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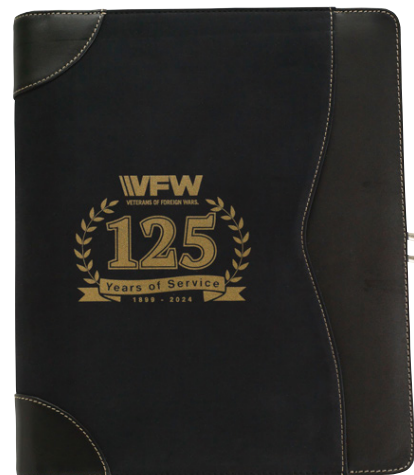


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STATE COMMANDER'S CORNER



Eugene Blackwell
Commander
Department of Illinois VFW

During my travels throughout our districts, I have seen firsthand the remarkable work our Posts and Auxiliaries do each day. From honoring veterans and supporting military families to strengthening our communities through youth outreach, service projects, and civic engagement, you continue to embody the true mission of the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Yet, while we witness these outstanding efforts, they are not always fully captured on our dashboard. Please remember: the dashboard is our report card. It documents the impact we make across Illinois and contributes to the VFW National Fact Sheet, which combines data from all 51 Departments. This fact sheet represents who we are and what we do – and it must reflect the full depth of our service. When veterans, partners, or community leaders ask about our work, this is the document that speaks on our behalf.

Our program year runs from July 1 through June 30. Posts and Districts should continue reporting activities in Community Service, Veterans Assistance, Youth Programs, Legislative Engagement, and Illinois-specific initiatives. Once submitted, these entries are reviewed by State Headquarters before being recorded on the dashboard.

Please keep in mind that certain items – such as program nominations, donations, audits, bonds, inspections, meeting attendance, and membership – are documented centrally by State Headquarters and will count toward recognition at our State Convention.

I want to extend my sincere congratulations to the Posts and Districts that are consistently updating the dashboard and working diligently toward All-State recognition. This honor is a testament to your steadfast commitment to our veterans, their families, and the communities we proudly serve.

Across Illinois and across the nation, the VFW remains rooted in service – hosting events, raising funds, supporting youth programs, providing scholarships, and promoting patriotism. These activities also present meaningful opportunities to welcome younger veterans and family members into our organization, ensuring the continued strength and growth of our ranks.

Let us remain committed to documenting every act of service, sharing every success, and ensuring that every veteran feels the power and presence of this great organization.

On another note, connecting with younger generations means embracing innovative programs such as VFW Combat Tested Gaming (CTG). With more than three billion gamers worldwide, esports have become a dynamic avenue for camaraderie, wellness, and engagement. CTG provides a welcoming platform for service members and veterans to enjoy competitive gaming, build fellowship, and combat social isolation, advancing our mission in a modern, meaningful way. For more information on CTG, log in at VFW.org, navigate to the Community tab, and select VFW Combat Tested Gaming.

As we approach the holiday season, let us pause to reflect on our comrades who cannot be with their families — those deployed overseas, and those who may be facing physical or emotional challenges. May we keep them in our thoughts and prayers and continue to support them in every way we can.

I wish each of you a blessed and safe Thanksgiving, a very Merry Christmas, and a Happy New Year. May God continue to bless you, your families, and this great organization.



Illinois VFW News

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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

As your Department President I am so honored to be invited to your events happening in Illinois, plus I am able to add in a few family trips which make traveling even sweeter. The first weekend of September I was scheduled to attend District 10 meeting in Quincy. I grew up in Missouri south of Hannibal, and Quincy was my Dad's go to for shopping, it was a big deal when I was a kid. So, I was able to stay at my cousin's cottage in Louisiana, Missouri. I spent Friday evening visiting with him, then on Saturday my niece and I spent the day, visiting my parents & family cemetery then some antiquing and dinner. It was great to reconnect, I honestly don't remember ever spending one on one time with either one of them in the past, another first in my life.

Sunday, I took the scenic route to Quincy, was great to see everyone from the 10th District, Karen Hirstein did a fine job running the meeting, we covered the Auxiliary Programs, enjoyed a wonderful lunch, and renewed friendships. We did miss representation from Chatham Auxiliary 4763 and Havana Auxiliary 6408. Which I understand life gets in the way, however it is important that someone from each Auxiliary attend the district meeting, carpool, spend time together, that's how we make our auxiliaries stronger.

