

Malone, Wiemer take state Voice of Democracy, Patriot's Pen top honors at awards ceremony



Illinois VFW State Commander Brett Nila and Department Auxiliary President Lynn Smith presents Riley Malone, a senior at Elmwood High School in Elmwood, Illinois, with the John H. Emery Youth, Pageantry and Patriotism first place Voice of Democracy award at the state awards banquet in Springfield Feb. 10. Malone, the District 9 Voice of Democracy champion, was sponsored by Archie Miles Post 4724 and its Auxiliary in Elmwood.

The State of Illinois Veterans of Foreign Wars announced its Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen State Champions at the 78th annual Voice of Democracy banquet held Feb. 10 in Springfield.

Riley Malone, a senior at Elmwood High School in Elmwood, Illinois, was named the VFW Department of Illinois' first-place winner in the 2023-24 Voice of Democracy Scholarship program.

Malone, daughter of Chris and Donna Malone, is the recipient of the John H. Emery Youth, Pageantry and Patriotism award in the amount of \$2,500.00.

Malone, the District 9 champion, was sponsored by Archie Miles Post 4724 and its Auxiliary in Elmwood.

Ava Wiemer, an 8th grade student Saint Gilbert School in Grayslake, Illinois, was selected as Illinois' first-place winner of the VFW's 2023-24 Patriot's Pen youth essay contest.

Wiemer, daughter of Ray and Kerry Wiemer, is the recipient of the John H. Emery Youth, Pageantry and Patriotism award in the amount of \$1,000.

Wiemer, the District 5 champion, was sponsored by Ronald Hill Memorial Post 2245 in Grayslake.

Both students were provided the opportunity to read their winning essays at the banquet.

In addition to Malone and Wiemer, awards were presented to each of the remaining 16 District Voice of Democracy

Champions as well as second, third, and fourth place State Patriot's Pen students.

Patriot's Pen Awards
 • **Gaye Hines Memorial 2nd Place award** - Katelyn Davin, a 6th grade student at Staunton

Public School in Staunton, is the recipient of the Gaye Hines Memorial 2nd Place award in the amount of \$500.

Davin, the District 12 champion, was sponsored by Staunton Post 1241 and its Auxiliary in Staunton.

• **William Glenn Britt Memorial 3rd Place award** - Braelynn Gossage, an 8th grade student at Ridgeview Junior High School in Colfax, Illinois, is the recipient of the William Glenn Britt Memorial award in the amount of \$400.

Gossage, the District 7 champion, was sponsored by Milton Hill Post 2029 in Saybrook.

• **Raymond L. Moreland Memorial 4th Place award** - Luke Martinez, an 8th grade student at St. Mary School in Buffalo Grove, Illinois, is the recipient of the Raymond L. Moreland Memorial award in the amount of \$300.

Martinez, the District 4 champion, was sponsored by Arlington Post 981 in Arlington Heights, Illinois.

Voice of Democracy Awards
 • **2nd Place: George R. Cramer & Ray R. Soden Scholarship Award** - Sam Matznick, a senior at Lane Tech College

See Voice of Democracy Continued on Page 7



Illinois VFW State Commander Brett Nila and Department Auxiliary President Lynn Smith present Ava Wiemer, an 8th grade student at Saint Gilbert School in Grayslake, Illinois, with the John H. Emery Youth, Pageantry and Patriotism first place Patriot's Pen award at the state awards banquet in Springfield Feb. 10. Wiemer, the District 5 Patriot's Pen champion, was sponsored by Ronald Hill Memorial Post 2245 in Grayslake.

PAGE 5




Delivering Holiday Cheer

PAGES 12-13



Membership Awards

PAGE 15



VFW Auxiliary

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

VFW Life Member Kevin Jacobs Appointed Chief of Staff, Becomes First Black General in Illinois Air National Guard

By Sgt. Trenton Fouche
Illinois National Guard
Public Affairs

Col. Kevin Jacobs, of O’Fallon, a life member of Scott Post 4183, the newly appointed Illinois Air National Guard Chief of Staff, made history Dec. 2 when he was promoted to brigadier general, making him the first Black general officer in the history of the organization.

“I’m honored to congratulate Air Force Colonel Kevin Jacobs on his promotion to brigadier general and on becoming the highest-ranking Black officer in the Illinois Air National Guard’s history,” said Governor JB Pritzker. “Colonel Jacobs’ promotion speaks to the continued progress the Illinois National Guard has made in ensuring historically underrepresented communities are fairly represented within its ranks and given the opportunity to excel at the highest levels of leadership, as Colonel Jacobs has clearly done and will certainly continue to do.”

“Throughout his career, Kevin Jacobs has taken increasingly challenging command and staff positions and has earned the respect and admiration of those Airmen who have served with him,” said Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the Adjutant General of Illinois and the Commander of the Illinois National Guard. “He is an outstanding officer and I look forward to seeing what he will accomplish as the Illinois Air National Guard’s Chief of Staff.

Jacobs began his career in 1984, as an exterior electrician for the 126th Civil Engineering Squadron. He commissioned in 1994 as a distinguished graduate of the U.S. Academy of Military Science and was assigned to the 217th Engineering and Installation Squadron. Later in 1994, he was assigned to the 126th Civil Engineering Squadron as the Deputy Base Civil Engineer. Since 1999, he has held various

positions in the state and 126th Air Refueling wing, to include Commander of the 126th Logistics Readiness Squadron, Deputy Commander of the 126th Mission Support Group, Inspector General of the 126th Air Refueling Wing, Illinois Air National Guard Director of Staff, 126th Mission Support Group Commander and 126th Air Refueling Wing Commander at Scott Air Force Base.

As the 126th Air Refueling Wing Commander, he led over 900 personnel executing global mobility operations, including both air refueling and airlift, supporting a wide range of conventional and nuclear operation plans.

“This is a significant milestone,” said Brig. Gen. Daniel R. McDonough, Assistant Adjutant General – Air, Illinois National Guard. “Jacobs is a proven leader with an extraordinary background. Seeing our Airmen ascend to the top is a great feeling. From our junior enlisted, to our officers, we must continue to grow great leaders.”

Jacobs, who lives in O’Fallon, is already federally recognized as a brigadier general and is just awaiting his official ceremony to pin on his first star. He has served in the Guard for nearly 40 years. His career has seen him climb the ladder from 10 years as an enlisted Airman to various command and staff positions.

“First, I thank God for this tremendous leadership opportunity and for everything he has done for me and my family. It has truly been an honor and a privilege to serve in the Illinois Air National Guard for almost 40 years,” Jacobs said. “Developing your career doesn’t happen overnight. It takes immense dedication and family support. I attribute this accomplishment, in large part, to the love and support of my devoted wife of 32 years, Michelle, and to our



U.S. Air Force Brig. Gen. Kevin Jacobs’, Illinois Air National Guard chief of staff, center, family pins on the rank of brigadier general, with Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, The Adjutant General of Illinois, during a promotion ceremony at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, Dec. 2, 2023. Jacobs is the first African-American general officer in the Illinois Air National Guard. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Aaron Rodriguez)

3 incredible children Darien, Kierra, and Erica. I would not be in the position I am in today if it wasn’t for her and for them. Their patience, perseverance, and understanding helped me balance the needs and activities

of our family with my military commitments.”

Jacobs holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Industrial Engineering from University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, a Master of Science degree in

Environmental Management from Webster University, completion of the U.S. Northern Command’s Dual-Status Commanders Course, and the U.S. Air Force War College.



U.S. Air Force Brig. Gen. Kevin Jacobs, Illinois National Guard chief of staff, and family, pose for a photo during his promotion ceremony, Dec. 2, 2023, at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois. Jacobs is the first African-American general officer in the Illinois Air National Guard. (U.S. Air National Guard by Staff Sgt. Vincent Lang)

★ VETERANS ★

WERE YOU EXPOSED TO BURN PITS OR OTHER TOXINS DURING YOUR MILITARY SERVICE?

The Bladder Cancer Advocacy Network (BCAN) is advocating for bladder cancer to be accepted as a tied-to-service condition for veterans exposed to burn pits and other toxins - making it easier for veterans to receive timely health care and benefits when they need it most.

- If you are a veteran who:
- Has served in the Gulf War era or post-9/11 and
 - Has a bladder cancer diagnosis

We want to hear from you.

Scan the QR code or use the web link to tell us your story via a brief survey.



<https://bit.ly/BCAN4VETS>

If you need assistance with completing the survey, please contact Patricia at (301)637-6965 or prios@bcan.org.



HONORING ALL WHO SERVED

The Bladder Cancer Advocacy Network | bcan.org





While the winter months have substantially limited outdoor activities, there are still a variety of indoor events and activities taking place throughout the Department of Illinois.

