

ILLINOIS

COMMANDER'S LEADERSHIP MANUAL



SERVING OUR COMMUNITY WITH RESILIENCE
EUGENE BLACKWELL, STATE COMMANDER, 2025-2026

NATIONAL COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF 2025-2026
Carol Whitmore
"FOR VETERANS - BY VETERANS"



YOU ARE THE LEADER

This book has been published to assist you and your Program Chairpersons during your term of office as the Post or District presiding officer. We have outlined all of our State VFW Programs and awards with words of encouragement from our State Commander Maurice Bridges.

As a District or Post leader, it is your responsibility to read this book carefully so you are aware of the contents of each program, especially the 2025-2026 Membership Program. You are asked to bring this book to each of your meetings so you can answer any questions which may come up regarding specific programs, program deadline dates and program awards. Remember, the Commander's Leadership Manual is available to all members. You are encouraged to share the contents of this book with all of your key people.

Make photocopies of each of the programs contained within the ***Serving Our Community With Resilience*** Manual so you can give each Program Chairperson a copy of his/ her program. Having this information at an early date will enable that person to start working on the program as soon as he/she receives the information. The Leadership Manual will be available online at <http://www.vfwil.org>. Check this site for updates to the Commander's Leadership Manual for any changes that have to be made. You will also be able to print out programs from the manual for distribution to your Program Chairperson.



STATE HEADQUARTERS

3300 Constitution Drive

Springfield, Illinois 62711

Phone: (217) 529-6688 • Fax: (217) 546-3415

E-mail: vfwil@vfwil.org • State Website: <http://www.vfwil.org>

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THE VFW 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.

The Mission Statement is a concise description of our intention—derived from the purpose—that guides our activities by providing focus; it enables us to establish priorities and make decision on what we should and should not be doing. It helps us to put our purpose into action. It also creates a sense of identity for our members and for the public. The Mission Statement describes what we do.

THE VFW 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.

The Vision Statement is what we want the future to look like. It is the target on which we align our Mission Statement. The Vision describes where we want to be someday.

THE VFW CORE VALUES

- Always put the interests of our members first
- Treat donors as partners in our cause
- Promote patriotism
- Honor military service
- Ensure the care of veterans and their families
- Serve our communities
- Promote a positive image of the VFW
- Respect the diversity of veteran opinions

Core Values are the principles of how we interact with each other and with our communities. They are a foundation for a healthy environment in our Posts, at our meetings, or anywhere in which we gather. They help to form the culture that we build in our Posts and Districts. Core Values are meant to shape where we work.

CONSTITUTION OF THE VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES SECTION 230102 - Purposes

The VFW Purpose

Per the Congressional Charter, the purposes of the corporation are fraternal, patriotic, historical, charitable, and educational, and are:

- (1) to preserve and strengthen comradeship among its members;
- (2) to assist worthy comrades;
- (3) to perpetuate the memory and history of our dead, and to assist their surviving spouses and orphans;
- (4) to maintain true allegiance to the Government of the United States, and fidelity to its Constitution and laws;
- (5) to foster true patriotism;
- (6) to maintain and extend the institutions of American freedom; and
- (7) to preserve and defend the United States from all enemies.

The Mission, Vision, and Core Values are all based upon the purpose of the VFW. Our purpose establishes why we exist.

Veterans of Foreign Wars Posts, just as individuals do, sometimes lose sight of their objectives. As individuals most of us take inventory now and then to make certain that we are staying on the track and heading toward our objectives. The good Veterans of Foreign Wars Post will follow this same practice to ascertain its current status.

STATE COMMANDER

Comrades,

Congratulations to all the newly elected and appointed officers for the 2025–2026 term of the Illinois Department of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. You have been chosen to lead—an honor that carries both responsibility and opportunity.

Leadership is the ability to influence and guide others toward achieving a common goal. It involves empowering individuals, motivating members, making sound decisions, fostering collaboration, and encouraging growth. A true leader not only sets the direction but also inspires others to follow, as we continue our mission of advocating for fellow Veterans through service, community engagement, and fellowship.

This will be the longest year—with the shortest days. You will be tested more than you can imagine, and it will not always be easy. Throughout this journey, let us commit to doing what is right, improving what needs attention, and preserving what already works well. Change should not be made for its own sake, but only when it brings real and lasting improvement. Membership remains vital to our existence and effectiveness—but it is not our only focus. My priorities for the year will center on three foundational pillars: Veteran Advocacy, Service Officers, and our POW/MIA Mission. These principles reflect the very foundation upon which our organization was built. They directly impact on Veterans and their families. Be the change for a fellow Veteran. Honor those who came before us. If we champion these core missions, we will generate renewed interest and attract more members.

Part of our mission requires resources. That's why I plan to revitalize and activate the VFW Illinois Foundation, transforming it into a reliable and functional support arm to strengthen our efforts. Over the years, we've lost valuable opportunities for sponsor support. By restoring confidence and purpose in our Foundation, we will better serve Illinois Veterans and their families.

Each of our programs matters. The key to their success—of course—is membership. We need committed individuals at the post and district levels to carry out these initiatives. One person cannot do it all. There is no "I" in team. It takes collaboration, communication, and shared purpose. There are many eligible Veterans throughout Illinois. Our job is to find them, recruit them, and retain them.

Use this Leadership Manual not just as a guide—but as a recruiting tool. Many people don't know the full scope of what the VFW offers. If a new member connects with even one program, you may gain a lifelong supporter. Familiarize yourself with our membership tools—and remember, by Serving Our Community With Resilience, your post will grow stronger and more vibrant.

And do not overlook the power of the VFW Auxiliary. They are a force multiplier—enhancing engagement, promoting teamwork, and increasing our reach and impact.

Let us step into 2025–2026 with our objectives clearly defined and our energy focused on the continued growth and strength of our organization.

God bless our Veterans. God bless the Illinois VFW. And God bless America.

And remember our theme for the year: "Serving Our Community With Resilience."



Eugene Blackwell
State Commander

3300 Constitution Drive
Springfield, IL 62791-3206

Business: (217) 529-6688
Fax: (217) 546-3415

E-mail: vfwil@vfwil.org
Website: www.vfwil.org

STATE ADJUTANT



Scott Swinford
State Adjutant

3300 Constitution Drive
Springfield, IL 62791-3206
Business: (217) 529-6688
Fax: (217) 546-3415
E-mail: vfwil@vfwil.org
Website: www.vfwil.org

Thank You to Commander Blackwell for the appointment as Adjutant. Congratulations to all the incoming District and Post Officers. I look forward to working with you all to make the Department of Illinois the very best we can be. Additionally, a big Thank you to all the outgoing officers for the foundation they have laid for their successors to achieve new goals.

This past year was a year of challenges for the Department, with a change in the Adjutant position mid-year, the closing of Posts and trying to help Posts who have been struggling. The latter is going to be the focus of Department Headquarters this coming year.

Our mission is to support and assist Posts and Districts in overcoming the challenges posed by the strict requirements set in the By-Laws and to work our Programs. The Headquarters' staff is committed to aiding Posts and Districts with "Serving our Community with Resilience".

We are continuing to make changes, we hope for the good, to the State Convention. The hope is that we are making for a more beneficial event for Posts and members by providing the education tools needed to execute our Programs and requirements and recognize their achievements and excellence. Any recommendations for changes or additions are encouraged and welcome. It is, after all, your convention.

Our Programs are make our organization what it is. We serve our communities and fellow veterans, support our youth, support legislation that supports and benefits veterans and recognize outstanding achievements in these areas.

We can't forget about membership; members accomplish our mission! Our goal for this year is 101%, a number which is attainable for every level. We lost over 1500 members last year to the unavoidable. We owe it to those members who served our Posts to continue their mission, to do that we must replenish our ranks. Without members we don't exist! Membership numbers have a direct bearing to our ability to help veterans and to influence legislation that is a benefit to all veterans. It directly affects the amount of money that each Post and State HQ receives in per capita membership payments.

I look forward to working with each and everyone of you to further our goal of "Serving our Community with Resilience". Thank you for being part of the Department team for 2025-2026.

CHIEF OF STAFF

"Serving Our Community with Resilience"

Greetings Comrades,

I hope you are well, able, and willing to tackle this year with the same tenacity as we have in the past.

Illinois has been doing great things in the Veterans sphere of influence and the VFW has been leading the way in much of it. I have no doubts that through our joint efforts across the state that the Department of Illinois will be a leader amongst its peers this year and for years to come.

I would like to thank Commander Blackwell for this appointment, many of you may be wondering why a Past State Commander would be a Chief of Staff, the answer is simple... I have no political aspirations to move up in the Department, as the Commanders right hand I can provide just, fair, and unbiased feedback on situations that may arise, and I am able to give that feedback with the unique perspective of having sat in the "hot seat" before.

I look forward to serving you, our Department and as the Commander's motto states, our community with resilience.



Robert Welch
Chief of Staff

4319 Whitehall Ln
Richton Park, IL 60471

Phone: (815) 549-9406

E-mail:
b.welch.vfwil@gmail.com

Post 2791-16

STATE INSPECTOR



Cathy Stubbs
Inspector

420 Stone River Rd
Belleville, IL 62221

Phone: 618-830-9142

Email:
CStubbsVFW@gmail.com

Post 7710-14

Congratulations to all the new Commanders and Quartermasters serving at the District and Post levels.

As stated in the National Manual of Procedures, ARTICLE V - DEPARTMENTS, Section 518: "The Department Inspector shall ensure that each District, County Council (if applicable), and Post are inspected in accordance with Department and National guidelines."

Those responsibilities and requirements are as follows but not limited to:

- Books and records are inspected.
- That the National, Department, District, County Council and Post by-laws be enforced.
- That the opening and closing of meetings, the order of business and rules of order be followed and the initiation of recruits and other ceremonies are conducted as prescribed by the by-laws, Manual of Procedure and Ritual.
- A report on the decorum of meetings.
- Submission of a detailed report concerning the Post or District finances, records and property at time of inspection.
- Make sure that the District and Post has filed it's 990 Form direct with the IRS.
- Ensure the District and Post is bonded in an amount sufficient to cover it's liquid assets.

These are the guidelines and procedures in addition to those items listed on the Post Inspection Forms that will be followed with all inspections. When notified of a scheduled inspection, please be sure that all necessary records are prepared, up to date and readily available for your inspector. There should be no reason for the absence of any record on the day of your inspection. Ensure all Trustee audits are filed on time.

Commanders and Quartermasters should ensure that their Posts are incorporated under the laws of the State of Illinois. This removes the members and the Post Officers from the liabilities and debts of the post in unforeseen litigation.

Adjutants at all levels should ensure that proof of eligibility for all officers, both elected and appointed is on file pursuant to Section 216. Ensure all Ceremonial Rifle Deeds of Gift, Storage Certification, Notarized Annual Utilization Certification and Tri-Annual Inventories are current and accurate in accordance with National VFW Policy and Instructions for Conditional Donation of Ceremonial Rifles, Ammunition & Military Equipment and U.S. Army AR 700-131, Chapter 6, Loan, Lease, and Donation of Army Materiel.

Trustees should pay particular attention to their duties prescribe in Section 218 of the National By-laws.

