



VETERANS ASSISTANCE

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☐ **Veterans Assistance**

- **Military Assistance Program (MAP/UnMet Needs)**

- *Adopt a Unit*
- *UnMet Needs/Relief*
- *Sport Clip Help a Hero Scholarship*
https://webportalapp.com/sp/login/help_a_hero

- **Homeless Veterans (\$50 donation)**

- *Stand Down Participation*

- **National Home for Children (\$50 Donation)**

- **Student Veterans Liaison**

- **Claims and Benefits**

- **VFW Mental Wellness**

☐ **Support of VA Hospital or State Veterans Home**

- *Support of VA Hospital and CBOCs*
- *Support of IL Veterans Homes*

☐ **Buddy Poppy Drive**

MILITARY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (MAP)/UNMET NEEDS

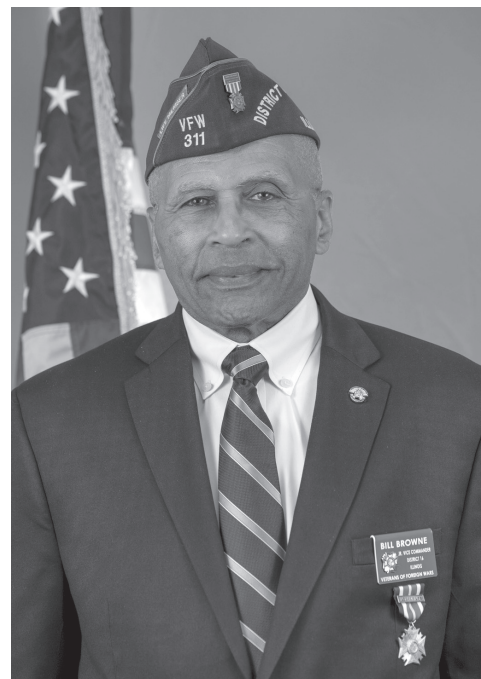
The Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) is in the forefront of patriotism as the organization and its members find innovative ways to show support for America's veterans and her armed forces. The VFW Veterans and Military Support Programs are designed to give support to veterans, soldiers and their families. The keystone of this program is the involvement of local Posts with the military family or unit. This is especially important now that deployments are winding down.

ADOPT-A-UNIT: The Adopt-A-Unit program was developed as a means to pledge VFW Post and Auxiliary support to the service members and families of a unit from the local military community. When a Post "adopts" a unit, they make a commitment to the service members and families through moral and emotional support before, during and after deployment. To Adopt-A-Unit, fill out the Application for Sponsorship and submit it to VFW National Headquarters. A Certificate of Adoption will be mailed to the Post in approximately four weeks. An annual report is required.

MAP GRANTS: The MAP Grant program is intended as financial assistance for Posts, Districts, and Departments to sponsor events for military units of the Active-Duty, National Guard, and Reserves. These events are most successful when local Posts interact directly with the military unit, involving National Certified Recruiters and Veterans Service Officers. A MAP Grant Application should be submitted to VFW National Headquarters a minimum of three weeks prior to the event. The application must be filled out completely, and include a signature by the Commander or Quartermaster, an itemized event budget, description of VFW involvement with the event, Federal Tax ID number, and IRS tax-exempt status.

UNMET NEEDS: This program was created to assist military service members and their families who are experiencing a financial hardship directly related to military service. The financial assistance is in the form of up to \$2,500 in grants that do not need to be repaid. All grants are paid directly to the "creditor" companies (such as the electric company), and not to the individual. Each case is reviewed individually and acceptance is determined by a committee. Since the program began in 2004, over 3,500 military families have been assisted and over \$4.8 million has been disbursed in aid.

Some cases need even more immediate attention. There are procedures now in place for the State Headquarters to assist families with urgent needs. The Department must verify eligibility, need and get pre-approval from the Veterans and Military Support Programs Department Director to ensure reimbursement. A completed application along with copies of checks and the applicant's bills must be submitted to State with the reimbursement request.