Our Veteran of the Month program, in its third year now, has been evolving. To encourage more submissions, an actual form was developed quite some time ago with three questions and space for responses. This was to help guide those submitting entries in highlighting why the Veteran being submitted was deserving. Late last Summer, Department established a process for ensuring submissions are judged and awardees are announced in a timely manner, as overseen by the Department Junior Vice. This process was further refined to ensure that once the monthly winner is determined, the member who submitted them will be contacted to determine how the announcement will be made. And this year, National has introduced a Veteran of the Year award. To make certain our

winner can compete Nationally, we have broadened our criteria to coincide with that of the National Program. Our program no longer limits the time-frame of the Veteran's activities and contributions to a one month period. The Veteran of the Month submission form can be found on the Department website under: Resources / Reports & Forms / Veteran of the Month Nomination Form.

Membership efforts over the Winter months kicked-off with a new recruiting tool in the December General Orders: the "Illinois VFW Fact Sheet." Patterned after National's "Fact Sheet," the graphics and format are instantly recognizable, but the data is strictly Illinois. This quantifies what the Illinois VFW is doing to help Veterans and will help prospective members understand what they could be joining.

New this year are the Membership Team's efforts to assist Posts directly, through outreach efforts they are making to expired members. On the first Sat-

urday of December, John McGlynn, Joe "Skip" Skipper, Tara Skipper and I, made over 250 calls from Department Headquarters, to members throughout the state who had expired within the past 2 years. There were 2,500 members on that list. Adjutant Quartermaster Joe Bartley was on hand to process several renewal orders. We actually spoke with several; some were skeptical, asking questions like "How do I know you're really the State Commander?" All in all it was a productive event. Plus it helped having several of us calling simultaneously; we compared notes on what we experienced, learned a few things and had a few good laughs. Since then, several more renewals have come in.

After the phone call campaign, we then decided to switch to texting the remaining members on the list before moving on to a "members at large" list. Over the next few weeks, "Skip" sent over 3,000 text messages asking members to support our lobbying efforts by renewing their membership. The Department HQ phone number and an online renewal link were provided in those texts. Even before that campaign concluded, John McGlynn began a new campaign of emailing expired members. These campaigns were designed to be a "first contact" and give

Posts a head-start. As Posts carry out their responsibility to contact and renew their members, it will be at least the second time the member has received a request to renew.

Members on Facebook may have noted numerous postings from Tara and Skip highlighting membership progress being made by many of our Posts. The month of January also brought about a state membership challenge. Three categories were established for Posts, based upon membership count, plus a fourth category for Districts. Details were outlined in the January General Orders, with prizes being awarded at the February Council of Administration meeting.

The Winter months also ushered in the season of banquets and awards programs for Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen. These are important opportunities for us, as Veterans, to interact with society—especially young people—and provide them with a realistic perception of Veterans. With all the attempts to bring help and resources to aid our less fortunate comrades, much of our Society—having little or no contact with the 7% of American who are Veterans—has developed a distorted view. They see Veterans as those most likely disabled, possibly homeless, with mental

health and substance abuse issues, who are constantly fighting for benefits. It's no wonder that Recruiters are so often hearing, "Why would I sign up for that!" from high schoolers.

For many years, the Armed Forces have relied on recruiting young people from families of Veterans in order to maintain the All Volunteer Force. But as the percentage of Veterans continues to shrink, the "pipeline" of enlistees is drying up, resulting in recruiting shortfalls. However as more of Society sees that in reality, the majority of Veterans are productive members of their communities, the more young people will consider military service as an option. So while our Youth and Community Service programs support the VFW mission of "serving...the community" they are also "serving the military" by supporting the All Volunteer Force. As such, with Community Service accomplishing two objectives of the VFW Mission, the VFW "Day of Service" in May is now twice as significant. Watch for more on how the Department of Illinois will promote it this year.

Thank you to all of you who are continuing to work our Programs. And thank you to so many Posts that are developing and participating in innovative events of their own to help Veterans and contribute to our communities. It all enhances a positive image of the VFW that we call all be proud of. An image that will help us bring new Veterans into the VFW in order to expand our innovations and increase our contributions.



Happy New Year! This fiscal year is going by very fast. Before you know it, the Department, Districts and Posts will be nominating and electing new officers for the 2024-2025 term.

The first weekend of January 2024 was very cold. Although it was below zero, I enjoyed representing the Department of Illinois in Northern Illinois. Although the meeting I was to attend as a State Rep was canceled, I was still able to attend a VFW VOD/Patriot Pen Banquet even though I wasn't the assigned State Rep. I was impressed with the turnout due to an outside temperature of -9 degrees not counting the windchill factor. During the first quarter of this year, it was an honor and pleasure to attend many VOD/Patriot Pen Banquets and District meetings all over the State. As a result of these visits for me, I became more acquainted with many of the District Commanders!

Congratulations to Riley Malone, who is the 2024 State of Illinois VFW Voice of Democracy first place winner, and congratulations to Ava Wiemer, who is the 2024 State of Illinois VFW Patriot's Pen first place winner. It was also an honor to co-present the George R. Cramer and Ray R. Soden second

place award at the ceremony held at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Springfield, Illinois on Feb. 10.

I want to thank all the Post and Districts who participated in the Patriots Pen and Voice of Democracy program this year. In case you didn't know, the Patriots Pen and VOD program is the VFW's premier annual Scholarship event. I would like to provide you a little history about the VOD program. This audio-essay program was established in 1947. The audio-essay program provides high school students with the unique opportunity to express themselves in a democratic and patriotic-themed recorded essay. Each year nearly 25,000 9-12 grade students from across the country enter to win their share of more than \$2 million in educational scholarships and incentives awarded through the program. The Department of Illinois first place winner wins a \$2,500 dollar cash prize and the national first place winner receives a \$35,000 dollar scholarship paid directly to the recipient's American university, college or vocational/technical school.

Patriots Pen students participating in their program have more participants competing than the Voice of Democracy.

Each year nearly 68,800 students in grades 6-8 enter the VFW's Patriot's Pen youth essay contest for a chance to win their share of more than \$1.4 million in state and national awards. The Department of Illinois first place winner wins a \$1,000 dollar cash prize and the national first place winner wins \$5,000.

Now, I want to talk about one of the services that the Illinois VFW provides. The Illinois VFW provides Veterans Service Officers (VSOs). VSOs provide assistance, guidance, and advocacy to veterans and their families. One of the services that the VSOs provide is claims representation. They assist veterans in preparing and filing claims for VA benefits and represent them throughout the claims process, including any necessary appeals.

One of the things that a Veteran must have when working with a VSO when filling for a claim are medical records. I believe that is why most claims are denied. In addition, I believe the National Guard and the Reserve have the highest VA claims denials. In my case, I served both Active Duty and National Guard. While in the National Guard I had several minor injuries, i.e. closing a door on my finger, hitting my finger with a hammer, twisting an ankle, and back injuries due to heavy lifting. In many cases injuries are not reported and if reported to your supervisor, your supervisor would tell you to man up or suck it up and don't be a wimp. I even witnessed a supervisor tell a Guardsman if you report this, it may end

your career. In hindsight, there were injuries that I should have reported.

I say all of this to say that when I interact with current military troops about the VFW, I also brief the importance to the troops to report any injuries to their medical section no matter how minor it is. I also hope all who is reading this article will pass on the same information when you come in contact with our military troops.

When you report injuries to the medical section, it becomes a matter of record. This record then becomes a "Line of Duty" (LOD).

LOD is used in military contexts to refer to the circumstances under which an injury or illness occurs while a service member is performing their duties. It's crucial for determining eligibility for benefits, including medical care and disability compensation. In addition, the LOD indicates that the injury or illness occurred while the member was performing their duties and was not the result of misconduct or negligence. In such cases, the service member is entitled to benefits and support. Lastly, if a National Guard troop is State activated and gets injured or becomes ill, they are not covered by VA and cannot file for a VA claim.

Let's continue to ensure our Veterans, Active Duty Servicemembers, Guardsmen and Reservists receive their VA benefits when deserved.

In closing, once again, Happy New Year and
VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES, WE GOT YOU.

ILLINOIS VFW NEWS
USPS 008-251
Official Publication of the Department of Illinois
Volume #61 Issue #3
The Illinois VFW News is published four times per year (September, December, March and June) by the Department of Illinois, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, 3300 Constitution Dr., Springfield, IL 62711. Periodical Postage paid at Springfield, IL and additional office: Stevens Point, WI.

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

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

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

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

State Junior Vice Commander

Eugene Blackwell



Greetings fellow Comrades! Fostering Patriotism and Inspiration: District Winners Shine at our 2024 Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen Awards Banquet

The auxiliary and post members showed a remarkable amount of dedication and hard work in their thorough review of hundreds of inspiring essays submitted by contestants for the Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen competitions. During the State Awards Banquet, each participant was celebrated for their insightful and carefully crafted essays. Reflecting on the effort put forth by all contestants, it became apparent that each writer was a winner, as the essays showed a great deal of effort and commitment in expressing their thoughts and ideas about America.