DISTRICT COMPENSATION AND INCENTIVE PROGRAM

Each District will be compensated at the time the District becomes 100 percent inspected and approved by the Department Inspector. If 100 percent completed by December 31, District will receive \$20 per Post. If 100 percent completed by April 30, District will receive \$10 per Post. District will receive no Compensation or Incentive if 100 percent complete after April 30.

STATE SERVICE OFFICE

The State of Illinois VFW Department Service Office is headquartered at the VA Regional Office in Chicago. The Department Service Office is organized under the authority of the Department By-Laws and provides services under the supervision of the Department Veterans Service Committee. All Service Officers employed by the VFW of Illinois are members of the VFW. All Service Officers and Claims Consultants are accredited by the VA through the VFW and perform their duties in accordance with the National Policy and Procedure Manual of the VFW National Veterans Service.

The mission of the Department Service Office is to assist all veterans of Illinois, their dependents, and their survivors in the pursuit of all benefits administered by the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to which they may be entitled. This mission is pursued through the development of supportive relationships with County Veteran Assistance Commission (VAC) Offices, Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs (IDVA) Offices, VA Social Workers, and a state-wide network of volunteer VFW Post and District Service Officers. From these sources claims for benefits are received, prepared, and submitted to the VA.

The Department Service Office is under the direction of the Department Service Officer, Sean D. Conner, an Iraq War Veteran. Currently, the Service Office staff includes four Assistant Department Service Officers, two working in Chicago, one stationed at the Marion VAMC, and one stationed at the Danville VAMC. We also have a part-time Assistant Department Service Officer in the Metro St Louis area. Field service coverage is also provided at various locations as indicated in the schedule listed below. The Regional Office staff includes one Claims Consultant and one clerical support staff member.

Activities of the Service Office staff include case management of claims submitted to the VA from all state-wide sources to include representation for appeals pending at the Board of Veterans Appeals. Staff members provide training to Post and District Service Officers and participate in training seminars for IDVA and VAC staff and local volunteers. The staff also provides guest speakers on issues pertaining to VA benefits to VFW Posts and Districts, local civic groups, military Reserve and National Guard units, and college student organizations upon request.

The hours of operation and contact information for the Department Service Office are listed below. Members with questions about existing claims or requesting information about VA benefits are encouraged to contact the Department Service Office during hours of operation or by e-mail.



**Sean Conner
and George**
State Service Officer

1900 E Main St
Bldg 98, Room 1012
Danville, IL 61832

Phone: 217-554-4502

Fax: 217-554-4361

E-mail: sean.conner@va.gov

Department Service Office Contact Information

VFW Service Office
2122 West Taylor St., Chicago, IL 60612
Room 105
Phone: 312-980-4284
Fax: 312-980-4680

Email: vso@vfwil.org
Website link: www.vfwilserviceoffice.com

Office Telephone Hours
Monday - Thursday
8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.
Friday 8 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Office Walk-In Hours
Monday - Thursday
8 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.
12:30 p.m. to 3 p.m.
Friday 8 a.m. to 12 p.m.

VFW Service Office Staff

Sean Conner
Marine Corps, Iraq
Director of Veterans Service
Danville VA Medical Center
sean.conner@va.gov

Zach Brooks
Army, Korea
Assistant Department Service Officer
Marion VA Medical Center
zachary.brooks3@va.gov

Russell Meredith
Navy, Iraq
Assistant Department Service Officer
Chicago Regional Office
russell.meredith@va.gov

Craig Koch
Marine Corps, Desert Storm
Assistant Department Service Officer
craig.koch@va.gov

Charles Johnson
Army, Iraq
Assistant Department Service Officer
Chicago Regional Office
charles.johnson5@va.gov

Grabiela Salgado
Claims Consultant/Office Manager
Chicago Regional Office
grabiela.salgado@va.gov

Dick Taylor
Navy, Iraq
Assistant Department Service Officer
Danville VA Medical Center
richard.taylor16@va.gov

Field Office/Outreach Locations

-Southern Illinois-

Marion VA Medical Center
AmVets Building, Room 110
2401 W. Main St.,
Marion, IL 62959
Phone: 618-997-5311 ext. 158230
FAX: 618-997-8219
Monday-Friday, 8:00 am - 3:00 pm

O'Fallon VFW Post 805
Every Tuesday
223 West 1st St.
O'Fallon, IL 62269
618-624-6575
11 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Metro East Vet Center
Every Wednesday
228 West Pointe Drive
Swansea, IL
8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

-Central Illinois-

Illiana Health Care System

Danville VA Medical Center
Bldg 104, Room 127
1900 E. Main St., Danville, IL 61832
Phone: 217-554-4502
FAX: 217-554-4361
Monday-Friday, 8:00 am – 3:00 pm

Mattoon VA Clinic

First Tuesday of the month
501 Lake Land Blvd., Mattoon IL
9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Dow Stepp Memorial Post 5975

First Thursday of the month
112 North 5th, Marshall, IL
9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Crawford County Post 4549

Second Tuesday of the month
712 E. Main St., Robinson, IL
9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Decatur VA Clinic

Second Thursday of the month
792 North Sunnyside Rd., Decatur, IL
9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Peoria VA Clinic

Third Tuesday of the month
7717 N Orange Prairie Rd., Peoria IL
9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Busey-Fletcher-Stillwell Post 630

Third Thursday of the month
1303 E. Main St., Urbana, IL
9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Bloomington VA Clinic

Fourth Tuesday of the month
207 Hamilton Rd, Bloomington IL
9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Springfield VA Clinic

Fourth Thursday of the month
5850 South 6th St., Springfield, IL
9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

-Chicagoland-

Hines VA Medical Center

Every Thursday & Third Friday of the month
5000 S. 5th Ave., Hines, IL 60141
Building 1, Room 109
Phone: 708-202-2562
9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Frisbie Senior Center

First Monday of the month
52 E. Northwest Hwy., Des Plaines, IL 60016
9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Judd Kendall Post 3873

First Tuesday of the month
908 Jackson Ave., Naperville, IL 60540
10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Benjamin O. Davis Post 311

Every Monday & Tuesday and First & Second
Wednesday of the month
(except 1st Monday & Tuesday)
22341 S. Governors Hwy., Richton Park, IL 60471
Phone: 708-679-0995
9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Chicago Vet Center

First Friday of the month
8658 S. Sacramento Ave., Chicago, IL 60652
9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Aurora Vet Center

Second & Fourth Friday of the month
750 Shoreline Dr. #150, Aurora, IL 60504
9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

MEMBERSHIP



Mathius Carter
Chairman

1113 Sagebrush Trail
Cary, IL 60013

Phone: (847) 404-2668

Email: mathius.carter@yahoo.com

Post 12014-5

2025-2026 Membership Program: Building a Stronger VFW Together

Department Membership Team (DMT) Mission:

The DMT is made up of all districts in the Department. Each District representative will be working with the Chairman throughout the year. The DMT is the vital bridge between our community and the VFW, serving as the welcoming face and primary point of contact for new and prospective members. We're dedicated to fostering growth and engagement within our ranks.

DMT Responsibilities:

Communication & Collaboration:

- Establish and maintain clear communication channels between DMT members, Post Commanders, and community leaders.
- Serve as a liaison, ensuring seamless information flow and collaborative efforts.

Community Engagement & Outreach:

- Proactively identify and pursue community outreach opportunities to raise awareness of the VFW's mission.
- Cultivate and strengthen relationships with local businesses, schools, municipal agencies, and other key stakeholders.

Reporting & Accountability:

- Provide regular and detailed reports of all membership activities to the Department Membership Chairman.

Post Level Support:

- Provide guidance and support to posts on new and reinstated member integration.
- Answer questions such as "What is your responsibility at the Post level?" and "You got a new/reinstated member, now what?"

New Member Integration Timeline: Turning Recruits into Engaged Members

Week 1: Welcome & Confirmation

- Contact the new member to confirm receipt of their VFW

membership ID.

- If yes: Congratulate them and extend a warm invitation to the next Post meeting for formal induction.
- If no: Verify the ID's status and follow up within 5 days.

Month 1: Building Connections

- Inquire about their first Post visit.
- If yes: Gather feedback and inform them about volunteer opportunities and upcoming events.
- If no: Schedule a personal meeting and highlight relevant community-focused events.
- Ensure they are receiving Post email updates and are engaged with Post social media.

Year 1: Celebrating Membership

- Solicit feedback on their first year in the VFW.
- Reinforce their value and importance to the organization.
- Provide them with their renewal date.
- Outline the benefits and purchase options for Life Membership.

Strategic Membership Drives: "Membership PUSH"

- Four times a year, Posts and Districts will participate in coordinated membership drives to maximize recruitment and engagement. These drives are designed to be cost-effective and community focused.

Patriots Day Push (September 11th Weekend):

- Engage in local Patriots Day events, such as presenting colors at high school football games.
- Utilize these events for recruitment and to reignite interest in the Post.

Veterans Day Push (November 11th Weekend):

- Leverage local media to share veterans' stories.
- Participate in parades and connect with new recruits.

Christmas Push:

- Promote Life and Legacy Memberships as meaningful gifts.
- Support local initiatives like Toys for Tots.

April Open House:

- Host a public event to showcase the VFW's contributions.
- Highlight programs like Patriots Pen/Voice of Democracy, Teacher of the Year, First Responder awards, and community service activities.
- Consider a community dinner.
- If you do not have a post home, work with other posts in the area, or find a community space.

Important Note: All membership activities should be documented in your monthly Activities Report. "One Team, One Mission!"

Membership Program Awards: Recognizing Excellence

- **101% Membership Achievement:** Posts achieving 101% membership receive a banner and entered into a \$200 drawing.
- **Top Recruiters:**

Top 10 recruiters receive a 2025-2026 Commanders Polo with Membership Team distinction.

- Top recruiter receives a 2025-2026 Commanders Polo with Membership Team Captain distinction.

District Recruitment:

- The District with the most recruiters (5+ recruits/reinstatements) receives a certificate from Commander.

Post Recruitment (by Division):

- The Post in each division with most recruiters (2+ recruits/reinstatements) receives a certificate from Commander.

Membership Divisions (Based on June 30, 2025 National Membership Report):

Division 1: 950+ members
Division 2: 750-950 members
Division 3: 356-749 members
Division 4: 246-355 members
Division 5: 185-245 members
Division 6: 143-184 members
Division 7: 112-142 members
Division 8: 88-111members
Division 9: 68-87 members
Division 10: 51-67 members
Division 11: Under 50 members

Award Verification:

- All awards are based on National Membership MemStats and National Membership Department records.
- To receive recruiter credit, include your NAME and VFW MEMBERSHIP ID NUMBER on the membership application.
- Post Quartermasters must accurately record recruiter information when submitting new and reinstated members.



Illinois Membership Program 2025-2026

Eugene Blackwell
State Commander

"Serving Our Community With Resilience"

ILLINOIS MEMBERSHIP PROGRAM 2025-2026

VFW MEMBERSHIP MISSION: Our mission is to sustain and strengthen our organization for current and future Veterans well into the next century. To achieve this, Posts, Districts, and State leadership must collaborate effectively to retain existing members, recruit new ones, and reinstate those whose memberships have lapsed. District and State leaders should spearhead a well-coordinated membership campaign, complementing other vital VFW programs.

