Illinois VFW News
Vol. 64, No. 3
November 2026




# Illinois Day at VFW National Home Nets $104,052 in Donations

Page 12

# Department of Illinois

## Fact Sheet

## About us

The VFW traces its roots back to 1899 when veterans of the Spanish-American War (1898) and the Philippine Insurrection (1899-1902) founded local organizations to secure rights and benefits for their service. Many arrived home sick or wounded. There was no medical care or veterans' pension for them and they were left to care for themselves.

## 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.

## 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.


**Contact Us:**

**Phone:** 217-529-6688

**Facebook:** VFW State of Illinois

**Email:** vfwil@vfwil.org


## 2025/2026 Metrics

| | |
|---|---|
| $280,230<br>$47,176 | Service Members Assistance<br>Military Appreciation Programs |
| 76,269 | Total VFW/AUX Volunteer Hours |
| 86 Scholarships and<br>$406,918 Awarded | Help a Hero<br>Scholarship |
| 1,291 | Voice of Democracy Student Participation |
| 209,000 | Poppies Distributed |
| 3,391 | Patriots Pen Student Participation |
| 503<br>$306,336,955 | VA Claims Filed<br>New Recoveries |

**Community Service VFW/AUX**
**Hours 76,204 Donated $1,377,717**
**Total** (Hours & Dollars) **$4,028,862**

| | |
|---|---|
| 33,451 | Members |
| December 11, 1920 | Charter Date |
| 2026-2027<br>State Commander | Robert Bailey |

Illinois VFW News

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# FROM THE STATE COMMANDER

## Standing Together in Service for our Veterans, Military, and Communities




**Robert J. Bailey**
Commander
Department of Illinois VFW

**Comrades, Auxiliary Members, and VFW Family,**

As we move deeper into the autumn season, I want to take a moment to reflect on the incredible dedication demonstrated across every Post, District, and Auxiliary unit in the Department of Illinois. From Chicago to Cairo, our membership continues to prove that our commitment to serving veterans, military service members, and our local communities is unwavering.

Whether you are organizing local parades, staffing Buddy Poppy drives, assisting a fellow veteran with claims paperwork, or hosting youth education banquets, your daily efforts form the backbone of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. I extend my sincere gratitude to each and every one of you for your continued service, leadership, and camaraderie.

### 1. Honoring Veterans Day Across the Land of Lincoln

With Veterans Day on November 11th, Posts and Auxiliaries across Illinois are gearing up for one of our most vital times of the year. This is our opportunity to stand front and center in our towns and cities, highlighting the service of all who have worn the uniform.

- **Community Outreach:** Reach out to local schools, civic groups, and local leaders. Volunteer to speak at assemblies, host open houses at your Post homes, and engage the public in honoring our nation's heroes.
- **Buddy Poppy Distribution:** The Buddy Poppy program remains a cornerstone of our relief funds. Ensure your distribution teams are active in high-traffic community locations, explaining to the public that every donation directly supports local veterans in need and maintains our relief programs.
- **Welcoming the Public:** Use Veterans Day events as primary recruiting opportunities. Have membership applications ready, welcome returning service members and active-duty personnel, and show them firsthand the value of joining our VFW family.

### 2. Youth Programs, Scholarships, and Program Book Submissions

Our Youth Programs Chairpersons are actively receiving entries for two of our premier national competitions: the Voice of Democracy audio-essay contest and the Patriot's Pen written essay contest.

- **Judging & Advancements:** Post-level judging should be wrapping up, with winning entries advancing to the District level strictly according to schedule. Thank you to all Post Youth Chairs and Auxiliary volunteers who spent hours reading and evaluating these outstanding student submissions.

• **2027 Program Book Advertisements:** Posts, Auxiliaries, Districts, and individual supporters wishing to place an advertisement or tribute in the 2027 Voice of Democracy / Patriot's Pen Program Book for the upcoming February banquet must submit their completed request form with full payment by December 15, 2026. Submissions, ad copy, and high-resolution photos should be directed to State Headquarters as soon as possible to ensure proper layout and printing.

**3. Critical Post Administrative Operations & Compliance**

To ensure our Department remains strong, transparent, and financially sound, Post and District leadership must stay vigilant regarding national and state administrative requirements. Please review and execute the following deadlines immediately:

• **IRS Form 990 Filing Deadline:** The federal deadline to file your Post's IRS Form 990 (or 990-EZ / 990-N) is November 15, 2026. Failure to file can endanger your Post's tax-exempt status. If your Quartermaster needs assistance, contact Department Headquarters immediately.

• **Mandatory Officer Bonding:** As a reminder, all Post and District Officer bonds expired as of August 31, 2026. Under National Bylaws Section 703, every officer who handles Post funds—including Quartermasters and Adjutants—must be properly bonded. If your Post has not renewed its bond policy for the current term, execute it without delay.

• **Post Audits and District Inspections:** Quarterly audits for the preceding quarter must be completed by the Trustees and submitted on schedule. Additionally, District Inspectors are actively conducting annual Post inspections. Ensure your Post meeting minutes, financial ledgers, Quartermaster records, and relief logs are organized and accessible.

**4. Legislative Advocacy & Service Officer Support**

Our mission extends far beyond our Post doors. Through the VFW National Legislative Service and our Department Service Officers, we continue to fight for veterans' rights, healthcare improvements, and earned benefits at both the state and federal levels.

• **VA Claims Assistance:** Remind comrades in your area that Department Service Officers are available to assist with VA claims, appeals, and PACT Act benefit inquiries at no charge. Never let a veteran pay for claims assistance when our trained VFW Accredited Service Officers are here to help.

• **Grassroots Advocacy:** Stay informed on active legislation affecting veterans. Sign up for VFW Action Alerts so you can contact your federal and state representatives when critical veterans' legislation comes to the floor.

**5. Membership Growth & Auxiliary Partnership**

A strong Post relies on an active, growing membership base. Recruitment and retention must remain a daily priority.

• **Retention & Dues Renewal:** Reach out directly to continuous members who have not yet renewed their annual dues for the current term. A simple phone call or personal visit often makes all the difference.

• **Auxiliary Collaboration:** The VFW and VFW Auxiliary operate best when working shoulder-to-shoulder. Coordinate joint fundraising, community service initiatives, and family events to strengthen the bonds within your Post family.

**Standing Together in Service**

Our organization's strength has always been rooted in our shared purpose and camaraderie. When we work together—supporting our veterans, mentoring our youth, and giving back to our communities—we ensure that the Department of Illinois remains a trusted leader within the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Thank you for your sacrifice, your hard work, and your relentless devotion to our cause. Let us finish this quarter strong, meet every deadline, and continue to serve with honor.

# FROM THE AUXILIARY PRESIDENT

## Reflections of the approaching holiday season



**Danielle Krull**
President
Department of Illinois
VFW Auxiliary

THEIR FIGHT. THEIR STORY. OUR VOICE.

As the holiday season approaches, I find myself reflecting on what this time of year truly means. Beyond the decorations, gatherings, and traditions, the holidays remind us of the importance of gratitude, kindness, and hope. They give us a chance to pause, count our blessings, remember those we love, and reach out to those who may need a helping hand.

This season also carries with it the promise of new beginnings. As one year comes to a close and another begins, we are given the opportunity to start fresh, set new goals, and look ahead with optimism. For many of us, the new year brings hope that tomorrow can be better than yesterday, and that together we can continue making a positive difference in the lives of others.

When we think about serving veterans, military families, and our communities, we often think of fundraising and financial support. Those efforts are certainly important, but sometimes the most meaningful assistance comes in much simpler ways. Sometimes it is taking the time to teach, mentor, listen, or encourage.

As we move into the new year, I encourage each Post and Auxiliary to take a look within its own membership. Are there comrades or Auxiliary members who could benefit from a class on identifying email and phone scams? Is there someone who would appreciate learning how to send a text message, use email, or connect with loved ones through technology? Could we offer a training session that helps members feel more confident navigating today's digital world?

Many of our members have incredible knowledge and talents to share. By helping one another learn new skills, we strengthen not only the individual but our entire VFW family. A few hours spent teaching someone how to recognize a scam, access important information online, or stay connected with family can be just as valuable as any financial contribution.

The holidays remind us that service comes in many forms. Sometimes it is found in a donation, and sometimes it is found in a conversation, a lesson, a helping hand, or simply being there for one another. When we invest in our members, we build stronger Posts, stronger Auxiliaries, and stronger communities.

As your Auxiliary Department President, I am grateful for each of you and for all that you do throughout the year. Thank you for your dedication, your compassion, and your commitment to our veterans and their families. It is an honor to serve alongside such remarkable people.

I wish you and your loved ones a joyful holiday season filled with peace, laughter, and cherished memories. May the new year bring you good health, happiness, hope, and many new opportunities.

Stay safe, stay warm, and may you have a blessed, prosperous New Year.



**Department President Danielle Krull was on hand to present daughter and newest Auxiliary member, Kennedy Krull her membership card and welcome her into the VFW Auxiliary.**



**Department President Danielle Krull with District 6 Auxiliary President Tinia Kulavic during Krull's official visit to District 6.**


# Illinois VFW News

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ILLINOIS VFW NEWS COMMITTEE

Robert J. Bailey ..... State Commander
Bobby Edwards ..... State Adjutant
Brett Nila ..... Committee Chairman
Bobby Welch ..... State Historian
Barb Wilson ..... Editor



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## STATE OFFICERS

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Commander | Robert Bailey | 7452 | District 19 |
| Sr. Vice | Ryan Higginbotham | 4266 | District 13 |
| Jr. Vice | Doug Jameson | 1739 | District 14 |
| Adjutant | Bobby Edwards | 10302 | District 10 |
| Judge Advocate | Jayson Hoffman | 4763 | District 10 |
| Surgeon | Dr. Damon Arnold | 311 | District 16 |
| Chaplain | David Terrinoni | 454 | District 7 |
| Chief of Staff | David Long | 454 | District 7 |
| Inspector | Cathy Stubbs | 7710 | District 14 |
| Jr. Past Cmdr | Eugene Blackwell | 311 | District 16 |
| NCM | Matthew Claussen | 2868 | District 4 |

## DISTRICT COMMANDERS

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 3 | Zhi Chen | Post 5079 | Chicago |
| 4 | Evamarie Duff | Post 2868 | Brookfield |
| 5 | Mathius Carter | Post 12014 | Crystal Lake |
| 6 | John Winterton | Post 8739 | Oregon |
| 7 | Justin Penrod | Post 5520 | Champaign |
| 8 | Iris Miller | Post 5117 | Carthage |
| 9 | Scott Heyob | Post 2470 | Ottawa |
| 10 | Lawrence Miller | Post 11463 | Rochester |
| 11 | Joseph May | Post 99 | Decatur |
| 12 | Anthony Avers | Post 976 | Troy |
| 13 | Benjamin Newborn | Post 9153 | Waltonville |
| 14 | Jill Schofield | Post 7682 | Mascoutah |
| 15 | Carmel Owen | Post 9763 | Creal Springs |
| 16 | Rupert Evans | Post 311 | Richton Park |
| 17 | James Thorne | Post 7862 | Arcola |
| 18 | Paul Cravens | Post 725 | Mokena |
| 19 | Steven Hunter | Post 1197 | Batavia |

# Skip & Tara's Membership Minute

***By Alonzo "Skip" and Tara Skipper***
***Department of Illinois VFW and VFW Auxiliary Membership chairmen***

## Full Steam Ahead for Membership!

First, NASCAR — WOW! Our team put in 117 documented volunteer and staff hours over the NASCAR weekend, talking with Veterans and families from Illinois and well beyond. We handed out flags, wristbands and Buddy Poppies, talked membership and Auxiliary eligibility, but some of the most important conversations had absolutely nothing to do with asking someone to join.