William Browne
Chairman

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Post 311-16

VFW Unmet Needs also proudly stands ready to assist our service men and women when they are burdened by circumstances out of their control after state-declared natural disasters such as tornadoes, hurricanes, fires or floods. Service members must have served on active duty within the past 36-months and complete a one-page application. Assistance is limited to natural disasters which have damaged or forced the service member to vacate their primary residence. One time grants for \$300 or \$500 are available.

VFW's Sport Clips Help-A-Hero Scholarship: This program will provide scholarships of up to \$5,000 to help our veterans complete their educational goals. Contact HelpAHero@vfw.org with questions. Applications are available only at www.vfw.org/Scholarship. Eligibility requirements include:

- Active duty, retired or honorably discharged or a member of the National Guard/Reserves;
- Military rank E-5 or below;
- Demonstrate a need for financial assistance;
- Participate in, be accepted to or currently enrolled in a VA approved program or school

Applications for the Help-A-Hero Scholarship can be submitted at https://webportalapp.com/sp/login/help_a_hero

DONATIONS are needed for all these programs and VFW National Headquarters is encouraging Posts to donate to Veterans and Military Support Programs. Posts giving \$100 or more will receive a certificate of recognition. All Posts must donate a minimum of \$50.00 to the VFW Department Headquarters for the Military Assistance Program in order to receive credit on the State Dashboard.

Please remember the objective of all Veterans and Military Support Programs initiatives is to increase awareness of the VFW. This does not end when the troops re-deploy home. They and their families continue to need our backing and assistance.

Make them welcome in your posts. They are the future of our organization!

HOMELESS VETERANS PROGRAM

Homeless veterans are fast becoming a major portion of our “street people”. Vietnam veterans make up a lot of these street people and Desert Storm veterans are not far behind. Women make up one-tenth of the armed forces. One in every 10 homeless veterans on the street is a woman veteran, many with children. This is becoming a big issue, because a lot of homeless veterans shelters don't have the facilities for women veterans, much less for the children. We are working on that problem.

We need to identify and help these veterans with food, clothing, and support such as Stand Downs, shelters, and Vet Centers with medical and group therapy. We need to support stand-downs that are conducted within our areas. Stand Downs might seem like short term solutions, but it shows our veterans we care. It gives them some dignity and compassion, which is things they don't get too often and things that we take for granted.

We have to go out in our neighborhoods to feed and clothe our veterans, not just on holidays, but everyday. These veterans are our other M.I.A.'s (Missing in America)! You know where they are in your area; a minute or two of conversation and a smile works wonders.

All Posts are reminded that in order to receive credit on the Department dashboard, they must send in a minimum \$50 cash donation to the VFW State Headquarters. You can also donate with a credit or debit card on the department's website at www.vfwil.org.

All Post Commanders or Homeless Veterans Chairmen need to keep track of all monies, clothing, food cards, backpacks, or items you spend on the homeless program. Please keep track of your hours, miles, and all items so they can be added up for the end of our reporting period.

Contact your local V.A. Hospital, Outreach Clinic, or your local Vet Center and ask what you can do. I go out in the streets every week, so if you have any questions, call me. Remember, we need to embody our Commander's motto:

Serving Our Community With Resilience



Paul Bezazian
Chairman

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Post 8322-3

NATIONAL HOME FOR CHILDREN



Kyna Simpson
Chairman

720 Carnation Ln
Matteson, IL 60443
Phone: (708) 977-5083

E-mail: fog4kat@me.com

Post 311-16

Line is staffed Monday-Friday 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. by caring professionals who can provide information and connections for services wherever needed in the United States. The help line can also serve as the first step to living in the National Home community.

Funding: The VFW National Home receives no government funding. The Home is funded solely through donations.

Governed by: The National Home is governed by a 17 member Board of Trustees - 12 are elected, 5 are ex officio members (including the VFW Commander-in-Chief, Adjutant General, Quartermaster General, VFW Auxiliary National President and National Secretary-Treasurer).

Illinois Day at the National Home is Saturday, September 20, 2025

History: The Veterans of Foreign Wars established The National Home for Children in 1925 to care for the children and families of World War I veterans. The home has grown through the years and now also provides care for our nation's Iraq and Afghanistan veterans and their families as well.

