

Illinois

VOL. 63, No. 2



VFW

News

SEPTEMBER 2025



Illinois Educator Honored
at National VFW Convention

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VFW
VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS.





Department of Illinois

Fact Sheet

About us

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

Vision

Ensure that veterans are respected for their service, always receive their earned entitlements, and are recognized for the sacrifices they and their loved ones have made on behalf of this great country.

Mission

To foster camaraderie among United States veterans of overseas conflicts. To serve our veterans, the military and our communities. To advocate on behalf of all veterans.

Get in Touch

Phone: 217-529-6688

Facebook: VFW State of Illinois

Email: vfwil@vfwil.org

2024/2025 metrics

\$280,230 Service Members Assistance
\$44,676 Military Appreciation Programs

191,825 Total VFW/AUX Volunteer Hours

82 Scholarships and
\$386,918 Awarded Help A Hero
Scholarship

1,439 Voice of Democracy Student
Participation

209,000 Poppies Distributed

4,288 Patriots Pen Student
Participation

46,342 VA Claims Processed
\$102,082,288 Amount Recovered

Did You Know?

34,150 Members as of June
30, 2025

December 11,
1920 Charter Date

2025-2026
State Commander Eugene Blackwell

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STATE COMMANDER'S CORNER



Eugene Blackwell
Commander
Department of Illinois VFW

At the national level of the VFW, our core mission remains unchanged and unwavering: legislative advocacy, supporting our service officers, and striving for a full accounting of all U.S. troops still missing in action. Meeting these goals requires teamwork at every level of our organization.

This year marks a historic milestone for the VFW with the election of our first female Commander-in-Chief (CIC), Carol Whitmore of Des Moines, Iowa. CIC Whitmore has pledged to ensure that our mission is carried out with the full weight of every tool and resource at her disposal. Her election not only demonstrates the strength of our leadership pipeline but also reflects the growing influence of younger Veterans who continue to step up with new ideas, new energy, and a willingness to serve our organization and our communities.

The 126th VFW National Convention, held August 9-13, 2025, at the Columbus Convention Center in Columbus, Ohio, will be remembered as a convention of historic decisions. For many comrades, it was their first time experiencing the VFW on the national stage and a chance to witness both the camaraderie and the serious decision-making that will shape the future of our organization.

And this year, the membership made their voice heard. Traditionally, national leadership progression follows a set path: the Junior Vice CIC advances to Senior Vice CIC, and so forth. By that measure, Comrade Tim Peters was next in line to become Senior Vice CIC. However, the delegates voted for change. In an unprecedented move, the membership elected Comrade Cory Geisler of Wisconsin directly from the floor, bypassing the traditional order of succession. This bold step showed that our members are no longer satisfied with “business as usual” but instead demand accountability, transparency, and fresh perspectives.

Together, the elections of CIC Whitmore and Sr. Vice CIC Geisler signal a renewed commitment to open leadership and to breaking away from the “handshake agreements” that once defined our elections. They reflect what our members have been telling us at every level: the future of the VFW depends on strong leadership, but also on membership growth and active engagement in our communities.

The message from this convention is clear: our members want leaders who are accountable, transparent, and dedicated to moving the VFW forward. But leadership at the top means little without active membership and strong posts at the local level.

Many comrades at the post and district levels may be unfamiliar with the VFW’s conference system. Unlike the Auxiliary, the Military Order of the Cootie, or the soon-to-be-recognized National VFW Riders—each of which is outlined in our National By-Laws—the conferences are not part of our governing documents. Instead, they serve a specific purpose: to bring comrades together across multiple departments and to help determine who is elected to national office.

Each conference operates under its own by-laws and represents a region of the country:

Big Ten: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri,

Nebraska, Ohio, South Dakota, Wisconsin

Eastern: Connecticut, Delaware, Europe, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont

Western: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, Pacific, Utah, Washington, Wyoming

Southern: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia

Conferences do not set policy or govern the organization. Instead, conferences provide a structure for rotating elections for national offices such as Surgeon, Judge Advocate, and Junior Vice CIC.

“Serving our Community with Resilience”. Comrades, membership is the lifeblood of the VFW. Without strong and active posts, our mission at the state and national levels cannot succeed. Each new member we recruit, and each current member we retain, strengthens our ability to advocate for Veterans’ benefits, to support our service officers, and to serve in our communities.

Service within our communities is what makes the VFW unique. Whether it’s hosting food drives, supporting local schools, mentoring youth, conducting Buddy Poppy distributions, or visiting Veterans in hospitals and homes, our presence in the community demonstrates the values of service, sacrifice, and camaraderie that define us as Veterans. Recruitment becomes easier when people see us not only as an organization that honors the past but as one that is actively shaping the present.

Membership is not just about numbers; it is about ensuring that every Veteran has a place to belong and an opportunity to continue serving. Every new member represents another set of hands ready to help, another voice ready to advocate, and another heart ready to serve. Our challenge and our responsibility in Illinois are to welcome them, involve them, and help them find purpose within our ranks.

I congratulate each of you on a successful year in your posts and districts. Let us continue to focus on strengthening membership, engaging in meaningful community service, and working as a team to make the Department of Illinois stronger than ever. Together, we can carry the spirit of renewal, accountability, and teamwork into the year ahead.

Illinois VFW News

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ILLINOIS VFW NEWS COMMITTEE

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Scott Swinford	State Adjutant-Quartermaster
Brett Nila	Committee Chairman
Bobby Welch	State Historian
Barb Wilson	Editor

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STATE OFFICERS

Commander	Eugene Blackwell	311	District 16
Sr. Vice	Rob Bailey	7452	District 19
Jr. Vice	Ryan Higginbotham	4266	District 13
Adj./Qm	Scott Swinford	4168	District 11
Judge Advocate	Jayson Hoffman	4763	District 10
Surgeon	Doug Jameson	1739	District 14
Chaplain	Gary Holmes	342	District 6
Chief of Staff	Robert Welch	2791	District 16
Inspector	Cathy Stubbs	7710	District 14
Jr. Past Cmdr	Maurice Bridges	4183	District 14
NCM	Matthew Claussen	2868	District 4

DISTRICT COMMANDERS

3	Zhi Chen	Post 5079	Chicago
4	Evamarie Duff	Post 2868	Brookfield
5	Mathius Carter	Post 12014	Crystal Lake
6	Rob Bland	Post 1461	Belvidere
7	David Long	Post 454	Bloomington
8	Kenneth Morey	Post 1422	Bushnell
9	John Finnegan	Post 5506	Marseilles
10	Joshua Seed	Post 755	Springfield
11	Rick Hobbs	Post 4495	Taylorville
12	Anthony Avers	Post 976	Troy
13	Robert Shehorn	Post 2055	Centralia
14	Amiee Louer-Wagoner	Post 7710	New Athens
15	Clarence Caraker	Post 3455	Anna
16	William Browne	Post 311	Richton Park
17	James Thorne	Post 7862	Arcola
18	Paul Cravens	Post 725	Mokena
19	Michaelangelo Di Cosola	Post 5815	Lombard

AUXILIARY PRESIDENT'S CORNER



***Diane Ahrens
President
Department of Illinois
VFW Auxiliary***

When we volunteer as a leader, at any level, the most difficult part is being 5 hours away and unable to call a meeting to sit down, and talk, really talk.