State Headquarters stands ready to provide the technical, logistical, and financial support necessary for successful retention and recruitment efforts. Additionally, our National organization offers valuable incentives to help us meet these objectives. It is our collective responsibility to leverage these resources and execute a robust Membership Program to ensure lasting success.

VFW MEMBERSHIP VISION: Our Membership Program starts with the foundation of last year's accomplishments. From this strong starting point, we aim to grow—if not in numbers, then in unity and purpose. Together, we must welcome Veterans and their families from all backgrounds and conflicts, creating a community that celebrates the diverse experiences and perspectives they bring. There is no room for bias or barriers here, if someone qualifies, let us embrace them as part of our family.

True and lasting success lies in our ability to retain members, reconnect with those we've lost, and continually bring new Veterans into our fold. The potential is immense, with Veterans of all ages still eligible to join. Yet, our focus must remain clear: Post-9/11 Veterans are the key to our future, and we must ensure they see a home within our ranks. Let us also shine a spotlight on our female Veterans, whose contributions are essential as they represent the fastest-growing membership group.

By working together, we can build a thriving, inviting organization that not only honors our past but also secure a bright future for generations to come.

OUR GOAL THIS YEAR IS 101%

Our membership numbers speak volumes when we advocate for Veterans' rights at the National or State level. Strong membership sends a powerful message: the VFW is a thriving, influential organization committed to making a difference. Each of us holds the key to that strength. By recruiting just one new member, we can see remarkable growth. Imagine the impact—if every member brings in one recruit, we will see significant progress within a single year. Repeating this effort year after year could lead us to surpass 50,000 members once again. Success starts at the Post level. Every one of us is a recruiter for our post and the organization. Tell other Veterans who are qualified to join the Veterans of Foreign Wars about us. Invite community members to our post or events to increase knowledge about what we do in the community. Share about our scholarship programs. Share what the Auxiliary is doing. Conduct Buddy Poppy and recruiting events in the community.

Let's take to heart the inspiring words of our National Commander in Chief:

Commanders, this will be the longest year, with the shortest days. It will test you in more ways than you can imagine. If it were easy, everyone would do it. Membership is tremendously important in our organization, but it is not the only thing. When you go through your year, change what you can, do the right things and leave the rest. Prioritize and organize.

I have three main focuses: Advocacy, service officers and our POW/MIA mission. They all tie together, and it is what the VFW was founded on. They impact fellow veterans and their families lives. Be the change for a fellow veteran. Honor those who came before us. If we promote these three things, I know we will evoke more interest, which will bring more members.

101 percent membership is our goal. The OIF/OEF community is ready to be involved. Let them know what we do, how we can change lives, and how they can feel a part of the military community again. Tell our story, tell your story!!!

Have no regrets, don't take anything personally, never assume anything....be the transformation to the future! Honor the dead, by helping the living!

This year, you'll find clear guidelines for hosting membership drives and events. From ordering brochures, posters, and other materials through the Membership Recruiting Brochure Order Form in OMS at vfw.org, to accessing resources for Post Development, Membership Campaigns, and Mentorship in the Training & Support Section, we have all the tools needed to succeed.

Additionally, promotional assets like radio spots, advertisements, public service announcements, and media kits can be found in the Media Room on vfw.org. Whether part of a standalone effort or in conjunction with other events, a membership drive is an invaluable opportunity to connect with potential members and guide them through the application process.

Remember, all awards are based on the official membership numbers posted in the National Membership Report the morning after the cut-off date—so let's aim high and make every effort count. Together, we can build a legacy of strength and support for Veterans, ensuring our VFW continues to thrive.

MEMBERSHIP CHALLENGES

Throughout the membership year, exciting Membership Challenges will be announced and shared, complete with incentives to recognize and reward Posts or Members who rise to the occasion. These challenges will be communicated via email and featured in the General Orders for the corresponding months.

RECRUITING AWARDS

All members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars who sign up:

- Each Quarter, any member that has recruited 5 new or reinstated members for the year will be recognized at the Post level, receive a certificate and receive \$20
- Each Quarter, any member that has recruited 10 new or reinstated members for the year will be recognized at the district level, receive a certificate and receive \$30
- Each Quarter, any member that has recruited 15 new or reinstated members for the year will be recognized on the Department website, receive a certificate and receive \$40
- Each Quarter, any member that has recruited 25 new or reinstated members will be recognized on the Department website, receive a certificate, a VFW coin, and free registration at Convention or Conference
- 50 new or reinstated members will receive a personalized engraved plaque
- 75 new or reinstated members will receive a \$100 gift certificate to VFW Store
- 100 new or reinstated members by June 1, 2026, will be awarded \$500 to attend the 2026 National Convention. This award is transferable and will be presented to the winners at the National Convention.
- TOP Recruiter Award – The Top Recruiter in the State will receive a specially engraved trophy.

Membership Trophy – During each Council of Administration meeting the membership trophy will go to the district which has the highest membership percentage. This will be a traveling trophy (It will be determined by the percentages of the morning of the meeting)

- The district with the highest membership percentage on 6/30/2026 will receive a Top District 2025-2026 trophy for the district to commemorate the accomplishment.
- The District Commander will also receive a plaque to commemorate the accomplishment.
- The Post with the highest membership percentage on 6/30/2026 will receive a Top Post 2025-2026 plaque for the post to commemorate the accomplishment.

Golden Pen Award

Posts that have completed all required tasks on the All-American Dashboard and are at 95% membership by 12/31/2025 will have their Quartermaster entered into a drawing for the Golden Pen Award. This award is an engraved pen set. It will be presented at the Winter Conference in February along with a \$100 Gift Certificate to the VFW Store (this is only valid for posts who have turned their bonding paperwork in audits in correctly and on time)

MEMBERSHIP AWARD

- Posts achieving at least 99% membership by Dec 31, 2025, will receive a special certificate from the State Commander \$100
- Posts achieving at least 101% membership by Feb 28, 2026, will receive \$150 check for a post membership celebration meal recognizing the posts efforts.
- Posts achieving at least 101% membership by June 30, 2026, will receive 100% Membership Pennant

POST AWARD

The Post having the largest increase in Legacy Life Membership, with a minimum of 4 new Legacy Life Memberships by April 30, 2026, will receive a \$100 gift certificate from the National VFW Store.

DISTRICT AWARD

Districts who are 99% in membership by February 1, 2026, will receive a \$250 cash award. Districts who are 101% in membership by April 1, 2026, will receive an additional \$250 cash award.

(Up to \$500 can be awarded to the district)

CRAMER-SODEN AWARD

The District Commander who has the highest numerical increase from 2024-2025 year to their 2025- 2026 year and their membership is 100% or greater will be the recipient of the Cramer-Soden Award. This plaque is sponsored by our fellow Illinois Past National Commanders-in-Chief, George R. Cramer, and the late Ray R. Soden. The deadline for this award is April 30, 2026.

ALL-STATE AWARD PROGRAM

The 2025-2026 All-State Program is designed to recognize exceptional leadership and teamwork. Not only in Membership but in overall Post/District development and VFW Programs. If a Post qualifies to be "All-state," ALL Post members will be recognized for this achievement because: **THEY ARE A TEAM!**

- The program runs through June 15, 2026
- To receive All-State awards at the State Convention, the deadline for completion of All-State criteria is April 30, 2026.

ALL-STATE AWARD PROGRAM CRITERIA

Membership greater than 101%

Posts must hold 1 membership drive/event and submit report to Program Reporting Dashboard

Posts must be 100% reported on the Department Programs Reporting Dashboard ..

Posts must have submitted all 4 quarterly Trustees Audits and audits were approved.

Posts must be in compliance with all questions on the National and Department Inspection Sheets (for example: a post that is not incorporated shall not be eligible until proof is provided that they are complying)

Posts must order at least 3 poppies per member with a minimum of 1,000 poppies.

Posts must have one nomination for each of the programs of Patriot's Pen and Voice of Democracy submitted to District for judging. Donations to Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen as stated in this manual will be accepted if a Post does not have a nomination.

Posts must have one nomination in any of the following programs: Teacher of the Year or Public Safety (police, fire, EMT, dispatcher, EOD). Donations to any of these programs DO NOT receive credit towards All State Awards.

Posts must have representations at all properly called District Conventions or meetings.

Posts must have representation at least one of the town hall meetings. (Roll Call will be taken)

Posts must make a \$50 donation to the Service Office Support Program (SOS). This is separate from the Red, White, and Blue Program donations.

New Posts need a minimum of 35 members to achieve All State.

ALL-STATE POST AWARDS

There will be no limits on the number of Posts that can achieve All-State status.

All-State Post Commanders will receive: All-State Post Commander's Cap and a Distinguished Service Lapel Pin.

All-State Post Quartermasters may purchase an All-State Post Quartermaster's Cap and will receive a Distinguished Service Lapel Pin.

All-State Post Members may purchase an All-State Team Post Member Cap.

ALL-STATE DISTRICT CRITERIA

- Membership greater than 101%
- Districts must have 100% of Posts inspected and the inspections must be cleared up by the State Inspector by April 30, 2026
- Districts must hold a minimum of one School of Instruction and submit a report to State Headquarters.
- Districts must hold or participate in 1 membership drive/event and submit report to Programs Reporting Dashboard
- Districts must submit 1 of the following to Department Headquarters for judging.
 - Patriot's Pen
 - Voice of Democracy
 - Teacher of the Year
 - Public Safety of the Year (Police, Firefighter, EMT, Dispatcher, EOD)
- Districts must forward a record of the Roll Call of Officers and Posts of each District meeting to State Headquarters

ALL-STATE DISTRICT AWARD

There will be no limits on the number of Districts that can achieve All-State status.

All-State District Commanders will receive: All-State Commander's Cap and a Distinguished Service Lapel Pin.



Carol Whitmore

Commander-in-Chief 2025-2026

NATIONAL MEMBERSHIP PROGRAM 2025-2026

Commander's Introduction

Carol Whitmore was elected Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. on Aug. 1, 2024, at the 125th VFW National Convention in Louisville, Kentucky.

Carol served in the U.S. Army from 1977 to 2013, earning her VFW eligibility by serving in Iraq. 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, among many others.

She joined the VFW in 2012 at Post 9127 in Des Moines, Iowa, where she maintains her Gold Legacy Life membership. 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.

MEMBERSHIP MISSION

To build a strong organization through recruiting new members while retaining our current membership, building a solid foundation for the future. To assist in mentoring our leadership and members, coordinate programs to support our Posts, Districts, and Departments in their membership efforts, and to provide training for all levels of VFW membership.

ALL-AMERICAN PROGRAM

The All-American program exists to recognize exceptional leadership and teamwork, authentic accomplishment in membership growth and VFW core programs.

ALL-AMERICAN POST CRITERIA

- Membership must be at least 101%, based on adjusted prior year totals
- Post-Election Report must be submitted to National Headquarters and be in good standing
- Meet all the following Program Participation Criteria by Jan. 31, 2026:
 - Voice of Democracy - minimum of one entry advanced to District judging (Overseas Post can donate \$125 to National in lieu of entry)
 - Patriots Pen - minimum of one entry advanced to District judging (Overseas Post can donate \$125 to National in lieu of entry)
 - Donate to Veterans & Military Support Programs Services, minimum of \$125.
- Must participate in the VFW Day of Service event held during the month of May and registered at todaysvfw.org/day-of-service/ no later than May 15. Participation may count as community service for All-American quarterly requirements. The event must meet certain criteria aimed at making a meaningful difference in the community. The criteria and more information can be found here: <https://todaysvfw.org/vfw-day-of-service-faq/>
- A Post must submit a community service report quarterly to their department for submission to the All-American Dashboard. The quarters are July-Sept, Oct-Dec, Jan-March, and April-June.
- Must purchase a minimum of 500 Buddy Poppies

ALL-AMERICAN POST AWARD

All Posts that meet the listed criteria will receive an All-American Post Citation, Post Streamer and be recognized in the VFW magazine.

