading us out to the other side safer, stronger, and more unified."

As Adjutant General, Neely oversaw the deployment of 4,800 Soldiers and Airmen to 21 countries worldwide, and supported domestic missions made up of 5,600 Guard members, oversaw 220 international partnership activities assisting countries across the world including the Illinois National Guard's State Partnership Program with Poland.

"You forget how many people you interact with across a 40-year career," Neely said. "As I transition, I am extremely encouraged that my leadership had some impact to the



State Senior Vice Commander Maurice Bridges, center, and State Junior Vice Commander Eugene Blackwell, third from right, attended the Illinois National Guard change of command ceremony May 4 in Chatham. Following the change of command, the two had an opportunity to congratulate both Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the 40th Adjutant General of Illinois, and Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, the 41st Adjutant General of Illinois, and their spouses, Tammy Neely and Darlene Boyd. Bridges, who retired from the Illinois Air National Guard, served with Brig. Gen. Kevin Jacobs, Chief of Staff-Air, in the 126th Air Refueling Wing.

organization."

Neely said that when becoming Adjutant General, for he and his wife, Tammy, it was about giving back.

Neely thanked his family for their support throughout his career.

"My family has put up with many many things," he said. "They've endured multiple deployments, many schools, lots of deployments, and the kids never complained. It was my wife, Tammy, who sacrificed the most. It was my second deployment - she was left at home with four teenagers and a seven-

year-old, managing a business. I think my deployment to Iraq was easier than her time at home.

"She's been an amazing partner," he said. "I sought out her approval before accepting this position because I knew she would be thrust into an even more challenging position."

Boyd said it feels like he's been preparing for this role his entire life.

"Thank you, Governor Pritzker, for offering me the opportunity to command this great organization," he said. "I feel like I have been preparing for this my entire life."

Boyd also thanked the Neely family for their support.

"We can't do what we do without the support of our spouses, significant others, and our family," Boyd said. "We have the easy job. We put on the uniform, and we go. Without you all, we can't do that."

Boyd also expressed his appreciation to his family - including his siblings, two sons, Rodney, Jr., and Randy, and most importantly, his wife Darlene.

"My wife Darlene and I have been together 34 years this August," he said. "We have a lot more work to do, so hang in there."





# VFW Auxiliary

## Auxiliary President

Cindy Watters



Hello, my name is Cindy, and I am deeply humbled by the opportunity to hold the esteemed office of Department President.

Allow me to share how this remarkable journey began, but first a little about myself.

In 1985, I married an amazing man, John Watters. Together, we welcomed three children: two boys and a girl. J.R. is the oldest, followed by Josh, and then Jen. Over time, our family expanded through the marriages of our kids, bringing us two wonderful bonus children and four grandsons!

In 2008, my daughter, Jen, was part of the JROTC. As someone who dives headfirst into every endeavor, I eagerly volunteered as a chaperone for the cadets. It was during one of

these JROTC events that fate intervened.

The VFW Auxiliary in Olney organized a fundraiser, and I found myself assisting. Little did I know that this seemingly ordinary day would alter the course of my life. I became a life member and dedicated myself to supporting the Auxiliary in every way possible. My active involvement became a source of pride, and I cherish the friendships and shared purpose within our community.

But there is more to this story. My membership eligibility is traced back to my father, a World War II Army Infantry Veteran who was awarded a Purple Heart. A man of quiet strength, he carried secrets that only surfaced a few years

before his passing. Imagine my surprise when I discovered that my unassuming father had been a "BadA\*\*." He served as a marksman and a heavy equipment specialist, a revelation that left me both amused and awestruck.

Imagine if John had only known that about Dad before dating me! It was at this time, that I became fixated on his compass. I took a picture of it on the dining room table and it has served as my screen saver for many years. I knew that when the time came, I would use it as my pin. For me, a compass is not merely a tool for navigation but a cherished heirloom that is now in my possession. This simple device guided my dad in struggling times of war, it will guide us toward the future as one.

As life unfolded, unexpected opportunities arose. I had my sights set on running for Department Guard at a later time, but fate had other plans. Rhonda Borkgren, in front of John and with impeccable timing, asked if I would run. My husband's

unwavering support left me speechless, with my mouth hanging open! His encouragement is still present today.

My father, ever present in my heart, played a pivotal role in shaping my special project. He had a special bond with his dog, Stubby—a loyal companion and lifeline for 13 years. Despite Dad's occasional reluctance, he dutifully took Stubby outside and cooked for him and their connection undoubtedly prolonged his life. Stubby was not a trained service dog, but he fulfilled that role for my father in ways words cannot capture.

Recently, when Samee Schmidgall promoted "This Able Veteran" as her special project, it struck a chord deep within me. The cause resonated—the intersection of service, loyalty, and unwavering commitment. I carry my father's legacy with me, knowing he

looks down with a sheepish grin, proud of the path I have chosen.

The theme "Navigating the Future" was chosen not just for its literal significance but for the path it charts for our organization—a path laid in unity and solidarity with our National Commander-in-Chief and National President, and together in partnership with Department Commander Bridges. Together, we embark on this journey, not as individuals, but as a collective force dedicated to making a tangible difference in the lives of those we serve.

In this office of Department President, I pledge to honor our organization and serve with the same dedication that guided my father and Stubby. Their spirits propel me forward, and I embrace this extraordinary privilege with gratitude.

Thank you for allowing me to share my story.

## Year-End Wrap Up Auxiliary President

Lynn Smith



growing.

I would like to end by adding a sixth and seventh attribute to VFW and Auxiliary membership: comaraderie and being part of a family that cares for one another and makes a difference in the lives of our veterans!

Every program sponsored by the VFW and the VFW Auxiliary, whether jointly or separately, they COMPLIMENT each other.