We are everyone human, and every one of us has our ideas, concerns, desires and often they conflict with others. During these times we need to stop, listen and look at the BIG PICTURE, not who is right or wrong, but how are we serving our veterans, military & community. When we are in the middle of a tug of war, we are wasting precious resources, energy that is needed in a positive effort to make a difference in our most important endeavor, serving.

Apologizing, listening, forgiving, renewing our commitment to the Veterans of Foreign Wars and its Auxiliary are key to being successful.

We are adults, we have been through many messes, disagreements, and survived, are we stronger, more patient, better having gone through them, or are we bitter, angry and resentful?

We each need to look at ourselves and make an effort to be the one willing to put past issues behind us and leave them there, forgive, work on building bridges instead of tearing them down. We have a responsibility to serve, support and encourage.

Ask yourselves, how can we resolve this "issue" and get back to working together to get our Post & it's Auxiliary back on track, stronger, and inviting so that Veterans and their families want to join us. It may not be easy, but it is worth it when you see joy in the eyes of those we serve.

Life is Sweet Serving our Veterans! Semper Fi

AUXILIARY MEMBERSHIP



Alena Kim & Katie Makey
Co-Chairmen
Department of Illinois
VFW Auxiliary Membership

Illinois is kicking off a great membership year. As of the moment this column was written, Illinois sits at 82.83 percent. This is up from two weeks ago when we were at 81.37 percent. Our sprinkle squads across the state of Illinois have been busy.

We sent out email traffic to the Districts as well as posted on Department of Illinois VFW Auxiliary's Facebook page about getting our annual members' dues notices out. Pointing out that folks can email those notices, however leadership should assess if some should be general mailed out due to email address challenges.

Our State's first target for achievements were to get to 85 percent by Aug. 3. We had 3 Districts hit 85 percent as of the 3rd of August. District 12 (87.63 percent), District 8 (88.75 percent), and District 3 (90.70 percent). We had 58 Auxiliaries hit 85 percent. Of those we had 39 auxiliaries hit 90 percent. Of those we had 20 auxiliaries hit 95 percent and of those we had 11 Auxiliaries hit 100 percent or more. The exciting part was we had 64 "new" life or annual members.

All of these Districts and Auxiliaries were put into our drawing at the Council of Administration Aug. 23 at Tinley Park. As a reminder, those that hit 85 percent by Aug. 3 receive one opportunity. Those who hit 95 percent receive two opportunities. Those who hit 100 percent receive 3 opportunities and those that hit 101 percent receive 4 opportunities.

It was exciting to have Danetta Wakefield, National Council Member #5, visiting from Missouri pull the lucky winners for the opportunity to spin on the Reward Wheel. Besides cash, there were also Life Membership vouchers. From the District pool was District 12. The lucky winner for the Auxiliary pool was Paul McVey Auxiliary 1592 out of District 17.

District 12 spun and won \$500.00 and Auxiliary 1592 spun and won \$250.00.

But here is even greater news, as of Aug. 22, we had a continued growth of 4 Districts hitting 85 percent or better. As District 12, District 8, and District 3 climbed above 89 percent, we saw District 7, District 14, District 18 and District 17 get up over that 85 percent hurdle. We had 3

more auxiliaries get over 85 percent and we had "new" membership grow 13 more new members to 77 in just two weeks.

The Illinois Sprinkle Squads are doing their thing and we are on our way to getting the membership above 100 percent.



FROM THE SENIOR VICE



Rob Bailey
Senior Vice Commander
Department of Illinois VFW

Each of us raised our right hand and swore an oath—to protect, to serve, and to defend. That bond does not fade with time, nor does it end when we hang up the uniform. It lives on in the work we do together through the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

We are more than an organization—we are a family bound by sacrifice and service. Every meeting we attend, every veteran we help, every community project we support is another way we continue to fulfill that oath. Our mission is not only to honor the past but to strengthen the present and shape the future for those who will come after us.

It's easy to forget the power we hold when we act as one. A single voice may go unheard, but together we speak for millions. Whether it's standing up for veterans' rights, mentoring the next generation, or being there for a fellow comrade in need, your involvement makes a difference.

I challenge each of you to remember why you joined the VFW: for camaraderie, for purpose, for service beyond self. Let that reason fuel you today. Bring a fellow veteran to our meetings. Step up for a new project. Share your experience, your story, your strength. The smallest act of service can spark a wave of change.

Together, we carry forward the values of duty, honor, and country. Together, we keep alive the spirit of service that defined our military years. And together, we prove that the uniform may come off, but the mission continues.

Stay proud, stay strong, and never forget—you are not alone. We are VFW. We are family.

FROM THE JUNIOR VICE



Ryan Higginbotham
Junior Vice Commander
Department of Illinois VFW

Conventions and council meetings, why you should attend

The month of August has been busy, from attending the National Convention in Columbus, Ohio to the first council meeting, or often referred to as a “C of A”, which was also in conjunction with Commander Blackwell’s homecoming.

It had me thinking, how many of you have attended a VFW Convention, whether it be State or National? Also, how many have ever attended a C of A?

Let us start off with State Convention and why you should attend. For one its about representing not only your District but your Post. Your little section of Illinois where even your voice can be heard. Whether it be voting for an elected office or voicing your concern for a proposed bylaw change. How about camaraderie, which is high on every member’s reason they joined the VFW. I for one enjoy getting a chance to see many of my comrades that I may only see a few times or even once a year, at Convention. It’s also a great chance to network with other members and veterans’ groups that are in attendance in the vendor exhibit.