The Top 15 Posts in each Division will receive:

- All-American Post Commander's citation
- All-American Post Commander's Cap
- All-American Post Commander's badge
- All-American Post Commander's lapel pin

These awards for the top 15 Posts will be presented on stage at the 127th National Convention

The top five Post Commanders in each division will also be reimbursed for up to \$1,000 of travel/ lodging expenses for the 127th National Convention. The top two Post Commanders in each division will be named as Captain and Co-Captain of the All-American Team, and their caps will bear a special designation

ALL-AMERICAN DISTRICT CRITERIA

- Membership must be at least 101%
- District Election Report must be submitted to National Headquarters.
- Meet all the following Program Participation criteria by Jan. 31, 2026:
 - o Voice of Democracy - minimum of one entry advanced to Department judging (Overseas Districts may donate \$125 to National in lieu of entry)
 - o Patriots Pen - minimum of one entry advanced to Department judging (Overseas Districts may donate \$125 to National in lieu of entry)

ALL-AMERICAN DISTRICT AWARD

All Districts that meet the listed criteria will receive an All-American District Streamer, and All-American District Commander's Citation, and recognition in the VFW magazine.

In addition, the Top 10 Districts in each membership division will receive:

- All-American District Commander's Cap
- All-American District Commander's Badge
- All-American District Commander's lapel pin

These awards for the top 10 District Commanders will be presented on stage at the 127th National Convention

The top two District commanders in each division will also be reimbursed for up to \$1,000 of travel/ lodging expenses for the 127th VFW National Convention. The top two District Commanders in each division will be named as Captain and Co-Captain of the All-American Team, and their caps will bear a special designation.

ALL-AMERICAN DEPARTMENT CRITERIA

- Membership must be at least 101%.
- Department must submit Department legislative chairman reports monthly through the Program dashboard tool.
- Must conduct two Membership recruiting events, report of these events must be submitted through the Program dashboard tool.
- Meet all the following Program Participation criteria by Jan. 31, 2026:
 - Voice of Democracy - An entry advanced to National judging
 - Patriots Pen - An entry advanced to National judging
 - Veterans & Military Support Programs - Must complete State/Department fundraiser and proceeds donated to Veterans & Military Support Programs, Kansas City, Mo.

ALL-AMERICAN DEPARTMENT AWARD

- All-American Department streamer
- All-American Department Commander's citation
- All-American Department Commander's badge
- All-American Department Commander's cap
- All-American Department Commander's lapel pin
- Reimbursement for up to \$1,000 of travel/lodging expenses for the 127th National Convention

These awards will be presented on stage at the 127th National Convention

All-American Notes:

Any member of a Post that is named as an All-American Post may purchase a All-American Post Member cap from the VFW Store after the 127th National Convention.

Post, District, and Department Quartermasters and Adjutants may purchase an All-American Post Member cap bearing their title. Quartermasters may also purchase an All-American Quartermaster pin from the VFW Store.

Donations made to replace Program Participation by eligible overseas Posts, Districts, or Departments as well as fundraising donations must be made through the All-American Dashboard, not through any other means.

INDIVIDUAL RECRUITING AWARDS

- 1, 5, 10, 15 members recruited: recruiting pin
- 25 members recruited: Commander-in-Chief's Coin
- 50 members recruited: Commander-in-Chief backpack
- 75 members recruited: Commander-in-Chief's Medallion Set
- 100 members recruited: Century cap **or** \$50 VFW Store credit & Citation

Recruiting Awards will be sent out five times during the year to the Post, to be given out at a Post meeting to those members who have recruited new members. Mailings will take place near the end of October, January, March, May, and then after the end of the membership year.

EARLY BIRD AWARD

The top two Posts in each division on Jan. 1, 2026, will each be awarded a \$1,000 gift certificate to the VFW Store.

LEGACY LIFE MEMBERSHIP ACQUISITION

Each Post that achieves the cumulative benchmarks of 25, 50 and 75 Legacy Life Members will be awarded a Legacy Society Post Proclamation. Proclamations will be sent out to the Post along with recruiting awards throughout the year.

For each Post that achieves the distinctive benchmark of 100, 250, or 500 Legacy Life members by June 30th, 2026, their commander or Post representative will be reimbursed up to \$1,000 for travel / lodging for the National Convention, reserved seating at the 127th VFW National Convention joint opening session and a Legacy Society Post Proclamation presented at the National Convention.

101% MEMBERSHIP STREAMER

All Posts, Districts, and Departments that reach the goal of 101% membership based on adjusted prior year totals by June 30, 2026 or before will receive a distinctive streamer.

DIVISIONAL RECRUITING CHALLENGE

The top two Posts in each membership division based on new and reinstated members according to the table below will receive a \$1,000 membership grant deposited into the Post's account.

Division	Size	New Member Quota
1	951+	At least 125 new/reinstated members
2	750-950	At least 120 new/reinstated members
3	356-749	At least 100 new/reinstated members
4	246-355	At least 75 new/reinstated members
5	185-245	At least 60 new/reinstated members
6	143-184	At least 50 new/reinstated members
7	112-142	At least 40 new/reinstated members
8	88-111	At least 30 new/reinstated members
9	68-87	At least 20 new/reinstated members
10	51-67	At least 15 new/reinstated members
11	Under 50	At least 10 new/reinstated members

DEPARTMENT ABOVE & BEYOND AWARD

Each Department that exceeds the membership goal and reaches 102% membership on June 30, 2026 will receive a \$2,000 award deposited into the Department account. If the Department reaches 103% membership, the award will increase to \$4,000. If the Department reaches 104% or above in membership, the award will increase to \$7,500.

TOP DEPARTMENT RECRUITER

The top recruiter in every Department as of June 30th, 2026 will receive a Commander's Medical Bag. A minimum of 25 new/reinstated members is required to win this award.

ELITE RECRUITER

Any VFW member who signs up 250 or more new and/or reinstated members as of June 30th, 2026 will also be reimbursed for up to \$1,000 of travel/lodging expenses for the 127th VFW National Convention as well as a distinctive cap, citation, and name badge. In the event that an Elite Recruiter is already being reimbursed for travel/lodging from another award, a \$1,000 stipend will be issued at the 127th National Convention.

RECRUITER OF THE YEAR

The Elite Recruiter who signs up the greatest number of new and/or reinstated members greater than 250 as of June 30th, 2026, will receive an additional \$1,000 stipend, reserved seating at the 127th VFW National Convention joint opening session, a distinctive cap, citation, and name badge, and the Commander-in-Chief's Crystal Eagle trophy.

LIFE MEMBER RECRUITER AWARD

Any VFW member who recruits at least 50 new and/or reinstated Life members by June 30th, 2026 or before will receive a special citation from the Commander-in-Chief and a Recruiter Satchel with the Commander-in-Chief's logo.

NEW POST DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT GRANT

For each new Post chartered the Department Quartermaster will receive a \$250 credit from the VFW Store to be used towards necessary materials for the new Post. Department Commanders and Quartermasters may apply for this grant directly through the National Membership Department.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF'S CHALLENGE

To emphasize the importance of Life Membership as the backbone of our membership strength, the Commander-in-Chief is issuing the following challenge to all VFW Posts. Each quarter (July-September, October-December, January-March, April-June), Posts will accumulate points as follows:

- New Annual Member: 1 point
- Annual or Lapsed Member converts to Life Member: 5 points
- New Life Member: 10 points

Each quarter, the Post that leads their membership division in points will receive a special award designated by the Commander-in-Chief. In addition, at the end of the year every Post who has led their division in the challenges will be recognized at the 127th National Convention for their achievements.

MEMBERSHIP NOTES AND RESOURCES

- Awards given to a Post may be transferred to any member of that Post.
- No more than one stipend will be awarded to an individual for a given event.
- Posts, Districts, and Departments must reach a minimum of 101% membership to qualify for any award. This does not apply to the Early Bird Award.
- NOTE: Cash stipends paid by the VFW will be reported to the Internal Revenue Service on Form 1099 if the total of payments made to you during any calendar year equals \$600.00 or more. The reimbursement you receive from the VFW will be deemed by the IRS to be taxable income. Since the circumstances of each individual are different, it is recommended that you consult your tax advisor to determine the effect these payments may have on your personal tax situation. It is your responsibility to keep receipts and other records as you and your accountant and/or tax advisor deem necessary in order to document your expenditures.
- Employees and officers of the VFW National Headquarters are excluded from receiving stipends or awards in this program unless otherwise authorized by the Adjutant General and/or Quartermaster General.
- Awardees receiving reimbursement for travel and lodging costs for the 127th National Convention must provide receipts to the VFW Membership Department no later than August 31st, 2026 in order to receive reimbursement. Reimbursements shall be made by ACH deposit.

PUBLIC RELATIONS/ILLINOIS VFW NEWS



Barbara Wilson
*Chairman,
Public Relations*

*Editor,
Illinois VFW News*

802 N. 3rd St
Riverton, IL 62561
Cell: 618-559-3331

E-mail:
barb.wilson2@outlook.com

Post 3455-15

One of the best kept secrets of the Veterans of Foreign Wars is the great works our Posts, Districts and the Department does in support of the communities in which we live and work and on behalf of our military service members, veterans and families.

How our Posts and Districts market themselves within their communities and with local media organizations could set the stage for success in the years to come.

Media Advisories, Calendar Notices, Social Media posts and News Releases can serve to communicate the message of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, promoting the good work of our Posts, Districts and Departments, and engaging the communities in which we live and work.

Public Relations not only works to improve our credibility and accessibility, but also aids in marketing our organization to potential members, donors and supporters. Today, Public Relations is much more than just distributing press releases. It's about taking advantage of a number of ways to best engage, educate and influence our audience.

When developing your Public Relations program, you will need to define your objectives and decide what you want to accomplish.

- Determine your audience. Who do you want to reach with your message? Different VFW activities appeal to different segments of the community.
- Define your message. Sticking to one message is essential. However, your message may be presented in several ways through various outlets. Determine the best way to present your message for the various outlets.
- Develop a strategy. How can you best accomplish your goals? Look at the dynamics of your community. Build a relationship with the media in your area. Keep an up-to-date list of contacts for each outlet. You may have better results if you have one person at each news media outlet as your go to contact. Become the best source of information in your community on patriotic and veterans' issues.
- Make your Post, District and Department visible and active on social media.

From time to time you may need to evaluate your strategy. Listen carefully to feedback from members and officers, members of the community and the media. Take this information and fine tune your strategy, if necessary. Just remember developing a good public relations takes time and commitment.

There ways to promote your Post, District and the Department within the community. Media advisories, News Releases, and Social Media Posts are some of the most important ways you can promote what the organization is doing within your community. If you need help in developing a Media Advisory or writing a News Release, please contact me. I will be glad to answer questions or offer suggestions.