Among the standout winners

was Ava Wiemer, who represented the Fifth District and captivated the audience with her eloquent presentation titled "How are You Inspired by America?" Ava's ability to convey her admiration for our country left a lasting impression, earning her the first-place position in the Patriot's Pen competition. She now eagerly anticipates the opportunity to compete at the national level, where she could secure a \$5,000 prize.

Riley Malone represented the Ninth District, and successfully showcased her prowess in oratory skills with her essay titled "What are the Greatest Attributes of Our Democracy?" Her articulate delivery and insightful reflections earned her the top spot in the Voice of Democracy competition. Riley is now poised to vie for a \$35,000 scholarship at the national level.

One notable addition to this year's banquet program was the presence of last year's state winner, Andrew Kula, who graciously shared his experience of competing and winning first place. His presence served as both inspiration and encouragement for this year's contestants, highlighting the transformative power of these VFW youth scholarship competitions.

Marc Garduno, the Quartermaster General of the VFW,

served as the National representative and addressed the audience with words of encouragement. He urged the students to become advocates for the VFW, sharing their personal stories of how the organization has positively impacted their lives. In addition, Comrade Garduno was extremely impressed with our department on orchestrating our State Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen Award Banquet.

As the evening ended, it was

evident that these competitions not only fostered patriotism but also provided a platform for our young people's voices to be heard.

The dedication of all involved, from contestants, to reviewers, to organizers, reaffirmed the importance of celebrating and nurturing the spirit of democracy and inspiration in our youth.

Thank you again for a great program and thank you all for your service!



Members of Belleville Post 1739 were honored to receive the Proclamation by Mayor Patty Gregory congratulating the post on its 90th Anniversary. Pictured, from left, members John Lawson, Terrence Williams, Steve Mudd, Doug Jameson, Mayor Gregory, Chuck Mank, Dan Buentgen, and Mike Shearon.



St. Juvin Post members (from left) Commander James "Hoppy" Phillips and Jr. Vice-Commander Jim Richards present one of the commemorative throws to a Marine veteran at the Pointe in Morris, Illinois.

St. Juvin Post continues Christmas "Blankets for Vets" tradition

St. Juvin Post 1336 Veterans of Foreign Wars members visited with veterans in assisted living, skilled care and memory care facilities in Dwight and Morris with their signature "Blankets for Vets" program.

Since 2013 when the first blankets were distributed to Post members, WWII vet Bill Finn, Korean War vet Sheridan Bailey and Vietnam vet Gary Simons as a trial to see if the personalized tapestry throws with branch of service logo would be a good replacement for the usual monetary gifts or gift packages presented to vets during the Christmas season.

The program was conceived by then Post Commander Charlie Brown's wife Kathy and proved to be very well received by veterans.

While the bulk of the throws are presented during the Christmas season the program spans the entire year. Each blanket has a custom label that reads "The members of St. Juvin Post 1336 veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States present this throw to you as a symbol of your service to a grateful nation"

This year 19 blankets were awarded at Christmas and an additional 12 during the year for a total of 31 raising the decade long program to 628 blankets representing about \$34,540 raised by the Post's Buddy Poppy events, raffles and generous donations from our special benefactors, Tom Fulton, local business Berkots Super Foods, Babes Tap, Don's Beer Store, Mustachios, MinitMarts in Coal City and Diamond, Whitmore Ace Hardware, Casey's General Store and the generosity of the entire community.



One of the many issues facing female Veterans with babies is the ever-increasing costs of diapers and baby wipes. When hearing of this issue, Bloomingdale VFW Post 7539 contacted Jesse Brown VAMC in Chicago to determine how much funding would be needed to support a year-long program to provide these items. Yesterday, members of Bloomingdale VFW Post 7539, Commander Cliff Hall and Joe Palmer presented to the leadership at Jesse Brown VAMC Chicago, checks totaling \$5,000 to fund a program for one year for women Veterans.



Crawford County VFW Post 4549 in Robinson, Illinois, donated \$1,500 to the Robinson Food Pantry. Pictured, from left, Kathy Irby, VFW Auxiliary and food bank volunteer, Mike Weck, VFW and volunteer, Ralph Beabout, volunteer, J.D. Spindler, Post 4549 Quartermaster, and Mary Guyer, assistant manager.

St. Juvin 'Venice Detachment' delivers holiday cheer to veterans

On Dec. 21, St. Juvin Post 1336 members Phil Brucato and Charlie Brown delivered six boxes of books, magazines, CD's and DVD's along with items of clothing to Florida's Jacobson veteran's home in Port Charlotte.

The 'Venice Detachment' consists of four members of St. Juvin Post who reside at the Floridian Club.

The clothing and media items that were donated by the Floridian Club of Sarasota Club members and staff helped make the Christmas season a little merrier for the 112 men and women vets who reside at the facility.

Phil and Charlie were greeted by Activity Director Megan Kirkpatrick and three of her self assistants who helped off load the goodies.



St. Juvin Post members Phil Brucato (left) and Charlie Brown deliver a little Christmas cheer to the Douglas T. Jacobson Veteran's Home.



Activity Director Megan Kirkpatrick (far right) and her elves greeted Charlie and Phil.

VFW presents awards to Civil Air Patrol Composite Squadron Cadets



Lawrence Miller, Junior Vice Commander of District 10, presents C/CMSgt Allen and C/SMSgt Gardiner with the VFW Cadet NCO Medal award for Outstanding achievement and exceptional leadership.



Kyle Blumhorst, Commander, Rochester Post 11463 presents C/2Lt Gross and C/2Lt Jones with the VFW Cadet Officer Medal award for outstanding achievement and exceptional leadership.



Belleville VFW Post 1739 shared a \$2,500 Military Assistance Program grant with the 618th AOC, Scott AFB to support their holiday event for unit members, family and staff. Pictured are Post 1739 Commander Doug Jameson, Adjutant Ron Milton and receiving the \$2,500 check is an Active Duty member of the 618th - who is also a Post 1739 Life Member.

Fulfilling needs of vets at Anna Veterans Home



Belleville VFW Post 1739 collected and delivered items for the residents at the Veterans Home in Anna, to include sweat shirts, sweat pants, toiletry items, bed linens and wash cloths, puzzles and more. Additionally, Post Commander Doug Jameson and Jr Vice Commander Lachelle Stevenson presented a \$500 donation to Administrator Amy Kiestler to meet other needs of these honored Veterans.



District 15 and its Auxiliary were joined by State Commander Brett Nila and Department President Lynn Smith for the dedication of five park benches at the Anna Veterans Home in Anna, donated by posts and auxiliaries within the district in memory of Marilyn Crawford, who served as the Auxiliary VAVS representative at the home for more than 20 years. Crawford's family were also in attendance for the dedication ceremony.

District 6 Honors Past Commander Rick Frank

By Rob Bland

Before the District 6 meeting on Nov. 19, at Post 8739 Oregon, a ceremony was held to honor the Past District Commanders and Presidents.

This year, Past District Commander Rick Frank was honored for his service to the District, the VFW and the Community.

The ceremony opened with the Pledge of Allegiance, singing of the National Anthem from the Oregon Singers and the opening prayer. After the introduction of the head table, the honoring of the Past District



Rick Frank thanks friends and fellow veterans from District 6 for the recognition. Photo by Elizabeth Costa

Commanders and Past District Presidents started by reading of the names and a pause of reflection for those who have passed. The names were read by the immediate Past District Commander Ruben Hernandez and the immediate Past District President Diana Rudeen.

At the conclusion of the reading of the names, Phil Maughan, the Advisor to the State Commander, was brought up to the podium to introduce the honoree, Rick Frank.

Rick Frank was drafted in 1968 and served as a Military Police Sergeant E-5 in the U.S. Army. He was awarded the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, earning his eligibility to the VFW.

He became a member of John Hugo Kaiser Post 1461, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States of America in 1970 and served as Post Junior Vice, Senior Vice and Commander for two terms, achieving All-State Commander in both terms; he has also served his Post in various elected and appointed offices, including 3rd, 2nd and 1st year Trustee and has served many years as chairman of the Post's Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen, Adjutant, Quarter-

master and chairman of many programs.

Rick has served District 6, State of Illinois Veterans of Foreign Wars in various elected and appointed offices, including, 3-, 2-, and 1-year trustee, Judge Advocate, Community Service Chairman, District Junior Vice, Senior Vice, and Commander. He was selected as the Captain of the All-State Team of District Commanders and was selected as the first ever All-American District Commander of the VFW Illinois District 6. He also served

many years as the chairman of the District Voice of Democracy speech competition for high school students.