September 12, I headed to Red Bud, to attend events with the 14th District. I was honored to spend the weekend with Kathy & Clyde Rowold, what a wonderful B & B. We met Ed & Emma for dinner Friday evening, then Saturday we attended O'Fallon Post & Auxiliary 805 Bacon Fest. They really know how to work together! The "Second Generation Swing" band was exceptional, great orchestra, not just a band...the food of course was delicious, anything with bacon has my vote. Honestly, I changed my schedule from the 16th District to be able to attend, need to have some fun and learn what other Auxiliaries are doing. We should all take time to go to other Districts and Posts to attend their events when possible, to learn and take similar events to other parts of Illinois...

Sunday was the 14th District Auxiliary meeting, another great meal, wow! It was hosted by Millstadt 7980, Laurie Lesperance hosted a wonderful meeting, she asked me to read the letter that I had sent out, it was good for me to read it again. It was a hard letter to write, coming from a low point, after a rough day and 5 hours on the road, lots of time to think about it. Monday, we went to tour John Cochran VA Hospital and the Jefferson Barracks Fisher House, this was a great day seeing all that is happening... volunteers are needed, and the ones who are working are doing a fantastic job!

As a Department Officer we spend lots of time on the road, went to Michigan this past weekend, another 8+ hours on the road to and from VFW National Home. This ride home was much more

pleasant, lots of positive changes and upgrades at National Home, every time I visit there is something new to be seen, always changing for the good of our veterans and their families.

This trip I have been thinking on what this Marching Forward will address, it's like pick one, which will it be? To be on a more positive note, the 25 words of affirmation, I need to look them up, because we need to use them more instead of complaining and finding fault.

I have been sending letters to Auxiliaries that don't attend their District meetings, if your Auxiliary President isn't able to attend, please send a couple of your members, District meetings are important, there is encouragement, fellowship and hopefully you will learn at least one new thing, I always do. You don't have to be an officer to attend, my mentor took me to lots of meetings, district, state and National, and I am thankful for her. She will be 100 years in just a couple of weeks and still going and still mentoring.

Part of my road trips are spent praying in the Spirit, I don't know what everyone is going thru,

and I am not sure what lies ahead but Father God knows all things, sees all things and He is gracious and merciful. I am so grateful that He has blessed me by being your president, I recently visited the 2nd floor nurses at Hines VA, 16 years ago I was there, an Open-Heart patient, defective aortic valve replacement. Five days after surgery almost ready to go home, I died, my husband and daughter were in my room. I was reopened, and spent 12 minutes getting back into surgery, they told my husband I probably wouldn't know him, generally with that much time it causes extensive damage. Father God protected me through it all, I didn't lose memory, I recovered quickly, and the staff at Hines always welcomes me when I visit with hugs and cheers, 16 years!

It is an honor to lift others up and Romans 8:26-27 pretty much sums up because I don't know how to pray, and thankfully the Holy Spirit does and is merciful, gracious and loving. I can lean on Him and rest in His peace knowing I am where I am supposed to be.

Semper Fi



District 19 President Vicky Cobbett and Department Auxiliary President Diane Ahrens, who both served in the United States Marine Corps, attend the Marine Corps Ball.

FROM THE SENIOR VICE



Rob Bailey
Senior Vice Commander
Department of Illinois VFW

As we enter this holiday season, I want to extend warm wishes and heartfelt gratitude to each of you for your continued support of our fellow veterans and for the service you've given our nation. Whether you're actively involved or supporting from a distance, your membership matters. Together, we carry forward the VFW's mission—serving veterans, supporting our families, and strengthening our community.

For many, the holidays bring joy and togetherness. For others, this season can be difficult. This time of year reminds us of the importance of family, friendship, and the bonds we share as veterans. Whether you are celebrating close to home or far away, know that you are part of a community that values you and stands with you. We must remember the strength of our VFW family, one built on service, sacrifice, and the unbreakable bonds formed in the defense of our nation.