The Illinois VFW News is the official publication of the Illinois Veterans of Foreign Wars. In its current printed format, the Illinois VFW News is printed and mailed in September, December, March and June. The Illinois VFW News is also uploaded on our website.

Articles, news, and other items for the *Illinois VFW News* can be submitted via e-mail. If you do not have access to a computer, you can also mail the information to the editor at the above address. If sending via U.S. mail, please include name and telephone number of the person submitting the item; type or print news item legibly; and send original photographs. The deadline for submitting items will be the 1st of the Month preceding publication, but is subject to change.

2025-2026 State Publications Contest

Editors of District and Post newsletters are invited to enter one issue of their publication in the 2025-2026 State of Illinois Publications Contest. All entries must be provided as a paper copy and mailed to either the editor at the above address, or to State Headquarters. The entry must have been published between January 1, 2025 and December 31, 2025.

Publications will be judged using the following categories:

- Post Publications published 1-4 times per year
- Post Publications published 5 or more times per year
- District Publications published 1-4 times per year
- District Publications published 5 or more times per year

Editors of post and district publications are responsible for submitting their own entry to the National Publications Contest.

State Publications Contest first place winners will receive a beautifully engraved plaque. Awards will be given out at the State Convention in June 2026.

An independent panel will judge all entries in the Publication Contest. Publications sent to State Headquarters for inclusion on the website will not be considered entered into the State Publications Contest. It is the responsibility of the newsletter editors to choose, and submit, one publication into the contest.

All entries **must** include the following:

- Name of Newsletter
- Editor's name, mailing address, email address, and telephone number
- Frequency of publication (1-4 times per year or 5 or more times per year).

All entries must be received not later than **February 28, 2026**.

Media Professional of the Year

Posts and Districts are invited to nominate a Media Professional in your community for the State of Illinois News Media Professional of the Year competition. There is no entry form - please type a one-page nomination letter highlighting how your nominee has best told the VFW story or your Post's or District's work in your community. There are three categories - print, radio, and television. You may also include newspaper clippings and/or weblinks with your nomination. The deadline for nominations is **April 30, 2026**. The Media Professional of the Year will be recognized at the Illinois State Convention in June. All nominations should be mailed to State Headquarters.

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VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS

5 PILLARS VFW SERVICE



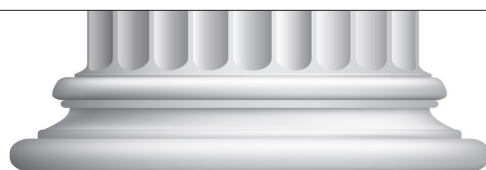
COMMUNITY SERVICE

VETERANS ASSISTANCE

YOUTH PROGRAMS

LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY

ILLINOIS SPECIFIC



DEPARTMENT OF ILLINOIS VFW

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COMMUNITY SERVICE

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Community Activities

- Community Service Programs
- Disaster Relief
- Participation in or sponsorship of community activities

Americanism/Honor Guard/Flag Honors

- Americanism
- Flag Etiquette
- Display of US or POW/MIA Flag
- Honor Guard
- POW-MIA

Safety

- Safety Program Activities
- Public Service Recognition
 - ♦ Firefighter
 - ♦ Law Enforcement
 - ♦ Emergency Medical Technician
 - ♦ Emergency Dispatcher
 - ♦ EOD Technician
 - ♦ Life Saving Award

COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES PROGRAM

Community Activities are an important part of the Veterans of Foreign Wars way of life and has proven to be a win-win situation for the VFW and the community. Our support of community activities by volunteering, supporting community activities and organizations, or participating in events is a great benefit to the community. Your community activity raises awareness of the VFW within the community and supports our programs. Everyone develops their own perception of their community by what they see going on immediately around them. Your work within your community and with other non-for-profit organizations can help your Post accomplish our goal.

You will notice some changes in the manual this year on the community service pillar. There are only 3 sub programs under the Community Service Pillar this year. Any community activity that you do as a Post or District should fall within one of those 3 sub-programs. This year, Community Service and Americanism is consolidated under one program Chairman

Look over your Community Activity Programs and appoint an Activity Chairperson for each of the categories. Remember that all programs in the Veterans of Foreign Wars are important to Commanders at all levels. A Post that is strong in Community Activities not only earns respect in the community, but will also be strong in membership.

Commanders must report on-line or on the Community Activities Report Form by March 15, 2026 in order to qualify for a National Certificate of Recognition. Each Post must report in each of the following categories to qualify:

- a. Community Involvement
- b. Cooperation with other organizations
- c. Aid to others or Disaster Relief
- d. School and Church assistance

Community activities clearly benefits the people in the local community and involves the Post members to build a positive image for the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

When taking on a project, inform your local newspaper or TV station about your plans and if possible, document your efforts by taking photos as you work at or on your Community Activities.

Membership and community involvement will increase your Post and our goal. Your community activities will show we are **Serving Our Community With Resilience**. We must continue to work within our communities because "No One Does More For Veterans". Commanders at all levels should review the Department Programs Dashboard on a weekly basis by checking out our web-site at www.vfwil.org.



Steve Eller
Chairman

420 Stone River Rd
Belleville, IL 62221
Telephone: (618) 567-9296

Email:
spe9296@yahoo.com.au

Post 7710-14

Here is one VERY IMPORTANT thing about reporting your Community Service Activities. If your Post is working towards becoming an All-American Post for 2025-2026, the requirements include that you submit a minimum of 1 community activity report per quarter in order to qualify - and one of those activities must be for the VFW Day of Service. My advice is to input your community service reports immediately following the event. Don't wait until May and input 10 months of activities because it will prevent you from winning a National award but it may result in you losing notes or forgetting about activities resulting in underreporting your activities.

Please feel free to call me if you have any questions.....

Remember to report your dollars spent, hours, and total number of volunteers for each project. Please make sure that the dollars reported **reflect only those amounts donated or expended in the performance of their community activities.**

Our goal is to be 90% reported by December 31, 2025.

Report it when it happens on-line or to the:

State of Illinois Veterans of Foreign Wars
3300 Constitution Dr.
Springfield, IL 62711

Community Activities Recordbooks Award

The top Community Activities Recordbook in each Membership Category will receive a \$50.00 Cash Award at the 2026 State Convention.

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

RULES FOR THE RECORDBOOKS ARE AS FOLLOWS:

1. Community Service Projects completed between May 1, 2025 and April 30, 2026.
2. Book size should be no larger than 12 x 16 inches and no thicker than 3 inches. You may use as many volumes as necessary.
3. Book to be separated into 4 Sections, A- B - C & D describing each project. Show money spent, and volunteer hours for each project. Also, show total of dollars spent and hours used at the end of each Section
4. Clippings or photographs should show dates and captions from newspapers and any other information
5. Checks and Photostats should show what the money was spent for, also, total number of volunteer hours for each project.
6. Your book must be in State Headquarters by May 1, 2026 for judging on May 4, 2026.
7. The Community Activities Record Book Entry Form must be filled out and attached to the inside cover of the record book.
8. Pages must be numbered.

By reporting your out of pocket expenses, volunteers and hours for each project, we can continue

"Serving Our Community With Resilience"

Community Activities Record Book Entry Form

1. This Form must be filled out and attached to the inside cover of the Community Activities Record Book that your Post enters in the Department Community Activities Record Book Contest.
2. All Record Books submitted for Department Judging will be returned to the Post Commander following judging.
3. The Post Commander must sign this form.
4. Your book must be in State Headquarters by May 1, 2026 for judging on May 4, 2026.

Post # _____ City: _____, State: _____ Zip: _____

Total Projects

Total Hours

Total Funds

Since 5/1/24 _____ Volunteered _____ Used/Donated \$ _____

COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES CHAIRMAN:

Post Chairperson _____ Auxiliary Chairperson _____

JUDGES, NOTE THE FOLLOWING PROJECTS:

Page # _____, Project Name _____

Page # _____, Project Name _____

Page # _____, Project Name _____

Page # _____, Project Name _____

Post Commander Signature _____

Post Commander's Name (print) _____

Address: _____

City: _____, State: _____ Zip: _____

Deadline Dates

National VFW Post Special Project Program Deadline is April 30, 2026

"VFW Member Community Service Volunteer of the Year" Award Deadline must be in Department Headquarters by April 1, 2026

NATIONAL COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES CONTEST

- Department selects Posts based on their own criteria and National guidelines
- Number of Awards based on Department size:
 - Up to 200 Posts 1 selection
 - 201 to 400 Posts 2 selections
- Department selection due to National by May 1.
- Award presented to Post Commander at National Convention
- Each Post Commander receives \$599.00 to assist with Convention expenses
- National Award Plaque
- Post Recognition Street Sign

AMERICANISM PROGRAM

“AMERICANISM”...is the unfailing love of Country, loyalty to its institutions and ideals, eagerness to defend it against all enemies, undivided allegiance to the Flag, and a desire to secure the blessings of liberty for ourselves and for posterity”. As American citizens and members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, we know what Americanism stands for. It was, and is still, our responsibility to defend the United States in a time of peace as it is in time of war, foreign or domestic. By practicing Americanism we show our love of Country and must do so.

As veterans we should promote and participate in Americanism every day of every year. There are many things a Post, a District and an individual can do to promote Americanism. Here are just a few ideas. I am sure you can think of many more.

- Fly the American Flag and or POW/MIA Flag every day at your Post Home.
- Present Flags to different organizations or if you see a tattered flag, donate a new one
- Hold flag etiquette sessions with various other organizations
- Encourage your membership to be informed by studying political issues and get out the vote.
- Furnish Color Guards/Honor Guards for civic programs, athletic events, veteran funerals, and Memorial Service
- Remember Memorial Day, Independence Day, Patriot's Day, POW/ MIA Recognition Day, Pearl Harbor Day, Loyalty Day, Memorial Day, Flag Day and other memorial military days from our Nation's past.
- Conduct flag retirement ceremony for tattered flags

Reporting Americanism is easy: fill out the VFW of Illinois on line Reporting Form or if you don't have a computer then you may contact State Headquarters (217-529-6688) to request the form and fill it in and mail it back to State Headquarters, 3300 Constitution Dr., Springfield, IL 62711. Remember reporting dates are July 1, 2025 through June 30, 2026.

There are three (3) categories to report: Be sure to report all hours, money spent, and number of members participating in an event. You should report every time you have an event. The more you report the better chance you have of winning awards. One very important note about credit for flying/displaying the American Flag and/or POW/MIA Flag is that you can only get credit for 1 hour per day for each of the flags. If you fly or display both flags, maximum credit is 60 hours per month or 720 hours per year. If you only fly one of the flags, maximum credit is 30 hours per month or 360 hours per year.

DISTRICT AWARDS:

The Districts with the highest number in hours, money, and members participating in the following three Membership Categories will receive a \$30.00 Cash Award at the 2026 Department Convention.

Membership Category 1 - Up to 2,500 Members
Membership Category 2 – 2,501 to 3,600
Members Membership Category 3 – 3,601 Members and Up

POST AWARDS:

Posts with the highest number of hours, money and members participating in the following three Membership Categories will receive a \$30.00 Cash Award at the 2026 Department Convention.