This year at State Convention we had what many called a historic event in the runoff for Department Surgeon. Everyone I talked to said they don’t remember an election going so far before a concession was made! This is a perfect example of everyone’s vote matters.

Then came August and National Convention in Columbus, Ohio, the birthplace of the VFW. I won’t go into the historical aspect of the VFW and will leave that up to our Historian. However, this convention had plenty of its historical factors. Last year everyone was talking about the “roll call” vote, something that rarely happens at a National Convention. They even made stickers that said, “I survived the roll call vote 2024”. This year would not be subpar to last year, so we had two roll call votes. The first was a bylaw change not allowing a Past Commander-in-Chief (CIC) to hold a paid appointed position for 5 years after they serve as CIC. It did not pass due to needing 2/3 in favor to change the bylaw. Next was something no one had ever seen before. There was a comrade that made the decision to run for Sr. Vice CIC off the floor and upended the incumbent. It was a vote that shocked the entire organization and made everyone realize that their vote counts and their voices can be heard. Every delegate got to cast their vote and reminded everyone that we, the membership, are who make decisions.

Then we finished August with a Department C of A, tied into Commander Blackwell’s homecoming. Remember, anyone can attend a Council of Administration meeting. There has been a lot of hearsay over the years that only Department chairmen and District leadership are allowed to attend these meetings. That is false and every member is not only allowed but encouraged to attend so they can see how Department decisions are made.

This is also the best way to learn and gain information. We know that it may be a long drive sometimes but if you get a chance I recommend attending. We hope to see you all at the next Convention and Council meeting.



U.S. Sen. Tammy Duckworth is joined by members of the Department of Illinois Veterans of Foreign Wars for a special presentation of the Congressional Gold Medal to Pvt. Ruth Marshall, 6888th Central Postal Delivery Battalion.

World War II Veteran Ruth Ellen Lewis Marshall Honored with Congressional Gold Medal

U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth Leads Ceremony with VFW Department of Illinois
By Nekohl Johnson

U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth, joined by members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Department of Illinois, community leaders, and Veterans, honored Private Ruth Ellen Lewis Marshall, July 25, a 98-year-old World War II veteran of the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion with the Congressional Gold Medal.

The ceremony, held at Aperion Care Oak Lawn, recognized Marshall's service in the only all-Black, all-female battalion deployed overseas during World War II — a unit whose contributions remained widely unrecognized for decades.

The 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion was tasked with sorting and distributing years of backlogged mail for soldiers serving in Europe during World War II. This mission was vital in boosting morale and reconnecting soldiers with their families

and loved ones during wartime.

The 6888th holds a unique place in history as the largest all-female, all-Black unit to serve overseas during the war. Their story is one of extraordinary resilience, determination, and an unwavering commitment to ensuring that no soldier was forgotten.

Service in Silence, Honor at Last

Marshall enlisted in the Women's Army Corps at age 17 and was deployed to Europe, where she supported the mission of delivering mail to American troops. As part of the 6888th, she helped clear an immense backlog of correspondence, restoring morale and hope across the front lines. She also served as a military hairdresser, offering care and support to her fellow soldiers.

After her tour of duty, she was discharged for

being underage. She returned home and went on to serve as a U.S. Postal Inspector for several years.

For decades, as with many Veterans, Marshall did not speak publicly about her time in uniform, and she lived without recognition or Veterans' benefits — until now.

A Team Effort to Lift Her Legacy

The ceremony was made possible through the efforts of Wallace Braswell, who serves both as Marshall's Power of Attorney and as the Assistant State Inspector for the VFW Department of Illinois. Years ago, she cared for his aunt, Fluorine Braswell — and in return, he made it his mission to care for her and ensure her service would be honored. He was joined by Rose Caldwell, Ruth's longtime church friend, whose dedication helped bring Ruth's legacy into the public light.

Attending the event on behalf of the VFW Department of Illinois were:

- State Commander Eugene Blackwell
- Assistant State Surgeon Dr. Damon Arnold
- State Women's Chairperson Nekohl

Johnson

- Assistant State Inspector Wallace Braswell

Duckworth, a decorated combat Veteran, spoke about the historic contributions of the 6888th Battalion and the need to honor BIPOC and women Veterans.

She emphasized that recognition like Marshall's is part of a larger movement — to bring justice, visibility, and equity to Black service members and underrepresented communities, not only within the military but throughout American society.

Duckworth was joined by her staff, Kristen Hiendl and Jessica Seawell, whose behind-the-scenes work helped ensure the ceremony was handled with respect, care, and dignity.

Commitment to Continue the Mission

The Department of Illinois VFW remains committed to honoring all who have served — especially those whose stories have remained in the shadows. The recognition of Private Ruth Ellen Lewis Marshall is a reminder that every Veteran deserves to be seen, heard, and remembered.

Support Women Veterans. Share Their Stories.

The VFW Department of Illinois encourages all Posts and members to uplift the names and legacies of women Veterans. Their service matters. Their stories matter.

And we will continue to tell them — one voice, one name at a time.



Display honoring Pvt. Ruth Marshall, 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion, for her service during World War II.



The Congressional Gold Medal presented to Pvt. Ruth Marshall, 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion. The medal was presented to Marshall by U.S. Sen. Tammy Duckworth during a ceremony July 25 at the Aperion Care Oak Lawn.

VFW Elects Whitmore as National Commander

The Iowa native is the first woman elected to lead the 125-year-old organization

Carol Whitmore of Des Moines, Iowa, was elected as the new national commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars for the 2025-2026 year.

"Standing here today, surrounded by such incredible people — fellow veterans, families and friends — I am filled with a deep sense of pride and humility," said Whitmore during her acceptance speech. "This is not just a recognition of me, but of all the men and women who have served in our armed forces."

Whitmore's election as the VFW's 117th commander-in-chief occurred at the conclusion of the organization's 126th National Convention in Columbus, Ohio. More than 10,000 members of the VFW and its Auxiliary converged on the city to conduct the business of the organization, recognize individuals and organizations for excellence and to elect new leadership for the 2025 – 2026 year.

Whitmore is the first woman elected to lead the more than 125-year-old organization. She delivered remarks to those attending in person at the Greater Columbus Convention Center and watching via livestreaming video.

"When I think back on my journey, I am sure it was just like many others — my reality is not necessarily the VFW reality," said Whitmore. "But I was driven by a sense of duty, a desire to serve something greater than myself. And little did I know that decision would shape me in ways I could never have imagined."