If you or a fellow veteran needs support—whether it's a ride, a conversation, or assistance of any kind—please reach out. No comrade should face the holidays alone. Your comrades are here, ready to walk beside you. Lean on each other, and on the strength that got you through far tougher days. No matter where you are or what this season looks like for you, remember this: You are valued. You are needed. And you are never alone.

Our shared experiences—across generations, wars, and branches—bind us together in a way few others understand. New opportunities, new connections, and new moments of purpose are waiting for all of us in the coming year. Together, we will continue to serve, support, and strengthen one another.

As we close out the year and look forward to the next, I want to thank you for your dedication to our mission. Your work in your posts, your service in your communities, and your commitment to supporting veterans and their families keep our organization strong and moving forward. Every event you organize, every veteran you assist, and every hour you volunteer matters more than you know. Let this season be a reminder of hope, renewal, and the power of unity. Together, we will continue building a stronger foundation for the year ahead—one that honors our past, supports our present, and inspires our future.

Thank you for your service, resilience, and the heart you bring to the VFW. May this holiday season bring you comfort, hope, and renewed energy for the year ahead.

AUXILIARY MEMBERSHIP



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



Happy Holidays from your Sprinkle Squad!

As we roll into the end of another calendar year, it is important to keep our members engaged, informed, recognized, and involved in events.

Here are a few helpful tips to guide you:

- **Welcome New Members:** Recognize new and reinstated members by name (and photo, if available) to make them feel appreciated and part of the “Auxiliary family”.
 - **Calendar of Events:** Clearly list upcoming meeting dates and times, as well as future programs, projects, and fundraisers in newsletters & on social media sites.
 - **Auxiliary in Action (Completed Projects):** Boast about the successes of past projects and events with descriptions and photos. This showcases the impact of members’ efforts and the value of their membership.
 - **Program Spotlights:** Educate members about National and Department Programs (e.g., Hospital, Legislative, Scholarships, Veterans & Family Support). Explain the purpose and importance behind each, and include ideas for members to get involved, even those who don’t attend meetings.
 - **Membership Corner:**
 - **Dues Reminders:** Gently remind members about dues payment deadlines.
 - **Recruitment/Retention Ideas:** Share tips for inviting new members and engaging existing ones. Mention available awards for recruitment efforts.
 - **“Why I Joined” Stories:** Feature a brief story from a member about why they joined to inspire others.
 - **Legislative Updates:** Keep members up-to-date on important legislative concerns impacting veterans and their families, and suggest ways they can advocate, such as sending thank-you notes to legislators who supported key bills.
 - **Member Recognition/Personal News:**
 - Acknowledge personal milestones like anniversaries or birthdays.
 - Inform members about those who are ill or need “Thinking of You” cards.
 - **Veteran Benefits Information:** Offer and educate veterans and their families about available benefits and who they may contact for assistance.
 - **Lighthearted Elements:** Include a funny moment, an inspirational quote, or words of encouragement.
 - **Contact Information:** Always provide contact details for local and national VFW Auxiliary contacts and website information.
- Best Practices**
- **Be Creative and Visually Appealing:** Use photos from events to make the newsletter engaging.
 - **Use Templates:** Leverage available newsletter templates to ensure a professional look.
 - **Vary your delivery methods:** Send the newsletter via email or physical mail to reach all members.
 - **Encourage Interaction:** Invite members to submit questions, ideas, or photos to foster a sense of community.

- Promote National Resources: Direct members to the national website and e-newsletter for more information.

New Membership application form will be effective starting Jan. 1, submissions to Department. National has updated the application correcting Section D -- removing the second box asking for the VFW member's membership ID. Your District Presidents would be a good source for the details. You can reach out to Katie Makey or myself for more information.

Illinois, you have grown our membership across the state another 27 new members since Oct. 2 to 155 through Nov. 1. That is a 30.7 percent increase of new members since Oct. 2. This is a shout out to the top three districts in growth. District 5 and District 19 with 18 new members this year. District 12 at 17 new members. Way to GO!!!!

We see you are continuing to sprinkle and renew your members. Currently we have 80 auxiliaries across the state at 90 percent or above. That is 62 percent of our Auxiliaries. We have 50 auxiliaries at 95 percent or above. Currently we have 21 percent (27 of our auxiliaries) at 100 percent or above. Keep it up!!!