Mission: For families touched by the stresses of deployment and war, it can be difficult to provide a safe and loving home...perhaps a mother struggles to financially provide for her family or a father needs to work through the things he saw and dealt with while serving in Iraq or Afghanistan. The children might not be doing well in school and need a caring adult to monitor and guide them. The National Home offers struggling military and veterans families a chance to heal and grow, a chance to work on moving forward.

Families in Residence: The families living at our National Home have a chance to rebuild their lives. They are able to receive case management services, on site licensed child care, life skills training, and other services designed to help them heal and grow.

Facilities: The VFW National Home is located in Eaton Rapids, Michigan and has 42 single family homes on 629 acres. There are playgrounds, a community center, a licensed daycare facility, recreational areas, a guest lodge, chapel and an administrative building. Our VFW Department of Illinois sponsors 2 homes - Illinois #1 and Illinois #2.

Helpline: (800) 313-4200: Dedication and service to veterans, active duty members and their families goes beyond the campus through the Military and Veteran Family Help Line at (800) 313-4200. The Help

Program Credit

*****Requirements for Program Credit*****

In order to receive credit for participating in our National Home Program, you must complete your project and report it on Programs Reporting fo credit on the Dashboard. A minimum of \$50.00 is required. For example, your monetary donations may be earmarked for a specific purpose or to the National Home's General Fund; also you may purchase life memberships or commemorative bricks for example. Please note, it is recommended that donations be sent through Illinois VFW Headquarters. Indicate your Post Number on your check. You must submit a program report to receive credit.

This donation can be sent to State HQ and marked as National Home to get credit on dashboard. If you send a donation direct to the National Home that is \$50 or greater, send proof of the donation to State HQ and you will get credit on dashboard.

Awards

The top three Posts with the most dollars donated will each receive a beautifully engraved plaque. Citations will be awarded to all Districts that are 100 percent reported by April 30, 2026.

Address

The VFW National Home for Children
3573 S. Waverly Rd.
Eaton Rapids, MI 48827
Phone: (800) 424-8360 • Fax: (517) 663-3727
Email: info@vfwnationalhome.org

Remember - No One Does More For Veterans

STUDENT VETERANS LIAISON



Georges Sanon
Chairman

20 Corinth Ct.
Tinley Park, IL 60477
Home: (708) 633-7625
Cell: (773) 350-7849

E-mail:
geosanon1@gmail.com

Post 311-16

Today's veterans can face any number of obstacles while furthering their education. That's why we've teamed up with Student Veterans of America (SVA), to be there for veterans while they pursue their education.

Together we're committed to ensuring our nation's veterans succeed in their educational pursuits, community service endeavors, careers and personal lives. Working side by side, SVA Chapters and VFW Posts can help our nation's veterans attain these goals.

The missions and purposes of both organizations share a great deal of synergy. SVA offers peer support for veterans transitioning back to civilian life and academia, frequently after serving one or more deployments overseas.

The VFW provides opportunities for camaraderie, community service and veterans advocacy to those who have honorably served in overseas conflicts. While SVA Chapters are unique among veterans groups with their location on campus, VFW Posts are located in the same communities off campus.

These two organizations can experience great and mutual success working together through several key avenues of cooperation:

Shared access to VFW Service Officers to help file disability claims

- Camaraderie, peer support and mentorship
- Cooperating on community and veterans service initiatives
- Conducting joint events, celebrations and recognition ceremonies
- Fellowship Opportunities
- Use of VFW facilities
- Pooling community connections for mutual benefit
- Combined effort on local, state and national advocacy efforts to attain the best possible outcomes for veterans
- Access to VFW's Help A Hero scholarships
- Direct help from VA education benefit specialists through VFW's 1 Student Veteran

With more than 6,200 VFW Posts and more than 1,500 SVA Chapters, there are many opportunities for cooperation and engagement. What are you waiting for? Find an SVA Chapter near you to get involved today.

CLAIMS AND BENEFITS ASSISTANCE

VA Claims & Separation Benefits

As the largest organization of combat veterans, we understand the frustrations that can arise when transitioning out of the military or filing a claim with the Department of Veterans Affairs. The claims process can be confusing and one that service members and veterans shouldn't try to navigate alone. That's why the VFW's National Veterans Service (NVS) was established to help all veterans, service members and their families.

