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Assisting the USO

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Honoring a 101-year-old veteran

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VFW Auxiliary

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Martinez, Roscoe take top honors at awards ceremony

The State of Illinois Veterans of Foreign Wars announced its Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen State Champions at the 79th annual Voice of Democracy banquet held Feb. 8 in Springfield.

Joseph Martinez, a senior at Sarah E. Goode Academy, Chicago, Illinois, was named the VFW Department of Illinois' first-place winner in the 2024-25 Voice of Democracy Scholarship program.

Martinez, son of Jorge and Mary Ann Martinez, is the recipient of the John H. Emery Youth, Pageantry and Patriotism award in the amount of \$2,500.00.

Martinez, the District 3 champion, was sponsored by Johnson-Phelps Post 5220 and Auxiliary of Oak Lawn.

Georgia Roscoe, a 7th grade student at Saint Gilbert School in Grayslake, Illinois, was selected as Illinois' first-place winner of the VFW's 2024-25 Patriot's Pen youth essay contest.

Roscoe, daughter of Rachel Lesinski-Roscoe, is the recipient of the John H. Emery Youth, Pageantry and Patriotism award in the amount of \$1,000.

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

In addition to Martinez and Roscoe, 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** - Lynnly Guedet, a 6th grade student at Willowbrook Middle School in Roscoe, is the recipient of the Gaye Hines Memorial 2nd Place award in the amount of \$500.

Guedet, the District 6 champion, was sponsored by Roscoe Post 2955 and Auxiliary in Roscoe.

- **William Glenn Britt Memorial 3rd Place award** - Elanna Obert, an 8th grade student at Villa Grove Middle School in Villa Grove, is the recipient of the William Glenn Britt Memorial award in the amount of \$400.

Obert, the District 17 champion, was sponsored by Walter Jones Post 2876 in Villa Grove.

- **Raymond L. Moreland Memorial 4th Place award** -



Illinois VFW State Commander Maurice Bridges and Department Auxiliary President Cindy Waters presents Joseph Martinez, a senior at Sarah E. Goode Academy in Chicago, with the John H. Emery Youth, Pageantry and Patriotism first place Voice of Democracy award at the state awards banquet in Springfield Feb. 8. Martinez, the District 3 Voice of Democracy champion, was sponsored by Johnson-Phelps Post 5220 and Auxiliary in Oak Lawn.

Emma Meyer, an 8th grade student at St. Paul Grade School in Pocahontas, Illinois, is the recipient of the Raymond L. Moreland Memorial award in the amount of \$300.

Meyer, the District 12 champion, was sponsored by Highland Post 5694 and Auxiliary in Highland.

Voice of Democracy Awards

- **2nd Place: George R. Cramer & Ray R. Soden Scholarship Award** - Han Liao, an 11th grade student at Grayslake North High School in Grayslake, is the recipient of the George R. Cramer and Ray R. Soden Scholarship Award in the amount of \$1,500.00.

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

- **3rd Place: Terry L. McKinney Memorial Award** - Thaylee Dunaway, a 12th grade student at Edwards County High School in Albion, is the recipient of the Terry L. McKinney Memorial Scholarship Award in the amount of \$1,250.00.

Dunaway, the District 13 champion, was sponsored by Olney Post 4226 and Auxiliary in Olney.

- **4th Place: Dale & Catherine Clifton Award** - Amira Hammad, an 11th grade student at Tinley Park High School, Tinley Park, is the recipient of the Dale and Catherine Clif-



Illinois VFW State Commander Maurice Bridges and Department Auxiliary President Cindy Waters presents District 5 Commander Mathius Carter with the John H. Emery Youth, Pageantry and Patriotism first place Patriot's Pen award at the state awards banquet in Springfield Feb. 8 on behalf of Georgia Roscoe, a 7th grade student at Saint Gilbert School in Grayslake, as the Illinois' first-place winner of the VFW's 2024-25 Patriot's Pen youth essay contest.

ton Award in the amount of \$1,000.00.

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

- **5th Place: Johnson Phelps Post 5220 Auxiliary Award** - Reece Mileur, an 11th grade student at Murphysboro High School in Murphysboro, is the recipient of the Johnson Phelps Post 5220 Auxiliary Award in the amount of \$750.00.

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

- **6th Place: Edward Jarnell & Joseph Ross Award** - Raed Slim, a 12th grade student at Romeoville High School, Romeoville, is the recipient of the Edward Jarnell and Joseph Ross Award in the amount of \$600.00.

Slim, the District 18 cham-

See Voice of Democracy Continued on Pages 5-8

State Commander

Maurice Bridges

Veterans and Their Families - We Got You



Happy New Year! Hope all had a wonderful holiday! This fiscal year is going by very fast. Before you know it, my term as your VFW State Commander will end.

During the first quarter of this year, it was an honor and privilege to attend the many VOD/Patriot's Pen Banquets and District meetings. Attending these events allowed me to get to know and become more personal with the District Commanders of this State.

Congratulations to Joseph Martinez who is the 2025 State of Illinois VFW Voice of Democracy first place winner and congratulations to Georgia Roscoe who is the 2025 State of Illinois VFW Patriot's Pen first place winner. It was also an honor to co-present the John H. Emery Youth, Pageantry & Patriotism Fund 1st Place Award in memory of George G. Gorin Jr to Joseph Martinez and the John H. Emery Youth, Pageantry & Patriotism Fund 1st Place Award in memory of Robert Hubert to Georgia Roscoe at the Voice of Democracy & Patriot's Pen State Awards Ceremony held at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Springfield Illinois on February 8, 2025.

I want to thank all the Post and Districts who participated in the Patriot's Pen and **Voice of Democracy** programs this year. In case you didn't know, the Patriot's 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 oppor-

tunity to express themselves in a democratic and patriotic-themed recorded essay. Each year, nearly 25,000 students in grades 9-12 from across the country enter to win their share of more than \$1 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.