One interaction really drove home why having our VSOs involved in recruiting events is so important. We met a Veteran with cancer who had served at Camp Lejeune, had undergone a hip replacement and had other health concerns. He became emotional when he realized there may finally be someone who could help him navigate his benefits and claims. We were able to connect him with Craig Koch from Post 805 to review his case. We also connected a surviving spouse with assistance for survivor benefits.

That is recruiting.

Sometimes recruiting isn't asking, "Would you like to join the VFW?" Sometimes it is asking, "Have you talked to a VSO? Let us help you." When Veterans see what the VFW actually DOES, membership conversations happen naturally.

That same spirit has carried into our District visits. Since our last Membership Minute, we've added a couple more stops to our travels — District 4 on August 22 and District 18 on September 20 — and we're not finished yet! More District visits are still to come.

We've also been seeing Batavia actively promoting the Sponsor a Veteran program on social media. Batavia has really embraced Sponsor a Veteran, working to put Life Memberships into the hands of deserving Veterans while strengthening the VFW for years to come. If your Post or District is interested in Sponsor a Veteran, reach out or check out the information on vfwil.org.

By now, you should also have seen Skip's FULL STEAM AHEAD! challenge. The challenge runs October 1 through January 1. Our first statewide stop is 89 percent, and the final destination is 91 percent! Posts qualify based on their net membership growth from that September 30 baseline, with drawings at the 89 percent and 91 percent milestones.

So VFW — FULL STEAM AHEAD TO 91 percent!

And while the VFW is building steam, Auxiliary — this coffee is brewing up STRONG!

I am so proud of where we are going! While Skip and I were working NASCAR, Danielle threw out that pop-up challenge, and you answered it. Our Auxiliaries stepped up, and I cannot thank you enough.

And look where all that work has taken us — Illinois is currently #7 in the Nation!

But let's not slow down now. Our National goal is 95 percent by November 30. Yes, I set our Department goal earlier because I wanted us to beat the National deadline, but we can absolutely still get there! Then we keep brewing because our next Department goal is 98 percent by January 15.

Let's meet those goals — and then let's exceed them. 95 percent, then 98 percent!

As we head into the holidays, there is one more part of membership that Skip and I think becomes especially important: Buddy Checks.

We've had a recent reminder close to home of just how important it can be to check on our people. Sometimes we don't know what someone is going through until we pick up the phone, stop by, or simply notice that someone we normally see hasn't been around.

Don't only call someone because their dues are due. Call because you haven't seen them. Call because they normally come around and suddenly haven't. Maybe their health has changed. Maybe their financial situation has changed. Maybe they can't drive at night anymore or simply need a ride. Maybe life has just gotten hard.

Or maybe they just need to know someone noticed they weren't there.

That's the human side of membership, and sometimes that phone call is far more important than anything we're going to see on a membership report.

And because even heavy reminders need a little light at the end, you know Skip and I can't finish a Membership Minute without giving you another random fact about us…

We got married in Las Vegas at the Little White Chapel!

Now, back to work — because we still have goals to hit!

VFW — let's get to 91 percent!

Auxiliary — we need that 95 percent, and then we're coming for 98 percent!

Let's keep it moving — whether we're brewing coffee or running FULL STEAM AHEAD!




VFW

VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS.

ILLINOIS

# FULL STEAM AHEAD!

# ILLINOIS VFW MEMBERSHIP CHALLENGE

## OCTOBER 1 – JANUARY 1

**ALL ABOARD — EVERY POST COUNTS!**

### FIRST STOP: 89%

Your Post must achieve a

**+3% NET MEMBERSHIP**

BEFORE the Department reaches 89%.

QUALIFY & YOU'RE ENTERED FOR A CHANCE TO WIN:




8' VFW BLACK TABLE COVER

OR

**$100**

### FINAL DESTINATION: 91%

Your Post must achieve a

**+6% NET MEMBERSHIP**

QUALIFY & YOU'RE ENTERED FOR A CHANCE TO WIN:




**10' X 10' VFW TENT WITH VFW LOGO**

OR

**$300**

## HOW TO QUALIFY

- All Illinois VFW Posts are eligible.
- Grow your Post by the required net membership percentage.
- A Post must meet the applicable challenge requirements to be entered into the drawing.

The 89% drawing is fluid — it will be held the day after the Department reaches 89%.

**January 1.**
Membership numbers will be reviewed on January 2.

**THE MISSION**
*Recruit. Reconnect. Retain.*

*Every Post. Every Member. One Department.*

**FULL STEAM AHEAD TO 91%!**

# VFW Membership Teams Head to NASCAR Weekend












# State Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen Banquet Book Ad Form

## VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS & AUXILIARY DEPARTMENT OF ILLINOIS

## FEBRUARY 6, 2027

**Please place an "X" in the box of the ad size you are requesting**

☐ **FULL PAGE $200.00** • ☐ **1/2 PAGE $125.00** • ☐ **1/4 PAGE $75.00**

If wanted, please include a color photo with ad copy.
Print or type ad copy below, or attach a separate sheet.

PLEASE ENCLOSE PAYMENT IN FULL OR
PAY VIA CREDIT/DEBIT CARD AT www.vfwil.org

**BOOKS WILL BE DISTRIBUTED AT STATE VOICE OF DEMOCRACY AND PATRIOT'S PEN BANQUET IN FEBRUARY**

Please mail ad copy and any photos your Post/District wants included in the ad, along with appropriate payment to:

Editor, 2027 Voice of Democracy/Patriot's Pen Program Book
3300 Constitution Dr
Springfield, IL 62711

or send via email to: barb.wilson2@outlook.com (please cc vfwil@vfwil.org)
Questions? Contact State Headquarters at (217) 529-6688

**DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION IS DECEMBER 15, 2026**

# Rain Doesn't Dampen Spirit of Illinois Day at VFW National Home, Nets $104,052 in Donations

A little rain couldn't dampen the spirit of Illinois Day 2026 at the VFW National Home!

Each year, Illinois Day gives us the opportunity to welcome friends, supporters, and members of the VFW Department of Illinois and its Auxiliary to campus. While Mother Nature had different plans for this year's outdoor activities, the day was still filled with plenty of laughter, fun, generosity, and a few surprises.

And by surprises, we mean onions disguised as caramel apples.

A Prank with a Plot Twist

What started as a plan to prank VFW National Home Executive Director Dr. Jerred Johnson quickly turned into a double prank.

The original plan was simple: convince Jerred to take a bite out of what appeared to be a delicious caramel apple, but was actually an onion dipped in caramel. Once Jerred caught wind of the prank, he decided to turn the tables and make Chief Operating Officer Dave Lewis the unsuspecting victim instead. There was just one problem: the rest of the staff was one step ahead.

In the end, both Jerred and Dave took a big bite out of caramel-covered onions, much to the delight of everyone watching. Needless to say, neither one will be trusting a caramel apple handed to them by staff anytime soon.

Thankfully, there were plenty of real caramel apples to go around. Kids had the opportunity to create their own at the caramel apple station, choosing from a variety of toppings to make the perfect fall treat. Pumpkin decorating was another favorite activity, giving everyone a chance to get



creative and take home a little piece of fall from the National Home.

When It Rains, We Improvise

Illinois Day usually gives our guests a chance to enjoy the beauty of our 640-acre campus, but steady rain meant we needed to make a few adjustments.

Campus tours moved onto the bus, giving visitors a warm and dry way to see the National Home, learn more about our programs, and hear about the work happening across campus. We also brought the fun indoors, adding lawn games to the Community Center Auditorium.

Because at the National Home, a little rain simply means finding a new way to have fun.

More important than any activity, though, was getting to spend time with the friends and supporters who traveled from Illinois. State Days are about more than an agenda or a list of activities. They are about relationships. They give our supporters an opportunity to see firsthand the impact of their generosity while giving our families and staff the chance to personally thank the people who continue to believe in our mission.

“The partnership we have with Illinois means so much to the National Home,” said Dr. Jerred Johnson, VFW National Home Executive Director.




“Year after year, they show up for our veterans and their families with incredible generosity and a genuine passion for our mission. We are grateful not only for their financial support, but for the



relationships and friendships they continue to build with our families and staff.”

Illinois Helps Push Two Projects Across the Finish Line

That generosity was on full display this year.

VFW Department of Illinois State Commander Rob Bailey and Auxiliary President Danielle Krull announced that funds raised by Illinois would support two important projects at the National Home: the Early Education Center Playground and the Community Center Game Room. Both projects already had fundraising underway, but Illinois stepped in with the support needed to help push both projects across the finish line.

The Early Education Center Playground will provide a safe, engaging space where some of the youngest children on our campus can play, explore, learn, and simply be kids. Improvements to the Community Center Game Room will benefit families across campus, providing an updated space where kids and teens gather, stay active, and build connections with one another.

These projects are different in purpose, but they share something important, they help create the sense of community that makes the National Home so special.

For more than a century, the VFW National Home has been a place where veterans and their families can find stability, support, and hope for what comes next. Partnerships like the one we share with Illinois help us continue creating a place where kids can be kids and families can heal, and where veterans and families can build new beginnings.

To State Commander Bailey, President Krull, the VFW Department of Illinois, its Auxiliary, and every individual who donated, traveled to Michigan, participated in Illinois Day, or supports the National Home throughout the year, thank you!

Your generosity was overwhelming, and your friendship means just as much.




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Rio Tinto
Action
LUMBER

# Auxiliary Chairman First-Time Attendee of Illlinois Day at VFW National Home

On Sept. 19, approximately 75–80 members of the Illinois VFW and VFW Auxiliary gathered at the VFW National Home in Eaton Rapids, Michigan, for Illinois Day.

A particularly meaningful part of the day was recognizing the tremendous financial support provided by Illinois. The Illinois VFW and Department of Illinois VFW Auxiliary presented a grand total of $104,052.05 in donations to the VFW National Home.

This incredible contribution represents more than a dollar amount, it reflects the commitment, generosity, and dedication of VFW and Auxiliary members throughout Illinois who continue to support veterans, service members, and their families.

Illinois should be proud to know we supported two HUGE goals with this grand total. VFW National Home will install new playground equipment at the daycare on campus and update the game room for all to enjoy, especially with the upcoming winter months!