Enlisting in the Women's Army Corps in 1977, Carol's 36-year military career was marked by significant milestones, from integrating with men into the regular Army to becoming an Army nurse and later serving as a first sergeant for her unit while deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. It was there that she earned her VFW eligibility. In recognition of her service, she received the Legion of Merit Medal, Bronze Star Medal, Army Commendation Medal (six), Army Achievement Medal, Good Conduct Medal, Army Reserve



VFW National Commander Carol Whitmore, 2025-2026

Components Achievement Medal (two), National Defense Service Medal, Iraq Campaign Medal, Non-Commissioned Professional Development Ribbon (three), Army Service Ribbon, Overseas Ribbon (three), Armed Forces Reserve Medal with "M" device and the Combat Action Badge.

"As we look to the future, I believe that the strength of our veteran community is our greatest asset. We have so much to offer," said Whitmore. "We have lived through adversity, we have faced challenges that many can't even imagine and we've come out on the other side stronger. It's because of that strength that we are still serving our communities and our nation."

She joined the VFW in 2012 at Post 9127 in Des Moines, Iowa, where she maintains her Gold Legacy Life membership. She has served in elected and appointed positions at the Post, District and Department levels, culminating with her election as the VFW Department of Iowa Commander from 2018 to 2019, in which she achieved All-American status. On the national level, she served on the Legislative Committee, the General Resolutions Committee and on the National Council of Administration from 2019 to 2023. In 2022, she was elected as designee for

National VFW Commander-in-Chief for the year 2025, becoming the first woman and first Iowan to hold the position. She is also a life member of the Military Order of the Cootie, the VFW National Home, and the American Legion and its Auxiliary.

During the speech, Whitmore emphasized legislative advocacy as a priority for her year, with a focus on fighting to get Congress to grant concurrent receipt for select combat-injured veterans through the Major Richard Star Act.

“Through advocacy, our legislative efforts need to be resolute,” said Whitmore. “The [Major] Richard Star Act must pass this year. This effort was started in 2004, and the bill has repeatedly and shamelessly been voted down. Let’s get this done already. Honor the Contract!”

Whitmore also spoke passionately about the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) mission and the key diplomatic role the VFW played in Southeast Asia during the early 1990s.

“More than 30 years ago, it was VFW Vietnam War veterans who led the mission back to the country that cost them so much to extend a hand of peace to their former adversaries,” said Whitmore. “This tremendously brave effort opened U.S. relations with Vietnam and access to the country so DPAA could find and bring home our comrades who were missing in action.”

In addition to Whitmore, other national officers elected were Cory Geisler, an Iraq War veteran



Commander-in-Chief Al Lipphardt presents the Smart/Mahar National Citizenship Education Teacher of the Year award to Tim Smiddy, a 5th grade teacher at Staunton Elementary School in Staunton. Smiddy founded the “Patriot Club”, a program which pays tribute to the United States, the U.S. Armed Forces, Veterans and Prisoners of War/Missing in Action.



Delegates from the Department of Illinois Veterans of Foreign Wars and its Auxiliary listen to speakers during the Joint Opening ceremony of the Veterans of Foreign Wars National Convention.

from the Department of Wisconsin, as senior vice commander-in-chief, and Glenn Umberger Jr., from the Department of Pennsylvania, who is also a veteran from Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, as junior vice commander-in-chief. The final day of the convention also saw Adjutant General Dan West and Quartermaster General Marc Garduno reassume their posts.

“I may be the first veteran to have been elected VFW commander-in-chief while wearing a dress ... the first female veteran, but I will not be the last,” said Whitmore. “And as I have said while campaigning, I am your comrade by mud, by blood, by dust, by dirt, by sand, by land, by sea, by air ... I am a veteran first.”

Carol, a retired nurse, attended the University of Northern Iowa and Hawkeye Community College. She and her husband, Brad, reside in Des Moines, Iowa.

At right, State Commander Eugene Blackwell congratulates Valerie Young, Commander, Chapt. Horace Burke Post 3480 on earning All-American Commander honors.



Below, Department of Illinois VFW members gather to congratulate Tim Smiddy, the recipient of the Smart/Mahar National Citizenship Education Teacher of the Year award, grades 5-8, at the VFW National Convention in Columbus, Ohio.

VFW National Convention in Columbus, Ohio

Delegates gather to celebrate achievements, elect new officers



Members from the Department of Illinois and its Auxiliary participate in the VFW National Convention's Patriotic Rally parade of states.



Department of Illinois Commander Eugene Blackwell and Auxiliary President Diane Ahrens pause during the Joint Opening session of the VFW National Convention in Columbus, Ohio.



The National VFW Color Guard presents the colors during the Joint Opening Ceremony of the VFW National Convention in Columbus, Ohio.



2025-26 Council of Administration



Eugene Blackwell
Commander



Rob Bailey
Senior Vice
Commander



Ryan Higginbotham
Junior Vice
Commander



Scott Swinford
Adjutant
Quartermaster



Gary Holmes
Chaplain



Doug Jameson
Surgeon



Jayson Hoffman
Judge Advocate



Robert Welch
Chief of Staff



Cathy Stubbs
Inspector



Xhi Chen
Commander
District 3



Evamarie Duff
Commander
District 4



Mathius Carter
Commander
District 5



Rob Bland
Commander
District 6



David Long
Commander
District 7



Kenneth Morey
Commander
District 8



John Finnegan
Commander
District 9



Josh Seed
Commander
District 10



Rick Hobbs
Commander
District 11



Anthony Avers
Commander
District 12



Robert Shehorn
Commander
District 13



Amiee Louer-Wagoner
Commander
District 14



Clarence Caraker
Commander
District 15



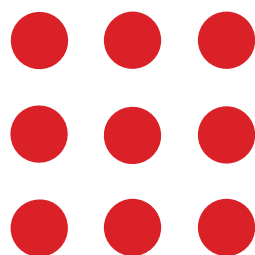
Bill Browne
Commander
District 16



Paul Cravens
Commander
District 18



**Michaelangelo
Di Cosola**
Commander
District 19



**Veterans
Crisis Line**

DIAL 988 then PRESS 1

Broughton builds Fire Pit for Northenders VFW Post 10302 in Springfield for Eagle Scout Project

Connor Broughton, Rochester Boy Scout Troop 280, created a fire pit for Northenders VFW Post 10302 and for the Elks Club as part of his Eagle Scout project. He donated the pit in June. His troop

came to the Post on July 22 to hold a flag retirement ceremony.