Membership Category 1 - Up to 100 Members
Membership Category 2 – 101 to 300 Members
Membership Category 3 - 301 Members & Up

“Loyalty Day May 1, 2026”

Loyalty Day or May Day is always May 1.

A truly inspired Holiday, Loyalty Day was created by the VFW Organization in 1921. It was through the efforts of the Veterans of Foreign Wars that in 1958 Loyalty Day was officially established by an act of Congress.

The reason we have Loyalty Day is to continually encourage loyal Americans to speak out. It is a Day upon which patriotic citizens should:

- 1) Hold parades
- 2) Conduct Flag ceremonies
- 3) Sponsor public meetings
- 4) Conduct school programs
- 5) and other American activities

Loyalty is an intangible thing, but it causes people to form a Government, to obey its laws and rules and to willingly defend their country against its enemies.

If your Post does not hold a Loyalty Day parade, maybe your District will

- 1) Invite civic leaders to participate and to speak
- 2) Encourage neighborhoods to join in
- 3) Invite the youth to march, or play in bands
- 4) Give out flags
- 5) Hold your VFW Buddy Poppy Donation Day

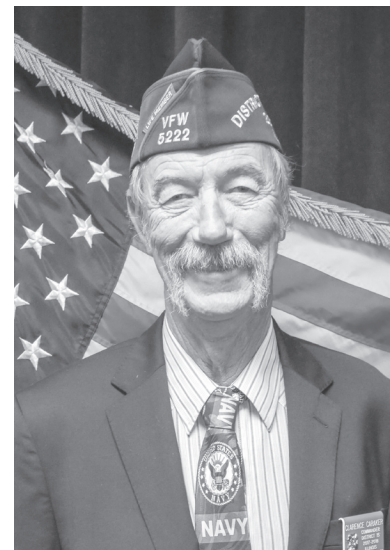
POW/MIA PROGRAM

We have not fulfilled our goal for a complete accounting of all our lost. What about our MIA or KIA's? We must continue to work for all the families to receive closure of their loved ones.

Now here are a few ways to get your credit on the dashboard under Americanism/Honor Guard/Flag Honors.

- The third Friday of September is National POW-MIA Recognition Day. Plan and carry out a POW-MIA service and invite your Post & Auxiliary members and the general public to attend.
- Display the POW-MIA missing man table & chair cover & recite the POW- MIA prayer at your meetings. (The prayer can be found in the manual procedure & ritual book)
- Carry the POW-MIA flag in a parade or fly or display it at your Post home or donate flags to local schools, village buildings or even nursing homes. If you fly the POW/MIA flag at your Post, you can get credit for 1 hour per day.
- Make a presentation at a local school and explain the importance of the POW-MIA Program to the students

REPORT REPORT REPORT !!!!



Clarence Caraker
Chairman

241 Paradise St.
PO Box 325
Olmsted, IL 62970
Cell: 618 771-6265

Email:
cecaraker@gmail.com

Post 3455-15

MEANING OF THE POW/MIA TABLE

The table is set for five, representing the five branches of our Armed Forces, the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and the Coast Guard. The military is filled with symbolism and this table is a way of symbolizing those that are missing from our midst, who are commonly called POW/MIA'S.

The table set for five symbolizes the frailty of the prisoners alone against their oppressors.

The tablecloth is white, symbolizing the purity of their intentions to respond to their country's call to arms.

The single rose displayed in the vase is symbolic of the families and loved ones who keep the faith waiting for their return.

The red ribbon tied so prominently on the vase is reminiscent of the red ribbon worn upon the lapel and breast of thousands who bear witness to their unyielding determination to demand a proper accounting of our missing and the return of all live POW'S and all those left on foreign soil.

The slice of lemon on the bread plate is to remind us of their bitter fate.

There is salt on the bread plate which is symbolic of the families tears as they wait.

The chairs are empty, they are not here.....

POW / MIA PRAYER

Our Heavenly Father, At such time and place as we know not, there are Comrades being held against their will in hostile circumstances. Prisoners of war and those missing in action who did not return. We plead for assistance in our efforts to bring them home. Our hearts bleed for the families of these veterans, may we not forget their sacrifice and be reminded by this vacant chair of our duty toward them. (Amen)

AWARD

The **Dennis Nelson Memorial POW-MIA Award** will be awarded to the VFW Post that demonstrates the most outstanding POW/MIA Recognition Program within their community.

Flying the POW/MIA flag or displaying the Missing Man Table at your Post does not count towards the POW-MIA award. The award is intended to recognize a Post that has an outstanding POW-MIA program within their community. What has the Post done to promote the POW-MIA issue within their community?

Let's make sure this year we put our renewed commitment into action as we continue
"Serving Our Community With Resilience"

SAFETY PROGRAM

The Safety Programs of the Veteran of Foreign Wars continues to provide and promote programs designed to safeguard our communities. This long-standing commitment to safety has grown through the years to include every possible program or event associated with safeguarding people. Be creative and develop a safety activity and REPORT all accomplishments on the Department of Illinois Program Reporting Form. The six basic categories in the National Program are as follows:

- | | |
|------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Highway Safety | 2. Pedestrian Safety |
| 3. Recreational Safety | 4. Home/Fire Safety |
| 5. Drug Awareness | 6. Recognition/Other |

1. **HIGHWAY SAFETY:** Any activity intended to improve individual driving skills and awareness or activities associated with improving safety in our vehicles and on our roadways.

2. **PEDESTRIAN SAFETY:** Any worthwhile activity intended to improve individual awareness and visibility or non-motorized vehicle riding skills, awareness and responsibility

3. **RECREATIONAL SAFETY:** Any organized activity associated with improving the skills and responsibilities of those individuals engaged in recreational activities with children and adults.

4. **HOME/FIRE SAFETY:** Activities designed to promote and inform individuals within the community about protecting their homes, possessions and lives are reportable.

5. **DRUG AWARENESS:** Any program designed to inform and protect your community from the influence of substance abuse including prescription drugs.

6. **RECOGNITION/OTHER:** A program to bring public recognition to the people of the community who spend their work day protecting the lives and property. Recognizing the heroism/or safety achievements of individuals in the community. This category may be used to report an activity that does not fit any of the above categories including cooperation with other groups and organizations besides the V.F.W.



Glen Goodrich
Chairman

105 N. Broad St.,
PO Box 273
Mt. Auburn, IL 62547
Cell: 217 820-2038
Home: 217 676-5571

Email:
navy5858@hotmail.com

Post 4495-11

POST AWARDS

A Special Plaque will be awarded to the top Post in the following Membership Categories who reports the largest amount of hours, dollars, and members. These Awards will be presented during our State Convention.

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

Report all completed work to the Department on the Department Program Report form. Good luck to all participating Posts.

PUBLIC SERVANT RECOGNITION

Each year, the Department of Illinois recognizes the great efforts of public servants throughout Illinois. Unless otherwise noted, the deadline to State Headquarters is April 30 for award nominations in the following categories:

- ☐ Outstanding Legislator of the Year
- ☐ Law Enforcement Officer of the Year (Jan. 1 for national consideration)
- ☐ Firefighter of the Year (Jan. 1 for national consideration)
- ☐ Paramedic/EMT of the year (Jan. 1 for national consideration)
- ☐ Emergency Medical Dispatcher of the year (Jan. 1 for national consideration)
- ☐ EOD Technician (Jan. 1)
- ☐ Outstanding Patriotism of the Year
- ☐ Outstanding Governmental Service of the Year
- ☐ Clergy of the Year
- ☐ News Media Professional of the Year (Public Relations program)
- ☐ Outstanding Citizen of the Year

For most of these awards, there is no special form to fill out to nominate an individual. Just submit a short nomination letter as why the individual deserves to be recognized. Include the name and address of the individual submitted in the appropriate category and the sponsoring Post and/or Auxiliary and the Post/Auxiliary contact person.

PUBLIC SERVANT RECOGNITION

(NATIONAL)

PUBLIC SERVANT AWARD CITATIONS FOR EMERGENCY MEDICAL TECHNICIANS, LAW ENFORCEMENT PERSONNEL, EOD TECHNICIANS, EMERGENCY MEDICAL DISPATCHERS, AND FIREFIGHTERS

Each year, the Veterans of Foreign Wars selects emergency medical technicians, law enforcement, 911 dispatchers and firefighter personnel to receive VFW Public Servant Awards. Post Safety Chairmen are encouraged to submit a candidate for these awards to their Department Headquarters by Jan. 1. The Department must select a single candidate for each of the four awards and submit those to VFW National Headquarters by Feb. 1.

NOTE: The only item the National VFW Programs Department requires is the "VFW Department Public Servant Award Citation Request Form" which is now available on the VFW website. You can locate this form by logging in to vfw.org and searching under "My VFW" in the Training & Support section.

VFW National Emergency Medical Technician Public Servant Citation:

Any individual, who actively gives emergency medical treatment, provides rescue service or civil disaster assistance as a member of any public or volunteer company organized to give emergency medical care, provide rescue and civil disaster assistance to our nation's citizens.

VFW National Law Enforcement Public Servant Citation:

Any individual who serves in a municipal, county, state or federal unit tasked with enforcement of the laws pertaining to their area of responsibility. This award does not apply to individual employed by private companies or security services.

VFW National Emergency Medical Dispatcher Citation

Any individual who is employed by a 911 Dispatch Center

VFW National Firefighters Public Servant Citation: Any individual who actively fights fires as a member of any public or volunteer company organized to fight fires and give assistance to our nation's citizens.

EOD Technician

Criteria for these awards – Candidates must have demonstrated:

- 1) Recognition by their colleagues or those they serve.
- 2) Consistent excellence in the performance of their duties.
- 3) Consistent dedication to their official responsibilities over a period of years and continuous growth in responsibilities and skills within their profession.

Documentation required for all Candidates:

- 1) Nomination letter containing the candidate's name, title, address, telephone and identifying the award for which the individual should be considered.
 - a. Include justification outlining background in field, accomplishments and awards.

Note NEW (not required) One (1) page VFW Public Servant Award Citation Post Entry Form is now available on the VFW website. You can locate this form by logging in to vfw.org and searching under "My VFW" in the Training & Support section.

If you have any questions contact Tammy Beauchamp at 816.756.3390 Ext. 6287, e-mail tbeauchamp@vfw.org.



VFW Public Servant Award Citation Post Entry Form

NOTE: VFW Point of Contact should fill out their section below prior to distributing this form.
This will provide individuals from outside of the VFW with the needed information to submit their packets successfully.

To be filled out by VFW representative

Sponsoring VFW Post #: Sponsoring District #:

Date of Presentation: MM/DD/YY (if available)

VFW Post POC

Full Name:

Phone: Email:

Address: (where to mail entry)

City: State: Zip:

Individual Submitting Nomination

Full Name:

Phone: Email:

Nominee Information

Choose appropriate citation: (EMT, Firefighter or Law Enforcement)

Full Name: (please list as you wish it stated on the citation)

Occupation Title: (if any) (please list as you wish it stated on the citation)

Employer Name: (please list as you wish it stated on the citation)

Address of Employer:

City: State: Zip:

Employer Phone: Employer Email: (if available)

Please complete this form and submit to your local VFW Post using the information provided above. Ensure to include all required documentation that is outlined on the instructions sheet provided with this form. All post entries must be received by their **Department Headquarters no later than January 1st**. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Tammy Beauchamp at 816-756-3390 x 6287, e-mail tbeauchamp@vfw.org



VFW Life Saving Award Citation Entry Form

NOTE: Please attach and send with this form all documentation of the event (newspaper clippings, articles, etc.).