The children participated in fall theme activities at the community building, including a personalized caramel “onion” for Executive Director, Dr. Jerred Johnson. I do believe he will be more cautious in the future when he bites into a caramel apple! The campus was lively on this day despite the rain.

As a first-time attendee at the VFW National Home, I was truly impressed by the compassion, dedication, and sense of community that I experienced. The VFW National Home is so much more than a campus of houses, buildings, and beautiful memorial gardens. It is a place where children can safely ride their bicycles to the community building, learn the importance of helping others, and grow up surrounded by a community that looks out for one another.

What touched me most was witnessing the way the staff interact with the families. They treat each family with genuine care and compassion, as though they are part of their own family. The laughter, smiles, and hugs shared throughout the day were a beautiful reflection of the love and connection that exists within the National Home community.

The VFW National Home is more than 472 acres of land and buildings. It is a community. It is a place of healing, growth, hope, and belonging, a place where families can find support, build meaningful connections, and move forward together!



# Simpson Installed as District 8 Trustee During Annual Meeting at VFW National Home

On Oct. 24, the VFW National Home gathered for its Annual Meeting, a time to reflect on our mission, celebrate the dedication of those who serve, and welcome new leadership to our Board of Trustees.

This year, we were proud to induct Jodie Hollinger as Board President, Bill Miles as District 5 Trustee, Kyna Simpson as District 8 Trustee, and Jim Payne as District 4 Interim Trustee.

While each brings unique experiences, talents, and perspectives to the Board, they all share something that lies at the very heart of the VFW National Home: a passion for serving veterans and their families and a commitment to ensuring that those who have sacrificed for our country have a place to turn when they need it most.

Kyna Simpson – District 8 Trustee

Representing District 8 (Illinois, Indiana, Missouri, and Kentucky), Kyna Simpson brings a unique combination of military experience, educational leadership, and a passion for advocating for veteran families.

Kyna retired from the United States Navy in 2019 after 24 years of active and reserve service, including a deployment to Afghanistan. Since joining the VFW in 2018, she has taken on numerous leadership roles, always looking for opportunities to make a meaningful difference.

Since 2023, Kyna has served as the Illinois National Home Department Chair, helping strengthen the connection between Illinois and the National Home. Through this role, she has developed a deep appreciation for how the National Home continues to evolve to meet the changing needs of veterans and their families.

As a retired public-school teacher who now operates a home-based school for young children, Kyna also understands the importance of education, emotional well-being, and a supportive environment in helping children thrive.

Her passion extends beyond providing immediate assistance. She believes in helping families build the skills, confidence, and resources needed for long-term success. As District 8 Trustee, Kyna looks forward to spreading awareness of the National Home's programs and ensuring more veterans and their families know that help, hope, and opportunity are available.



**Illinois' own Kyna Simpson, right, recites the oath of office during the installation of new VFW National Home board leadership during the VFW National Home's annual meeting. Simpson was inducted as the District 8 trustee, representing Illinois, Indiana, Missouri, and Kentucky.**

### A Heartfelt Thank You to Jerry Blake

As we welcome new leadership, we also want to take a moment to recognize and thank Jerry Blake, who concludes his six-year term representing District 8 on the VFW National Home Board of Trustees. During his time on the Board, Jerry served as Board President for the 2024–2025 year, providing leadership, guidance, and an unwavering commitment to our mission. But to those of us at the National Home, Jerry has become so much more than a trustee, he has become family. His genuine care for our staff, our families, and the work we do has left a lasting impression on all of us. Jerry, thank you for the countless hours, dedication, laughter, and heart you've poured into the National Home. While your time on the Board may be coming to an end, you'll always have a special place in our National Home family. We are incredibly grateful for everything you've done to help make our mission stronger!

### Leading with Purpose, Serving with Heart

For more than a century, the VFW National Home has been a place where veterans and their families can find stability, support, and a community that believes in them. That mission would not be possible without the dedication of individuals who give their time, talents, and hearts to helping others.

Our Board of Trustees plays an important role in protecting that mission, guiding our future, and ensuring we continue meeting the evolving needs of military and veteran families.

As we welcome Jodie as Board President, and Bill, Kyna, and Jim into their new leadership roles, we are reminded that service doesn't end when the uniform comes off or a leadership term concludes. It continues through the lives we touch, the families we lift up, and the opportunities we create for others.

Please join us in congratulating our 2026 Board leadership! We are grateful for their willingness to serve, their belief in our mission, and their commitment to helping veterans and their families build new beginnings.

Together, we look forward to another year of making a difference, one family at a time.




**Kyna Simpson, right, newly installed VFW National Home District 8 trustee, with Jerry Blake, of Indiana who is going out as the VFW National Home District 8 trustee, and Jenn Glenn, Department of Illinois VFW Women Veterans chairperson.**

# Johnson-Phelps 5220 Honors Prisoners of War, Missing in Action

Johnson-Phelps VFW Post 5220 and Auxiliary conducted a POW-MIA Remembrance Ceremony to commemorate the men and women who were held as Prisoners of War, service members still missing in action, and their families.

Post Commander Tony Smertene, joined by Auxiliary POW-MIA Chairman and Secretary Kathy Smertene.

Ed Howe performed TAPS at the end of the ceremony.











# Hometown-Murray 9773 Auxiliary Busy with Events

Hometown Murray VFW Auxiliary 9773 has been very busy since the start of the convention in June. The Auxiliary has given school bags to children filled with goodies, barbecued for the veterans at the Chicago Veterans Home.

In addition, the Auxiliary conducted a 911 service, commemorating the 25th anniversary of the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001 and POW-MIA Recognition Day service.











**The Chicagoland Young Marines, sponsored by Central Leyden Post 5979 in River Grove attended the Cook County Military and Veterans Resource Fair and paused for a photograph with Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, The Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, and Command Sgt. Maj. Kehinde Salami, Senior Enlisted Leader of the Illinois National Guard. (Photo by Spc. Davanh B. Sanamixay, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs)**




**During the Department of Illinois VFW Auxiliary Council of Administration Meeting in October, Department President Danielle Krull installed the newly elected District 4 Auxiliary President Greg Burkhardt.**

# Make Giving Tuesday Red, White and Blue for the Veterans Service Office Support

***By Rob Bland***
***Veterans Foundation of Illinois Vice President***

Dec. 1 is Giving Tuesday. Please mark your calendars to donate to the Red, White and Blue Veteran Service Support Program and/or the Veterans Foundation of Illinois.

For a little more than decade people have been using Giving Tuesday as the day to combine their generous donations, increasing the impact of their favorite cause. This year we are hoping that you will choose to support the Veteran Service Support Program.

"Donations to [the Veterans Service Support] program directly support the Illinois VFW Veterans Service Offices, which assist veterans with VA claims, healthcare, funeral and education benefits, employment counseling, and military records. The funds are utilized for specialty office requirements, outreach, and marketing to expand their reach." Illinois Commander's Leadership Manual, 2026-2027, Page 129.

The Illinois VFW Veterans Service Officers for the years of 2023 – 2025 reported 413,907 claims and $836,214,060 in recovered entitlements for veterans and their families. These results were achieved with a program cost of $412,195.20 for the program year of 2025-2026. This is a great return on your investment and significant impact on the veterans' community here in Illinois.

To donate:

- Go to the VFW Department of Illinois home page
- Scroll down until you see the DONATE NOW link.
- Click on the link and it will take you to the donation page.
- Fill out the online form
- Make sure that you fill out the Allocate Funds to section to designate that you are supporting the Red, White and Blue Veteran Service Support Program or the Illinois Veterans Foundation.
- Click on the proceed to Confirmation link
- Confirm your donation and you will receive your receipt

If you do not want to use a credit card you can also send in a check to:

VFW Department of Illinois
Attention: Red, White and Blue Veterans Service Support Program
3300 Constitution Drive
Springfield, IL 62711

There are four levels of donations for the Red, White and Blue Program:

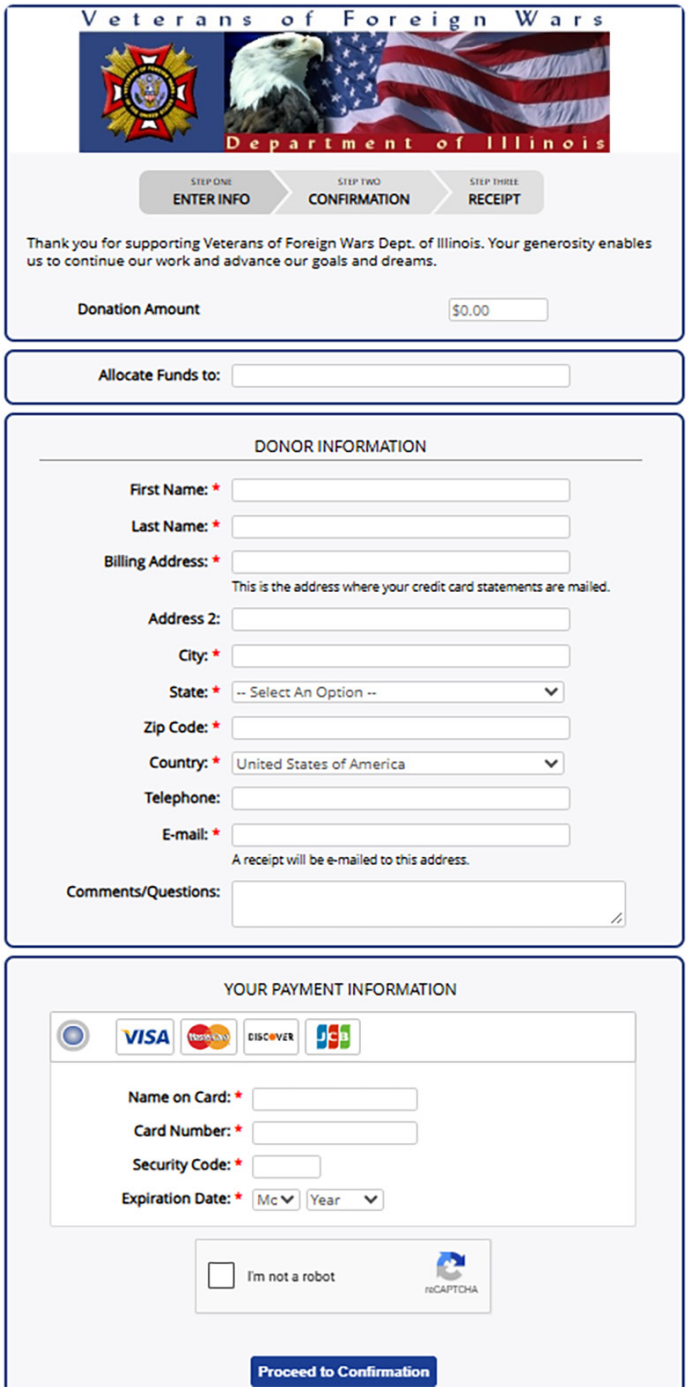
Red level supporters donate over $1,000 and will receive a distinctive plaque and special recognition at the State Convention.

White level supporters donate from $500 to $999 and will receive a distinctive plaque and special recognition at the State Convention.