Patriot's 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 from across the country enter the VFW's **Patriot's Pen** youth essay contest for a chance to win their share of more than \$1 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.

I want to wish Joe Bartley good luck on his new adventure. If you weren't aware, Joe Bartley, the Adjutant/Quartermaster for the VFW Department of Illinois resigned from both of his positions on October 31, 2024. Joe accepted another position which did not require him to travel as much and this was a slight increase in pay. When I received his resignation letter, the first thing I said was "Why Me". I soon realized that this resignation not only affected me, but the whole VFW Department of Illinois and more. Joe, you've been such an amazing part of this Department. I know you'll

do great things in your next role. Let's keep in touch! In addition, I'm so happy for you! This new chapter of your life sounds amazing, and you totally deserve it.

During this Adjutant/Quartermaster vacancy, I appointed Past State Commander Bobby Edwards as Adjutant and Pro Tempore Quartermaster. In my opinion, Past State Commander Bobby Edwards was a God send doing this vacancy. I want you to know how much I truly appreciated everything you did doing our time of need. Your hard work, dedication, and positivity inspired everyone in the office and the VFW Department of Illinois. We couldn't have done this without you! Job well done.

At this time, I want to welcome are new appointed Adjutant and elected Quartermaster, Joseph (Scott) Swinford. Scott was appointed Adjutant and elected as Quartermaster at a Council Administration Meeting on Saturday, November 23, 2024. Scott comes to the VFW Department of Illinois from Post 4168 in District 11. Scott has served in several roles to include current Post Commander, Current District Inspector and District Chief of Staff and a Past District Commander. Scott, starting a new position is always an exciting journey, and we're confident that you will excel in this role as Adjutant/Quartermaster and make a significant impact for the VFW Department of Illinois. Wishing you all the best as you take on this new opportunity and challenge. I'm looking forward to working with you and seeing all the great things you will accomplish! Please don't hesitate to reach out if there is anything you need.

There are things I've learned over the past few years that I would like to share with you. As we get older, our families worry about care for their elderly family members. It is unfortunate when some folks who go to state nursing homes may end up losing assets like

their home or money in banks. In Illinois, veterans residing in Illinois State Veterans Homes does not need to worry about the State taking a Veteran's assets. Veterans are typically charged a monthly maintenance fee, which may be based on their income and assets. For more detailed information, contact a Veterans Service Officer (VSO) or an elder law attorney for asset protection.

Secondly, if you have a U.S Department of Veterans Affairs ID card, you may want to check the expiration date. It has been reported that many U.S Department of Veterans Affairs ID cards are expiring this year. For example, my card expires in March of this year. To renew a U.S Department of Veterans Affairs ID card is very simple. Go to your nearest VA health care facility eligibility office. Bring your current U.S Department of Veterans Affairs ID card and a government-issued photo ID (driver's license). Another option is to request a damaged, lost, or expiring, Department of Veterans Affairs ID card online at www.VA.gov.

Lastly, as you are aware, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides various programs and services to support homeless veterans and those at risk of homelessness. Veterans Day weekend 2024, I was called about a homeless female veteran in Chicago who needed shelter. Being a holiday weekend, organizations that normally help are closed. Since then, I've learned that there is a 1-800 number to call to assist homeless veterans and those at risk of homelessness 24/7 and 365 days of the year. The number is (877) 424-3838. Remember, if you run into a homeless veteran and one who may be at risk of homelessness please use this number. Its 24/7 and 365 days of the year.

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



State Commander Maurice Bridges administers the oath of office to new Illinois VFW State Adjutant-Quartermaster Scott Swinford. Swinford was elected following the resignation of Past State Adjutant-Quartermaster Joe Bartley.

State Senior Vice Commander

Eugene Blackwell



Greeting Comrades,

I am thrilled to see the outstanding participation in our annual Department VFW Scholarship Essay Contest. The enthusiasm and dedication of our young contestants give us hope that democracy remains alive and strong in the next generation. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the parents, teachers, and supporters who have championed this program. Your continued encouragement is vital in ensuring that more young minds engage with this incredible opportunity.

This year, we hosted a successful Department Voice of Democracy (VOD) banquet, where students showcased their talents and passion through

their essays. Congratulations to Joseph Martinez, the winner of the Department of Illinois Voice of Democracy contest, for his exceptional essay, "Is America Today Our Forefathers' Vision?" Joseph, sponsored by Post 5220 from District 3, will go on to represent Illinois at the National VOD competition in Washington, D.C.

Additionally, we celebrate Georgia Roscoe, our Patriot's Pen winner, from Post 2245 in District 5, for her compelling essay, "My Voice in America's Democracy."

We were also honored by the presence of last year's VOD winner, Ms. Riley Malone, who returned to support and inspire this year's contestants. Her elo-

quent speech left a lasting impact on the students, reinforcing the importance of civic engagement and the VFW's mission to foster patriotism among young Americans.

As we prepare for our legislative conference, I want to remind our comrades, Veterans, and their families that the VFW maintains a Washington, D.C., office dedicated to monitoring legislation that affects Veterans. The National Legislative Service plays a pivotal role in setting VFW's legislative priorities, advocating for Veterans by testifying before congressional committees, and working directly with lawmakers.

With approximately 1.4 million members in the VFW and Auxiliary, we carry a powerful voice on Capitol Hill to advance Veterans' interests. The 2025 VFW Legislative Priorities, as directed by our National Headquarters, include:

- Fully funding programs for Veterans, service members, and their families

- Ensuring Veterans and their survivors receive timely access to earned benefits

- Supporting Veterans' successful transition to civilian life

- Providing timely access to high-quality health care without increased costs

- Maintaining a comprehensive benefits and retirement package to uphold the all-volunteer force

- Protecting national security, supporting our armed forces, and defending American interests globally

It is imperative that we, as an organization driven by our membership, stand firm in advocating for the benefits we have earned. However, to be effective in our efforts, we need the strength of our membership behind us when we engage with lawmakers.