The Membership Wheel was not at the October Council meeting, but the goals as defined in the program book remain with a lot of opportunity to spin and win at February Council. The milestones we are tracking is 95 percent by Nov. 12 and then 100 percent by Dec. 31.

Let's continue and grow our membership and collect our dues to ensure our ability to ensure Life remains Sweet Serving our Veterans in our communities.

AUXILIARY LEGISLATIVE



Kathy Rowold
Legislative Chairperson
Department of Illinois VFW
Auxiliary



VFW Action Corps Weekly Needs You!

One of our main legislative goals this year is to grow VFW Action Corps Weekly in both subscribers AND action takers to increase our voice on Capitol Hill. July reports show Illinois has over 20,000 subscribers but only 90 subscribers taking action when receiving alerts to contact their legislators – that is less than 1%!!

Action Corps Weekly is not just a newsletter – it is a call to action! Action alerts notify you when your voice is needed. These alerts guide you on how and when to contact your legislators – and the email is written for you and automatically identifies and messages your representative based on the address you enter in the website. Communicating with your representative is your voice in DC!

If you are already a subscriber, please also become an ACTION taker. If you are both – thank you – please encourage your fellow veterans, family members, and friends to also subscribe – being a veteran or auxiliary member is not a requirement – showing our support for our veterans IS a requirement!

Sign up today by visiting vfw.org/JoinActionCorps, texting “VFW” to 50457 or scanning the QR code below. Your support AND ACTION is appreciated!



Attendees at the ribbon cutting ceremony at the Illinois Veterans Home at Quincy, marking the opening of the newly constructed campus for the 139-year-old home.

Honoring Service with a New Standard of Care

Grand Opening of the Illinois Veterans Home at Quincy

By Doug Jameson
Department of Illinois VFW State Surgeon

On a crisp autumn morning in Quincy, Illinois, the state's oldest and largest veterans home marked a new chapter in its 139-year history.

State VFW Commander Eugene Blackwell joined Governor JB Pritzker in a ribbon-cutting ceremony, while VFW State Surgeon Doug Jameson, and VFW Auxiliary President Diane Ahrens looked on with local, state, and community leaders to celebrate the grand opening of the newly rebuilt Illinois Veterans Home at Quincy—a nearly \$300 million investment in veteran care and dignity.

The ceremony was a moment of pride and reflection. Gov. Pritzker addressed the crowd, stating, "This facility represents far more than

bricks and mortar. It is a promise kept—a promise of care for those who have served our nation with courage, sacrifice, and devotion." His words echoed the sentiment shared by all in attendance: that veterans deserve not only gratitude, but world-class care.

The new campus includes a 260,000-square-foot long-term care building and an 80,000-square-foot independent living residence, designed to support up to 467 residents and staffed by 417 professionals. The domiciliary, which welcomed its first residents in January, offers 88 private studio and one-bedroom apartments—some large enough to accommodate spouses and children. The long-term care building, opened in September, features private rooms and bathrooms for 210 residents, with amenities such as fireplaces, televisions, and a pub for social gatherings.

"This is a historic moment for Illinois veterans in our care. These stunning buildings are well equipped to meet the range of care the Home provides and are designed to elevate the veterans' quality of life with gracious living, outdoor, and gathering spaces," said IDVA Director Prince. "Additionally, this project invests in our extraordinary staff – giving them a world-class environment to provide care and practice their craft. We are grateful for Governor Pritzker's support, the work of the Capital Development Board, and finally, our incredible partners on the construction team for creating this magnificent home."

The Capital Development Board (CDB) oversaw the successful delivery of the design-build project at the Illinois Veterans' Home at Quincy, working in partnership with the joint venture team of Veterans United Constructors, Alberici, and River City Construction.

Seven outdated buildings were demolished, and the historic Neilson Dining Facility was fully renovated to include multi-purpose spaces, administrative offices, and stores. A unique underground tunnel system now handles laundry, mechanical operations, and meal preparation – keeping behind-the-scenes activity discreet and efficient. Founded in 1886 as the Soldier and Sailor's Home, the Illinois Veterans' Home at Quincy is the oldest and largest Illinois Veteran home.

This transformation was made possible through the Rebuild Illinois capital program and the dedicated work of union labor, veteran-owned, minority-owned, and women-owned businesses. As Governor Pritzker noted, "This new home at Quincy honors their service with state-of-the-art facilities that prioritize dignity, safety, and community."