There were 52 total in attendance at the ceremony between Scouts, Scout Masters, family and members of Post

10302 and its Auxiliary. Refreshments were held after in the Post hall.

"I think this is very important to do it so we don't have flags that are being tattered and are

torn and need to be retired," said Broughton. He emphasized the community aspect of the project, adding, "It brings communities together, it brings awareness to the flags because many people do not know how to retire a flag properly."

Broughton constructed a fire pit himself, which will serve as a lasting resource for scouts to use for flag retirement ceremonies for years to come.

It is hoped that the Troop will return to Post 10302 regularly to continue educating Scouts and the public on how to properly retire a U.S. flag.





National Home Donation

On June 27, Commander Dennis Orlikowski, left, and Quartermaster Joe Drought, right, from Floyd J. Tilton VFW Post 3878 in Rochelle, traveled to Eaton Rapids, Michigan to present a check to the VFW National Home. This donation is a part of the proceeds from a Queen of Hearts drawing jackpot conducted at the post "The VFW National Home assists military, veterans, and their families with children, by creating a foundation of services and resources to achieve their personal and family goals in order to move forward in a positive, safe, and healthy environment." Also pictured are National Home Executive Director Michael Wilson, second from left, and National Home Board President Jerry Blake.

Belleville VFW Post 1739 Makes History

A Legacy of Honor, Service, and Trailblazing Achievements

Belleville VFW Post 1739 is more than just a meeting hall; it is an active and vital part of the community. The post was chartered in 1934 and has served veterans and has distinguished itself through a series of trailblazing achievements.

During the recent elections for 2025 – 2026, the post elected the first female veteran as its Commander.

Commander Lachelle Stevenson served in the U.S. Air Force from 1995 – 2000 as a Maintenance Scheduler and earned her eligibility as a member of the VFW by serving at Osan AB, South Korea from 1998 – 1999.

Lachelle continues her dedication to leadership and is deeply committed to honoring the service of all veterans, fostering camaraderie, and building a strong connection within the community.



USACE Chicago District's Ericka Hillard Honored with Patriotic Public Service Award for Volunteer Work with Veterans of Foreign Wars

*Story by Emily Helton
USACE Chicago District*

Ericka Hillard, a Contract Specialist with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), received the Patriotic Public Service Lapel Pin Award for her volunteer service with her local Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Post.

The award ceremony was held at the district's Engineer Day award ceremony and picnic on July 16.

As the Junior Vice Commander of Benjamin O. Davis, VFW Post 311, Hillard was featured in the May/June 2025 issue of Veterans of Foreign Wars Magazine. Hillard and her daughter were highlighted for their support in distributing Buddy Poppies in Richton Park.

In addition, Hillard's VFW Post is actively involved in the VFW's Adopt-a-Unit Program which supports the 317th Engineer Company and 5th Battalion, 100th Regiment, 4th Brigade, 94th Division based out of Homewood.

"I truly enjoy participating in Poppy Drives and supporting fellow veterans, especially those in need," says Hillard about her favorite part of being a VFW volunteer.

The VFW Poppy Drive, also known as the Buddy Poppy Drive, is a tradition led by the Veterans of Foreign Wars to honor fallen soldiers and support living veterans. During the drive, artificial red poppies, symbols of remembrance inspired by the World War I poem In Flanders



Ericka Hillard receives Patriotic Public Service Award for Volunteer Work at the USACE Chicago District's Annual Engineer Day Award Ceremony. Photo by Elizabeth Concepcion, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Chicago District

Fields, are distributed to the public in exchange for donations. These poppies are handmade by disabled and needy veterans, who receive compensation for their work. The funds raised benefit vital programs such as the VFW National Home for Children, veterans' rehabilitation, and local relief for veterans and their families.

Hillard became a Life Member of VFW Post 311 in 2018 after previously serving as an annual member and member-at-large.

"I love the camaraderie. After

departing from active duty military service, I looked for a VFW Post to join - especially as an OIF military veteran myself," Hillard adds.

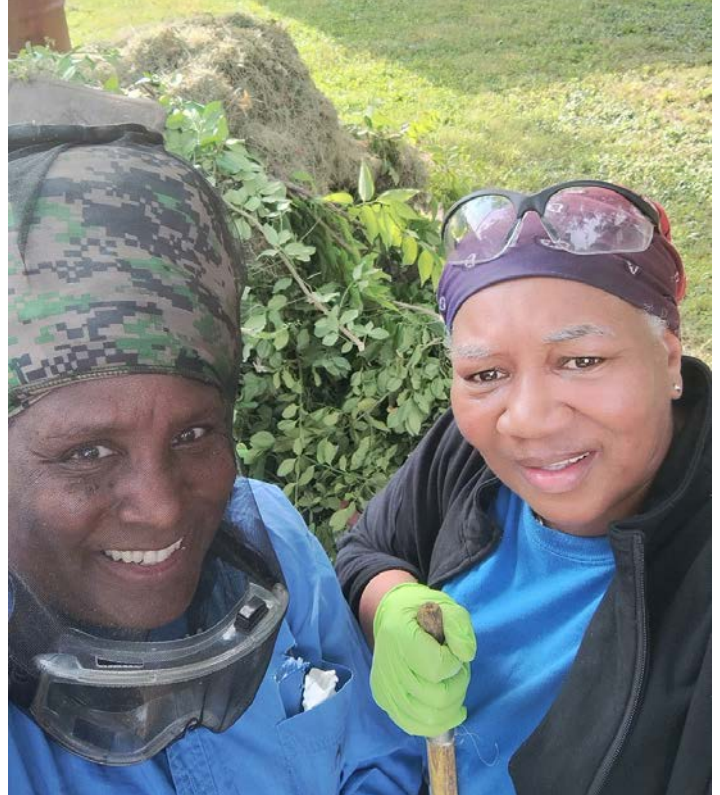
This award is granted to individual employees or groups of employees for service not related to the official position(s). Services provided must reflect patriotic, off-duty activities of a public service nature contributing to the mission accomplishment of an Army element or to the welfare of Army personnel.