A declining membership base and the closure of VFW posts pose a significant challenge to our department. Over the decades, we have witnessed a steady decrease in membership,

with some attributing it to factors such as younger Veterans prioritizing careers and families, shifting societal structures, and the decreasing number of eligible war Veterans.

To combat this decline, the VFW has taken active steps, including:

- Recruiting younger Veterans and adapting our programs to meet their needs

- Fostering family-friendly initiatives to make the VFW more inclusive

- Building strong relationships with recent war Veterans by engaging them in meaningful ways

The strength of our organization depends on each of us. Let's continue our commitment to growing our membership, strengthening our posts, and advocating for the rights and benefits of all Veterans.

Thank you for your service, and let's continue to stand together for our Veterans and communities.

IL VFW Members Support USO as Troops Head Home for the Holidays

On Dec. 21, VFW members from Illinois Districts 14 and 12 joined forces to assist the USO at St. Louis Lambert International Airport as thousands of troops rolled through on their way home for Christmas. Approximately 1,500 young service members, recently released from Basic Training, passed through the airport to reunite with their families for the holiday season.

The volunteers played a key role in making the soldiers' travels smoother, conducting pre-TSA checks to ensure compliance with airline security requirements. They assisted troops in removing prohibited items, such as liquids, from their carry-ons and uniform pockets and directed them to the correct terminals and gates.

Among the dedicated VFW volunteers were Department of Illinois Commander Maurice Bridges, District 14 Commander Doug Jameson, District 14

Senior Vice Commander Aimee Wagoner, Department of Illinois Inspector Cathy Stubbs, and Steve Eller. Scott Air Force Base Post member Gary

Shuler, East St. Louis Post Commander Valerie Young and Quartermaster Jeannen Flemings, as well as Collinsville Post Commander Alonzo Skipper and his wife, Tara, who is active in the Auxiliary, also contributed their time and efforts.

"This was a great morning," Commander Bridges shared in a Facebook post, highlighting the unity and purpose shown by the volunteers. The mission not only supported the USO but also exemplified the VFW's commitment to serving and uplifting active-duty troops.

For the young soldiers passing through, the kindness and assistance from these VFW members served as a heartfelt welcome as they began their journeys home for the holidays.



Illinois VFW Members from Districts 12 and 14 support the USO at Lambert International Airport as thousands of troops passed through the airport during holiday block leave.



Post 5791 Collinsville Commander Skip Skipper talks with Soldiers traveling through Lambert Airport in St. Louis as they head home for holiday leave.



Past District 14 Commander Steve Eller helps a Soldier with directions as he travels through Lambert Airport in St. Louis.



Illinois VFW members with Soldiers traveling through Lambert Airport on their way home on holiday leave.



Soldiers take advantage of the USO as they travel through Lambert Airport in St. Louis for holiday leave.



Soldiers take advantage of the USO as they travel through Lambert Airport in St. Louis for holiday leave.



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VFW Prospect Post 1337 to Celebrate 100th Anniversary

On April 7, 1925 fifteen World War I veterans from Mount Prospect submitted a signed Charter that created Prospect Post 1337 of the Veterans Of Foreign Wars of the United States. It is unlikely that the signatories of that document could have imagined that 100 years later the all-volunteer service organization they brought to life would prosper and remain a vibrant entity dedicated to serving veterans, their community and the Nation.

On April 5, 2025 VFW Post 1337 will celebrate its 100th Anniversary with a spectacular celebration at the Cotillion in Palatine. Featured will be a five-course gourmet dinner, a fantastic dance band, and, of course, some really great stories. On display will be some very special items such as a duplicate copy of the original charter and several National awards including our six consecutive All-American designations, plaques of our National Outstanding Community Service Awards in 2012-2022 and 2022-2023 and the Grand Award in the 2023 VFW National Publication Contest for our newsletter in the Post Publication / Small Frequency category. Also on display will be a moving AV display of about 250 photographs of our Post members and activities going back to our first year – 2025. A number of special guests have been invited to join in the fun including Mount Prospect Mayor Paul Hoefert, District 4 Commander Eric Morales, Department of Illinois Commander Maurice Bridges, State Senator Michael Porfirio, Chairman of the Illinois Senate Veterans Affairs Committee and Terry Prince, Director of the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs, and we are especially proud to welcome our Keynote Speaker, Medal of Honor recipient Allen J. Lynch!

April 5 is also a very special day in the history of the American military. It will mark the 250th anniversary of the Revolutionary War Battles of Lexington and Concord. Additionally, that date



Mt. Prospect Post 1337 Color Guard in 1955.

also will be the 250th anniversary of the creation of the U.S. Army. We have been selected to be the first Illinois event in the Army's official nationwide anniversary celebration.

All Comrades are invited to join our local veterans and special guests at this celebration. All veteran attendees will receive a special challenge coin designed exclusively to commemorate this historic event. If interested, please go to www.vfw1337.com (under programs) for registration and other information. The Comrades of Post 1337 are especially proud to extend this offer to the residents of Mount Prospect, our hometown. Please mark your calendars for this exciting event. You don't want to miss it!



A more recent photo of Mt. Prospect Post 1337 Color Guard.



District 16 Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen program participants with District 16 leadership and Department representatives. The District 16 program champions were announced at a recent banquet.



State Representative Donates to Scout District

State Representative Kevin Schmidt made a donation to Eagle Quest Illini District Scouts which was greatly appreciated. After conversation with the state Representative, his goal is to invite the scouts to the Illinois State Capitol. Our young men were excited.



Johnson-Phelps VFW Auxiliary Post 5220 President Lisa Rivera and Sr. Vice Aux President Linda Krone at the St. Gerald Grammar School 'Open House' Jan. 26, in Oak Lawn.



Auxiliary President Lisa Rivera talk about the Post and Auxiliary Programs.

Voice of Democracy

Continued from Page 1

pion, was sponsored by Lockport Post 5788 and Auxiliary of Lockport..