NVS consists of a nationwide network of VFW Accredited Service Officers and Pre-Discharge Representatives who are experts in dealing with the VA and are the key to your success. Our cadre of highly-trained and professional advocates help veterans cut through bureaucratic red tape. VA reports veterans represented by the VFW have recouped more than \$9.7 billion in earned benefits, including \$1.4 billion in new claims in fiscal year 2020 alone.

VFW Accredited Service Officers are trained experts, helping veterans develop their case with ease by reviewing and applying current law, pertinent legislation, regulations and medical histories. As skilled professionals, we assist in filing for disability compensation, rehabilitation and education programs, pension and death benefits, and employment and training programs. Furthermore, we won't hesitate to request hearings before the VA and the Board of Veterans Appeals to present oral arguments when needed.

VFW Accredited Service Officers are with America's veterans every step of the way once they're ready to file a claim. This is a service the VFW is proud to offer -- free of charge -- to anyone seeking assistance with the claims process.

For information about the Illinois VFW Service Office, contact the VFW State Service Office at (312) 980-4284, State Service Office Director Sean Conner or Dick Taylor at the Illiana Health Care System, Danville VAMC, Bldg. 98, Room 1012, 1900 E. Main St., Danville, IL 61832, at (217) 554-4502, or Zach Brooks at the Marion VA Medical Center, AmVets Bldg., Room 103, 2401 W. Main St, Marion, IL 62959, at (618) 997-5311 ext. 158230.

VFW MENTAL WELLNESS

The purpose of the VFW Mental Wellness project is to educate VFW and VFW Auxiliary members, veterans and communities about the important topic of mental health and wellness, and offer proven tools to intervene on behalf of veterans in crisis.

In order to help bring this complex set of issues to light for our members, veterans, the military and our communities, it is essential that the VFW and VFW Auxiliary work hand-in-hand on every level to bring the needed awareness and education to everyone.

Mental health issues for veterans and the military community are complex, often unseen, and affect more than just the service member or veteran. With 1.6 million members, the VFW and VFW Auxiliary are uniquely positioned to offer the support and educational base camp in more than 6,000 communities nationwide.

Here are some ideas of activities that will earn credit on the Dashboard for Veterans Assistance - Mental Wellness. This list is not all inclusive and Posts/Districts are asked to coordinate with facilities in your area and inquire on their specific needs.

- Volunteer at your local Vet Center with support groups or peer to peer counseling
- Volunteer or donate to veterans PTSD programs like Road Home at Rush
- Volunteer or donate at veterans retreats like Moraine R&R
- Volunteer or donate to organizations that provides service dogs
- Volunteer or donate to specialty programs like equestrian programs
- Assist a comrade in distress to seek help

Join VFW in opening our hearts, homes and Posts to those who defended our freedoms. Program Goals

- Build partnerships to serve the needs of service members, veterans, and families suffering from invisible injuries
- Provide training and resources to VFW personnel who provide direct services to veterans
- Create templates for VFW Posts and Departments to raise awareness and host community-based events
- Offer opportunities for VFW members to share experiences and leverage partner resources
- Contribute to research efforts that advance the dialogue on brain health and foster the development of new evidence-based treatments
- Advocate for federal legislation to improve access to mental health care and transitional benefits

Know the Five Signs of Emotional Suffering

- Personality Change: Sudden or gradual changes in the way someone typically behaves.
- Agitation: When someone seems uncharacteristically angry, anxious, agitated, or moody.
- Withdrawal: Withdrawn or isolated from other people; pulling away from family and friends.
- Poor Self-Care: Has stopped taking care of themselves and may engage in risky behavior.
- Hopelessness: Seems overcome with hopelessness and overwhelmed by their circumstances.

If you recognize that someone in your life is suffering,
CONNECT, REACH OUT, INSPIRE HOPE, and OFFER HELP!