Commanders Earn All-American Honors

District	Commander	Post
3	Jonathon Cooper	Post 8821
14	Douglas Jameson	Post 1739
18	Kenneth Piehl	Post 5422
Post	Post Name	Commander
99	Oren L. Davis Post	Ronald Boomer
342	Colonel Thomas G. Lawler Post	Gary Holmes*
503	Century Post	William Snyder
805	Sgt. Charles A. Fricke Post	Kipp Reed
976	Stage Depot Post	Anthony Avers*
1461	John Hugo Kaiser Post	Bernadette Bland
1739	Belleville Post	John Lawson
2245	Ronald Hill Memorial Post	Michael Magnetta*
2298	Tri-City Evergreen Post	Daniel Pearson*
2698	Randolph County Post	Kenneth Eddy*
2729	Rhine Post	Charles Johnson
2868	Joshua W. Harris Brookfield Mem. Post	Robert Tindon
2876	Walter Jones Post	Charolie Burris
2978	Logan-Avondale Post	Ray Doeksen*
3480	Capt. Horace G. Burke Post	Valerie Young*
3523	Goldsmith-Terry Post	Kenneth Goodman
3873	Judd Kendall Post	Staci Boyer
5079	Chicago Bridgeport Post	Antonio Munoz
5151	Arnold-Heath Memorial Post	William Lunsford
5346	Piatt County Post	Seth Floyd*
5422	Malcolm J. Mayo Post	Kenneth Piehl*
5691	Collinsville Kahokian Memorial Post	Alonzo Skipper*
5788	Lockport Post	Keith Carberry
5975	Dow Stepp Memorial Post	Jeremy Deckard
6408	Havana Post	Duane Sanders
7682	Mascoutah Post	Jill Schofield
7710	New Athens Post	Billy Tucker
8350	Chenoa Post	Dwayne Price
8739	Oregon Post	Matthew Alford
8821	P.F.C. Ted M. Stempien Post	Jonathon Cooper*
9153	Waltonville Memorial Post	Ryan Shurtz
9763	Creal Springs Memorial Post	Albert Dagner
9773	Hometown Murray Post	Howard Kirby*
11463	Rochester Post	Kyle Blumhorst*
12014	Crystal Lake Memorial	Joshua Deron

Posts In Action

Capt. Horace G. Burke Post 3480 Takes Care of Veterans in East St. Louis Community



VFW Post 3480's own Sr. Vice Commander Janese Jordan and Quartermaster Flemings decided to conduct a yard upkeep project in which will be an ongoing project throughout neighboring homes in the East Saint Louis area. Both comrades have established a rapport with various veterans/locals who are unable to address their very own needs pertaining to their yard upkeep.





School Supplies Giveaway

On Aug. 23, VFW Post 3480 and its Auxiliary conducted a Back to School Bookbag Giveaway. During the four hour event, the post and auxiliary gave away more than 50 clear bookbags and school supplies in accordance with District 189 guidelines. Clear bookbags are allowed in the District for safety reasons.



Sr. Vice Commander Janese Jordan of VFW Post 3480 constructed a cross for Calvary Missionary Baptist Church to enhance the pulpit. This act was done for fellow Veteran and Pastor James Rogers, an Army Veteran.



On July 20th VFW Post 3480 and its Auxiliary recognized the nominated Educators (Alonzo Nelson), Kareem Mateen, D. Curtis, and Cindy Colvin), Clergy (Gregory Witherspoon) , Law Enforcement (Lt. D'Angelo Franklin) and Media (Stephanie Anthony Miles) from 2024-25 fiscal year for their contributions and continued support.

Quincy VFW Karaoke Team Raises Money for Flood Victims

Post 5129 in Quincy's karaoke team, led by Mr. and Mrs. Wag, raised \$1,800 for the national relief fund for flood victims in Texas and Missouri benefiting VFW Posts inhabitants that were affected.



Department of Illinois VFW Auxiliary President Diane Ahrens, center, with Department Senior Vice President Danielle Krull, and Junior Vice President Terry Adams, during the Presentation of the Department Presidents with Colors at the VFW Auxiliary National Convention.

Outstanding Hospital Volunteer of the Year

Department of Illinois VFW Auxiliary President Diane Ahrens, right, took a few moments at the District 15 Meeting Aug. 30 to honor District 15 Auxiliary President and Department of Illinois Auxiliary VAVS representative at the Marion VA Hospital Lori Crites for being named as the National Auxiliary Outstanding Hospital Volunteer of the Year for Program Division 9 during the national convention in Columbus, Ohio.





Past Department President Cindy Watters, with Past National Auxiliary President Brenda Bryant, being inducted into the Circle of Excellence at the VFW Auxiliary National Convention in Columbus, Ohio.



Auxiliary members Cathy Sullivan, Laura Knackstadt, and Kathy Rowold, with their respective awards from the VFW Auxiliary's national convention in Columbus, Ohio.

Scholarships

VFW Auxiliary Award No. 1

Citation and \$25 to one VFW Auxiliary in each of the 10 Program Divisions that hosts the most outstanding activity and/or event educating their community about scholarship opportunities in the VFW and the VFW Auxiliary.

Citations will be mailed directly to the winning VFW Auxiliaries and money will be deposited into their account after National Convention.

Division 1	Eastern	Rhode Island	Amancio-Falcone-Gaccione No. 8955
Division 2	Western	Montana	John E. Freeman No. 5514
Division 3	Western	New Mexico	George O. Breece No. 401
Division 4	Eastern	Vermont	Carl M. Dessaint No. 1034
Division 5	Big Ten	South Dakota	George Dokken No. 2118
Division 6	Southern	West Virginia	Capital City No. 3466
Division 7	Southern	North Carolina	Blue Ridge Mountain No. 1142
Division 8	N/A		
Division 9	Big Ten	Illinois	Johnson-Phelps No. 5220
Division 10	Eastern	Pennsylvania	Pvt. Allen J. Beck Jr. No. 5265

"Buddy"® Poppy & VFW National Hom

VFW Auxiliary Award No. 1

Citation and \$25 to one VFW Auxiliary in each of the 10 Program Divisions that hosts the most outstanding activity and/or event using the VFW "Buddy"® Poppy to educate their community about the VFW "Buddy"® Poppy.

Citations will be mailed directly to the winning VFW Auxiliaries and money will be deposited into their account after National Convention.