• **7th Place: William Glenn Britt Memorial Award** - Josephine Griffith, a 12th grade student at Elmwood High School, Elmwood, is the recipient of the William Glenn Britt Memorial Award in the amount of \$550.00.

Griffith, the District 9 champion, was sponsored by Archie Miles Post 4724 and Auxiliary of Elmwood.

• **8th Place: Dick Cosner Memorial Award** - Kathryn Killian-Johnson, is the recipient of the Dick Cosner Memorial Award in the amount of \$500.00.

Killian-Johnson, the District 8 champion, was sponsored by Macomb Post 1921 and Auxiliary in Macomb..

• **9th Place: Vern and Lorraine Umphery, Post 6863 and Auxiliary Award** - Jackson Mullins, an 11th grade student at Litchfield High School in Litchfield, is the recipient of the Vern and Lorraine Umphery, Post 6863 and Auxiliary Award in the amount of \$450.00.

Mullins, the District 12 champion, was sponsored by Litchfield Post 3912 and Auxiliary in Litchfield.

• **10th Place: Robert C. Holysz Post 2200 Award** - K'Lynn Patterson, an 11th grade student at Rushville-Industry High School in Frederick, is the recipient of the Robert C. Holysz Post 2200 Award

in the amount of \$400.00.

Patterson, the District 10 champion, was sponsored by Guthrie-Pierce Post 1239 and Auxiliary in Beardstown.

• **11th Place: Grant-Parkholme Post 9115 Award** - Victoria McMillan, a 12th grade student at Robinson High School in Robinson, is the recipient of the Grant-Parkholme Post 9115 Award in the amount of \$375.00.

McMillan, the District 17 champion, was sponsored by Crawford County Post 4549 and Auxiliary in Robinson.

• **12th Place: West End Post 2004 award** - Matthew Peterson, Jr., a 12th grade student at Lake Park High School in Itasca, is the recipient of the West End Post 2004 Award in the amount of \$350.00.

Peterson, the District 19 champion, was sponsored by Addison Post 7446 and Auxiliary in Addison.

• **13th Place: Chester Spears Memorial Award** - Kyle McGuire, a 12th grade student at Pana High School, is the recipient of the Chester Spears Memorial Award in the amount of \$325.00.

McGuire, the District 11 champion, was sponsored by Pana Post 4431 in Pana.

Honorable Mention awards

Joshua Koyfman, an 11th grade student at Deerfield High School in Deerfield, is the recipient of the District 15 Runner-Up Award in the amount of \$300.00.

Koyfman, the District 4 champion, was sponsored by Northbrook Post 10236 in Northbrook.

Kaydance Wooton, a 12th grade student at Deland-Weldon High School, Deland, is the recipient of the District 10 Runner-Up Award in the amount of \$300.00.

Wooton, the District 7 cham-

pion, was sponsored by John H. Kraus Post 454 and Auxiliary in Bloomington..

Riley Doyle, a 12th grade student at Rochelle Township High School in Rochelle, is the recipient of the Sharon Edwards Memorial Runner-Up Award in the amount of \$300.00.

Doyle, the District 6 champion, was sponsored by Oregon

Post 8739 in Oregon.

James d'Entremont, an 11th grade student at Okawville High School in Okawville, is the recipient of the Rochester Post 11463 Runner-Up Award in the amount of \$300.00.

D'Entremont, the District 14 champion, was sponsored by Okawville Post 5596 and Auxiliary in Okawville.

My Voice In America's Democracy

By Georgia Roscoe
Department of Illinois
2025 Patriot's Pen Champion

My Voice matters, your voice matters, everyone's voices matter. When the Constitution was first drafted, our Founding Fathers' voices mattered and they still matter to this day. When the Berlin Wall was up, Ronald Reagan made his voice heard by saying, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" When Rosa Parks would not move from her seat on the bus, her voice was heard. The voices of the change-makers who came before us teach us that our voices matter. We should all be able to have our voices heard and respected no matter age, race, or religion.

There are many different ways to make our voices heard. One way is to participate in student government. Being a part of a government showed me the value of listening to voices and making sure all voices are heard. I had a voice, along with the other candidates running, because we had a chance to



campaign. The students had a voice because they were able to vote. As the elected Student Council Vice President, I feel the responsibility to address issues that peers have brought to my attention. We can unify our voices to make the school better.

In the U.S. government we have the right to vote for our representatives, too. All the people who vote in America's democracy have a say in who represents us. Just like in student government, we vote for the people that will lead the country to the best of their abilities. The

candidates have their voices heard by campaigning, just like we did for student government. The representatives in our government should try to make the U.S. a better place for everyone by listening and valuing everyone's voice.

We have a voice in the U.S. government because of the people who came before us. They battled, fought, and sacrificed for our freedom and rights, and made their voices heard. When people act out and speak out against injustice, they are honoring the Voices of those before us. What I have learned in student government and in conversations with my grandpa, who served in the National Guard, and in hearing about my great-grandpa, who served in the Army in WWII, people need to speak and act in ways that support our freedoms and honor all voices. This essay is a tribute to the people who taught us that we all have a voice, and it is a voice that matters.

"Is America Today Our Forefathers' Vision?"

By Joseph Martinez
Department of Illinois
2025 Voice of Democracy Champion

When America's founding fathers signed their names on the Declaration of Independence, they envisioned a fully united nation where people governed themselves, free of oppression and dictatorship. They used to speak of the pursuit of happiness, life and liberty. As we consider the current state of America we have to ask ourselves: Is this the country they would have envisioned?