Blue level supporters donate from $250 to $499 and will receive a distinctive plaque and special recognition at the State Convention.

Donations from $50 to $249 are SOS Supporters.

So, remember the "Red, White and Blue Service Support Program" this Giving Tuesday and join fellow donors to increase the impact of supporting veterans.





**Members and guests of VFW Post 11019 in South Beloit look on as a handcrafted patriotic quilt honoring veteran Bill Drost is displayed during the Post's Oct. 19 business meeting. The quilt was created by Mary Dummer and Cheryl Hirst in appreciation of Drost's military service.**

# South Beloit VFW Post 11019 Celebrates Auxiliary Milestone, Strengthens VA Connections and Honors Local Veteran

Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 11019 held a memorable regular business meeting Oct. 19, marking significant progress toward establishing a VFW Auxiliary, welcoming representatives from the Department of Veterans Affairs and recognizing a fellow veteran for his military service.

One of the evening's most significant announcements involved the ongoing formation of a VFW Auxiliary in South Beloit. Post leadership confirmed that the organization's charter application has officially been submitted, the required fee has been paid, and membership applications have exceeded the minimum necessary to establish the Auxiliary. The development represents an important milestone for the Post as it works toward expanding its ability to support veterans, military families and the surrounding community.

Once officially established, the Auxiliary will provide additional opportunities for eligible family members to participate in charitable activities, veteran advocacy, community outreach and programs supporting those who have served.

The meeting also featured representatives from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, who visited the Post to discuss programs, benefits and services available to veterans and their families. The discussion highlighted opportunities for greater communication and collaboration between the VA and local veterans' organizations. By strengthening these relationships, VFW Post 11019 hopes to help more veterans and their families become aware of the assistance, benefits and resources available to them.

Among the evening's most memorable moments was a heartfelt tribute honoring veteran Bill Drost.

Mary Dummer, one of the applicants helping establish the new VFW Auxiliary, presented Drost with a beautifully handcrafted patriotic quilt recognizing his service to the United States. The quilt, created by Mary Dummer and Cheryl Hirst, featured patriotic colors and an embroidered message expressing appreciation for Drost's dedication, sacrifice and service to the country.

Members and guests gathered to admire the craftsmanship and celebrate the recognition, creating a particularly meaningful moment during the evening's activities. The presentation reflected a longstanding VFW tradition: ensuring that veterans know their service and sacrifices are remembered and appreciated.

Continuing a Legacy of Service For VFW Post 11019, the evening demonstrated how the organization continues to build upon its mission of supporting veterans, strengthening community relationships and honoring military service.

From the progress toward establishing an Auxiliary to discussions with VA representatives and the recognition of a fellow veteran, the meeting reflected an organization focused on both honoring its history and preparing for the future. Through continued outreach, cooperation and community engagement, VFW Post 11019 remains committed to serving veterans and their families throughout South Beloit.

# VFW Post 11019 Auxiliary Charter Meeting Draws New Members and District Support

VFW Post 11019's Auxiliary Charter Organizational Meeting brought prospective members and supporters from across District 6 together for a successful evening in South Beloit.

District 6 Auxiliary President Tinia Kulavic and Past District Auxiliary President Beth Bland attended and greeted several candidates. Men and women submitted applications to join the Auxiliary, sharing stories about the veterans whose service made them eligible.

Members from across the district also stopped by to assist with the organizing effort. Post 11019 expressed gratitude for their support and for its partnership with the South Beloit American Legion, with whom it shares a post home. The Legion's support of the VFW's combat and overseas veterans is deeply appreciated.

The post has gathered the applications needed to move forward, but there is still time for additional members to join and have their names included on the charter document. Those who join now can be part of a historic moment for VFW Post 11019.



**District 6 Auxiliary President Tinia Kulavic and Past District Auxiliary President Beth Bland were in attendance.**

## A Legacy of Service

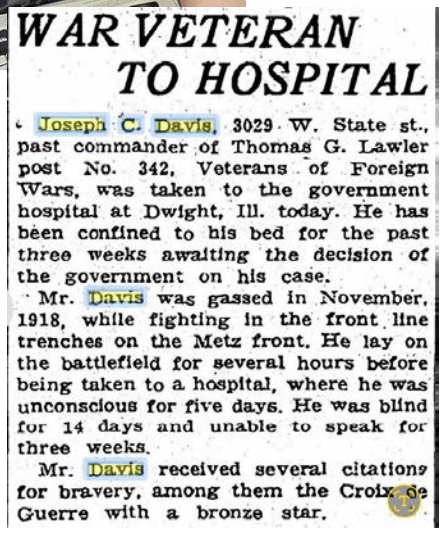
Military service has touched generations of Sara's family. Her father, Kirk, served overseas in Vietnam. Her brother's military career included several assignments during overseas conflicts, and her husband served in the Asian theater.

That legacy reaches back to her grandfather, Joseph C. Davis, a World War I veteran and past commander of Thomas G. Lawler VFW Post 342 in the same VFW district. A newspaper article Sara shared recounts how Davis was gassed while fighting in the front-line trenches on the Metz front in November 1918. He received several citations for bravery, including the Croix de Guerre with a bronze star, and later served fellow veterans through the VFW.

Sara attended the organizational meeting for the VFW Auxiliary at Post 11019 in South Beloit and submitted an application to join. The Auxiliary is gathering and reviewing eligible applications as it works toward becoming officially chartered.

From one generation to the next, her family's story reflects service, sacrifice, and commitment. We're grateful Sara is carrying that legacy forward in our VFW community.



WAR VETERAN TO HOSPITAL

Joseph C. Davis, 3029 W. State st., past commander of Thomas G. Lawler post No. 342, Veterans of Foreign Wars, was taken to the government hospital at Dwight, Ill. today. He has been confined to his bed for the past three weeks awaiting the decision of the government on his case.

Mr. Davis was gassed in November, 1918, while fighting in the front line trenches on the Metz front. He lay on the battlefield for several hours before being taken to a hospital, where he was unconscious for five days. He was blind for 14 days and unable to speak for three weeks.

Mr. Davis received several citations for bravery, among them the Croix de Guerre with a bronze star.

# On 25th anniversary of Sept. 11, Henderson promoted to colonel

***Story and Photos by***
***1st Lt. Trenton Fouche***
***Illinois National Guard Public Affairs***



**Family of then-U.S. Army Lt. Col. Jason P. Henderson removes his lieutenant colonel rank insignia during his promotion ceremony at the Illinois Military Academy in Springfield, Illinois, Sept. 11, 2026. Henderson's wife, Joy, and their children, Dylan, Charlie and Ryan, participated in the traditional pinning ceremony promoting him to colonel.**

Twenty-five years after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks changed the nation and ushered in a generation of military service, Col. Jason P. Henderson, a member of John H. Kraus Post 454 in Bloomington, marked the anniversary by reflecting on service and sacrifice as he reached a milestone of his own. Henderson, a more than 34-year veteran of the Illinois Army National Guard, was promoted to colonel during a ceremony at the Illinois Military Academy in Springfield, Illinois, September 11, 2026.

During the ceremony, Henderson recognized those whose lives and service were shaped by the attacks.

"I'd be remiss today if I didn't say a thank you to all the first responders that responded to the terrorist attacks 25 years ago today," Henderson said. He also recognized the military personnel and families "who have carried the torch over the last 25 years."

Henderson is among those whose military career spans both sides of Sept. 11. He joined the Illinois Army National Guard in 1993 as an enlisted artillery cannon crewmember and rose to sergeant first class before receiving a direct commission in 2003. He initially commissioned as an artillery officer before transitioning to Army aviation. His first officer assignment was as an aviation platoon leader with Company A, 1st Battalion, 106th Aviation Regiment.

A qualified Army aviator, Henderson has flown UH-60 Black Hawk, OH-58 Kiowa and TH-67 Creek helicopters. His military education includes the Aviation Officer Basic Course, Aviation Captains Career Course, Combined Arms and Services Staff School, Intermediate Level Education and Advanced Officer Course.

His service during the post-9/11 era included the Southwest Border Mission in 2007 and a deployment to Iraq from January 2009 to February 2010 with Aviation Task Force Diablo, where he served as a company commander. His career also included domestic response missions supporting Illinois flood duties in 2000 and Hurricane Irene in 2012.

Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, Assistant Adjutant General and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard, presided over the promotion ceremony and described three qualities that have defined Henderson's career: leadership, credibility and respect.

“Soldiers follow Jason, period,” Williams said. “He’s earned the credibility across every single rank in this organization through his selfless, lead-from-the-front style of leadership.”

Williams said Henderson has earned the respect of Soldiers throughout the organization not only because of how he conducts himself, but because of his commitment to those he leads.

“He’s a Soldier’s leader,” Williams said. “He’ll always put their needs above his own.”

Throughout his career, Henderson has served in numerous command and staff positions, including battalion S-1, battalion S-3, battalion executive officer, company commander and battalion commander. He also served as the M-Day State Army Aviation Officer for four years before transitioning to the Illinois Army National Guard G-7.




**Dylan Henderson, son of then-U.S. Army Lt. Col. Jason P. Henderson tacks his colonel rank insignia during his promotion ceremony at the Illinois Military Academy in Springfield, Illinois, Sept. 11.**

Henderson’s promotion to colonel was supported by his wife, Joy, and their children, Dylan, Charlie and Ryan.

“A rising tide lifts all boats,” Henderson said. “What that means to me is, in life, you don’t really get anywhere all by yourself.”

He thanked his wife for supporting him throughout their 22 years together and recognized his children, mother and other family members. Henderson also remembered his late father, whom he described as his “North Star” and someone who always knew what was right.

Henderson’s service to Illinois has also extended beyond the National Guard. Henderson served more than 25 years with the Illinois State Police, retiring as the Zone 5 Division of Criminal Investigation commander. The Illinois State Police’s Zone 5 is based in Champaign and serves Champaign, Coles, DeWitt, Douglas, Edgar, Ford, Iroquois, Livingston, Macon, McLean, Moultrie, Piatt, Shelby, and Vermillion counties. He earned a bachelor’s and master’s degrees in criminal justice from Western Illinois University.

For Henderson, reaching colonel represents another chapter in a military career that began eight years before the Sept. 11 attacks and continued through the quarter century of military service and sacrifice that followed.




**U.S. Army Col. Jason P. Henderson delivers remarks following his promotion to colonel at the Illinois Military Academy in Springfield, Illinois, Sept. 11, 2026. Henderson joined the Illinois Army National Guard in 1993 and served his first 10 years as an enlisted artillery cannon crewmember, attaining the rank of sergeant first class before receiving a direct commission in 2003. His officer career has included service as an aviation platoon leader, battalion staff officer, executive officer, company commander, battalion commander, State Army Aviation Officer and G7.**

## District 9




### *LaSalle Post Presents Doll with Law Enforcement Award*

**The La Salle Police Department is proud to recognize Officer Alex Doll as the recipient of the inaugural Law Enforcement Award, presented by La Salle VFW Post 4668. The award is presented in grateful recognition of Officer Doll's unyielding adherence to the highest ideals of law enforcement in maintaining, preserving, and protecting the lawful rights of all citizens.**

## District 10

### *Land of Lincoln Honor Flight*

Northenders VFW Auxiliary 10302 presented a check for $4,900.37 to Joan Bortolon, Land of Lincoln Honor Flight Coordinator, on Sept. 16 from the fundraiser held in March 2026. Their mission is to provide round-trip transportation from Abraham Lincoln Capital Airport in Springfield, Illinois, for veterans in order of their service (WWII, Korean Era, and Vietnam Era) who wish to visit their memorials in Washington, D.C. This one-day trip includes air and ground transportation, meals and snacks, a T-shirt and cap, and other items provided completely free of charge to the veteran in honor of his/her service to our country.