He has served the State of Illinois in the following elected offices: Big Ten Conference Delegate, Junior Vice, Senior Vice and Commander; and an All-American State Commander. He also served as President and treasurer of the Past State Commanders Club and State Adjutant-Quartermaster.

Rick has served as VFW National Assistant Inspector General and on several VFW National committees, including: VFW National Finance and Internal Affairs Committee (three times), VFW National By-Laws, Ritual and Manual of Procedures Committee (twelve times); VFW National Youth Activities Committee as Vice Chairman; VFW National Voice of Democracy Committee; VFW National Security Committee (three times); VFW National Veterans Employment & Training Committee (three times), Vice Chairman (two times); VFW National Strategic Planning Committee; VFW National Homeless Veterans Committee as Vice Chairman; VFW National Buddy Poppy Committee; VFW National Citizenship,



Rick Frank receives a plaque from Past State Commander Phil Maughan and Bob Coulter. Photo by Elizabeth Costa.

Education & Community Service Committee, VFW National General Resolutions Committee (three times) and was a member of the National VFW Strategic Planning committee for several years.

He was elected to a two-year term on the VFW National Council of Administration and selected to serve on the VFW National Budget Committee both years.

Rick was elected Vice Chairman of the VFW Big Ten Conference in 2006 and was elected as Chairman in 2007.

His list of positions at all levels of the VFW is not to be

outdone by his years of service to the community.

Rick served as Vice Chairman of the Northern Illinois Chapter of the March of Dimes, many years as Secretary and Chairman of the Boone County Crime Stoppers Board of Directors (five times); Boone County United Way Board of Directors, including Planning & Needs Chairman; six years as a United Way Loaned Executive; Chairman (11 years) and treasurer of the Boone County Veterans Memorial Commission (seven years). As a member of the Boone County Veterans Club, he has served as Junior Vice,

Senior Vice, President, Trustee, Secretary and Treasurer. He also served as a Director of the ABD Federal Credit Union.

Rick was presented with a plaque and a Past District Commander rank bar for his membership badge. He had a few comments, first thanking Post 1461 Belvidere and then going on to thank everyone who supported him through his journey in the VFW.

After Rick Frank's remarks were completed, the District leadership had some closing remarks, and the ceremony ended with the closing prayer and Salute to the Colors.



Bloomington Post conducts winter coat drive to benefit veterans using Jesse Brown VAMC

Bloomington VFW Post 7539 conducted a Winter Coat drive for homeless Veterans in October. The village agencies involved were Village Hall, Public Library, Park District, and Fire District 1. Members of Bloomington VFW Post 7539 made multiple trips throughout the month to collect the generous donations of more than 350 coats, 350 sweaters, and other items. Also, VFW Post 7539 purchased 672 4-piece sets of hats, gloves, scarfs, and sock sets which were delivered to Jesse Brown VAMC center in Chicago.



Department Auxiliary President Lynn Smith, National VFW Auxiliary President Carla Martinez and Department Auxiliary National Council Member Rhonda Borkgren visit with Commander Brett Nila during the Council of Administration Meeting Feb. 10 in Springfield, Illinois.

Voice of Democracy awards

Continued from Page 1

Prep High School, is the recipient of the George R. Cramer and Ray R. Soden Scholarship Award in the amount of \$1,500.00.

Matznik, the District 3 champion, was sponsored by Longan Avondale Post 2978 in Chicago.

• **3rd Place: Terry L. McKinney Memorial Award** - Elizabeth McConkie, a junior at Sycamore High School in Sycamore, is the recipient of the Terry L. McKinney Memorial Scholarship Award in the amount of \$1,250.00.

McConkie, the District 19 champion, was sponsored by Sycamore Post 5768 and its Auxiliary in Sycamore.

• **4th Place: Dale & Catherine Clifton Award** - Regan Kaner, a sophomore at Bishop McNamara Catholic School in Kankakee, is the recipient of the Dale and Catherine Clifton Award in the amount of \$1,000.00.

Kaner, the District 7 champion, was sponsored by Kankakee Post 2857 and its Auxiliary in Kankakee.

• **5th Place: Johnson Phelps Post 5220 Auxiliary Award** - Samantha Thum, a junior at Cuba Senior High School in Cuba, Illinois, is the recipient of the Johnson Phelps Post 5220 Auxiliary Award in the amount of \$750.00.

Thum, the District 8 champion, was sponsored by Canton Post 1984 in Canton, Illinois.

• **6th Place: Edward Jarnell & Joseph Ross Award** - Ellen Wiker, a freshman at Athens Community High School in Athens, Illinois is the recipient of the Edward Jarnell and Joseph Ross Award in the amount of \$600.00.

Wiker, the District 10 champion, was sponsored by Havana Post 6408 in Havana, Illinois.

• **7th Place: William Glenn Britt Memorial Award** - Benjamin Koch, a junior at Verita Homeschool academy in Barrington, Illinois, is the recipient of the William Glenn Britt Memorial Award in the amount of \$550.00.

Koch, the District 4 champion, was sponsored by Joshua W. Harris Brookfield Memorial Post 2868 and its Auxiliary in Brookfield..

• **8th Place: Dick Cosner Memorial Award** - Claire Deterding, a freshman at Red Bud High School in Red Bud, Illinois, is the recipient of the Dick Cosner Memorial Award in the amount of \$500.00.

Deterding, the District 14 champion, was sponsored by Red Bud Post 6632 and its Auxiliary in Red Bud.

• **9th Place: Vern and Lorraine Umphery, Post 6863 and Auxiliary Award** - Benjamin James, a junior at Tinley Park High School in Tinley Park, Illinois, is the recipient of the Vern and Lorraine Umphery, Post 6863 and Auxiliary Award in the amount of \$450.00.

James, the District 16 champion, was sponsored by Bremen Post 2791 and its Auxiliary in Tinley Park..

• **10th Place: Robert C. Holysz Post 2200 Award** - Sahana Subramanyan, a junior at Grayslake Central High School in Grayslake, Illinois, is the recipient of the Robert C. Holysz Post 2200 Award in the amount of \$400.00.

Subramanyan, the District 5 champion, was sponsored by Ronald Hill Memorial Post 2245.

• **11th Place: Grant-Parkholme Post 9115 Award** - Anya Campbell, a junior at Annunciation Co-op in Rockton, Illinois, is the recipient of the Grant-Parkholme Post 9115 Award in the amount of \$375.00.

Campbell, the District 6 champion, was sponsored by Clifford E. Johnson Post 9759 and its Auxiliary in Loves Park, Illinois.

• **12th Place: West End Post 2004 award** - Giada Roti, a junior at Lockport Township High School in Lockport, Illinois, is the recipient of the West End Post 2004 Award in the amount of \$350.00.

Roti, the District 18 champion, was sponsored by Lockport Post 5788 and its Auxiliary in Lockport.

• **13th Place: Chester Spears Memorial Award** - Sarah Wright, a junior at Staunton High School in Staunton, Illinois, is the recipient of the Chester Spears Memorial Award in the amount of \$325.00.

Wright, the District 12 champion, was sponsored by John L. Meyer Post 1104 and its Auxiliary in Carlinville, Illinois.

Honorable Mention awards

Clair Osborn, a senior at Pana High School in Pana, Illinois, is the recipient of the District 15 Runner-Up Award in the amount of \$300.00.

Osborn, the District 11 champion, was sponsored by Hall-Evey Post 4168 and its Auxiliary in Clinton, Illinois.

John Voss, a senior at Murphysboro High School in Murphysboro, Illinois, is the recipient of the District 11 Runner-Up Award in the amount of \$300.00.

Voss, the District 15 champion, was sponsored by Jackson County Post 7190 and its Auxiliary in Murphysboro.

Jack Patterson, a senior at Lawrenceville High School in Lawrenceville, Illinois, is the recipient of the Sharon Edwards Memorial Runner-Up Award in the amount of \$300.00.

Patterson, the District 13 champion, was sponsored by Ambaw Post 2244 and its Auxiliary in Lawrenceville.

Gunner Cline, a senior at Villa Grove High School in Villa Grove, Illinois, is the recipient of the Rochester Post 11463 Runner-Up Award in the amount of \$300.00.

Cline, the District 17 champion, was sponsored by Walter Jones Post 2876 and its Auxiliary in Villa Grove.



State Voice of Democracy Champion Riley Malone reads her award winning essay at the state banquet held in Springfield Feb. 10.



State Patriot's Pen Champion Ava Wiemer reads her award winning essay at the state banquet held in Springfield Feb. 10.



Sixteen of the 17 District Voice of Democracy champions gather on stage as they are introduced at the state Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen banquet Feb. 10 in Springfield, Illinois.