To be filled out by VFW Representative

Sponsoring VFW Post #:	<input type="text"/>	VFW Department:	<input type="text"/>
Date of Presentation: MM/DD/YY (if available)	<input type="text"/>		
VFW POC			
Full Name:	<input type="text"/>		
Phone:	<input type="text"/>	Email:	<input type="text"/>
Address: (for mailing citation)	<input type="text"/>		
City:	<input type="text"/>	State:	<input type="text"/>
		Zip:	<input type="text"/>

Nominee Information

Choose appropriate citation: (Regular, Line of Duty or Valor)	<input type="text"/>
Full Name: (please list as you wish it stated on the citation)	<input type="text"/>
Gender:	<input type="text"/>
Occupation Title: (please list as you wish it stated on the citation or N/A)	<input type="text"/>
Employer Name: (If available)	<input type="text"/>
Address of Employer: (If available)	<input type="text"/>
City:	<input type="text"/>
State:	<input type="text"/>
Zip:	<input type="text"/>
Employer Phone:	<input type="text"/>
Employer Email: (if available)	<input type="text"/>

Please complete this form and submit to VFW National Headquarters, Attn: Tammy Beauchamp at Fax# 816-968-1149 or E-mail to tbeauchamp@vfw.org or Lynn Rolf at lrolf@vfw.org. Ensure to include all required documentation that is outlined above in reference to the event. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us.

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VETERANS ASSISTANCE

VETERANS ASSISTANCE

☐ **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

17834 Ridgewood Dr.
Hazel Crest, IL 60429
Phone: (708) 705-6090

E-mail:
billbrowne1225@comcast.net

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

6952 W. Wolfram
Chicago, IL 60634
Phone: (773) 637-2469

E-mail:
pbezazian@sbcglobal.net

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.



YOUTH PROGRAMS

YOUTH PROGRAMS

☐ **Youth Activities**

- ☐ **Voice of Democracy**
- ☐ **Patriot's Pen**
- ☐ **Youth Programs**
 - *JROTC/SROTC*
 - *Civil Air Patrol*
 - *Navy Sea Cadets*
 - *Support of Community Youth Activities*
 - *Youth Recognition Programs*
 - *Post Scholarships*
 - *VFW in the Classroom*

☐ **Teacher of the Year**

☐ **Scouting**

- ☐ **Scout of the Year**
- ☐ **Scouting Awards**
 - *Eagle Scout*
 - *Girl Scout Gold Award*
- ☐ **Support of Scout Troop or activities**

VOICE OF DEMOCRACY

The 2025-2026 Theme is
“How Are You Showing Patriotism and Support for Our Country?”

Program Overview

The Voice of Democracy Scholarship Competition is especially designed for high school students from grades 9 through 12 including home-schooled students. It is a valuable educational experience for students and a wonderful opportunity for positive publicity for students, teachers, schools as well as the VFW in your community. The program dates back to 1946 and continues to be one of the VFW's most exciting programs. The VFW annually commits \$3 million in scholarships and incentives at the Post, District, State and National levels. Participants write and then record a three-to-five-minute audio essay on a patriotic theme selected annually. The Voice of Democracy Program is endorsed by the National Association of Secondary School Principals and is designed to foster patriotism in the participants and enhance their written and oral communication skills. In addition, this program demonstrates the VFW's willingness to partner with local schools and the community.

Key Information for Posts

You may make this a joint effort with your Post Auxiliary. Prior planning ensures a high-level performance. Start early! In August, send press releases to local newspapers announcing the 2025-2026 topic. Shortly after school starts, bring or send Voice of Democracy materials to local principals or a previously developed contact within the school. Remember there are many home-schooled students that can't be reached through the local schools. This makes media presence even more critical to the success of this program. Your R.O.E (Regional Office of Education) or in some areas D.O.E. (District Office of Education) has a list of all home-schooled students who register with the R.O.E. or D.O.E. (Home schooled students are not required to register but most do to insure accreditation.) They are generally grateful for the opportunity to advertise student scholarship information, and home-schooled students and their parents are often grateful as well.

It will be the Post PP and VOD Chairperson's responsibility to submit their name and email address to the District PP and VOD Chairperson's respectively. In turn, the respective District Chairperson will add your credentials to Scholars App as described in the simplified training developed by the Department of II. Scholars App will generate a free poster advertising the PP/VOD Contests. You can make copies of these posters and distribute them in libraries, churches, community bulletin boards etc. The posters are complete with a QR Code outlining the rules and eligibility for students. Students can enroll in the contests directly through Scholars App.



David Darte
Chairman

173 Yaeger Lake Trail
Litchfield, IL 62056
Cell: (217) 273-2218
Email: ddarte@yahoo.com

Post 3912-12

As soon as possible after the Oct. 31st deadline for student entries, assign your judges through Scholars App as directed in the department training. Post deadline for judging is Nov. 15, 2025 unless otherwise specified by your District VOD Chairman. Note: The judging criteria supplied by national is vague. The Judging Rubric that is used at the II department level gives judges more quantifiable guidelines and is available at vfwil.org under Resources/ PP and VOD. Department recommends you send this rubric to your post judges in addition to what Scholars App. provides.

Once the post judging is completed, Post Chairpersons should advance (promote) post winners to the district for judging as prescribed by Scholars App. Posts may advance their "winner(s)" based on the following schedule;

- 1-15 essays – One (1) entry to District
- 16-30 essays – Two (2) entries to District
- 31-45 essays – Three (3) entries to District

(NOTE: Each additional 15 essays, entitles another entry. The number of schools participating does not affect the number of entries allowed.)

Do not forget to heap loads of recognition and praise on your post winner(s). Completing a press release for the local paper with a picture, as well as some prize for the winner(s), would be most appropriate.

Key Information for Districts

District Chairpersons are urged to aggressively promote the Voice of Democracy Program. After coordination with your auxiliary counterpart, please reach out to every post and auxiliary in your district. Establish a quick, easy and effective line of communication between you and the Post Voice of Democracy Chairman/Commander. Consider using email or social media for this purpose. It will be the District PP and VOD Chairperson's responsibility to submit their name and email address to the Department PP and VOD Chairpersons respectively with cc to the Department Quartermaster at vfwil@vfwil.org. It will also be the District PP and VOD Chairperson's responsibility to enroll all posts in their district and their respective Post PP and VOD Chairpersons into Scholars App as described in the simplified instructions developed by Department of II. ASAP so those individuals will be included in the Scholars App Suborganization line-up. As the District meeting is to be a School of Instruction, it would not be at out of line for the District Voice of Democracy Chairman to ask for time to present training materials to Post Voice of Democracy Chairmen and Commanders on the program requirements.

Posts have been advised to have their post judging completed by November 15, 2025. Please advise posts in your district of your deadline to receive post entries via Scholars App This will allow adequate time to assign judges, complete district judging and advance

District Winner to department in Scholars app by December 15, 2025.

Headshots of District winners can be uploaded to Scholars App. Picture must be a good quality color, head and shoulders photo (cell phone pictures are acceptable). As an alternative, pictures can be sent to Department Headquarters to arrive no later than December 15, 2025. The Student Introductory Questionnaire with both parent's names must also be in the hands of the department by December 15, 2025. This will allow time for the printing of the program book distributed at the State Awards Banquet.

Key Dates (Please Note New Deadlines)

- October 31, 2025 - Student entries to post
 - November 15, 2025 - Post judging complete unless otherwise specified your District
 - December 10, 2025 - District judging complete
 - December 15, 2025 - District winners due to the State Headquarters
 - January 10, 2026 - State Judging will be completed
 - January 10, 2026 - District Participation Report due to the State Headquarters
 - January 15, 2026 - Department winners due to National
- January 31, 2026 - Department reports due to National
February 14, 2026 - State Voice of Democracy Awards Banquet, Springfield

Prize Structure at the National and State Level

The winner from each state competition earns a trip to Valley Forge Pennsylvania and competes for national awards which range from a minimum \$1,000 up to \$35,000 for first place.

The State Awards are:

1st Place - John H. Emery Youth, Pageantry and Patriotism Fund First Place Award in Memory of George G. Gorin, Jr	\$2,500 Cash
2nd Place – George Cramer/Ray Soden Scholarship Award	\$1,500 Cash
3rd Place – Terry L. McKinney Memorial Award	\$1,250 Cash
4th Place – Dale & Catherine Clifton Award	\$1,000 Cash
5th Place – Johnson Phelps Post 5220 Auxiliary.....	\$750 Cash
6th Place – Jarnell/Ross Award.....	\$600 Cash
7th Place – William Glenn Britt Memorial Award.....	\$550 Cash
8th Place - Dick Cosner Memorial Award.....	\$500 Cash
9th Place – Vern & Lorraine Umphery, Post 6863 & L.A. Award.....	\$450 Cash
10th Place – Robert C. Holysz Post 2200 Award.....	\$400 Cash
11th Place – Grant-Parkholme Post 9115 Award.....	\$375 Cash
12th Place – West End VFW Post 2004 Memorial Award.....	\$350 Cash
13th Place - Chester Spears Memorial Award.....	\$325 Cash
All other District Winners will receive an award of	\$300 Cash

Districts and posts wishing to become an award sponsor should forward their donation of \$300 to Department Headquarters by December 1, 2025; it should be earmarked V.O.D. Award Sponsorship. Thank you for this valuable support of the state program. Sponsorships will be awarded in the order received. Districts wishing to sponsor the Annual VOD Pizza Party or the Annual VOD Ice Cream Social for 2024-2025 Champions can donate \$300, but their donation must be earmarked “VOD Pizza Party Sponsor” or VOD Ice Cream Social Sponsor.” The first district to respond will receive the sponsorship. Districts wanting to sponsor other Voice of Democracy weekend events, such as Saturday’s student luncheon, the Springfield tour or the tour of The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum should forward a donation of \$300 to Department Headquarters. The Donation should be earmarked Springfield Tour.

Each District Winner and family will be provided two nights free lodging in Springfield and one ticket to the Voice of Democracy Awards Banquet.

The post sponsoring the state winner will receive a beautifully engraved plaque at the State Convention.

The school that the state winner attends will receive a \$500 award. In the event the student is home-schooled, the Department of Illinois VFW will donate \$500 to the charity of the parents’ choosing.

The district sponsoring the largest number of students participating in the VOD contest will receive \$100. Because districts are comprised of varying numbers of posts, the award will be calculated by dividing the total number of students participating by the total number of posts in the district (regardless if those posts participate or not). This is intended to level the playing field among larger and smaller districts. The award will be known as the Voice of Democracy Participation Quotient.

Additional Resources

All the information needed to conduct the PP/VOD programs is online at <https://www.vfw.org>. After you log in, (or create an account and log in), click on My VFW and then on the VFW Training and Support heading. There you will find a wealth of information about VFW programs! Scroll down and click on Community Service & Youth Activities for more information specific to Voice of Democracy.