# VFW Post 11463 Proudly Carries the Colors at Rochester Homecoming Parade

VFW Post 11463 of Rochester proudly participated in the 2026 Rochester Homecoming Parade, honoring our nation, our veterans, and the community by carrying a large American flag along the parade route.

The impressive flag required 11 people to carry it, creating a powerful and patriotic display as it made its way through the streets of Rochester. Members of VFW Post 11463 worked together to keep the flag proudly displayed throughout the parade, reminding spectators of the freedoms and sacrifices represented by the Stars and Stripes.

The Post was grateful to receive assistance from Civil Air Patrol Composite Squadron 036, whose members joined VFW Post 11463 in carrying the large flag during the parade. Their participation helped make the presentation of the colors a memorable part of this year's Homecoming celebration.

The large American flag drew attention and appreciation from parade spectators along the route. For the members of VFW Post 11463, participating was more than simply being in a parade—it was an opportunity to demonstrate respect for the United States, honor those who have served, and bring the community together around the flag.



VFW Post 11463 would like to thank the Civil Air Patrol Composite Squadron 036, the Rochester Homecoming organizers, parade participants, and everyone who came out to support the event.

The sight of 11 people working together to carry one large American flag served as a fitting reminder that while we may each play a small part, together we can proudly carry the symbol of our great nation.



## Post 10302 Auxiliary Spends Time with Nursing Home, Assisted Living-bound Veterans to Celebrate National Cookie Day

**Each year, on "National Cookie Day" the VFW Post 10302 Auxiliary members bake and deliver homemade treats to veterans in local nursing homes and assisted living facilities. Auxiliary members take the cookies to the facilities and spend time chatting with them and listening to their life stories.**






## Gold Star Mission across Illinois

**The 10th Annual Gold Star 500 riders continued their annual journey across Illinois.**

**This grueling five-day, 500-mile endurance ride followed historic Route 66 from Chester to Streamwood honoring Illinois' fallen military service members and the Gold Star Families who carry on their legacies.**

**Northenders Post 10302 Auxiliary members were proud to travel to Chester to assist in the registration process for the riders and support staff and to fuel these incredible cyclists with a delicious lunch on day three of their journey as they rode to keep the memories of our heroes alive!**






# Supporting Gold Star Mission's 500 mile trek

Gold Star 500 riders continued their journey across Illinois today, departing McLean, Illinois, and making their way north to the Illinois National Guard's Bloomington Armory.

The 10th Annual Gold Star 500 is a five-day, more than 500-mile endurance bicycle ride honoring Illinois' fallen military service members and the Gold Star Families who carry on their legacies. This year's route follows much of historic Route 66 as riders travel from Chester to Streamwood, stopping in communities and Illinois National Guard facilities along the way.

However, the miles represent something much greater than an endurance challenge. The Gold Star Mission works to ensure the names, stories and sacrifices of Illinois' fallen service members are never forgotten. Funds raised through the ride support educational scholarships awarded in honor of fallen Illinois service members and the Fallen Heroes History Project, which preserves their stories for future generations.

For many of these riders, every mile has a name, a story and a family behind it.

***Photos by 1st Lt. Trenton Fouche***
***Illinois National Guard Public Affairs***







# Creech retires after four decades of service to Illinois National Guard

***Story and Photos by Zachary Zimerman***
***Illinois National Guard Public Affairs***

After four decades of service that began as an enlisted Infantry Soldier and culminated with his service as the United States Property and Fiscal Officer for Illinois, Col. Brian S. Creech, a member of Menard County VFW Post 6871 in Petersburg, retired from the Illinois Army National Guard during a ceremony Sept. 18 at the Illinois Military Academy at Camp Lincoln.

"I gave the Army everything I had, and it gave me back more than I expected," Creech said.

"He understood the tactical realities of supporting Soldiers in the field and the strategic responsibilities of managing resources," said Brig. Gen. Ronnie Barnes, National Guard Bureau Comptroller. Brig. Gen. Barnes presided over the ceremony, which brought together family, friends, fellow service members, Illinois National Guard leaders, and multiple United States Property and Fiscal Officers from other states to recognize Creech's 40 years of military service.

The United States Property and Fiscal Officer (USPFO) is a federally appointed officer who serves as the single Title 10 National Guard officer through which all federal resources flow to a state or territory's National Guard.

Barnes said that those in the USPFO community could always call Creech when they had a difficult problem. "His responses would always be thoughtful, honest, and grounded in experience," Barnes said. "And they would always be straightforward."

Creech thanked several leaders who mentored and developed him, and all the subordinates who accomplished so much under his direction, but he especially thanked his family.

"Every time the Army asked something of me, it asked something of you too," he told his spouse, Stephanie.

Creech began his military career in August 1986 as an enlisted Soldier with Company A, 1st Battalion, 123rd Infantry Regiment. During his enlisted service, he served as a rifleman and squad leader before receiving his commission as an Infantry second lieutenant in September 1996.

His career included assignments in Infantry, Logistics, Financial Management, Human Resources and command positions throughout the Illinois National Guard.

Creech served as a platoon leader and commander




**Brig. Gen. Ronnie Barnes, National Guard Bureau Comptroller, presents Col. Brian Creech with the Legion of Merit.**

with the 3637th Maintenance Company and later held staff positions with the 232nd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion. In 2003, he deployed to Iraq with the 232nd CSSB in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom II.

Just prior to being activated for Iraq, he "confidently" told his pregnant spouse, Stephanie, that "the National Guard never deploys." He returned from Iraq on their son Bryson's first birthday. "I learned never to make a promise on behalf of the U.S. Army," he said.

Following his deployment, Creech transferred to Joint Force Headquarters, Illinois, where he served as a logistics plans officer, budget officer, commander and financial manager. In May 2010, he began a Title 10 assignment with the National Guard Bureau as a program analyst for the Army National Guard Recruiting Division.

While working as a program analyst for the Army National Guard Recruiting Division he provided professional, and characteristically straightforward ethical advice on several highly scrutinized programs including marketing contracts with NASCAR and World Wrestling Entertainment and the Guard

Recruitment Assistance Program.

He returned to Illinois in October 2010 and assumed duties as the USPFO supervisory logistics management specialist. From October 2013 through October 2016, he commanded the 405th Brigade Support Battalion.

Creech subsequently returned to Joint Force Headquarters, where he served as the Human Resources Officer and deputy USPFO before assuming the position of USPFO for Illinois in September 2021.

As USPFO, Creech oversaw critical personnel, financial and logistical functions supporting the Illinois National Guard. His service in the position included supporting multiple training and domestic operations while contributing to readiness across the organization.

During the retirement ceremony, Creech was presented with the Legion of Merit for exceptionally meritorious service as the USPFO for Illinois. The award recognized his leadership and technical expertise and his contributions to personnel, finance and logistics readiness.

Creech was also presented with his retirement certificate. His wife, Stephanie, received a spouse's certificate recognizing her support and dedication throughout his military career.

A commitment to professional development accompanied Creech's military service. He earned a bachelor's degree in economics from the University of Illinois Springfield and graduated from the United States Army War College in 2018 with a master's degree in strategic studies.

His military awards and decorations include the Legion of Merit, Bronze Star Medal, Meritorious Service Medal, Army Commendation Medal, Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal, Army Achievement Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Humanitarian Service Medal, Joint Meritorious Unit Award, Meritorious Unit Commendation, Combat Action Badge and Iraq Campaign Medal with campaign star, along with additional federal and state awards.

Throughout the ceremony, Creech's family was recognized as an integral part of his military journey. He and Stephanie have been married for more than 24 years and have four sons, Zach, Ethan, Dylan and Bryson. The family resides in Petersburg.

The ceremony concluded with the reading of Creech's retirement orders, formally recognizing his separation from the Army National Guard and placement on the retired list effective Sept. 30.

Creech's retirement marks the conclusion of a career spanning enlisted and commissioned service, combat deployment, command assignments and senior leadership positions at the state and national levels.

After 40 years in uniform, Creech leaves the Illinois National Guard having served across multiple generations of Soldiers and through some of the organization's most significant missions at home and abroad.



**Col. Brian Creech was joined by family during a retirement ceremony marking the end of a 40 year career.**




# Honoring the Flag: A Day of Respect and Remembrance

Rochester VFW Post 11463, BSA Troop and Pack 40, and the Civil Air Patrol came together at Rochester First Methodist Church for a meaningful 2nd annual Flag Retirement Ceremony.

Over 250 United States flags were retired in a proper and honorable manner, paying tribute to the symbol of our nation and the sacrifices of the men and women who have served to defend it.

This ceremony was a beautiful example of our community coming together to show respect for Old Glory and teach the importance of patriotism, honor, and service to the next generation.






# Cruise in Car Show nets donations to Auxiliary

Bond County Memorial Post 1377 Auxiliary received donations from Thacker Insurance Service and the Double J Doggie Play N Stay in Greenville from proceeds from the Cruise In Car Show held during Apple Days.

The proceeds will be used to purchase grave markers for Mt Auburn and Montrose Cemeteries.

Auxiliary President Deb Marti and Treasurer Angie Belcher present a check to Cheyenne Elam, Coordinator of the BCCU2 Weekend Backpack Program. This program provides kid-friendly, shelf-stable meals and snacks to eligible students in the Bond County CUSD #2 school district to ensure they have food over weekends and holiday breaks. The program operates during the regular school year. It also extends through the summer months, with summer deliveries supported by the Bond County Sheriff's Department and the Greenville Police Department.





# 80 Years Later, Alice Abendroth Still Relishes Highland's VFW Auxiliary

***By Brittany Blackwell***



At 102, years old, Alice Abendroth sat with friends and fellow auxiliary members, ready to be honored for 80 years of membership.

On Saturday, Oct. 3, the Highland VFW Post 5694 and Auxiliary held its annual membership dinner. More than 100 people came together to enjoy dinner, music, guest speakers, welcome new members and honor those who have served for many years.

Abendroth's 80-year milestone was the highlight of a list that also included 44 auxiliary members honored for five or more years of membership. Honorees also included 56 post members. Pins were made for all honorees to mark their years of service.

For Abendroth, the evening was a chance to look back on the people, the work and the memories she has gathered over eight decades.

"Because it's fun," Abendroth said when asked why younger people should consider joining the Auxiliary. "It's a chance to meet people and learn new things."