"This veterans home has been in the dream and the minds of people for years. And to come here and see it actually open and people living here, it's just been an amazing day. We're going to be famous across the nation today," said Director of Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs Terry Prince. "And always, there's an example that we're showing of what we're doing for Illinois Veterans and their families,





offering them this opportunity to have a place for care that far exceeds anything they would find in other places around the community.”

Illinois Veterans Homes: Eligibility and Application

The Illinois Department of Veteran Affairs operates five state veterans homes in Quincy, Anna, Chicago, LaSalle, and Manteno. All these facilities offer domiciliary (independent living) options while only Quincy and Anna offer skilled nursing care.

Eligibility includes:

- Veterans who served during wartime (priority given)
- Peacetime veterans
- Spouses and surviving spouses of eligible veterans
- Gold Star parents

Applicants must meet medical and residency requirements. Each home provides a unique environment tailored to the needs of its residents.

To apply:

- Download the application from the Illinois Department of Veterans’ Affairs website
- Contact your local Veteran Service Officer for assistance
- Submit completed forms to the home of your choice

“This home is a testament to what we can accomplish when we put veterans first,” said Pritzker. “It’s a place of healing, community, and honor.”

With this grand opening, Illinois sets a new national benchmark for veterans’ care—one built not just on infrastructure, but on compassion, respect, and enduring gratitude.



The Department of Illinois Auxiliary welcomes National Auxiliary President Lois Callahan to Illinois.

National Auxiliary President Makes Official Visit to Land of Lincoln

October brought a special kind of warmth to our Auxiliary family as we welcomed National President Lois Callahan for a memorable visit that spanned four VFW Posts across Illinois.

Highlights from Her Visit:

- President Lois connected with members at four different Posts - VFW Posts 2298 West Dundee, 7448 Winthrop Harbor, 4308 Lake Villa and 6791 West Chicago, sharing her passion and gratitude for their service. A special visit to Fisher House 100 for a donation presentation. The Auxiliary also visited Operation Sweet Life in Elgin.

- A festive dinner brought together Auxiliary members and guests for an evening of fellowship and inspiration.

- Friday's outing included a cheerful shopping trip to a local cheese shop—laughter and camaraderie filled the air!





Auxiliary members line up to present the Aisle of Flags to commemorate the official visit of National Auxiliary President Lois Callahan to Illinois.

A Message of Heartfelt Leadership:

Throughout her visit, President Lois shared thoughtful ideas and uplifting stories that reflected her deep commitment to Veterans. Her actions spoke volumes, reminding us all why we serve and how we can continue to make a difference.

Captured Moments & Lasting Memories:

From warm handshakes to shared smiles, every moment with President Lois was a reminder of the strength and unity within our organization. Her visit left us energized and proud to carry forward the mission of honoring Veterans and their families.





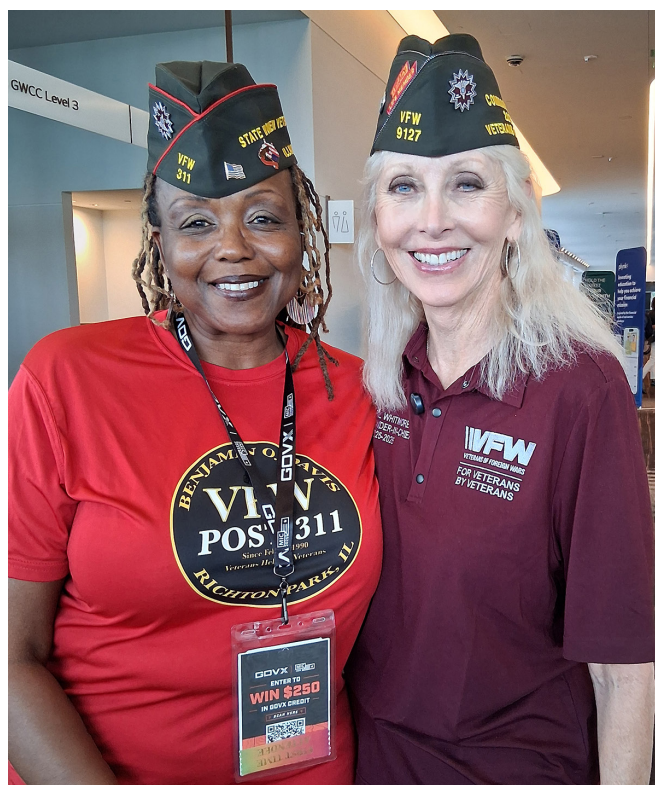
Historic Encounter at Military Influencer Conference