On one hand, our forefathers' philosophies and principles are very much visible in our modern life. Our first ever President George Washington spoke of unity and forewarned us about the divided nature of political parties. While political divisions are apparent, our system of checks and balances ensures that one person or group of people cannot monopolize power. The fact that we as Americans can vote, petition, and protest is proof of our democratic structure. According to the Pew research center, almost 90% of Americans consider voting as "A part of being a good citizen" (Pew Research Centre 2022)

However, as much as modern America goes along with the founding fathers ideas, it also diverges in ways that our forefathers might see as unrecognizable. For example, while our forefathers set the foundation for their freedom, they



did so in a time where slavery was not yet abolished, and women had no rights. So our founding fathers idea of freedom were fundamentally different from our current idea of freedom here in America. This poses another question. Would presidents like Washington or Jefferson have foreseen an America of different ethnicities and genders could vote, work, and hold office? In fact, A leading figure in the civil rights movement Elizabeth Cady Stanton argued that the promise of equality needed a rework to reflect the "American Ideal"

Furthermore, our founders envisioned a nation grounded in freedom of expression. Allowing for a diverse nation of

people all allowed to voice their own opinions. With the rise of social media, this freedom has exploded beyond what our founding fathers could have ever imagined. As of today, the reach of one's voice is as close to limitless, capable of sparking movements such as the BLM protests or the march for our lives protest, each lead by Americans using social media to push for their beliefs. This shift toward digital activism shows that while Americans still believe in voicing their opinions, they do so at a radically different scale than what activists during our forefathers time could've ever achieved.

Another thing that raises questions is the USA's stance in the world. The founding fathers were wary of entangling alliances and foreign conflicts. As Thomas Jefferson advised, the United States should have "peace, commerce, and honest friendships with all nations, entangling alliances with none." Today, however, America plays a pivotal role on the world stage, often involving ourselves in global conflicts to hold our ideals. Would the founders have recognized their humble, fledgling republic in the powerful nation we see today?

Finally, There's a matter of what the forefathers have not envisioned: an everchanging America wrestling with technological and environmental based challenges. When Benjamin Franklin was experimenting with electricity he

hardly ever could've predicted the digital revolution we are living in today. With climate change posing a serious risk, my generation faces decisions the founding fathers which were predominantly land owners could've never imagined.

Ultimately, America is a mix of our forefathers visions and the ambitions of each and every

generation since their time. While our country isn't exactly as our forefathers could've imagined, many of their core beliefs and ideas still remain. The story of America is one of constant evolution, where each era redefines freedom, equality, and unity. Like the famous historian Joseph Ellis once said "The founders' greatest legacy is that they bequeathed a framework within which every generation could engage in an outgoing conversation about the meaning of the American dream." (Ellis, American Dialogue 2018).

In conclusion, America remains both faithful and distant from the vision of our forefathers. Their work was the foundation of today's citizens, and serves to continue building toward a more inclusive, equitable and just society.

Sources:

Pew Research Center. (2022). What Makes a Good Citizen? Retrieved from Pew Research Center

Ellis, J. J. (2018). American Dialogue: The Founders and Us. New York: Knopf.

VFW, Auxiliary Members Present Youth Essay Contest Awards



2nd Place: George R. Cramer & Ray R. Soden Scholarship Award - Han Liao, an 11th grade student at Grayslake North High School in Grayslake, is the recipient of the George R. Cramer and Ray R. Soden Scholarship Award in the amount of \$1,500.00. Liao, the District 5 champion, was sponsored by Ronald Hill Memorial Post 2245 in Grayslake.



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5th Place: Johnson Phelps Post 5220 Auxiliary Award - Reece Mileur, an 11th grade student at Murphysboro High School in Murphysboro, is the recipient of the Johnson Phelps Post 5220 Auxiliary Award in the amount of \$750.00. Mileur, the District 15 champion, was sponsored by Jackson County Post 7190 and Auxiliary in Murphysboro.



6th Place: Edward Jarnell & Joseph Ross Award - Raed Slim, a 12th grade student at Romeoville High School, Romeoville, is the recipient of the Edward Jarnell and Joseph Ross Award in the amount of \$600.00. Slim, the District 18 champion, was sponsored by Lockport Post 5788 and Auxiliary of Lockport.



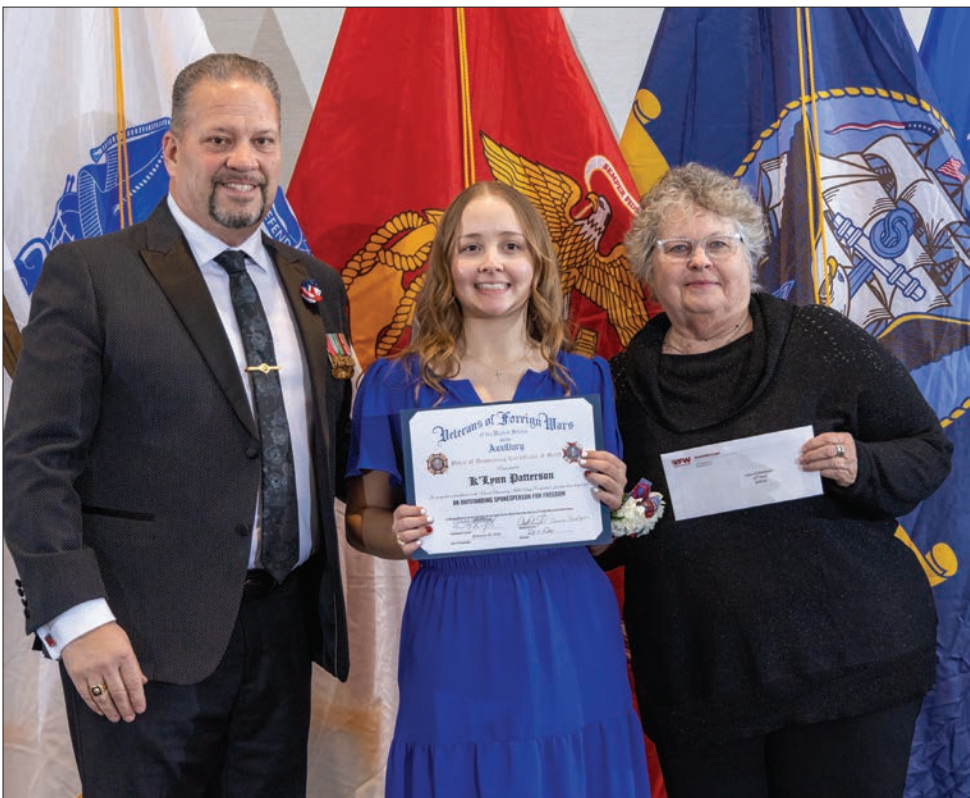
7th Place: William Glenn Britt Memorial Award - Josephine Griffith, a 12th grade student at Elmwood High School, Elmwood, is the recipient of the William Glenn Britt Memorial Award in the amount of \$550.00. Griffith, the District 9 champion, was sponsored by Archie Miles Post 4724 and Auxiliary of Elmwood.