Abendroth, of Highland, joined the auxiliary in her early 20s, soon after marrying her husband, Douglas. Her mother-in-law, a charter member, encouraged her to join.



At first, Abendroth wasn't sure if the auxiliary was right for her.

"I thought, 'Well, I'm not really this kind of person but I'll join,'" she remembered. At the time, she worked at a jewelry store in town.

Before long, she was attending meetings and was elected secretary.

"I said, 'Oh, I can't do that. I can't do that,'" Abendroth remembered.

But she did it, and kept going.

"I liked being active," she said.

For decades, Abendroth volunteered wherever she was needed.

She worked at lunch stands, sold sandwiches in the kitchen, helped with fish fries and took part in blood bank drives. Many Thursday mornings, she made potato salad

for the Friday fish fries, a routine that became a familiar part of her life with the auxiliary. She also spent years volunteering to serve food at a local nursing home.

Members remember her showing up to help year after year.

“She worked with us until she was 100 years old. She came all the time,” said auxiliary member JoAnn Steiner, who worked alongside Abendroth and is a longtime family friend.

“Some of her favorite members are from the organization’s membership celebrations, which used to be formal events. Women wore long gowns, men wore suits, and everyone gathered to celebrate the organization and each other.




And there was dancing.

Abendroth and her husband, who was also active with the post, never missed a membership event and were known for dancing together.

“He was a really good guy,” she said. “He died much too early.”

Douglas Abendroth, who served in the Army, died at 71. He worked at the local post office and enjoyed playing bingo at the VFW. Even after he died, Alice stayed connected to the organization and the people she had spent so much time with.

“I’ve had wonderful friends and neighbors,” she said.

After eight decades, she has plenty of stories. Some come to mind right away, while others, she says, might return to her later that night or the next day.

Even at 102, she still takes care of herself and her home.

“I love to be outside when the weather is nice,” she said. “Up until this year I had my own garden.”

She enjoys doing her own work for the auxiliary and working on puzzles, though she had to slow down after cataract surgery on one eye.

She raised two children, a son named Andy and a daughter named Deann, and has five grandchildren. Three of her grandchildren live in Highland and two in St. Louis, keeping family nearby.

“They’re all precious,” she said. “We get together a lot.”

She recalled the recent death of a daughter-in-law, whom she described as a wonderful person.

The Highland VFW Auxiliary is marking its own 80th anniversary this year, making Abendroth’s milestone particularly fitting.

The auxiliary’s president, Lois Moore, who is celebrating 30 years of membership herself, said Abendroth joined soon after the group was founded.

“Alice has done a lot for our auxiliary,” Moore said.

“I cannot believe she has put up with this much,” she said jokingly.

Abendroth’s custom 80-year pin and bracelet are a reminder of how long some members have been part of the auxiliary. Usually, the auxiliary only makes pins for up to 70 years of service.

Even across the country, longer memberships are rare. Auxiliary member Nancy Rieke said the national group found woman on the East Coast with 83 years of membership who recently turned 100.

Highland VFW Post 5694 and Auxiliary has 233 Auxiliary members and more than 300 post members.

# Olney Central College Blue Knights Baseball Team Supports VFW Post to Hang Flags Throughout City

The Olney Central College Blue Knights Baseball Team (about 46 young men) were getting involved in the community to garner support for their erecting a flagpole at the college's baseball fields so they'd have a flag to salute when the games open.

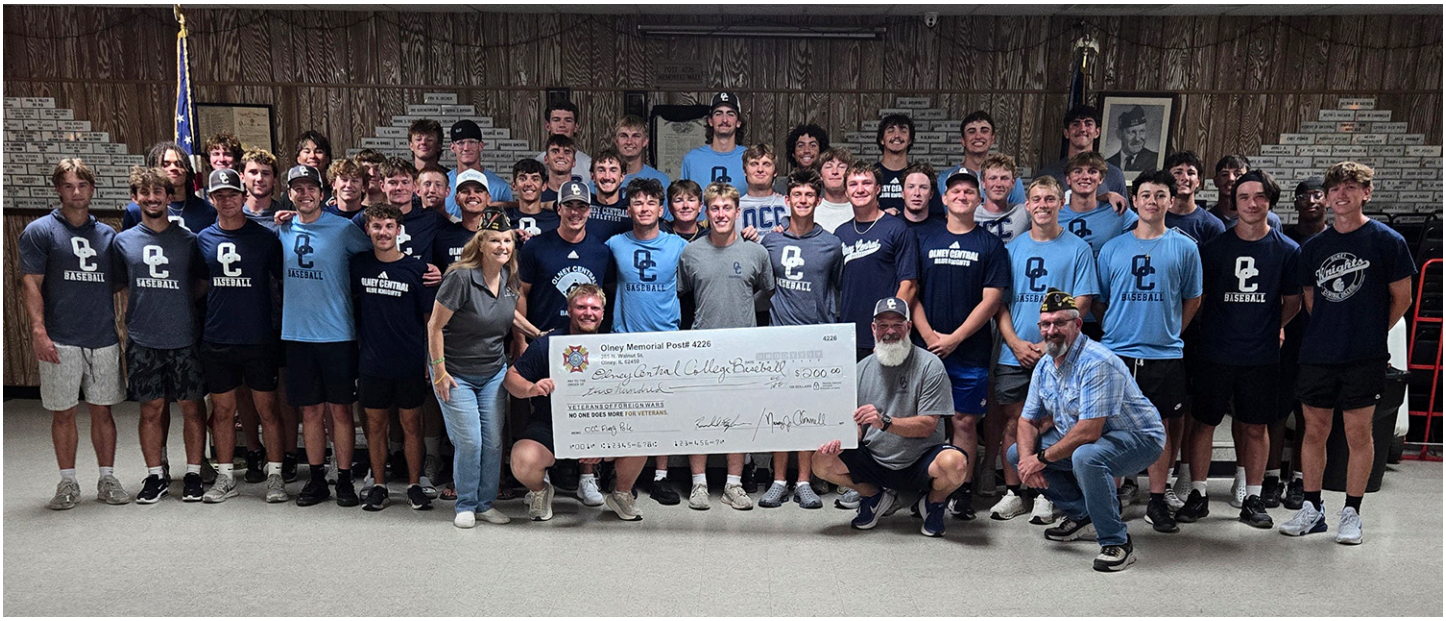
Brad Kapper, EMT and Firefighter brought this to our attention. He and Nancy O'Connell, Post Quartermaster, worked on the details.

About a dozen young men volunteered to put out flags throughout the city on Sept. 11 in honor of Patriot Day. They put out nearly 100 flags at 6 a.m. and picked them all up at 5 p.m. that day.







# Olney Post, Auxiliary Honors POW-MIA Recognition Day

Patriots from VFW Post 4226 and its Auxiliary, Olney, gathered together for a candlelight vigil to honor and remember the brave men and women who were Prisoners of War and those still Missing in Action.

As the candles glowed and our POW/MIA Flag stood proudly, we shared a few words, a moment of silence and were reminded that we will NEVER forget their sacrifice, their service, or the families who have carried the weight of their absence.

Their names may be missing from our rolls, but they are never missing from our hearts.

You Are Not Forgotten.




## Olney Post 4226 Auxiliary Delivers Comfort Items to Marion VA Hospital

**Olney VFW Post 4226 Auxiliary members recently made a trip to the Department of Veterans Affairs Hospital in Marion taking various comfort items for the veterans who live in long-term care.**





**Illinois's Department Hospital Chairman Laura w/the VAVS Reps & Deputies in attendance with Dept. President Danielle & National Council Member #5 Danetta Wakefield & Sara Colgrove (Dir. of Activities & Volunteer Services @ IVH-Quincy)**

# Illinois Auxiliary Meets at Quincy Veterans Home

The Illinois VFW Auxiliary conducted its October Council of Administration Meeting at the Quincy Veterans Home – a first for the Auxiliary.

During the weekend of meetings, the Auxiliary toured the Veterans Home grounds and held its Hospital Conference, plus hosted Bingo for the residents.



**Tour time with Sara after the Hospital Conference. It was a beautiful weekend, so many people took advantage.**



**Prior to the Council of Administration meeting, the District Presidents are given an opportunity to discuss, with the Chief of Staff Paula, any issues, concerns, news, etc. in an informal setting.**



**National Council Member #5 Danetta Wakefield reiterates President Danielle Krull's School of Instruction...they are "Bylaws" not "BySuggestions." During her remarks, Wakefield spoke about National President's and Commander in Chief's 2026–2027 Special Project "Operation Bring Them Home". support the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) in recovering, identifying, and repatriating U.S. service members who were Prisoners of War (POW) or Missing in Action (MIA) from past conflicts.**





**Above left, Department Conductor Carol Shutts escorts in National representative National Council Member #5 (representing Missouri and Illinois) Danetta Wakefield.**

**Above right, National Council Member #5 Danetta Wakefield and President Danielle Krull.**

**Right, Department Senior Vice President Terry Adams hands out the Knowledge Finding Tour..it came with a little snack pack, questions & a map. The goal was to gain knowledge while answering the questions about Quincy Home which celebrated 140th year in October and find as many ducks as you can.**



# Highlights of the Big Ten Conference






















INDIANA/ILLINOIS
PLATOON 3

# Belleville Post1739 Supports Scott AFB's 126th Air Refueling Wing's Troop Support Program

Post 1739 Belleville donated approximately $1500.00 worth of items to the Scott AFB 126th Air Refueling Wing's Airmen Resiliency Center in support of their 50 for our FIGHTERS program. The items will be included in care packages for the unit's members who are currently deployed. The donated items included Energy drink powder packets, Packs of Energy Gum, Trail Mix, Ramen Packs, Individual condiment packages, Protein Bars, Single serve Peanut Butter, and Meat Sticks.

Pictured is the Post Commander Lachelle Stebvenson and Jillian Stevens, Coordinator, 126th ARW Airmen Resiliency Center.

Under the VFW Adopt-a-Unit Program the post adopted the 126th ARW in 2023 and have been an active supporter of their members and unit programs.







**Capt. Horace G. Burke's VFW Post 3480 and Auxiliary volunteered by hosting Bingo with the Veterans at Jefferson Barracks Veterans Medical Center in St. Louis, Mo. Past post Commander Valerie Young was honored to be the caller. Thankful to VAVs for having us. Grateful for the Laughter, camaraderie and pure fun.**



**Mascoutah VFW Auxiliary Post 7682 played Bingo with the veterans at Jefferson Barracks Sept. 20. It was a great day for the veterans to be inside out of the heat, have fun and receive goodies.**

## Red Bud Auxiliary Presents Missing Man Table to students at St. John Lutheran School

In remembrance of Prisoners of War/Missing in Action (POW/MIA) day observed on the third Friday of September each year, VFW Auxiliary to Red Bud Post 6632 Senior Vice Kathryn Rowold and 4th grader Hayden Schlimme presented the Missing Man Table to grades 4-8 at St. John's Lutheran School, Red Bud on Sept. 16.

The meaning of each item was explained and Principal Justin Palm was presented with a POW/MIA flag.