"Teamwork is the ability to work together towards a common vision. The ability to direct individual accomplishments towards organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain an uncommon result."

Thank you for being a part of our family!

What a year!

First, I would like to thank all our Auxiliaries and Districts for their hard work. To the Auxiliary and District Chairmen, great job. To the Department Chairmen, Line Officers, you all have worked so hard to make this a great year.

The National Convention was held in Louisville and Illinois had a great representation and we did a great job winning awards.

Here they are -

- Auxiliary Outreach, Cheryl Miller won Award 1 and Award 2, first place Outstanding Performance Award.
- Historian & Media Rela-

tions, Mary Spindler won Award 2, first place Outstanding Performance Award.

• Hospital, Laura Knackstedt won Award 1 and Award 2, first place Outstanding Performance Award. Janet Long won Outstanding Hospital Volunteer.

• Legislative, Janet Long won Award 2, first Place Outstanding Performance Award.

• Membership, Rhonda Borkgren, won Award 2, second Place Outstanding Performance. Karen Scherer, Chelsea Maynor, and Brandon Lake received awards for recruiting 20 new members. Michael Maruszak received National Conference Coaches Award.

• Mentoring For Leadership, Barbara Howard won Award 2, second place Outstanding Performance Award.

• Scholarship, Laurie Sparwasser, won Award 2, second place Outstanding Performance Award.

The year ended on a great note. I want to thank every member for all the hard work they have done. This was all possible because of your hard work for our Veterans. Because of this we made the Circle of Excellence. Thank you, Thank you, Thank you.

Now, as the new year starts don't stop working, I want to congratulate Cindy, our Line Officers and Chairmen, wishes for the best year. Thanks again for the memories.

Photos from the Department and National Conventions are on Pages 15-16.

## Auxiliary Membership

Kathy Rowold & Mary Lee



According to Google, membership has five attributes: boundaries, emotional safety, a sense of belonging and identification, personal investment and a common symbol system.

Being a member of the VFW and VFW Auxiliary provides those attributes and more! Overall the Auxiliary has nearly 470,000 members and more than 3,500 Auxiliaries representing all 50 states, the Philippines and Guam.

Illinois currently has 17,341 members, a decline from 18,067 last year. We cannot continue on this downward spiral!

The big question for every organization when it comes to membership is "How do I maintain AND increase membership?"

Obviously if we had the answer, our numbers would be increasing, not decreasing. BUT, that doesn't mean we give up—we just need to explore new ways and be open to new ideas. The Auxiliary and the VFW offers member referral awards. The Auxiliary is thankful for those members who recruit 20 plus members in one year but we are also thankful for the member who recruits one new member!

We need to partner with our Post to recruit members. Do all your Post members have family members belonging to your Auxiliary? If not, why not?

When a comrade or Auxiliary member sees a veteran either in

veteran attire or even by their license plate, are we asking them if they have served in a foreign campaign and if so, are they a member of the VFW? If the first answer is 'yes' and the second answer is 'no I don't belong to the VFW', after explaining the benefits, don't stop there! The next question should be 'Do you know 12 members of your family are eligible to join the Auxiliary?' The Comrades and the Auxiliary need to work together to keep both our families



2023-2024 Department Auxiliary President Lynn Smith was inducted into the National VFW Auxiliary's Circle of Excellence during the National Convention was cheered on by several delegates of the VFW and its Auxiliary during the induction ceremony in Louisville, Kentucky.



# Auxiliary Delegates travel to Louisville for National Convention



Illinois VFW Auxiliary delegates pause for a group photo during the Auxiliary National Convention in Louisville, Kentucky.



Past National President Colette Bishop and Past Department President Lynn Smith during the Circle of Excellence ceremony.



Congrats to Membership Chairman Rhonda Borkgren for her 2nd Place Outstanding Performance Award.



Congratulations to our very own Michael Maruszak on his Golden Malta Award Win as the Big 10 National Conference Coach!!



Congratulations Legislative Chairman Janet Long on her 1st Place Outstanding Performance Award for the state of Illinois!!



Congratulations Hospital Chairman Laura Knackstedt on your 1st Place Outstanding Achievement Award and your specialty award!



Congratulations to our Historian Mary Johnson Spindler on her 1st Place Outstanding Performance Award.



Congratulations to VFW Auxiliary 6632 Red Bud, for their Most Outstanding use of the Buddy Poppy in another VFW Auxiliary National Program.



Congratulations to our Scholarship Chairman Laurie Sparwasser on your 2nd Place Outstanding Performance Award.



Congratulations to Mentoring for Leadership Chairman Barbara Howard on your 2nd Place Outstanding Performance Award.



# Auxiliary delegates receive awards at Department Convention



Several auxiliaries within Illinois were inducted into the Circle of Excellence during the Auxiliary's 100th Department Convention in June. Congratulations to all the auxiliaries who achieved this honor.



Barbara Howard presents the mentoring for leadership award to Janet Kays.



Barbara Howard presents the mentoring for leadership award to Cheryl Miller.



District 14 President Kathy Rowold was named District President of the Year.



Lynn Smith presents the auxiliary's donation to Project Diehard for suicide prevention. Project Diehard was Smith's special project as Department President.



Sarah Higginbotham presents Buddy Poppy/National Home awards.



Billie Guthals presents a Veterans and Family Support award to Diane Ahrens.



Billie Guthals presents a Veterans and Family Support award to Patricia Caraker.



State Commander Brett Nila visited the Auxiliary during their convention. Nila thanked Department President Lynn Smith and the entire auxiliary for their work on behalf of veterans.



Membership Chairman Rhonda Borkgren presents awards to Laura Knackstadt during the auxiliary convention.