Resources

Veterans Crisis Line 1.800.273.TALK (8255)
www.veteranscrisisline.net

Give an Hour providers www.giveanhour.org
Click on "Search for a Provider"

Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) www.samhsa.gov
1.800.622.HELP (4357)

Patients Like Me online network www.patientslikeme.com

VA Health Care 1.877.222.VETS (8387)
www.va.gov/health

PTSD Coach Online Apps www.ptsd.va.gov/PTSD/apps/ptsd-coachonline

Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health & Traumatic Brain Injury www.dcoe.mil

VA Vet Center Program www.vetcenter.va.gov/

National Suicide Prevention Hotline - 988

HOSPITAL/VAVS PROGRAM

You will notice a major change to the Hospital/VAVS Program. There is not a separate Hospital/VAVS Chairperson this year. All of the programs under Hospital/VAVS are under the duties of the State Surgeon. State Commander Eugene Blackwell's theme "*Serving Our Community With Resilience*" should remind each of us to take a good hard look at the Veterans of Foreign Wars Hospital & VAVS Program. Veterans in VA Hospitals, Veterans Homes, and Nursing facilities need our help because in many cases, they cannot help themselves. Hospitals may provide the medical treatment for veterans, but it's the volunteers that can help them cope with the daily routine.

Volunteers can provide that extra ray of sunshine or smile to those less fortunate. All veterans are not in Federal or State facilities; they can be confined to private facilities in the community or even at home. As volunteers, we provide that service to show the community that we care and have not forgotten the people that are less fortunate. Volunteers also provide valuable service to ensure that facilities are providing adequate care for our men and women.

Post/District Hospital Chairmen should coordinate with Directors of State Veterans and Community Health Care facilities to identify the activity the volunteers can provide for the Veterans. Hospital Chairmen ensure the volunteers are registered at our VA facilities and others to receive proper recognition. As Chairmen, he/she needs to include the responsibility for recruiting volunteers, maintaining records of hours served by the Post volunteer, and requesting appropriate certificates and/or pins from the State Hospital director.

If you are planning activities or visits at facilities and you would like a State Representative there, you can contact State Headquarters at 217-529-6688 or email vfwil@vfwil.org describing your activity or visit, with dates and times, and they will coordinate a State Representative with you. Remember as much advance time as possible is always helpful. If, during your visit, you encounter something that needs to be corrected, please bring this to our attention. Sometimes, we can help to change things...Not Always, but Sometimes.

The Hospital & VAVS Program starts July 1, 2025 and continues through June 30, 2026. Please use the Programs Reporting Form "online" to report the hospital work that you and members of your Post are involved in. Please report HOURS, DOLLARS AND MEMBERS keeping in mind that you can include the actual cost of items you purchased to donate to our various Hospitals and Nursing Facilities. Each year, Post and Districts lose valuable credit for their efforts because nobody takes the time to report. Convention awards will be determined based on reports received by April 30, 2026.

Here are some ideas of activities that will earn credit on the Dashboard for Support of VA Hospitals or State Veterans Homes. This list is not all inclusive and Posts/Districts are asked to coordinate with facilities in your area and inquire on their specific needs

Support to VA Hospitals or Community Outpatient Based Clinics (CBOCs)

- Provide transportation to veterans for VA Hospital visits
- Hospital Visits for hospitalized veterans
- Food or Clothing Donations for veterans
- Support Christmas activities with cards or gifts
- Support the Activity funds
- Volunteer to serve in VA Hospital

Support to IL Veterans Homes

- Visits to the residency and spend time with veterans
- Food or Clothing Donations for veterans
- Support Christmas activities with cards or gifts
- Support the Activity funds
- Volunteer to serve in VA Hospital
- Assist a veteran in applying for residency
- Host a picnic, bingo, or other event for residents

POST AWARDS

The "Top Post" in each membership category will receive a plaque.

Membership Category 1 - Up to 150 members
Membership Category 2 - 151 to 300 members
Membership Category 3 - 301 members and up

DISTRICT AWARDS

All Districts who achieve 100% in Post participation in the Hospital/VAVS Program by April 30th, 2026 will be awarded \$50.00 CASH to be used in the continuation of their Hospital/VAVS Program.