Division 1	Eastern	Rhode Island	William G. Fournier No. 916
Division 2	Western	Montana	John E. Freeman No. 5514
Division 3	Western	New Mexico	George O. Breece No. 401
Division 4	Eastern	Vermont	Hyde Park No. 7779
Division 5	Southern	Georgia	1LT Sharon A. Lane Memorial No. 121
Division 6	Southern	West Virginia	Greater Huntington No. 1064
Division 7	Southern	North Carolina	Oscar L. Joyner, Jr. No. 5352
Division 8	Big Ten	Missouri	Jack Ray No. 5789
Division 9	Big Ten	Illinois	Red Bud No. 6632
Division 10	Big Ten	Indiana	Lawton-Byrum No. 972

Historian & Media Relations

Department Chairmen Award No. 1

\$25 VFW Store gift certificate to one Department Chairman in each of the 10 Program Divisions for the best training/education on the use of the social media sources to promote VFW Auxiliary Programs.

Division 1	Eastern	Rhode Island	GinaMarie Doherty
Division 2	Western	Wyoming	Nicole Osler
Division 3	Eastern	New Hampshire	Nathaniel Nicholas
Division 4	Eastern	Massachusetts	Lynn LeBlanc
Division 5	Big Ten	Iowa	Emily Steele
Division 6	Southern	West Virginia	Barbara Schultz
Division 7	Eastern	New Jersey	Mary Sandman
Division 8	Eastern	Maryland	Catherine Gistedt
Division 9	Big Ten	Illinois	Cathy Sullivan
Division 10	Big Ten	Ohio	Lisa Rashley

Membership

Outstanding Performance Award Second Place

The Outstanding Performance Awards are given each year to recognize hardworking Departments and Department Chairmen who have given an extra amount of effort.

\$100 goes to the Department and a citation goes to the Department Chairman.

Division 1	Eastern	Rhode Island	Erika Westbrook
Division 2	Western	Montana	Tamee Havrilla
Division 3	Western	New Mexico	Kelly Fouse
Division 4	Eastern	Massachusetts	Paul LaPorte
Division 5	Big Ten	Nebraska	Donna Fenske
Division 6	Southern	Arkansas	Linda Evans
Division 7	Eastern	New Jersey	Victoria Hendrix
Division 8	Western	Kansas	David Huddleston
Division 9	Big Ten	Illinois	Kathryn Rowold
Division 10	Eastern	Pennsylvania	Amy Peterson

Hospital

Member Award No. 3

Citation to the most Outstanding Hospital Volunteer of the Year in each of the 10 Program Divisions.

Division 1	Western	Nevada	Stephen P. Gibbs Memorial No. 12198	Sharon Frederick
Division 2	Southern	Mississippi	Oswald L. Fayard North Bay No. 6731	Elizabeth Ashmus
Division 3	Eastern	Connecticut	Wolcott No. 1979	Ronald Doucette
Division 4	Eastern	Vermont	Robert E. Glidden No. 758	William Bronson
Division 5	N/A			
Division 6	Western	Colorado	Pioneer No. 2121	Pam Park
Division 7	Western	Washington	Rainier No. 2289	Virginia Carman
Division 8	Big Ten	Missouri	Pleasant Hill No. 3118	Vickie McCarty
Division 9	Big Ten	Illinois	Heyde-Pillow No. 1301	Lori Crites
Division 10	Eastern	Pennsylvania	Douglas A. Post-Harry C. Wilson II Memorial No. 6493	Lori Myers

Historian & Media Relations

Outstanding Performance Award First Place

The Outstanding Performance Awards are given each year to recognize hardworking Departments and Department Chairmen who have given an extra amount of effort.

\$200 goes to the Department and a keepsake goes to the Department Chairman.

Division 1	Eastern	Rhode Island	GinaMarie Doherty
Division 2	Western	Wyoming	Nicole Osler
Division 3	Eastern	New Hampshire	Nathaniel Nicholas
Division 4	Eastern	Massachusetts	Lynne LeBlanc
Division 5	Western	Oregon	Katherine McCauley
Division 6	Southern	West Virginia	Barbara Schultz
Division 7	Eastern	New Jersey	Mary Sandman
Division 8	Eastern	Maryland	Catherine Gistedt
Division 9	Big Ten	Illinois	Cathy Sullivan
Division 10	Big Ten	Ohio	Lisa Rashley

Veterans & Family Support

Department Chairmen Award No. 2

\$25 VFW Store gift certificate to one Department Chairman in each of the 10 Program Divisions for the most outstanding activity and/or event to increase the support of veterans, active-duty service members and their families.

Division 1	Eastern	Rhode Island	Shauna Jamieson
Division 2	Western	Alaska	Amy Vukasin
Division 3	Eastern	Connecticut	Deborah Breault
Division 4	Southern	Louisiana	Clifford Bailey
Division 5	Big Ten	Iowa	Wendy Powers
Division 6	Southern	Kentucky	Kellie Lightner
Division 7	Southern	North Carolina	Joe Nelson
Division 8	Big Ten	Missouri	Darla Nebel
Division 9	Big Ten	Illinois	Tammy Napier
Division 10	Big Ten	Ohio	Chad Hoke

Hospital

Outstanding Performance Award Second Place

The Outstanding Performance Awards are given each year to recognize hardworking Departments and Department Chairmen who have given an extra amount of effort.

\$100 goes to the Department and a citation goes to the Department Chairman.

Division 1	Western	Nevada	Sharon Frederick
Division 2	Western	North Dakota	Elaine Dosch
Division 3	Western	New Mexico	Jeanette Garcia
Division 4	Eastern	Vermont	Sally Choquette
Division 5	Big Ten	Iowa	Kathleen Colbert
Division 6	Southern	Kentucky	Nancy Bogacki
Division 7	Western	Washington	Margaret Lindberg
Division 8	Big Ten	Missouri	Karen Cypret
Division 9	Big Ten	Illinois	Laura Ann Knackstedt
Division 10	Southern	Pennsylvania	Linda Dilling

Membership

Department Chairmen Award No. 1

\$25 VFW Store gift certificate to one Department Chairman in each of the 10 Program Divisions for the most outstanding training and promotion of the Membership Program.

Division 1	Western	Hawaii	Jo An Hill
Division 2	Western	Alaska	Willia Watts
Division 3	Western	New Mexico	Kelly Fouse
Division 4	Eastern	Massachusetts	Paul LaPorte
Division 5	Southern	Georgia	Melissa Talley
Division 6	Southern	West Virginia	Josephine Crouser
Division 7	Southern	North Carolina	Lyndsey Bowlus
Division 8	Western	Kansas	David Huddleston
Division 9	Big Ten	Illinois	Kathryn Rowold
Division 10	Eastern	Pennsylvania	Amy Peterson

"Buddy"® Poppy & VFW National Home

VFW Auxiliary Award No. 2

Citation and \$25 to one VFW Auxiliary in each of the 10 Program Divisions that hosts the most outstanding activity and/or event to recognize and celebrate the VFW National Home's 100th Birthday.