8th Place: Dick Cosner Memorial Award - Kathryn Killian-Johnson, is the recipient of the Dick Cosner Memorial Award in the amount of \$500.00. Killian-Johnson, the District 8 champion, was sponsored by Macomb Post 1921 and Auxiliary in Macomb.



9th Place: Vern and Lorraine Umphery, Post 6863 and Auxiliary Award - Jackson Mullins, an 11th grade student at Litchfield High School in Litchfield, is the recipient of the Vern and Lorraine Umphery, Post 6863 and Auxiliary Award in the amount of \$450.00. Mullins, the District 12 champion, was sponsored by Litchfield Post 3912 and Auxiliary in Litchfield.



10th Place: Robert C. Holysz Post 2200 Award - K'Lynn Patterson, an 11th grade student at Rushville-Industry High School in Frederick, is the recipient of the Robert C. Holysz Post 2200 Award in the amount of \$400.00. Patterson, the District 10 champion, was sponsored by Guthrie-Pierce Post 1239 and Auxiliary in Beardstown.



11th Place: Grant-Parkholme Post 9115 Award - Victoria McMillan, a 12th grade student at Robinson High School in Robinson, is the recipient of the Grant-Parkholme Post 9115 Award in the amount of \$375.00. McMillan, the District 17 champion, was sponsored by Crawford County Post 4549 and Auxiliary in Robinson.



12th Place: West End Post 2004 award - Matthew Peterson, Jr., a 12th grade student at Lake Park High School in Itasca, is the recipient of the West End Post 2004 Award in the amount of \$350.00. Peterson, the District 19 champion, was sponsored by Addison Post 7446 and Auxiliary in Addison.



13th Place: Chester Spears Memorial Award - Kyle McGuire, a 12th grade student at Pana High School, is the recipient of the Chester Spears Memorial Award in the amount of \$325.00. McGuire, the District 11 champion, was sponsored by Pana Post 4431 in Pana.



Joshua Koyfman, an 11th grade student at Deerfield High School in Deerfield, is the recipient of the District 15 Runner-Up Award in the amount of \$300.00. Koyfman, the District 4 champion, was sponsored by Northbrook Post 10236 in Northbrook.



Kaydance Wooton, a 12th grade student at Deland-Weldon High School, Deland, is the recipient of the District 10 Runner-Up Award in the amount of \$300.00. Wooton, the District 7 champion, was sponsored by John H. Kraus Post 454 and Auxiliary in Bloomington..



James d'Entremont, an 11th grade student at Okawville High School in Okawville, is the recipient of the Rochester Post 11463 Runner-Up Award in the amount of \$300.00. D'Entremont, the District 14 champion, was sponsored by Okawville Post 5596 and Auiliary in Okawville.



Riley Doyle, a 12th grade student at Rochelle Township High School in Rochelle, is the recipient of the Sharon Edwards Memorial Runner-Up Award in the amount of \$300.00. Doyle, the District 6 champion, was sponsored by Oregon Post 8739 in Oregon.



Lynly Guedet, a 6th grade student at Willowbrook Middle School in Roscoe, is the recipient of the Gaye Hines Memorial 2nd Place award in the amount of \$500. Guedet, the District 6 champion, was sponsored by Roscoe Post 2955 and Auxiliary in Roscoe.



Elanna Obert, an 8th grade student at Villa Grove Middle School in Villa Grove, is the recipient of the William Glenn Britt Memorial award in the amount of \$400. Obert, the District 17 champion, was sponsored by Walter Jones Post 2876 in Villa Grove.



Emma Meyer, an 8th grade student at St. Paul Grade School in Pocahontas, Illinois, is the recipient of the Raymond L. Moreland Memorial award in the amount of \$300. Meyer, the District 12 champion, was sponsored by Highland Post 5694 and Auxiliary in Highland.



Students with the Southeast High School District 186 JROTC, Springfield, post the colors during the state banquet.

Schatte is New Athens Hometown Hero

Dennis Schatte is a member of New Athens VFW Post 7710 in New Athens, Illinois. He was recognized as a Hometown Hero at a school assembly in front of students, faculty, VFW Comrades and First Responders.

Dennis was born on July 20, 1943 and graduated from New Athens High School in 1961. He was drafted on May 30, 1968 into the United States Army. Dennis attended boot camp at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, followed by specialized training at Fort Lewis, Washington, and was then sent to Vietnam.

On Thanksgiving Day, 1968, the vehicle Dennis was traveling in was struck by a roadside bomb. He sustained injuries consisting of three broken vertebrae, a broken foot, and numerous shrapnel wounds. He was airlifted to Saigon and then transported to Japan. Due to his injuries, Dennis was flown back to the United States in March 1969. He was in a full body cast for over a year due to his injuries, and doctors told him he may never walk again. Dennis was determined to prove them wrong – and he did!

Being wounded as a result of enemy action while serving in the U.S. Military earned Dennis the Purple Heart. General William Westmoreland, who commanded the United States Forces in the Vietnam War from 1964 to 1968, and then served as



Dennis Schatte, a member of New Athens VFW Post 7710.

Army Chief of Staff from 1968 to 1972, personally presented Dennis with the Purple Heart in April 1969.