Riley Malone, District 9 champion, was named state champion and will advance to the national Voice of Democracy competition. The national winners will be announced during the annual VFW Washington Conference March 4.

How are You Inspired by America?

“Success is not final, failure is not fatal: It is the courage to continue that counts,” said by Winston S. Churchill contains a very important theme, strength. Our country requires courage and strength with many things; violence, crisis, or disagreement. America continues to display perseverance during these times, and that is what inspires me.

As a military child, I especially appreciate the military. Military families all over the world constantly take risks to serve our government. Even when the job can take a toll on the person or family, they continue to work hard. I remember when my dad had to go on deployment for almost a year, and our family was left at home worrying about him. Despite these circumstances, he continued to travel and work overnight, all for us, our country. Countless efforts are made when you are in the military, which affects many aspects of your life, especially your time. Your time is consumed with work, and no

time to spend with family, or sometimes even friends. Though this sounds unenjoyable, we thought of the positives. You get to travel, learn important qualities and traits like leadership, determination, and discipline. So next time you see someone in the military, thank them for

State Patriot’s Pen winning essay

By Ava Wiemer

District 5 Patriot’s Pen champion

their service, because it’s important to recognize the risks taken, the time taken, and sometimes the happiness taken all for our country.

Many people overlook the fact that we are actually pretty lucky to have basic human rights! In many countries, their government limits their people’s rights. In the United States, we are able to have freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and freedom to specialize in anything we want. In countries like North Korea, Iraq, and Afghanistan, they take away these

rights and many people are unaware of this. The fact that I have the right to have life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness is what inspires me.

Another thing that inspires me are the constant advances in technology. The United States has remained the hub for

technological advancements. The United States has always been first when in the race to new inventions and improvements. With our country’s intelligence, I feel protected and thrilled for what will come next. We are persistently coming up with new conveniences for ourselves, to make our lives easier and less complicated. Our country has a history of great inventions, such as the aircraft, spacecraft, the internet, the laser, and the cellphone. Though some of these inventions may not seem that important to be proud of, this

topic makes an interesting point, that the U.S. is one of the most intelligent and admirable countries, because of all of these types of technologies. The fact that the United States is the birthplace for half of Britannica’s 321 Greatest Inventions, is definitely something to be proud of.

From technological advancements, to military strength, and human rights, I think we can both agree that the United States is pretty inspiring. Though we do still have some things to work on, we’ve come a long way. Many people don’t think about the importance of our advantages here in the United States, but I think maybe we should think about it more. So many people, and hours of work have been put into our country, to make it a better place, for you. Therefore, next time someone asks, “What inspires you in America?” think of those people, those hours, and the time and effort. Because that is what inspires me.



Katelyn Davin, a 6th grade student at Staunton Public School in Staunton, is the recipient of the Gaye Hines Memorial 2nd Place award in the amount of \$500.



Braelynn Gossage, an 8th grade student at Ridgeway Junior High School in Colfax, Illinois, is the recipient of the William Glenn Britt Memorial award in the amount of \$400.



Luke Martinez, an 8th grade student at St. Mary School in Buffalo Grove, Illinois, is the recipient of the Raymond L. Moreland Memorial award in the amount of \$300.



The top four state Patriot’s Pen finalists gather on stage as they are introduced during the annual Voice of Democracy and Patriot’s Pen banquet in Springfield Feb. 10. Ava Wiemer, the District 5 champion, was named the state champion and is competing at the national Patriot’s Pen competition level.



VFW Quartermaster General Marc Garduno delivers the keynote address at the state banquet Feb. 10.



National VFW Auxiliary President Carla Martinez congratulates the students, parents, and educators during the state banquet Feb. 10.

What are the Greatest Attributes of Our Democracy?

American Democracy: An All-Access Pass

One dull Friday night, the unspoken movie night in my household, I rushed downstairs to the smell of buttery popcorn and freshly baked sugar cookies. I grabbed my bowl of popcorn and situated myself on my designated couch cushion. It was my night to pick a movie, and I was eager to pick the newest Disney movie. This privilege was quickly taken away when my parents declared we were watching Hacksaw Ridge. Like any other young girl, I whined and moaned, exclaiming that this would be just another mundane movie. However, I was very mistaken. After finishing this extraordinary movie, I became fascinated with America and its government. I interrogated my parents for hours, yearning to learn more about the country I lived in. After learning of the way our soldiers fought tirelessly to secure countless rights for people they had never met, I realized how essential our democracy is. I also learned that there are specific attributes that constitute our democracy as a great one, and two of these attributes include having access to all media and having the ability to learn about our history.

Since my fascination with our democracy began, I have learned that its greatness shines through in how our country allows its citizens to have access to any and all media. I am free to watch any movie, listen to a variety of music, and

view any piece of news or information that I wish to. This freedom has personally impacted me in a variety of ways. One of these impacts occurred when I was in the fifth grade. One ordinary day at school, I heard murmurs about the presidential election candidates and how my school would be holding a mock election for these candidates. Everywhere

to easily find information to answer my question. Knowing that not many other countries have this privilege ignites great pride for the country I reside in.

Another attribute that ignites great pride for the country I reside in is having the ability to learn about our country's great and extensive history. I am liberated to inform myself about the ups

and downs of our country. This ability has given me the opportunity to be an informed citizen and a part of a tremendous and always-evolving society. I can recall the first instance in which I learned of this great attribute. It was seventh grade, September 11th, and my teacher began discussing the horrific day of 9/11. She then put on a video describing the atrocities committed on this day. I was absorbed by this information and simply wondered why something like this happened. As my peers practically rushed out the door to go to the long-awaited lunchtime, I remained seated, having so many questions about the time before me. I spent the entirety of lunch pestering my history teacher with numerous questions about the past and how our country has evolved since then. I reluctantly left

the classroom, my head filled with an abundance of information and even more questions, but with insufficient time to ask them all. However, a solution to this problem was to take a plethora of history classes in just a few years. So once I reached high school, I filled my schedule with Government and A.P. U.S. History. Here, I learned the extensive history of our country, gaining information on our successes and failures. I learned about a myriad of events in our history that made us who we are as a country. These incredible classes have molded me into an educated citizen and have exceptionally prepared me to vote in just a few months. I feel so grateful to be able to educate myself about our extensive history because it allows me to have a crucial perspective for understanding and solving present and future issues.

In summary, I consider having access to all media and having the ability to learn about our history to be the most significant attributes of our democracy. It is with these attributes that I am able to make informed decisions and become an empowered American citizen. These two characteristics allow not only me, but other American citizens to become informed and make responsible decisions for present and future generations. I am eternally grateful to be able to watch movies like Hacksaw Ridge and have educated discussions with those around me.

State Voice of Democracy winning essay

By Riley Malone

District 9 Voice of Democracy champion

I turned, I heard different voices with different opinions. It's like I could see opinions flying by me like paper airplanes, putting me in a daze of confusion. I decided that I would later utilize my resources, such as my educators, parents, and the internet to learn more about this election and make an informed decision. Later that night, I researched both candidates and what they stood for. I finally decided who I would vote for the next day. While walking up to the mini-voter stands, I felt empowered and informed to make a decision that I felt best suited me. This instance made me grateful that I have the privilege of having access to different resources to make an informed decision. I am very thankful that if I ever have a question about a current issue, election, or even just a movie I am able

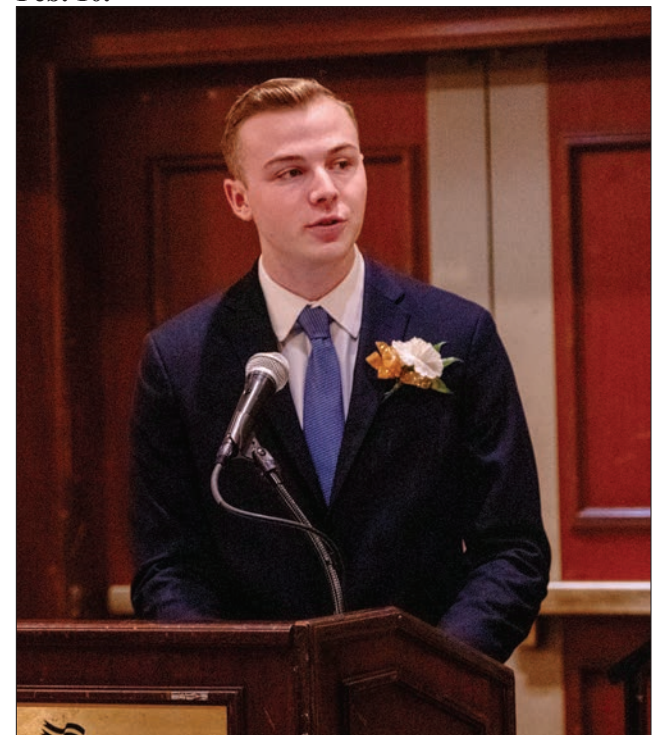
and downs of our country. This ability has given me the opportunity to be an informed citizen and a part of a tremendous and always-evolving society. I can recall the first instance in which I learned of this great attribute. It was seventh grade, September 11th, and my teacher began discussing the horrific day of 9/11. She then put on a video describing the atrocities committed on this day. I was absorbed by this information and simply wondered why something like this happened. As my peers practically rushed out the door to go to the long-awaited lunchtime, I remained seated, having so many questions about the time before me. I spent the entirety of lunch pestering my history teacher with numerous questions about the past and how our country has evolved since then. I reluctantly left



Cadets from the Civil Air Patrol Composite Squadron 36, Springfield, post the colors during the Illinois VFW Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen banquet, Feb. 10.