V.A. HOSPITALS

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. VA Illiana Health Care System
1900 E Main St.
Danville, IL 61832
Phone: (217) 554-3000 | 2. Hines VA. Medical Center
5000 S. 5th Ave.
Hines, IL 60141
Phone: (708) 202-8387
Fax: (708) 202-2246 |
| 3. Marion VA Medical Center
2401 W. Main St.
Marion, IL 62959
Phone: (618) 993-5311
Fax: (618) 993-4155 | 4. Capt. James A. Lovell Federal
Health Care Center
3001 Green Bay Road
North Chicago, IL 60064
Phone: (847) 688-1900 |
| 5. Jesse Brown VA Medical Center
820 S. Damen Ave.
Chicago, IL 60612
Phone: (312) 569-8387, Ext. 56109 | 6. St. Louis VA Medical Center
#1 Jefferson Barracks Drive
St. Louis, MO 63125
Phone: (314) 652-4100 |

VETERANS HOMES

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Illinois Veterans Home at Manteno
1 Veterans Dr.
Manteno, IL 60950
Phone: (815) 468-6581, Ext. 259 | 2. Illinois Veterans Home at Quincy
1707 N. 12th St
Quincy, IL 62301
Phone (217) 222-8641, Ext. 386 |
| 3. Illinois Veterans Home at LaSalle
1015 O'Connor Ave.
LaSalle, IL 61301
Phone: (815) 223-0303, Ext. 259 | 4. Illinois Veterans Home at Anna
792 N. Main St.
Anna, IL 62906
Phone: (618) 833-6302, Ext. 125 |
| 5. Illinois Veterans Home at Chicago
4250 N. Oak Park Ave.
Chicago, IL 60634
Phone: (773) 794-3763 | |

BUDDY POPPY DRIVE

Since 1922, the Buddy Poppy has been an integral part of the VFW community. As the VFW's official memorial flower, the poppy represents the blood shed by American service members. It reiterates that the VFW will not forget their sacrifices.

The poppy movement was inspired by Canadian Army Col. John McCrae's famous poem, "In Flanders Fields." Poppies were originally distributed by the Franco-American Children's League to benefit children in the devastated areas of France and Belgium following World War I.

Today, disabled veterans assemble poppies and the VFW pays them for their work. In most cases, this extra money provides additional income for the worker to pay for the little luxuries that make hospital life more tolerable.

Another reason poppies are so important is because all proceeds from distribution are used for veterans welfare or for the well-being of their needy dependents and the orphans of veterans.

More than 1,300 children of veterans have been, or are being cared for in the VFW National Home for Children in Eaton Rapids, Michigan, thanks to a portion of poppy funds.

PLAN TO SUCCEED

There are two critical components to conducting a successful campaign: planning and enthusiasm.

Planning ensures nothing will be left to chance and there will be plenty of poppies for distribution. The more enthusiasm you demonstrate, the greater your chances are of inspiring others to help make this year's campaign a true success.

Here are some important things to consider when preparing for your "Buddy"® Poppy distribution. Identify potential volunteers within your Post and Auxiliary and gather them together for an informational meeting explaining the purpose of the Buddy Poppy campaign.

Plan on each volunteer distributed 200 poppies. It sounds like a lot, but the right placement in the community, 200 will go fast.

Choose distribution dates. Memorial Day is always a popular time, but you can distribute this memorial flower throughout the year. Request from your Department headquarters an order form to purchase your poppies.

Multiply the number of volunteers by 200 and that's approximately how many poppies you should order. Be sure to place your order at least three months before your first distribution date.

Stake out key distribution venues in advance. Choose high traffic areas and determine the number of workers you need to cover the locations. Ideal locations include storefronts, office or factory entrances and recreational areas.

Make sure you get permission from the business owners before setting up shop.

Photocopy the Buddy Poppy flyer found in your Post's VFW Programs Chairmen's Guide (or order one from VFW Supply) and post it around town in key areas such as post offices, coffee shops or gas stations. It will let people know when and where they can get a Buddy Poppy.

If your town newspaper has a community calendar section, be sure to let the editor know about two weeks in advance that you'd like to place your poppy announcement in the calendar. Send a news release to let the media know about your campaign.