In January 1972 Dennis began his position as the transportation director and head custodian at New Athens School, where he worked full-time for 34 years. He then continued to work as a New Athens school bus driver for another six years.

Since retiring, Dennis has raised hogs, loves to watch St Louis Cardinals baseball (was good friends with HOF Whitey Herzog), enjoys watching his grandkids play sports, and is an active member of New Athens VFW Post 7710.



VFW Commander-in-Chief Al Lipphardt and Past National Home District Trustee Steve York at the National Home 100th Anniversary Black Tie Gala Feb. 8. Lipphardt and York both served in the 196th Light Infantry Division in Vietnam, although in different units.



Morton Post Quartermaster Retires from Illinois Army National Guard

Morton VFW Post Quartermaster Chad Bell, of Morton, described as a “family-first, Soldier-first” leader, the 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade’s Operations Sergeant Major and Chief Operations Sergeant, retired after more than 26 years of service in the Illinois Army National Guard during a ceremony Jan. 31 at The Barn at Bull Run Park in Morton.

“He’s a family-first, Soldier-first leader,” said Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, Assistant Adjutant General-Army, and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard. “None of us who wear the uniform could do this without the support structure of family, friends, and community. It takes a village to support Soldiers so they can do what they love. Thank you to Tiffany and your children for your support. You can be proud of the service and accomplishments of one of the finest noncommissioned officers I have served with.”

Bell enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard in 1998 as a Motor Transport Operator, serving with the 1544th Transportation Company in Paris.

Williams, who has served with Bell for about 20 years, said he can personally attest to the accolades and leadership qualities Bell has demonstrated throughout his career.

“We can’t do this career as an officer without the support of senior noncommissioned officers,” Williams said. “Great senior NCOs willingly provide candor, and great officers have the humility and fortitude to accept it. Chad has always provided candor to me over the years, even when I didn’t seek it out. Smart officers surround themselves with these kinds of senior NCOs and he embodied every part of that. I’ve seen it, witnessed it, and benefitted from it.”

“Chad I personally valued and benefitted from your candor and advice over the years even at times when I didn’t ask for it,” he said. “I’m a better officer for it because I had the honor to serve with you and other great senior NCOs I’ve surrounded



Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, Assistant Adjutant General - Army, and Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Kelly, State Command Sergeant Major, presents a certificate of retirement to Sgt. Maj. Chad Bell.

myself with throughout my career.”

Williams said his watch words describe Bell as a Soldier and leader.

“My watch words are respect, credibility, and legacy. Earn the respect of those we lead. Ask yourself do you have credibility with your subordinates, peers, and superiors, and lastly ask yourself what your legacy will be,” he said. “Chad, those who served with you respect you immensely, which has earned you credibility at all levels of the organization and ensured your legacy will live on through the Soldiers you led and mentored. I always say get the people part right in all you do. You’ve done that throughout your entire career. You’re going to be fantastic in your next chapter.”

Bell, who enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard just 11 days after his 17th birthday, said this past week has been especially hard.

“This past week has been hard for me. The final week of my military career,” he said. “Sometime this past week it hit me. It’s hard to believe. What will it be like? How did I get this far? What will I do now? I remember the first week of basic training getting issued all that Army equipment the first time. That smell, the anxiety, and the drill sergeants.”

Bell, who along with his wife, owns Blue Jay’s Daycare Center in Morton, said he’s been asked about what he will do with all his free time.

“Owning a business and raising six kids hardly provides any free time,” he said. “It’s time to take a knee, slow down and focus on my family. It’s time to be home every night, every weekend. It’s time to be present. My definition of fun is doing something with our children.”

Bell said his military commitments have forced him to miss time with his family.

“I’ve missed birthdays, holidays, basketball and baseball games, and family reunions,” he said. “I will never again be forced to miss an important event. Everyone who served in the uniform has a similar story to tell, but those are the sacrifices we make.”

Bell thanked his family for their support throughout his career.

“Thank you, mom, and dad, for starting my career. I don’t know where I’d be if I didn’t join the Army,” Bell said. “I’m blessed to have supportive parents. You have stuck with me through good and bad times. I wasn’t always easy to deal with especially as a teenager.”

Bell also thanked his wife, Tiffany, and sons, Jordan, Jaxon, Jeter, and Justus, and daughters, Aubrey, and Jruw Ann.

“I always thought no one worked harder than me until we had our sixth child. I quickly learned my wife, Tiffany, works harder than I,” he said. “She runs our daycare center, manages our home, ensures our kids are taken care of each day. She does it all, which is not easy with six growing children. You are truly an amazing person, amazing mother, and the best wife a man could ask for.”

“To my children, you are so special to me, and I am so grateful God gave you all to me. I love watching you grow and learn about life,” he said. “I enjoy witnessing each of you grow into your own unique personality.”

Bell deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom II from 2003-2005 with the 1544th Transportation Company, and again in support of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan from 2008-2009.

Bell thanked his 1544th Transportation Company family, and said he will always remember the fallen Soldiers from the 1544th.

“We went to Iraq together. We went to Hell together,” he said. “Less than 24 hours into my first deployment to Iraq we lost a Soldier struck by shrapnel from a mortar round on his way back to the barracks after breakfast. That day changed our lives forever. The 1544th lost five Soldiers that deployment and 36 Soldiers received a Purple Heart. During every moment of silence we observe, I remember those five Soldiers – Sergeant Phipps, Specialist Ridlen, Specialist Lamb, Sergeant Morrison, and Specialist Cawvey. I will never forget them.”

Chicago Bridgeport VFW Post 5079 honors 101-year-old World War II Veteran on Veterans Day weekend Sunday, November 10, 2024

In the photo, honored guest seated, 101-year-old World War II Bronze Star Veteran Benito Morales. Back Row from left to right. State Commander, Maurice Bridges, 5079 Past Commander Jose Guereca, 5079 Post Commander Antonio Munoz and District 5 Sr. Vice Commander George Gandara.