*By Nekohl C. Johnson
State Women's Chairperson
Department of Illinois VFW*

The 2025 Military Influencer Conference was an unforgettable experience that brought together veterans, leaders, and advocates from across the nation. It was a space filled with connection, collaboration, and empowerment — where service and storytelling met innovation and influence.

Among the many highlights of the conference was a moment of history in the making. I had the profound honor of meeting and connecting with the first woman ever appointed to serve as Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) of the United States.

Standing beside her was both humbling and inspiring. To see her leadership on full display — representing over a million veterans nationwide — was a powerful reminder that the VFW continues



to evolve while remaining steadfast in its mission: No one does more for veterans.

During her time at the conference, the Commander-in-Chief hosted a powerful panel discussion and shared insights about the future of veteran advocacy, service officer support, and the ongoing commitment to the POW/MIA mission. The VFW Department of Georgia also maintained a strong presence at the event, hosting an engaging booth, recruiting new members, and spreading awareness of our national programs and services.

For me personally, this moment reaffirmed why I serve through the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Our mission to support, empower, and honor all who have served reflects the strength and unity of our organization – past, present, and future.

The Military Influencer Conference reminded me that leadership comes in many forms – and that the next generation of veteran leaders, especially women, are not just watching history unfold; we are shaping it.

As the Commander-in-Chief said so perfectly: “For veterans, by veterans.”



Bloomington VFW Post 7539 members attend a dedication ceremony at St. Andrews Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Bloomington for all Veterans who served in the armed forces in all conflicts.



Elizabeth Costa-Bland and Rob Bland present a check to the National Home. Pictured left to right: State VFW Commander Eugene Blackwell, State Auxiliary President Diane Ahrens, District 6 Auxiliary President Elizabeth Costa-Bland, District 6 Commander Rob Bland, Buddy Poppy Child Lachlan and Executive Director Michael Wilson.

100th Centennial Celebration of the VFW National Home for Illinois Day

Rob Bland
*Commander, District 6
 Department of Illinois VFW*

The \$50 donation to the family home is an annual requirement for All State. For years my Post would pay for it and have the remembrance for the National Home in Eaton Rapids, MI during our meeting. Again, at the District meeting we would have our donations for the National Home and the remembrance. I became a Life Member of the National Home, because it seemed like

something I should do as a leader in my Post and at the District. I did not know what the impact of the Posts \$50 donation would be.

On September 20, 2025, it was Illinois Day at the National Home. This was the first year that my wife, Elizabeth Costa-Bland District 6 Auxiliary President, and I attended and it happened to be the Centennial year. We started off the day before with a scenic trip from Northern Illinois to Eaton Rapids. Friday evening attendees were invited to VFW Post 2406 in Charlotte. Besides great conversation and catching up with

fellow Veterans, it is an opportunity to meet new VFW members from across the State. The pork chops that were served for dinner were huge and delicious.

Saturday started off early with a memorial service at the Rose Hill Cemetery. The morning was slightly cool as the sun was rising to promise a warm sunny day. The State Chaplain Gary Holmes started with an opening prayer. It was followed by remarks from the State VFW Commander Eugene Blackwell and State Auxiliary President Diane Ahrens. The IL State National Home Chairperson Kyna Simpson told the story of Elgie Hanna. Elgie Hanna was a child resident of the National Home who joined the Army when he was old enough. He was killed in action in Southern Vietnam at the age of 19. The Assistant Sergeant at Arms Steve Noodwang played Taps and then the Auxiliary Chaplain Michael Maruszak gave the closing prayers.