Encourage your volunteers to smile and be enthusiastic during the distribution. If they appear friendly, it will project a good image for the VFW. Furthermore, make sure they wear their VFW caps.

Remind your volunteers that they are not "selling" Buddy Poppies, but "distributing" them with the hope of getting donations. If you follow these simple steps, your Buddy Poppy campaign is sure to be a success.

ALTERNATE DISTRIBUTION

Many factors lead to poor Buddy Poppy distributions. Perhaps you live in a bustling city like Chicago or New York where folks aren't as eager to stop on the streets. Or maybe you live in a town with only 600 people and you'd be lucky to hand out 200 poppies in a week. Or perhaps your members are primarily older or in failing health and can't be out distributing.

If any of these sound familiar, perhaps you should work with the Auxiliary or try a different approach to handing out the poppies and raising funds for needy veterans. Below is a list of alternative methods for distributing Buddy Poppies:

Sell coat hanger wreaths made out of poppies. Use a child-size wire coat hanger and bend it into a circle. Straighten the hook to make a ground stake. Wind the stems of about 50 poppies around the wire to complete your wreath. Popular around Memorial Day.

Make a "Wall of Remembrance" at your Post. Patrons can request a poppy in honor of a loved one who has died. Their name gets placed on the wall with a poppy hanging next to it. Honorees' names can be typed on note cards with the poppies stapled to them.

Use poppies to make table centerpieces that can be raffled off at Post suppers.

Contact another civic organization in your community and ask if you can give a small presentation on the Buddy Poppy. Be sure to have plenty with you, as you'll likely get several "takers."

Set up a booth at county fairs, public forums and school events. Let your imagination and that of your volunteers guide you in distributing these beautiful red flowers.

WOMEN VETERANS



Nekohl Johnson
Chairman

Address is Private by
request
Home: (312) 708-7458

E-mail:
hello!@nekohl.com

Post 311-16

It is with deep gratitude and humility that I accept the role of Women Veterans Chairperson for the Department of Illinois. I am honored to serve in this capacity and follow in the footsteps of leaders who have championed the cause of women veterans with courage, vision, and heart.

I extend sincere thanks to Commander Eugene Blackwell (State of Illinois), Commander Bill Browne (District 16, State of Illinois), and Commander Aretha Spurlock (Benjamin O. Davis VFW Post 311) for your leadership, trust, and support as I step into this role.

As a wartime veteran, survivor, and advocate, my journey has shown me that healing and leadership are not separate paths—they are deeply connected. I believe in creating spaces where women veterans are seen, heard, and supported—not only for their military service, but for the full lives they lead beyond the uniform.

My mission as your chairperson is rooted in connection, healing, and empowerment is to amplify the voices of Illinois' women veterans, foster community and belonging, and build sustainable systems of care that prioritize mental health, leadership development, and whole-person wellness.

My vision is a VFW Department where women veterans:

- Are empowered through meaningful leadership opportunities
- Have access to trauma-informed wellness and peer support
- Connect across generations and branches in safe, inclusive environments
- Are recognized and celebrated—not just for their past service, but for their continued impact in our communities and organizations

In this term, I will focus on the following goals:

- Establishing statewide Women Veteran Leadership Circles—safe spaces for mentorship, healing, and shared advocacy

- Hosting quarterly Wholeness Workshops that integrate wellness, storytelling, and practical tools for post-service life
- Expanding outreach and engagement efforts to reach underrepresented and transitional women veterans
- Increasing membership, with an intentional focus on engaging younger veterans and welcoming them into our VFW family as we build for the future
- Welcoming family-inclusive events, programs, and resources that support not only veterans but also their spouses and children, recognizing that the strength of a veteran is often held together by the love of their family
- Collaborating with VFW programs and leadership to ensure gender-inclusive approaches across all services and initiatives
- Uplifting the visibility and leadership of women veterans in every post, district, and department activity

Together, we will continue to honor the legacy of those who served before us, while creating space for new leaders and families to thrive. Our strength is not only in our service—but in our stories, our sisterhood, and our shared commitment to healing and wholeness.

I look forward to walking this journey with you and welcome your voice, your leadership, and your presence.