VFW Auxiliary

Auxiliaries Celebrate Century of Service of Department



Post 1308 Auxiliary



Post 1377 Auxiliary



Post 2729 Auxiliary



Post 4598 Auxiliary



District 8 Auxiliary



District 5 Auxiliary



District 19 Auxiliary



District 18 Auxiliary



District 10 Auxiliary



Post 9801 Auxiliary



Post 7682 Auxiliary



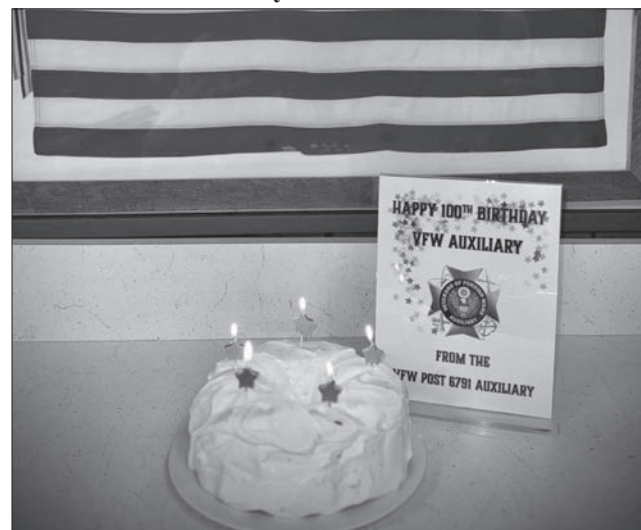
Post 7678 Auxiliary



Post 6865 Auxiliary



Post 6632 Auxiliary



Post 6791 Auxiliary



VFW Auxiliary

Auxiliary President

Cindy Watters



Hello! I hope you all had a wonderful holiday season. As we transition back to our regular routines, I would like to take this opportunity to address an important matter.

We are currently facing challenges with some of our Auxiliaries closing due to a lack of

participation in securing officers and attendance at meetings to meet quorum requirements. Additionally, our membership numbers are impacted by the unfortunate loss of members. Our organization thrives because of your involvement and support. We greatly need your eligible

relatives to join our ranks. Are your spouse, parents, children, siblings, or grandchildren members yet?

We understand that financial constraints are a reality for many. If gifting life memberships is not feasible, we encourage you to consider gifting an annual membership. This allows new members to experience what we do and hopefully, they will choose to continue their membership. The organization is making concerted efforts to facilitate the recruitment of new members. Below is a QR code

that links directly to an application and brochure.

I am delighted to report that our joint project, Backpacks for Homeless Veterans, has greatly exceeded my expectations. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to every Post and Auxiliary for their dedication and hard work on this project.

Thank you to all the Voice of Democracy and Patriots Pen students for your inspiring essays. The task of judging these submissions is indeed challenging, and our judges consistently excel in preparing Illinois with

an outstanding student at the national level. With the support of the parents and educators, I have great confidence in the future, given the caliber of these exceptional young individuals. I commend all winners at all levels.

Thank you, VFW members, for everything you have done and continue to do. We, the Auxiliary, are here to help and couldn't be here without you! I like to think that we have made big strides in working together. I am looking forward to the rest of the year.

Auxiliary Membership

Kathy Rowold & Mary Lee



Membership is one program that does not have a start and stop date. Without our members, the VFW and the VFW Auxiliary would have no other programs to support. Our members are vital to our organizations and we must be mindful to show our appreciation to our members.

Recruiting new members is vital in our efforts to replace deceased members and/or our non-returning members. In our recruiting efforts, we should not only tell new members what we do, but also who we are! Who we are to each other! We are a family of members who are

there for each other through good times as well as times of disaster.

A reminder that VFW members also qualify for Auxiliary Department and National membership contests and awards. Currently the Department of Illinois Auxiliary has a contest where each new member that joins between the ages of 16-25, that recruiter is entered into a \$100 drawing to be held at the June convention. There is also a contest where the Auxiliary that collects the most dues, unpaid or new member, between January 20 till April 1, that

Auxiliary will receive \$100. At the National level, a recruiter pin and awards to each VFW and VFW Auxiliary member who recruits five or twenty new and/or rejoined members to the VFW Auxiliary between July 1, 2024 and May 31, 2025. These are just a couple of examples of how the VFW and VFW Auxiliary can team together to increase membership.

Quoting National Membership Chairman Linda Roloff, "We are here for each other; WE are the families we serve when we say "... Veterans and their Families." "Membership is a

state of being part of something and that something is whatever we make it. Be the change you want to see in the world and we won't have to worry about recruiting new members, people will be beating a path to our door."



Post 5788 Auxiliary



Post 4325 Auxiliary



Post 3553 Auxiliary



Post 5694 Auxiliary



Post 5079 Auxiliary



Post 4226 Auxiliary



Post 5222 Auxiliary



Post 4549 Auxiliary



Post 4308 Auxiliary

Student Champions Tour Springfield During Mid-Winter Weekend



North Carolina National Council Member Victor Letourneaut delivered the eulogy to Abraham Lincoln during the weekend events.



The Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen students viewed the Abraham Lincoln hearse during the weekend events.



The Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen students toured the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum and Library during the weekend events.



National VFW Auxiliary Guard Janey Feher delivers the eulogy to Mary Todd Lincoln, wife of President Abraham Lincoln Feb. 8.



The Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen students toured the Illinois State Military Museum.



Students check in with Voice of Democracy Chairman Dave Darte before the tour of Springfield.



National VFW Auxiliary Guard Janey Feher, Department Auxiliary President Cindy Waters, State Commander Maurice Bridges, and North Carolina National Council Member, and National Representative Victor Letourneaut lay a wreath at President Abraham Lincoln's Tomb Feb. 8.



The Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen students were able to take a photo in front of the White House located at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum and Library.



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. 8. Lincoln's Tomb was one of the Lincoln sites during the students' visit to Springfield Feb. 7-9.