After the closing prayers, it was time to start heading to the National Home. After checking in at the auditorium, we were able to take a tour of the campus and see the two Illinois houses. One of the houses was open, so we were able to tour it. This house was the first on their campus to have a wooden deck attached to it. A couple of years ago, the IL Auxiliary funded a playground. We saw it during the tour and were told that it was the most popular playground on site. With all of the different equipment to play on, it was easy to see why kids love it. We were able to see Tribute Park filled with tributes and memories in a peaceful setting that included a beautiful water feature and several donated statues. A quick visit to the newly renovated gift shop, allowed us to get National Home shirts, pins, coins and more.

At noon we all went back to the auditorium for lunch and then the program. The State leadership gave remarks and we received an update from the Executive Director Michael Wilson. He told us on where the National Home stands now and where he would like to see it go. He also discussed some of the programs that are available on site.

Heroes to Hives, a free program that in 9-months will teach service members how to keep honey bees as a hobby, business or as therapy.

Guitars for Veterans is another program that is offered, using the healing power of music to help Veterans with PTSD and other trauma. These are just a couple of the programs that are offered to



Elgie Hanna newspaper cut out from the VFW National Home Museum.

help Veterans and their families at the National Home.

It was then time for the parade of checks. I have seen the parade of checks at the State Convention- it is a sight to see, and so was the parade of checks at the National Home. The member of the Illinois delegation representing the State, Districts, Post, Auxiliaries and individuals donated a total of \$128,533.93.

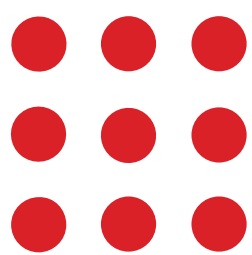
For those who have never been to the National Home, I recommend that you make a trip to Eaton Rapids Michigan to see what they are about. The remembrance that we have during meetings now has more depth and meaning for me and I am grateful that the VFW has this hugely impactful way to help Veterans in need.







Bloomington VFW Post 7539 just wrapped up its annual coat drive for Homeless Veterans. Jesse Brown VA in Chicago picked up the donations to be distributed to our homeless veterans. Donations totaled about 600 coats, hats, scarves, and sweaters, including a donation of 40 matching hats and scarves knitted by a woman in the village.



Veterans Crisis Line

DIAL 988 then PRESS 1



Waukegan VFW Post 1293 Hosts Back to School Books Bags Event

Waukegan VFW Post 1293 and Auxiliary held its annual back to school event on Sept. 14, supporting the students in the Waukegan district.

Each student had a blast selecting book bags, socks, warm gloves, then enjoying pizza, hot dogs and refreshments.



Post 3480 Feeds Community in Need

On Halloween, VFW Post 3480 in collaboration with Free Will Baptist Church of East St. Louis conducted a community service Buddy Poppy fundraiser.

To feed the community especially during a time when people are in need was a humbling experience. The community expressed their gratitude. Chili, hot dogs/bratwurst were provided and drinks.

Buddy Poppy Fundraiser was a success. We served in a controlled safe environment.



Dant Selected as Tazewell County's 2025 Veteran of the Year

Robert Dant, a member of East Peoria Post 2078, was recently selected as the Tazewell County 2025 Veteran of the Year.

Dant, who joined the VFW in 1999, is serving as the Post's three-year trustee.

In addition to the VFW, he is also a member of AMVETS and has been Post Commander and District Commander. He served as State Commander 2002-2003, State Service Foundation President 2003-2004, National Saddest Sacks 2004-2005.

He is currently a member of the State Service Foundation and serves as the Health Care Facility President.

He was a member of the Illinois Veterans Home - Quincy Advisory Board for ten years and served two years as Advisory Board President. He was the VAVS representative to the VAMC Peoria Outpatient Clinic for many years representing AMVETS. Locally he continues to serve AMVETS Post 169 as senior vice commander and has been the membership chairman for twenty-five years. He is the Post secretary and judge advocate. For the Board, he is the vice president and secretary. He is also the maintenance director at the Post.

He is an organizing member and president of the AMVETS Riders Chapter 169. He was the chairman of the Agent Orange Ride for many years with the proceeds of the ride going to scholarships for children and grandchildren of veterans.

He is part of the Central Illinois Vets for Vets Ride, a 501c3 motorcycle group, serving as secretary and judge advocate. Beneficiaries of this ride are several local veteran organizations including the TACT team, Fuller Center, Freedom Paws, Wreaths Across America, among others.