State Commander Brett Nila addresses the Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen banquet attendees Feb. 10.



2023 State Voice of Democracy champion Andrew Kula tells students how participating in the Voice of Democracy program benefitted him.



Sam Matznick, a senior at Lane Tech College Prep High School, is the recipient of the George R. Cramer and Ray R. Soden Scholarship Award in the amount of \$1,500.00.



Elizabeth McConkie, a junior at Sycamore High School in Sycamore, is the recipient of the Terry L. McKinney Memorial Scholarship Award in the amount of \$1,250.00.



Regan Kaner, a sophomore at Bishop McNamara Catholic School in Kankakee, is the recipient of the Dale and Catherine Clifton Award in the amount of \$1,000.00.



Samantha Thum, a junior at Cuba Senior High School in Cuba, Illinois, is the recipient of the Johnson Phelps Post 5220 Auxiliary Award in the amount of \$750.00.



Ellen Wiker, a freshman at Athens Community High School in Athens, Illinois is the recipient of the Edward Jarnell and Joseph Ross Award in the amount of \$600.00.



Benjamin Koch, a junior at Verita Homeschool academy in Barrington, Illinois, is the recipient of the William Glenn Britt Memorial Award in the amount of \$550.00.



Claire Deterding, a freshman at Red Bud High School in Red Bud, Illinois, is the recipient of the Dick Cosner Memorial Award in the amount of \$500.00.



Benjamin James, a junior at Tinley Park High School in Tinley Park, Illinois, is the recipient of the Vern and Lorraine Umphery, Post 6863 and Auxiliary Award in the amount of \$450.00.



Sahana Subramanyan, a junior at Grayslake Central High School in Grayslake, Illinois, is the recipient of the Robert C. Holysz Post 2200 Award in the amount of \$400.00.



Anya Campbell, a junior at Annunciation Co-op in Rockton, Illinois, is the recipient of the Grant-Park-holme Post 9115 Award in the amount of \$375.00.



Giada Roti, a junior at Lockport Township High School in Lockport, Illinois, is the recipient of the West End Post 2004 Award in the amount of \$350.00.



Sarah Wright, a junior at Staunton High School in Staunton, Illinois, is the recipient of the Chester Spears Memorial Award in the amount of \$325.00.



Clair Osborn, a senior at Pana High School in Pana, Illinois, is the recipient of the District 15 Runner-Up Award in the amount of \$300.00.



John Voss, a senior at Murphysboro High School in Murphysboro, Illinois, is the recipient of the District 11 Runner-Up Award in the amount of \$300.00.



Jack Patterson, a senior at Lawrenceville High School in Lawrenceville, Illinois, is the recipient of the Sharon Edwards Memorial Runner-Up Award in the amount of \$300.00.



Gunner Cline, a senior at Villa Grove High School in Villa Grove, Illinois, is the recipient of the Rochester Post 11463 Runner-Up Award in the amount of \$300.00.



Students assist Post members in folding the flag.

St. Juvin Post teaches Coal City students how to fold flag

On Nov. 14, members of St. Juvin Post 1336 gave their Flag Protocol and Meaning of the Folds of the Flag Draped Coffin presentation to the fourth and fifth grade students and staff at Coal City's Intermediate School which has the Community Veterans Memorial located on the school grounds.

The meaning of each

of the 13 folds was explained along with the standardized presentation verbage for military funeral services used when presenting the folded flag to the next of kin or an appropriate family member of the deceased.

Post members demonstrated the folding of the flag and then volunteers from both grades assisted

in the flag folding. After the flag folding students and Post members assembled at the Community Veterans Memorial for a question and answer sessions about the memorial

The Post also conducted a free flag raffle where a U.S. flag kit was presented to the winners in each grade.



Intermediate School students view the more than 1000 names incirbed on the Memorial Wall of Honor. The Wall of Honor is located on the Intermediate School grounds.



Arlington Post 981 Saves Veteran's Day Breakfast

When a major sponsor of the November 4 Veteran's Day breakfast at Luther Village Retirement Community in Arlington Heights dropped out, Post 981 quickly filled in the money gap and enabled the function to go off. Open to all veterans in the community as well as those residing at Luther Village it brought together men and women who served in WWII all the way to the recently discharged. The Mayor of Arlington Heights, Tom Hayes, himself an Army veteran, delivered remarks along with Major General Matt Baker, Commanding General of the 88th Reserve Unit. The local men's acapella chorus, the Arling-tones, sang the National Anthem as well as the military songs of each service as veterans from each were recognized in turn. The celebration ended with a picture being taken of all veterans present.

Arlington Post 981 Member Revisits World War II Battlegrounds

Even though he is 101, Frank Fabianski didn't hesitate when offered a chance to go back to Europe in October to revisit the scenes of his service as a cryptographer in World War II.

Accompanied by his daughter and granddaughter, he spent 10 days following the route of Operation Pheasant which involved his unit, the 104th Infantry Timberwolves, clearing out German units in Belgium and Holland.

Frank received the Purple Heart while serving in that operation, and when he was unable to locate the medal a couple of years ago, Post 981 was instrumental in obtaining another and conducting a cere-



Frank Fabianski

mony for our Life-Member. Frank had breakfast with the U. S. Ambassador to Belgium, Michael Adler; led a parade with the Mayor of Etten-Leur, Netherlands celebrating the 80th anniversary of

its liberation; participated in other commemorative events; and ended his trip at the American Cemetery in Morgraten, Netherlands which contains the remains of 8,000 American service people.



Commander John Beele and Don Tollefsen of Homewood Post 8077 present a contribution to Homewood Police Chief McGrath in support of her running in the 128th Boston Marathon April 15, 2024. "The Homewood Police have always been Big Supporters of Our Post!"



St. Juvin Post presents flag folding to Cub Scout Pack 466

On Nov. 14, St. Juvin Post 1336 members Earl "Shorty" Fatlan, Jr. Vice Commander Jim Richards and Commander James "Hoppy" Phillips gave Cub Scouts of Pack 446 Coal City a ceremonial flag folding demonstration with the reading of the significance of each of the 13 folds given by Commander Phillips along with the new standardized presentation commentary of the folded flag to the next of kin. Cub Scouts, under the directions of the Pack leaders, Ryan & Katlyn Foster, also had a chance to participate in a folding. From Left Jr. Vice Commander Jim Richards at the foot of the casket and Earl "Shorty" Fatlan at the head, with Commander James "Hoppy" Phillips reading the 13 folds as Cub Scouts from Pack 466 prepare to fold the casket flag.

Posts, members recognized for membership efforts



State Commander Brett Nila presents State Chaplain Gary Holmes a set of six engraved VFW pint glasses. Holmes recruited nine members and was entered into a drawing for the glasses.



State Commander Brett Nila presents District 5 Commander Marie Honeywell a set of six engraved VFW pint glasses for Stephen Baker from Post 4308. Baker recruited 14 members and was entered into a drawing for the glasses.



J.D. Seed, Post 755-10, receives a coin from State Commander Brett Nila, for recruiting 25 or more new members. Seed also received a plaque for recruiting 62 members.



District 3 Commander Chris Garza accepts a plaque for Post 2978 noting the post was 98 percent in membership by Dec. 31.



District 4 Commander Eric Morales accepts a plaque for Post 10236 noting the post was 98 percent in membership by Dec. 31.



District 5 Commander Marie Honeywell accepts plaques for Posts 2298, 8387, and 4551 noting the posts were 98 percent in membership by Dec. 31.



District 7 Commander Jimmie Waters accepts a plaque for Post 7535 noting the post was 98 percent in membership by Dec. 31.



District 10 Commander Larry Carter accepts plaques for Posts 11463 and 755 noting the posts were 98 percent in membership by Dec. 31.



District 11 Commander Scott Swinford accepts plaques for Posts 4829, 4168, 730, and 6190 noting the posts were 98 percent in membership by Dec. 31.



District 12 Commander Tim O'Donnell accepts a plaque for Post 1377 noting the post was 98 percent in membership by Dec. 31.