As of the most recent official figures, less than 81,000 American service members remain missing from past conflicts from World War II and other recent conflicts.



## District 14




**New Athens Auxiliary 7710 recently celebrated its 80th anniversary. What better way to celebrate than to have cake during the celebration.**

## District 15



**Mike Cross, District 15 VFW VAVS representative at the Anna Veterans Home and District Senior Vice Commander presents Administrator Amy Keistler with the funds raised from the district's recent fundraiser. The proceeds will be used in the Member Fund.**




**Carroll P. Foster Post #3455 and its Auxiliary hosted Glo Bingo to benefit the Veterans Honor Flight. President Phillip Wright and Tricia Samuels presented a check for $1700.00.**

**Check presentation from the monthly All You Can Eat Fish Fry Fundraiser held at the Carroll P. Foster Post #3455, VFW. The winner of $206.00 was the Anna Jonesboro Community High School Beta Club. Present was Post Chaplain Mark Haddick and his Service Dog, Poppy, Elina Chen, Marilyn Corbit, Grayson Garner, Seth Cochran and Beta Club Sponsor Heather Craig.**



# Anna VFW, Auxiliary conduct POW-MIA program

**At right, Anna-Jonesboro Community High School Beta Club assisted in serving the meal. Pictured are students accepting a donation on behalf of the Carroll P. Foster Post 3455 in Anna. Presenting the check were Clarence Caraker and Mark Haddick.**







**Past and present Officers of both District and State went to Lick Creek School to teach students about POW MIA, flag etiquette and burial folding for Military funerals. Clarence Caraker, Dianna Steel, Mark Haddick, and Sherry Haddick made the presentation to 6th, 7th & 8th grade classes of Lick Creek Grade School in Lick Creek.**




**Above, Carroll P. Foster Auxiliary Treasurer Sherry Haddick, Rita Mitchell, Brenda Forcht and Linda Jackson presenting a check to the Veteran's Honor Flight for $229.00 from the Friday night fish fry fundraiser and below, a check for $471.00 from The Villa-Pizza Villa community night fundraiser.**






**The Carroll P Foster Post #3455, VFW and its Auxiliary held a fundraiser at The Villa/Pizza Villa in Anna for the Veterans Honor Flight. All tips were donated to the Honor Flight. Raised $470.00**

## *District 16*




**Members of Benjamin O. Davis Post 311, Richton Park, with Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, The Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard and Command Sgt. Maj. Kehinde Salami at the Cook County Military and Veterans Resource Fair Oct. 17. (Photo by Spc. Davanh B. Sanamixay, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs)**

# Post 311 Participates in Cook County Military, Veterans Resource Fair

Veterans, service members and military families gathered at Brookfield Zoo Chicago, Oct. 17, for the annual Cook County Military and Veterans Resource Fair.

Hosted by the Cook County Department of Veterans Affairs, the event brought together dozens of local, state, federal and nonprofit organizations offering resources in health care, housing, employment, education, veterans benefits and other essential services.

Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, The Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard and Command Sgt. Maj. Kehinde Salami, Command Senior Enlisted Leader of the Illinois National Guard, joined community leaders in supporting the event and emphasizing the importance of continued support for veterans and their families beyond military service.

"No veteran should ever have to navigate that journey alone," Boyd said.

Boyd also recognized the sacrifices of Gold Star families and highlighted the importance of partnerships that ensure veterans, service members and their loved ones remain connected to the military community.

The event reinforced a shared commitment to honoring military service through action, ensuring those who have served our nation have access to the support, opportunities and benefits they have earned.



**Illinois Army National Guard Col. Tim Newman talks about his friend, Col. Shawn Nokes, during Newman's retirement ceremony, Oct. 10, at the University of Illinois Urbana/Champaign Library in Urbana. From left is Chaplain (Lt. Col.) Tony Williams, Nokes, and Newman.**

# Colonel Retires After 27 Years of Making His Mark on History – And Having Fun

Col. Tim Newman of Fisher, Ill., a member of Cantigny Post 367 in Joliet, retired from the Illinois Army National Guard after 27 years of "standing the watch." Family, friends and fellow service members celebrated nearly three decades in uniform during an Oct. 10 retirement ceremony at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign Library.

"I now look back and can't believe everything that I've accomplished in the military and seeing how I was a part of something much bigger than myself," said Newman to family and friends who traveled from as far away as North Carolina, Georgia, Minnesota, and Texas to attend the ceremony. "I would have never imagined everything that I've done, places I've been, and the amazing people I've met who I now call my brothers and sisters."

During his 27 years in uniform, Newman:

- Traveled to more than 20 countries.
- Deployed three times (Iraq, Afghanistan, Kuwait).
- Built roads and fences along the U.S./Mexican border.
- Planned and executed transportation logistics for the 2012 NATO Summit in Chicago.
- Orchestrated the building of an ammunition holding depot in Germany.
- Improved roads in the Dominican Republic.
- Improved roads and widened lakes in Botswana.
- Built military-to-military strategic partnerships in Singapore, Israel, and Romania.
- Was highly involved in the Illinois National Guard's State Partnership Program with Poland, traveling to Poland more than 10 times.
- Served in Afghanistan as part of the Polish Army's 1st Armor Brigade as a brigade battle captain with the Illinois National Guard's Bilateral Embedded Support Team A5.

• Helped champion the Illinois National Guard's new State Partnership Program with Portugal.

• Met celebrities such as Bill Murray, Gary Sinise, and Charlie Daniels.

• Was one of two Illinois Army National Guard officers "coined" by Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta during the 2012 NATO Summitt.

• Met President Barack Obama and countless ambassadors.

• Worked with senior military leaders such as General George W. Casey, General Mark Milley, and General Stephen J. Townsend.

All this occurred as a member of the Illinois Army National Guard.

Newman's spouse, Evie, and son, Jameson, shared his military journey. Although Evie could not deploy with him, she did serve as the Family Readiness Group leader for all of Newman's deployments and served at one point on the Joint Family Advisory Council and State Family Readiness Group.

Newman's father, Coast Guard Capt. Frederick Newman Jr., swore his son into the Illinois Army National Guard in September 1999. Fast-forward 27 years and Tim Newman leaves a lasting legacy with the Illinois Army National Guard.

"Tim has not only been a senior leader, commander, and staff officer to our 10,000 Soldiers; he has been a mentor and Soldier-first leader that strived to change and positively impact the lives of our people for 27 years," said Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, the Assistant Adjutant General – Army of the Illinois National Guard and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard. "His legacy will live on in the lives of those he led and mentored."

One of those he mentored and befriended was the ceremony's master of ceremonies, Col. Shawn Nokes, the Illinois Army National Guard's Deputy Chief of Staff for Logistics. "You were always about the team, and you were extremely effective building relationships inside and outside the chain of command," Nokes told his friend.

Newman was the support operations officer and Nokes was his deputy during 2014 deployment of the Illinois Army National Guard's 108th Sustainment Brigade to the Middle East. During that time, the pair planned and coordinated the airdrop of more than 310 bundles of food and water into the Singar Mountains of Iraq where thousands of minority Yezidis had fled ISIS extremist forces. These bundles saved countless lives. It was just one example of the logistics missions that Newman and Nokes planned and coordinated that enabled the U.S. and its Allies to counter the so-called "Islamic State" in Iraq and Syria.

They also worked together on domestic response



**Illinois Army National Guard Col. Tim Newman, right, receives the Legion of Merit from Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, the Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard, upon Newman's retirement after 27 years of distinguished service.**

missions, such as the Capital Response Mission after the January 6, 2021 storming of the U.S. Capitol building in Washington, D.C. as well as numerous exercises and training events. Among Newman's qualities as a leader was taking advantage of his Soldiers' strengths, thus putting them in positions where they would succeed, Nokes said.

"Thank you for allowing me to be me," Nokes said. "Thank you for your leadership and counsel. Thank you for being you. Lastly, thank you for treating me like your brother from day one."

Throughout his military career, Newman said he had three leadership mantras throughout his career:

1. "I'm not going to tell you to do something that I haven't done or am not willing to do myself."

2. "I will let you fail, but I won't let you fall. It's ok to fail as failing is part of the learning process, but if you continue to fail at the same thing and didn't learn from your mistake then that is a whole different conversation."

3. "Have fun!! If you're not having fun, then you're working and who wants to work?"

Newman worked on many 'life or death' missions but always seemed to make these tough missions a little easier with an often-satirical sense of humor. Following Newman's direction to make his retirement ceremony funny, Nokes managed to weave 27 movie quotes into the ceremony script – one for each year of Newman's service.

In one of the tough missions, Newman served as a combat engineer platoon leader in Anbar Province, Iraq, in 2005. He returned from Iraq to take command of the 135th Engineer Co., converting the unit to the

631st Engineer Support Co. Then, in 2010, he was off to combat again, this time with BEST A5 and the Polish in Afghanistan.

After returning from Afghanistan, he served on the 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade's staff before serving as the operations officer for the 766th Engineer Battalion. Then it was overseas again in 2014 as the support operations officer with the Chicago-based 108th Sustainment Brigade, which is now rebranded as the 34th Division Support Brigade.

After returning from Kuwait, he would work some staff jobs with the Illinois National Guard headquarters and the 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, stand up a new unit – the 1886th Engineer Facility Detachment - and then take command 766th Brigade Engineer Battalion in September 2016.

Following battalion command, he briefly served in another headquarters staff position before being selected to command the 108th Sustainment Brigade in October 2020, leading 2,600 Soldiers and paving the way for the brigade's divisional alignment with the 34th Infantry Division out of Minnesota.

After brigade command, Newman served as the Deputy Chief of Staff for Strategy and Plans under the Illinois National Guard Joint Staff. Starting in July 2023, Newman developed strategic plans planning the future for the Illinois National Guard's Soldiers and Airmen.

Newman holds numerous awards including two Legion of Merits, two Bronze Stars, three Meritorious Service Medals, and the Bronze Polish Army Medal, and the Combat Action Badge. He was also a national recipient of the General Douglas MacArthur Leadership Award.

Newman graduated from a multitude of military courses including the Defense Strategy Course, the Joint Task Force Commander Training Course, the Dual Status Commanders Course, and the U.S. Army War College. His civilian education includes a bachelor's degree in architecture from Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, a masters of architecture and masters of science in civil engineering from the University of Illinois Urbana/Champaign, and a master's degree in strategic studies from the U.S. Army War College. He is slated to complete a master's degree in business administration from the University of Illinois Urbana/Champaign in May 2027.

Newman works as the Assistant Dean of Library for Facilities at the University of Illinois Urbana/Champaign. Newman plans to take Evie and Jameson to Poland in the coming year so they can experience that nation's culture and history as he has.

Newman concluded his remarks at his retirement ceremony by reading a poem his father wrote for him:

"For over twenty-seven years,
This Soldier has stood the watch.
While some of us were in our bunks at night,
This Soldier stood the watch.
While some of us were in school learning our trade,
This Soldier stood the watch.
Many times he would see his family standing there,
Needing his guidance and help,
Needing that hand to hold during those hard times,
But still he stood the watch.
He stood the watch for over twenty-seven years.
He stood the watch so that we, our families,
And our fellow countrymen could sleep soundly in safety,
Each and every night,
Knowing that a Soldier stood the watch.
Today we are here to say:
"Soldier …. The watch stands relieved.
Relieved by those YOU have trained, guided, and led.
Soldier you stand relieved … we have the watch!"