Citations will be mailed directly to the winning VFW Auxiliaries and money will be deposited into their account after National Convention.

Division 1	Eastern	Rhode Island	William G. Fournier No. 916
Division 2	Western	Montana	John E. Freeman No. 5514
Division 3	Southern	Alabama	E.W. Allgood Memorial No. 5404
Division 4	Eastern	Vermont	Robert E. Glidden No. 758
Division 5	Big Ten	South Dakota	Charles E. Thorne No. 2038
Division 6	Southern	West Virginia	Capital City No. 3466
Division 7	Western	Washington	Rainier No. 2289
Division 8	Western	Kansas	Lt. Col. John D. Riddell No. 1432
Division 9	Big Ten	Illinois	Red Bud No. 6632
Division 10	Big Ten	Michigan	Maple City No. 2406



Thanks to the 9 Auxiliaries in District 14 supporting Jefferson Barracks Hospital (Millstadt, Caseyville, Mascoutah, Coulterville, Waterloo, O'Fallon, New Athens, Red Bud, and East St Louis) Kathy Rowold, VAVS Representative for JB, was able to present donations in the amount of \$1,020 for the Women's Warrior baby shower to be held Sept 20 at JB. Accepting the donations were Marcena Gunt-er, Chief-Center for Development & Civic Engagement and Sylvia Stephens, Womens Health Program Specialist.

SIGN UP TO JOIN VFW ACTION CORPS

RECEIVE OUR WEEKLY E-NEWSLETTER
AND ACTION ALERTS

Use camera mode to scan code



or
Text "VFW" to 50457
or
Visit vfw.org/JoinActionCorps

VFW, Auxiliary Hold Council Meetings, Celebrate Commander, President during Homecoming



Clockwise, from above, Tara Skipper presents her program report during the Auxiliary's Council of Administration Meeting. Danetta Wakefield, the newly installed Council Member representing Missouri and Illinois, with Department President Diane Ahrens, Commander Eugene Blackwell, President Diane Ahrens, and National Representative Danetta Wakefield during the Commander and President's Homecoming. Commander Eugene Blackwell holds up an etched rock, a gift from Auxiliary President Diane Ahrens. Past Commander-in-Chief Fritz Mihelcic presents Commander Eugene Blackwell with the warrant designating Blackwell as State Commander.



All-State Honors Presented to Posts, Districts



Legacy Life Membership Award - Judd Kendall Post 3873, Naperville.



All State Honors - District 14 Commander Doug Jameson



District 3 - Post 5079.



District 3 Post 8821.



District 4 Post 2868.



District 5 Post 2298.



District 6 Post 342.



District 7 Post 2608.



District 11 Post 5346.



District 13 Post 9153.



District 14 Post 3480.



District 15 Post 9763.



District 16 Post 2791.



District 17 Post 4549.



District 17 Post 5975.



District 18 Post 5422.



District 18 Post 5917.

Illinois VFW News deadline

The deadline for the November 2025 issue of the Illinois VFW News is Oct. 15.

Please send items to Editor Barb Wilson at
bwilson@vfwil.org
 or barb.wilson2@outlook.com



District 19 Post 3873.



District 19 Post 7446.

All-American Districts, Posts Recognized



District 14 Commander Doug Jameson.



District 18, Commander Kenneth Piehl

Visit our website at:
www.vfwil.org



District 3, Commander Jonathan Cooper and Posts 2729, 2978, 5079, 8821, and 9773.



District 4, Posts 2868 and 5151.



District 5, Posts 2245, 2298, and 12014.



District 6, Posts 342, 1461, and 8739.



District 7, Post 8350.



District 10, Posts 6408, and 11463.



District 11, Posts 99 and 5346.



District 12, Posts 976 and 5691



District 13, Post 9153.



District 14, Posts 805, 1739, 2698, 3480, 3523, 7682, and 7710.



District 15, Post 9763.



District 17, Posts 2876 and 5975.



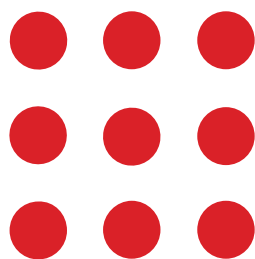
District 19, Posts 503 and 3873.



State Commander Eugene Blackwell and Barb Wilson, Chairman, Marketing, presents Past State Commander Russ Rieke, Sr. with a Red, White, and Blue plaque noting Highland Post 5694's donation to the Veterans Service Supporter Program.



State Commander Eugene Blackwell and Adjutant-Quartermaster Scott Swinford presents the Bloom Township High School Navy JROTC program with a certificate of appreciation for posting of the colors during the Council of Administration meeting.



Veterans Crisis Line

DIAL 988 then PRESS 1



VFW Members from Districts 13, 14, and 15 work the information table at Veterans Day at the DuQuoin State Fair in DuQuoin.



Past Department Commander Vince Long and Past Department President Janet Long work the information table at the Illinois State Fair in Springfield during Veterans Day at the State Fair.

VA



Hines Outreach/VAC DuPage/Naperville VFW

Veteran Resource Fair & Fun Fest

- ✓ Hines Outreach will help Veterans with new health care enrollments and share VA resources.
- ✓ Veteran Service Officers will be available to assist with filing claims and other benefit questions
- ✓ No appointment necessary. Walk-ins are welcome!
- ✓ Fun family-friendly activities in the canteen



October 25, 2025
10 a.m. — 2 p.m.



**Naperville VFW
Upstairs Hall**
908 Jackson Ave
Naperville, IL 60540



Please email
HinesOutreach@va.gov
with any questions.



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on front. Six-panel, structured, low profile,
100% cotton. Printed stars and stripes.
Adjustable hook-and-loop back closure.
Imported. 7121 \$16.95



NEW

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Polyester. 58". Imported.
8401 \$15.00

NEW

**NEW!
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PATRIOTIC
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polyester. Red,
white and blue
sublimated design.
VFW logo on front
left chest. Combat
Tested logo on
back. Unisex
sizing. Imported.
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\$40.00