He serves as the vice president of the Tazewell County Veterans Assistance Commission.

He volunteers with the Illinois Valley Fuller Center, working on over fifty projects. This group



From left, Post 2078 Junior Vice Commander George Herman, Robert Dant, Tazewell County's 2025 Veteran of the Year, and Post Commander Jack Harvey, Jr.

consists of veterans repairing other veterans' homes.

He has participated in over 300 missions with the Patriot Guard Riders providing flag lines and escorts for veterans' funerals and other special occasions.

He has participated in the Veterans Last Call, an annual ride that visits veterans in local nursing homes.

He participates in the flag lines at the Honor Flight Welcome Homes. He has gone as a guardian for a WW II veteran and has gone as a veteran himself.

He participates in cooking annually at the Goodwill Home for Veterans.

He assists with fundraising for Wreaths Across America. He leads the escort in December for the semi delivering the wreaths to Pekin. He assists with laying the wreaths in December, then collecting and disposing of them in March.

In his spare time, he helps his wife take care of his mother-in-law.



City of Belleville, VFW Post 1739 Recognize VFW 125th Anniversary with naming of “Honorary Veterans Memorial Square” and Dedication of a Permanent Marker

On Sept. 29, the City of Belleville, in partnership with Belleville VFW Post 1739, marked the VFW 125th Anniversary of the Veterans of Foreign Wars’ founding with dedication of a bronze plaque recognizing the naming of Public Square to “Honorary Veterans Memorial Square”.

This significant event marks a lasting tribute to the men and women who have served in the United States Armed Forces; reflecting the community’s deep appreciation for their sacrifices and service.

The honorary naming of the Square is fitting as it includes the Veterans Memorial Fountain, monuments dedicated to Belleville’s past armed services members, and is bordered by the office of the Veterans Assistance Commission of St. Clair County.

A dedication ceremony and placement of the plaque recognizing Honorary Veterans Memorial Square brought together local officials,

veterans, families, and residents to celebrate the transformation of the city square. Lachelle Stevenson, Commander of Post 1739 was the Master of Ceremonies, and the event featured remarks by the City of Belleville Mayor Jenny Gain-Meyer and John Lawson, immediate Past All-American Post 1739 Commander.

The event culminates a two-year effort originating with past All-American Post Commander Doug Jameson (later serving as Post 1739’s 125th VFW Anniversary Committee Team Leader) and City Alderpersons Mary Stiehl, Kent Randle, and Johnnie Anthony (also a member of Post 1739); where first a Resolution of the City Council was adopted by the City of Belleville under former Mayor Patty Gregory to “proclaim September 29 as VFW Day in honor of the VFW’s invaluable contributions to the veteran community in Belleville and around the world.

We hereby stand with the VFW to ensure 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." A permanent bronze marker was later added and coordinated between the Post and then City Clerk Jenny Gain-Meyer. Approved use of the VFW 125th Anniversary emblem was obtained from VFW National HQ.

The new plaque was installed on August 28, 2025, alongside the refinished Historic Site plaque by the St. Clair County Historical Society on the southeast quadrant of the Honorary Veterans Memorial Square. The new plaque reads: "Honorary Veterans Memorial Square: A tribute to our Armed Forces Veterans who have defended

the United States of America. In recognition of the 125th Anniversary of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and in partnership between Belleville VFW Post 1739 and the City of Belleville."

VFW Post 1739 was chartered on January 14, 1939 with 119 veterans. The post has been a part of the Belleville community ever since, serving and fostering a greater understanding of the sacrifices made by our service members.

By dedicating Belleville Public Square as Honorary Veterans Memorial Square it is a promise to preserve the legacy of our heroes for years to come. Residents and visitors alike are encouraged to use this space to honor our veterans and participate in events hosted by VFW Post 1739.





Gold Star 500 Rolls Through Illinois to Raise Money for Scholarships in Memory of Fallen







Memorial Dedicated at Oak Ridge Cemetery in Springfield to Honor Gold Star Families





HAPPY
holidays



*Wishing you the
most joyous of holiday
seasons and a
prosperous new year*

Department Commander
Eugene Blackwell

&

Department President
Diane Ahrens

and the officers of the Department of Illinois VFW
and Department of Illinois VFW Auxiliary