District 14 Commander Clyde Rowald accepts plaques for Posts 1739, 3480, 6504, 1117, and 6632 noting the posts were 98 percent in membership by Dec. 31.



District 15 Commander Chris Maynor accepts a plaque for Post 5222 noting the post was 98 percent in membership by Dec. 31.



District 16 Commander Bill Browne accepts a plaque for Post 311 noting the post was 98 percent in membership by Dec. 31.



District 17 Commander Sean Conner accepts plaques for Posts 7862 and 1592 noting the posts were 98 percent in membership by Dec. 31.



District 18 Commander Ken Piehl accepts a plaque for Post 5422 noting the posts were 98 percent in membership by Dec. 31.



District 19 Senior Vice Commander Jake Wyatt accepts a plaque for Post 5036 noting the post was 98 percent in membership by Dec. 31.



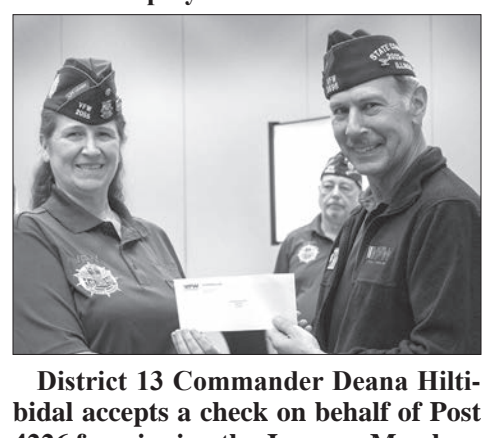
District 14 Commander Clyde Rowald accepts a check on behalf of Post 3523 for winning the state commander's January Membership Challenge.



State Chaplain Gary Holmes accepts a check on behalf of Post 342 for winning the state commander's January Membership Challenge.



District 5 Commander Marie Honeywell accepts a check on behalf of Post 4308 and District 5 for winning the January Membership Challenge.



District 13 Commander Deana Hiltibidal accepts a check on behalf of Post 4226 for winning the January Membership Challenge.

Posts receive membership banners for 100 percent membership



Post 2978 in District 3 was recognized with a 100 percent membership pennant.



Post 10236 in District 4 was recognized with a 100 percent membership pennant.



Posts 2298, 4308, and 8387 in District 5 were recognized with 100 percent membership pennants.



Posts 342 and 4857 in District 6 were recognized with 100 percent membership pennants.



Posts 2608 and 7535 in District 7 were recognized with 100 percent membership pennants.



Posts 755 and 11463 in District 10 were recognized with 100 percent membership pennants.



Posts 730, 4168, and 4829 in District 11 were recognized with 100 percent membership pennants.



Post 1377 in District 12 was recognized with a 100 percent membership pennant.



Post 9153 in District 13 was recognized with a 100 percent membership pennant.



Posts 1117, 1739, 3480, 6504, 6865, and 7710 in District 14 were recognized with 100 percent membership pennants.



Post 5222 in District 15 was recognized with a 100 percent membership pennant.



Posts 311 and 9801 in District 16 were recognized with 100 percent membership pennants.



Posts 1592 and 7862 in District 17 were recognized with 100 percent membership pennants.



Post 5422 in District 18 was recognized with a 100 percent membership pennant.



District 11 Commander Scott Swinford accepts checks on behalf of Post 730 and District 11 for winning the January Membership Challenge.



District 7 Commander Jimmy Waters accepts a check on behalf of Post 5212 and District 5 for winning the January Membership Challenge.

Defenbaugh Promoted to Chief Warrant Officer 5

By Barb Wilson
Illinois National Guard
Public Affairs

Brandon Defenbaugh, of Athens, Illinois, the Illinois Army National Guard's safety officer and a life member of Menard County Post 6871, Petersburg, became one of nine chief warrant officers five in the Illinois Army National Guard during a promotion ceremony Jan. 11 at the Illinois Military Academy, Camp Lincoln in Springfield, Illinois.

"Brandon is a fire and forget warrant officer," said Col. Lenny Williams, Chief of Staff, Illinois Army National Guard. "You give him something and he's going to attack it and get it done. I want leaders like that."

Williams said Defenbaugh is a servant leader and a candid advisor.

"Brandon is going to tell us like it is," Williams said. "I want leaders like that."

Defenbaugh enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard in 1992, serving with the 3637th Sustainment Maintenance Company. In 2004, he was appointed as a warrant officer with the Illinois Army National Guard

as an Electronic Systems Maintenance Technician.

"I'm at a loss for words," Deffenbaugh said. "If you would have asked in 1992 if I'd be standing up here on stage, I would have said no. But to ask me if I'd be up here getting promoted to this level, it would definitely be a no."

Defenbaugh began his federal technician career in 1996 as an electronics mechanic with the Combined Support Maintenance Shop and throughout his career has served as an Electronics Supervisor, deputy CSMS Superintendent, Materiel Readiness Branch Chief and Regional Maintenance Manager-South.

In 2022, he transitioned to the civilian federal technician sector as the first Sexual Violence Prevention Specialist with the Integrated Primary Prevention Workforce (IPPW). Defenbaugh is the interim Integrated Primary Prevention Officer for the IPPW.

"Brandon leads with empathy and is a great leader in uniform," Williams said. "But just as important is this role he's in when he comes to work everyday as a civilian technician to help our people."

Defenbaugh said he's super motivated where he's at in his full-time position.

"I'm excited to get at some of the corrosive behaviors in the organization and take care of the people," he said. "Without people you can't fight and win wars."

Defenbaugh holds a Master of Arts in Clinical Mental Health Counseling from Lincoln Christian University, Lincoln, Illinois, and a Bachelor of Science in Psychology with a focus on addiction and recovery from Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia.

He has held a variety of positions in the Illinois Army National Guard throughout his more than 30 years of service, including electronics non-commissioned officer with the 3637th SMC, electronic systems maintenance warrant officer, also with the 3637th, missile maintenance technician while serving with Company B, 634th Brigade Support Battalion, and maintenance warrant officer with Joint Force Headquarters. Defenbaugh deployed with the 3637th from June 2007 to May 2008 in support of Operation



Braxton Defenbaugh, grandson of newly promoted Chief Warrant Officer 5 Brandon Defenbaugh, places new rank on his grandfather's uniform during a promotion ceremony Jan. 11 at Camp Lincoln, Springfield, Illinois.

Iraqi Freedom.

Williams thanked Defenbaugh's family for their support of his career.

"You don't get to this level of service without family," Williams said. "It takes a village to support someone through this many years in their career."

Defenbaugh thanked his family as well.

"I wouldn't be here without my family," he said. "We can't do this without their support."

Defenbaugh, and his wife, Angela, reside in Athens, Illinois. They have two children, son Brandon, and wife Ashley, Defenbaugh, and daughter, Ashley, and husband CJ, Garcia, plus two grandchildren, Braxton and Braelynn Defenbaugh.

Casteleyn awarded MSM for successful command of 244th Digital Liaison Detachment

Illinois Army National Guard Colonel Max Casteleyn of Mundelein, Illinois, a life member of Lake Villa Memorial Post 4308, Lake Villa, was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal for his work as commander of the Chicago-based 244th Digital Liaison Detachment from January 2022 to August 2023.

Digital Liaison Detachments act as liaisons between military headquarters to allow commanders to integrate military operations in joint, intergovernmental and multinational environments by providing the staff interface, mentoring, support and communication required for partners and allies to accomplish

their missions.

Col. Casteleyn, a 27-year Army veteran, now commands the Peoria-based 65th Troop Command Brigade, which oversees an artillery battalion, aviation battalion and other aviation companies, a civil support team, a digital liaison detachment, a public affairs detachment, a cyber defense team, military intelligence units, and an Army band. These units are spread throughout Illinois.

Col. Casteleyn has deployed numerous times to the Middle East, South-Central Asia, and to the Balkans. As a civilian, he is a senior client partner for Franklin Covey.



Col. Jason Osberg presents Col. Max Casteleyn with the Meritorious Service Medal during the change of command ceremony on Aug. 27, 2023 at the Peoria Armory in Illinois. (Illinois Army National Guard photo by Cpl. Dasianelle Burton)



Arlington Post 981 in Arlington Heights took advantage of the warm summer weather to be visible within the communities they serve.

Arlington Post 981 uses summertime festivities to reach out to communities

Beginning in May and ending in October, Arlington Post 981 reached out during the summer to the communities it represents.

In a number of highly visible activities Post members created public awareness for veterans, interacted with individual veterans, and raised money for charities that the Post supports through its relief fund.

On consecutive May weekends leading up to Memorial Day, Post members were in the communities of Arlington Heights and Buffalo Grove with their Buddy Poppies. Over

\$6,000 was donated by the public.