**The "Newman Network" poses for a photo following Illinois Army National Guard Col. Tim Newman's Oct. 10 retirement ceremony at the University of Illinois Urbana/Champaign Library in Urbana.**

# District 19 Auxiliaries Assist Hines Baby Shower

Hines' annual Baby Shower Tea Party was held on Sept. 11 in their Auditorium.

The event was sponsored by Community Development and Community Engagement Department (formerly known as Volunteer Services).

We were thankful to have 16 expected mothers to receive a Park and Play Pen, special gift bags and many other items and delicious food was served.

A special thankful to Shirley Vega (2164-19) and Jan Bates (2801-19) who assisted CDCE on the Sept. 10-11. They were joyfully joined on Sept. 11 by Kaitlyn Forhner (2164-19), Fran Jensen (5815-19), and Deanna with her daughter Charlize Cole (7446-19).

Congratulations to all the expecting mothers and may your abundance of joy be a bless to your life. Thanks to the 19 District Auxiliaries for your donations to Hines' Baby Shower Tea Party.












**Illinois National Guard senior leaders stand with three Illinois Army National Guard Soldiers who earned expert skill badges during the E3B assessment at Fort Custer Training Center, Michigan, October 2026. Pictured from left are Chief Warrant Officer 5 Thomas R. Black, state command chief warrant officer of the Illinois National Guard; Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, assistant adjutant general – Army, Illinois National Guard; Staff Sgt. Bill Warszewik, Expert Field Medical Badge recipient; Maj. Jonathan Logeman, Expert Infantryman Badge recipient; Staff Sgt. Elijah Harlan, Expert Soldier Badge recipient; and Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Kelly, state command sergeant major of the Illinois Army National Guard.**

# Three Illinois National Guard Soldiers earn expert badges during historic E3B assessment

***Story and Photos by Sgt. 1st Class Robert Adams***
***Illinois National Guard Public Affairs***

Three Illinois Army National Guard Soldiers earned prestigious Army expert skill badges Oct. 9, 2026, during a demanding multi-state assessment at Fort Custer Training Center, demonstrating the technical proficiency, discipline and determination required to meet the Army's rigorous individual performance standards.

The Soldiers were among 26 candidates who successfully completed the assessment out of 169 participants, an overall success rate of approximately 15%. Hosted by the Michigan National Guard, the event marked the first time a National Guard state hosted all three Army expert badge assessments simultaneously.

Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Kelly, state command sergeant major of the Illinois Army National Guard, said the assessment reinforced the importance of mastering fundamental Soldier skills and maintaining the technical and tactical proficiency required for battlefield success.

"We often talk about the importance of being brilliant at the basics, and the E3B competition is a true demonstration of what that means," Kelly said. "Whether Soldiers are pursuing the Expert Infantryman Badge, Expert Soldier Badge, or Expert Field Medical Badge, this event challenges them to demonstrate their proficiency in the fundamental skills that are essential to success on the battlefield."

Known collectively as E3B, the Expert Infantryman Badge, Expert Soldier Badge and Expert Field Medical Badge assessments evaluate Soldiers on essential military tasks, including weapons proficiency, land navigation, medical procedures and physical endurance. Candidates must complete a series of demanding events while maintaining accuracy and attention to detail under strict performance standards.

Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, Assistant Adjutant General – Army, Illinois National Guard, said the assessment offered Soldiers an opportunity to challenge themselves personally and professionally, regardless of whether they ultimately earned a badge.

"It's about striving for excellence," Williams said. "Whether they made it or didn't make it, the training they got here was exceptional."

Of the 22 Illinois Army National Guard Soldiers who participated, three earned their respective badges. Williams said those who did not successfully complete the assessment still gained valuable training and



**U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Elijah Harlan, a chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear specialist assigned to the 445th Chemical Company, Illinois Army National Guard, demonstrates loading, firing and clearing procedures on an M320 grenade launcher during the Expert Soldier Badge (ESB) assessment at Fort Custer Training Center, Michigan, October 2026.**

experience they could bring back to their home units.

"What I told all of them is, go back home and pay that forward," Williams said.

Sgt. Maj. Christopher Winling, Illinois Army National Guard operations, plans, and training sergeant major, helped lead the assessment and said the event highlighted the importance of returning to fundamental Soldier skills, regardless of rank or years of military service.

"It is harder for those that have been in the military longer because we have bad habits and we get away from the basics," Winling said.

Winling recalled failing his first attempt to earn the Expert Infantryman Badge early in his military career before returning and successfully earning it as a private first class.

"So it took me two tries," Winling said.

He said the experience helped shape his military career and reinforced the importance of perseverance, attention to detail and maintaining proficiency in fundamental military tasks.

Kelly emphasized that the value of the assessment extends beyond earning a badge, particularly as the Army prepares Soldiers for increasingly complex operational environments.

"These assessments go beyond earning a badge," Kelly said. "They reinforce the importance of mastering individual Soldier skills, building confidence, and developing the technical and tactical proficiency necessary to operate effectively in a large-scale combat operations environment."

The three Illinois Soldiers who successfully completed the assessment were Maj. Jonathan Logeman, of Rockford, Illinois, who earned the Expert Infantryman Badge; Staff Sgt. Elijah Harlan, of Marion, Illinois, who earned the Expert Soldier Badge; and Staff Sgt. Bill Warszewik, of Elk Grove Village, Illinois, who earned the Expert Field Medical Badge.

For Logeman, an infantry officer assigned to the 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment, the opportunity represented a challenge unlike anything he had encountered in more than a decade of military service.

A civilian high school teacher, Logeman said participating required stepping away from his family and civilian responsibilities for two weeks. Despite those challenges, he recognized the assessment as a rare opportunity to test himself against the Army's expert standards.

"For me, 90% of the time I was here, I thought I was going to fail," Logeman said.

Logeman said the assessment proved considerably more demanding than he anticipated, requiring candidates to demonstrate technical proficiency and maintain attention to detail while completing complex tasks under strict time constraints.

"You're not going to grow unless you challenge yourself," Logeman said.

He emphasized that while earning an expert badge requires individual performance, the encouragement and support of fellow Soldiers played an important role in helping candidates succeed.

"It's definitely a team event," Logeman said. "But you have to accomplish all the events individually."

Harlan, a chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear specialist assigned to the 445th Chemical Company in Shiloh, Illinois, shared a similar perspective.

Harlan said the assessment required Soldiers to perform approximately 30 individual tasks, often involving complex procedures that had to be executed in the correct sequence and within demanding time limits.

"It was definitely brutal," Harlan said.

He identified call-for-fire procedures, the Mk 19 grenade launcher and the nine-line medical evacuation request as some of the most challenging tasks because of their technical requirements and strict time constraints.

Despite the individual nature of the assessment, Harlan credited his fellow Soldiers with helping him prepare and ultimately succeed.

"I didn't get through this by myself," Harlan said.

Harlan said several of the Soldiers who helped him study and practice did not earn their badges, but their encouragement and willingness to share knowledge

contributed to his success.

Warszewik, assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 766th Engineer Battalion based in Decatur, Illinois, said the assessment challenged him to revisit fundamental Soldier skills and perform them according to precise Army standards.

A nine-year military veteran and civilian police officer who has deployed to Afghanistan and Somalia, Warszewik described the experience as a demanding test of his military knowledge and experience.

"I told General Williams ... for me, it was like a midcareer gut check," Warszewik said.

Warszewik identified land navigation and tactical combat casualty care as particularly challenging, along with the volume of information candidates were required to learn and retain throughout the assessment.

He said instructors repeatedly encouraged candidates to focus on the next task rather than becoming overwhelmed by the number of remaining events.



**Staff Sgt. Bill Warszewik, of Elk Grove Village, Illinois, evaluates a simulated casualty during an Expert Field Medical Badge (EFMB) assessment at Fort Custer Training Center, Michigan, October 2026. The assessment tests Soldiers on critical medical skills, including tactical combat casualty care, under demanding conditions. The EFMB was one of three expert skill badges evaluated during the historic E3B event hosted by the Michigan National Guard.**

For Williams, the experiences of Soldiers such as Logeman, Harlan and Warszewik illustrate why the Illinois Army National Guard intends to continue encouraging participation in demanding professional development opportunities.

Williams said many Soldiers who did not earn their badges were eliminated because of relatively minor mistakes, despite demonstrating considerable skill and determination throughout the assessment.

He said those Soldiers remain motivated to return and attempt the assessment again, and the Illinois Army National Guard intends to support their efforts.

"They'll be back and we're going to support them," Williams said.

Winling echoed that commitment, emphasizing the success of the partnership between the Michigan and Illinois National Guards in executing the combined assessment.

Michigan's established training facilities and the experience gained by participating cadre provide a foundation for future events, he said.

"Illinois will continue to help resource and participate through cadre and board members and candidates in Michigan," Winling said.

The training also provides benefits beyond earning a badge, particularly as Soldiers return to their home units with improved technical skills and firsthand experience performing tasks under pressure.

Logeman said he would welcome the opportunity to return as an experienced badge holder and help other Illinois Soldiers prepare for future assessments.

"Any Soldier who makes it through this is a much better Soldier today than they were two weeks ago," Logeman said.

Kelly praised the Illinois Soldiers who volunteered to participate and the Michigan National Guard for hosting the event.

"I'm extremely proud of our Illinois Army National Guard Soldiers who stepped forward to challenge themselves and compete at this level," Kelly said. "Their willingness to test their abilities against such demanding standards speaks volumes about their commitment to excellence and readiness."

Williams said the physical and mental challenges of E3B help prepare Soldiers for the pressures they may encounter during real-world military operations.

"These Soldiers are going to be way better and more prepared if they have to go do their job for real," Williams said.

As the Illinois Army National Guard looks toward future opportunities to participate in E3B, senior leaders hope the experiences of this year's candidates will encourage more Soldiers to challenge themselves, strengthen their individual proficiency and pursue excellence throughout their military careers.

VFW

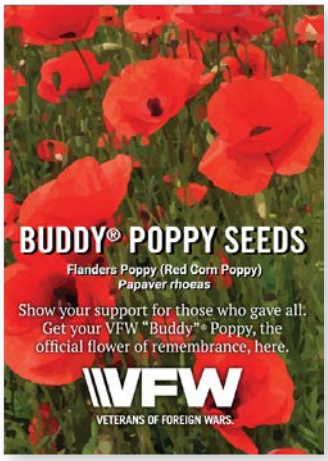
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- Yellow distressed screen print
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- Combat Tested logo on back
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- Imported; decorated in the USA

**7367** S-4XL **$32.00**




**POPPY SEEDS** Grow your own red corn poppies. Sow in late fall or early spring. Approx. 350 seeds per packet.
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