The Post Color Guard marched in 3 parades: Memorial Day and 4th of July parades in Arlington Heights and Labor Day parade in Buffalo Grove.

Post 981 members were a regular presence at farmer's markets and community fests. Set-up with a canopy and tables, members sold veteran's caps with the profits going towards the Post relief fund. Individual veterans were advised about their rights to deserved benefits. Those veterans who appeared

to be eligible for membership in the VFW were given information and a copy of the Post newsletter and encouraged to attend the next Post meeting. A total of 14 days were spent at three suburban fests (Taste of Arlington Heights, Palatine Home Fest, and Buffalo Grove Days) and farmer's markets in Arlington Heights, Palatine and Buffalo Grove.

While the whole Post participated at various times, special recognition should be given to Commander Mike Smogor, Quartermaster Roger Santagato and Trustee Pat Hickey.



VFW Auxiliary

Auxiliary President

Lynn Smith



Auxiliary Membership

Rhonda Borkgren & Paula DeDoncker



The year is now over halfway and we are on the downswing. It has been a busy year, with Council Meetings, my Homecoming, Luncheons, the National Home, District Meetings and the trip to Utah for the Celebrating America Freedom Event. I want to thank everyone for the hospitality you have shown all the Line Officers and myself.

Reporting is great but don't stop. Report it as you are doing it, that way you will not miss anything, did you send your Post the VFW Community Service report? If not, please get it done.

Thank you to Rhonda and Paula who are keeping busy with dues reminders and phone calls. They can't do it alone. We need your help, as of this writing we only need 38 members to be 100% paid in membership.

As I am writing this, we have the VOD weekend, along with the visit from our National President Carla Martinez, we have a jammed packed weekend. We have the special night out for the

District Presidents that achieved 98% by December 31, 2023. The breakfast, museum, Meet and Greet, District President's Night on the Town, Council Meeting, Lincoln Pilgrimage and the Voice of Democracy Banquet. I just know that it will be a wonderful weekend. Sunday morning at about 3:30 am we are headed to the airport for the Mid Year Conference.

Good news is we have been looking at a new system which will be better for reporting.

We have had some bumps in the road. I can only hope it is now behind us and we can move forward. We must all learn to be KIND to one another. We must be able to sit down and discuss our differences like adults. Listen to reason. If we can't do this, we will never grow. New members are joining us and then they are walking away.

I am looking forward to our 100th Convention in June. Let's make it a huge success.

Membership is not just the heart of an organization, but the key to it's success and growth.

So far this year 468 new members have joined our ranks, bringing our total membership to 17,656, which represents 99.80% of our membership total last year. If we "crunch" the numbers we see even with the addition of our new members, our total is shrinking.

Recruiting new members has always been a goal, but challenging. The Department and National websites provide numerous resources to aid us in

these efforts. We have a Department Membership Chairman, Co-Chairman, and the Big 10 Membership Coach all available to guide us.

One unique way of charting a recruiting path to success just may be going back to the basics, the 5 W's.

Who should do recruiting? We should all be on the lookout for new members. Sharing our experiences, and the goals of the Auxiliary to aid and assist our Veterans should be at the forefront. Younger potential members may not even realize

what the VFW and it's Auxiliary are. Spread the word! Seek out lapsed members to encourage them to rejoin. Reach out and reap the rewards!

What qualifies a person to be a member?

A new recruits veteran does not have to be a member of the VFW, but must meet the VFW's eligibilities requirements. Their Veteran must have honorably served in the Armed Forces of the United States, have service entitling the applicant to the award of a recognized campaign medal or as set forth in the Congressional Charter and By-Laws and Manual of Procedure and Ritual and have served in a war, campaign, or expedition on foreign soil or in hostile waters.

The recruit can be the grandparent, parent, spouse, sibling, child, or grandchild of any eligible veteran. Several renditions of the eligibility wheel are available online for printing.

Why should someone join? When asked, the majority of members will tell you it's to honor their veteran. Auxiliaries honor veterans by promoting patriotism in their communities and participating in programs that bring families and communities together with worthwhile projects. Most importantly Auxiliaries work to stress that veterans and their entitlements are a number one priority for our Legislators.

Where and When can we recruit? Everywhere!! Join the conversation at social events, explain how the Auxiliary works and share our mission goals, your experiences, and your Auxiliary's stories. Explore opportunities for recruiting tables at community events. Work together with your VFW to seek out potential members of their families that are eligible.

The possibilities are endless, we just have to identify and utilize them!



One of the stops during National VFW Auxiliary President Carla Martinez's visit to Illinois was to the President Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum.



National VFW Auxiliary President Carla Martinez renders a salute through the aisle of flags at a meet and greet during her visit to Illinois.



Auxiliary members from throughout the Department of Illinois pause for a group photo with National VFW Auxiliary President Carla Martinez at a meet and greet Feb. 9. Martinez visited Illinois during the department's Mid-Winter Conference, which included the annual Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen banquet and awards ceremony.

Illinois VFW, Auxiliary delivers annual Eulogy to Abe Lincoln

Abraham Lincoln was born in a small house in Kentucky on Feb. 12, 1809. He lived his adult life in Illinois, serving in the Illinois Militia during the Black Hawk War and later as a lawyer in Springfield, before being elected as the 16th President of the United States.

The Department of Illinois Veterans of Foreign Wars and its Auxiliary paid tribute to President Abraham Lincoln at Oak Ridge Cemetery in Springfield, Illinois, Feb. 10, as part of the organization's annual Eulogy to Lincoln ceremony.

The Eulogy ceremony is one of the events attended by junior high and high school students attending the VFW's annual Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen state banquet.

"Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them," said Marc Garduno, VFW Quartermaster General, quoting William Shakespeare in the tribute. "Abraham Lincoln was by no means an ordinary man. As President, Abraham Lincoln exhibited leadership, honesty, connectivity, persistence, and intelligence in many different ways."

Garduno said Lincoln was able to decide what was important and what had to be done so he could achieve his goals.

"By being able to put aside his personal ambition to achieve other goals shows how strong minded Lincoln was," Garduno said. "Without Abraham Lincoln our country the United States of America would not be as great as it is today."

Garduno thanked the crowd for their attendance.

"By taking part in this observance, each of us reaffirms our belief in the course he set for our



VFW Quartermaster General Marc Garduno delivers the annual eulogy to President Abraham Lincoln Feb. 10.



National VFW Auxiliary President Carla Martinez delivers the eulogy to Mary Todd Lincoln, wife of President Abraham Lincoln Feb. 10.

country," he said.

This year's ceremony also included a tribute to Lincoln's wife, Mary Todd.

"Many outsiders looked upon the Mary Todd and Abraham

Lincoln union with much skepticism," said Carla Martinez, National President, VFW Auxiliary. "Mary supported her husband socially and politically, not least when Lincoln was elected



Department Auxiliary President Lynn Smith, VFW Quartermaster General Marc Garduno, National VFW Auxiliary President Carla Martinez and State Commander Brett Nila lay a wreath at President Abraham Lincoln's Tomb Feb. 10.

president in 1860."

Martinez said during her White House years, Mary Lincoln faced many personal difficulties generated by political divisions within the nation.

"Her family was from a border state where slavery was permitted. Her family was slave owners," Martinez said. "Several of her half-brothers served in the Confederate Army and were killed in action, and one brother served the Confederacy as a surgeon."

However, Mary staunchly supported her husband in his quest to save the Union and was strictly loyal to his policies. His presidency was cut short by an assassin's bullet – the first president to be assassinated.

On the night of Friday, April 14, 1865, they attended a showing of Our American Cousin at Ford's Theatre. About an hour and a half into the performance, Mary slipped her hand into her husband's and leaned over to ask of him what the others in their group would think of her

bold display of affection. Before she could absorb his response, a man entered the box and pointed a revolver to the back of the president's head and pulled the trigger. Lincoln slumped over. He would die on April 15, 1865.

She later wrote of his death, "I often think it would have been some solace to me and perhaps have lessened the grief, which is now breaking my heart-if my idolized had passed away, after an illness, and I had been permitted to watch over him and tend him to the last."

In choosing Oak Ridge Cemetery as Lincoln's final resting place, Martinez said Mary was "simply fulfilling Lincoln's wishes."

"Mere weeks before his death, they'd taken a walk through the countryside," Martinez said. "Mary described the small, quiet cemetery they'd found. It was serene and beautiful. Reportedly President Lincoln told his wife 'when I am gone, lay my remains in some quiet place like this'."



The District Voice of Democracy champions and four state Patriot's Pen finalists join state and national VFW and Auxiliary leaders for the annual Eulogy to Abraham Lincoln at Lincoln's Tomb at Oak Ridge Cemetery Feb.

10. Lincoln's Tomb was one of the Lincoln sites during the students' visit to Springfield Feb. 8-10.