You can download and print the student entry forms for Voice of Democracy at the National website also by visiting the following link: <https://www.vfw.org/community/youth-and-education/youth-scholarships>

National's supply catalog has printed entry forms, posters and a wide variety of awards and gifts designed for use in the Voice of Democracy program. Telephone: (800) 821-2606 or <https://www.vfwstore.org/>

The State Voice of Democracy Director and Assistant Director are excited to help your post and district have a very successful Voice of Democracy program. If you have any questions about the Voice of Democracy, let us know. Our contact information is at the top of this section of the CLM.

State Dashboard Reporting

The participation entry for the Voice of Democracy Contest will be posted to the dashboard in February based upon the report submitted by each District Voice of Democracy Chairman to the State Chairman.

NOTE: Posts can receive credit for Voice of Democracy participation by making a cash donation to the Department of Illinois. Send a check earmarked, Voice of Democracy, by April 30, 2025:

Posts with 100 members or more must donate \$200.00. Posts with less than 100 members must donate \$100.00

Promote patriotism in our youth through the Voice of Democracy program as we embrace the motto of 2025-2026 IL VFW State Commander Eugene Blackwell "Serving our Community with Resilience"

VOICE OF DEMOCRACY



2025-2026 Theme

“How Are You Showing Patriotism And Support For Our Country?”

Student Entry Deadline: October 31, 2025

Patriotic Audio Essay Competition Grand Prize: \$35,000 Award

What is the Voice of Democracy Program?

Since 1947, the Voice of Democracy has been the Veterans of Foreign Wars' (VFW's) premier scholarship program. Each year, nearly 26,000 high school students compete for more than \$2 million in scholarships and incentives. Students compete by writing and recording an audio essay on an annual patriotic theme. This year's theme is, “How Are You Showing Patriotism And Support For Our Country?”

Why Should I Enter?

Prizes and scholarships can be awarded at the Post, District, state and national level. National winners will be notified of their scholarship & placement.

The Rules

Who can enter?

The Voice of Democracy is open to students in grades 9-12 by the Oct. 31 deadline who are enrolled in a public, private or parochial high school or home study program in the United States, its territories and possessions; or dependents of U.S. military or civilian personnel in overseas schools. Although U.S. citizenship is not required, students must be lawful U.S. permanent residents or have applied for permanent residence (the application for which has not been denied) and intend to become a U.S. citizen at the earliest opportunity allowed by law. Foreign exchange students, students age 20 or over, GED or Adult Education Students are ineligible.

What do I need to enter?

Record your original 3-5 minute (+ or – 5 second max.) audio essay on a flash drive, or other electronic device. You will submit the recording, typed essay and this completed entry form. Provide these items to your school/group competition or VFW Post for judging. In addition you can submit your emailed entry form, essay, and audio file to the VFW Post upon approval. You must be the sole author of your essay. Inappropriate use of ChatGPT or other AI tools is not allowed. The recording must be in your own voice and in English. Hearing/speech impaired students should email the Voice of Democracy National Office at youthscholarships@vfw.org for special instructions. No music, singing, poetry or sound effects are allowed. To ensure fairness and impartiality in judging, essays must be anonymous. Please do not include your name, address, school name, or any other personal identifiers in the body of your essay. Additionally, avoid references to your race, sex, religion, national origin, or other specific personal characteristics that could reveal your identity. General references to nationality or patriotic identity (such as being an American or referencing American values) are permitted if they are relevant to the essay theme. However, personal identifiers tied to your individual background or experience should be avoided.

You may enter only one competition at one Post (if otherwise eligible) per year. At any time during the contest, additional participant personal information could be requested by the VFW, including but not limited to a photograph, SSN, or biographical information.

Where Do I Submit My Entry?

All entries begin at the VFW Post level. The only exception is where schools/classes/youth groups have large numbers of students and wish to conduct their own competition, submitting one winner for each 15 students to the VFW Post. Individual students may submit their entry directly to the Post. Entries sent to VFW National will be returned. One winner for every 15 entries from each Post advances to District and one District winner advances to the state (Department) competition. If you need help finding a participating VFW Post, follow these instructions: First, visit this website [vfw.org/FindaPost](https://www.vfw.org/FindaPost) to “Find A VFW Post.” If you do not have success in finding a Post, or if you have trouble getting in touch with them, you can contact your VFW Department (state) office to see if they can offer any information or assistance. You can visit this link <https://www.vfw.org/ContactUs/> and look for “Find a State Contact” to get your VFW state office's phone number and email. If you still need assistance, please email us at VFW National Headquarters at youthscholarships@vfw.org

What Is the Deadline for My Entry?

All entries competing at the Post level must be in the hands of that VFW Post by midnight, **Oct. 31, 2025**. It is the responsibility of the student to meet this deadline by submitting their entry to the proper location by ensuring it is a participating Post.

What Are the Judging Criteria?

Originality is worth 35 points:

Treatment of the theme should show imagination and human interest.

Content is worth 30 points:

Clearly express your ideas in an organized manner. Fully develop your theme and use transitions to move smoothly from one idea to another.

Delivery is worth 35 points:

Speak in a clear and credible manner.

2025-2026 Official Entry Form Voice of Democracy Competition

Must Be Completed by All Contestants

Name: First, M.I., Last _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

() _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Date of Birth (mm/dd/yy) _____ Grade in School _____ Age _____ Jacket Size _____

School Name, City, State _____

Teacher's name and Email (if applicable) _____

To Be Completed by Student's Parent/Guardian

(Required even if student is 18 or over)

Parent/Guardian Name (Printed) _____

Parent/Guardian Signature _____ Date _____

() _____

Parent/Guardian Daytime Phone _____

Parent/Guardian Email _____

Participant Agreement for Students Advancing to National Level

If selected as a first-place state winner, I have the consent of my parent/guardian and school to attend the Founding Forward Spirit of America Leadership trip to Valley Forge, Pennsylvania as a guest of the VFW National Organization. In consideration for permission to participate in the National Voice of Democracy Competition ("Competition") I do hereby, for myself, for my heirs, executors, administrators and assignees, waive, release and discharge all rights and claims which I have or which may hereafter accrue against the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW) and/or the Departments (state organizations) of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and their respective officers, agents, successors and assigns from any damages which may be sustained by me in connection with my participation in or association with the Competition and/or arising out of any travel related to the Competition. In the event of sickness, accident or injury in connection with the Competition, I consent to and accept the services of a duly licensed medical, surgical or dental specialist selected on my behalf and for such treatments, as they may deem necessary. I understand that VFW will not be liable for such treatment. I further understand that the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States retains non-exclusive rights to use my audio file, essay, name and likeness in the promotion and execution of the organization's programs and activities.

I Have Read and Understand the Rules and Participant Agreement

I certify that I am the sole author of the enclosed audio/essay entry and that I have not inappropriately used any AI tools or Chat GPT. I have only entered the competition once yearly if otherwise eligible. I understand that if it is found that I have entered any other Post's competition or used this essay for another VFW competition, I face elimination from the competition and will return any and all prizes or incentives awarded.

Signature of Student Participant _____ Date _____

To Be Completed by the VFW Post

I certify that this student has an authorized entry in our VFW Post Level Voice of Democracy Competition.

Post Commander/Chairperson Signature _____ Post # _____

VFW Auxiliary President/Chairperson Signature (if applicable) _____

Post Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

VFW Post Email _____

No. of students participating _____

No. of winners advanced to District _____

Amt. of Post/Aux. scholarship awards \$ _____

Amt. of Post/Aux. additional expenses (banquet, pins, etc.) \$ _____

To Be Completed by the VFW District

I certify that the student named in the previous section is the duly selected winner of the Voice of Democracy Contest District Competition and is our sole entry into the Departments.

District Chairperson Signature _____ Dist. # _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

() _____

Phone _____ Email _____

To Be Completed by the VFW Department Chairperson

I certify that the student named in the previous section is the duly selected first-place winner of the Voice of Democracy Department Competition and is our sole entry into the National Judging.

Department Chairperson Signature _____

() _____

Daytime Phone _____ Email _____

The winner ☒ has been ☐ will be (check one) notified that they are the first-place Department winner on _____.

For assistance contact:
816.968.2787
Email: youthscholarships@vfw.org

Local VFW Post Information:

Contact: _____

Phone: _____ Best Time To Call: _____

Alternate Contact: _____

Phone: _____ Best Time To Call: _____





Voice of Democracy Introduction Questionnaire

Representing VFW Post _____ and its Auxiliary,
a _____ at _____
GRADE (FRESHMAN, SOPHOMORE, JUNIOR, SENIOR) SCHOOL NAME
in _____
CITY

STUDENT'S NAME

PRONUNCIATION OF STUDENT'S NAME

The student is the Son/Daughter of

Mother: _____

and

Father: _____

SUMMARY

DISTRICT VOICE OF DEMOCRACY PARTICIPATION REPORT

DISTRICT NO. _____

DEPARTMENT OF _____, VFW

The VFW Posts and Auxiliaries identified in this report in this District participated in the VFW annual Voice of Democracy Program.

GRAND TOTALS FOR POST COMPETITION: list totals taken from District report form(s)

Posts	Auxs	Students	Post Winners Advanced
\$ _____		\$ _____	
Scholarships & Awards		Addl. Money Expended	

MONETARY VALUE OF DISTRICT COMPETITION (add County Councils if applicable):

District Scholarships & Awards \$ _____

District Additional Expenses \$ _____

Signed by: _____ Date _____
District Chairman

***PLEASE ATTACH COMPLETED REPORT FORM(S) AND GIVE
THIS COMPLETED SUMMARY TO YOUR DEPARTMENT
VOICE OF DEMOCRACY CHAIRMAN***

DISTRICT VOICE OF DEMOCRACY REPORT FORM

[illegible]

YOUTH ACTIVITIES PROGRAM

Youth Activities programs can be a big asset for your post and district when they are promoted in your communities. Issue press releases and introduce these programs in the community. People like to hear of organizations doing things for veterans as well as local youth.

All the information that is needed to conduct the Youth Activities Program is online at <https://vfw.org>. After you log in (or create an account and login), click on My VFW and then on the VFW Training and Support heading. There you will find a wealth of information about VFW programs! Scroll down and click on Community Service & Youth Activities for more information specific information, including the Youth Activities Manual.

When approaching the various types of youth activities, develop a plan of implementation. Allow plenty of time for press releases and advertising as well as contact with community leaders. Local papers like to hear of different youth programs, so, it is usually easy to get coverage. Our youth is our future and can strengthen the posts within their communities. We are promoting good citizenship and showing young people the joys of service.

Informed post, district and auxiliary chairpersons are vital within our organizations. They provide a vital link between the community and today's youth. Contact your local schools and scouting organizations, as well as the many church groups of your areas. Check out the various kind of activities which they already have and try to build on them. Be excited about our programs. Be creative and work in new programs with local teachers and scout leaders. Be sure to honor these young people with certificates, trophies, plaques, and cash awards to help keep them excited and motivated.

Encourage your posts and districts to report their programs on the Department Dashboard. Reporting on a monthly basis makes it easier and more accurate.

Post Awards

There will be a \$50.00 cash award and certificate for first place presented to the Posts who have the most hours, dollars, and member participation reported in the following membership categories:

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

District Awards

There will be one district plaque award presented to the district who has the most hours, dollars, and member participation reported.



John Davin
Chairman

516 Lee Lane
Bolingbrook, IL 60440
Phone: 630-632-9878
Email:
bigjohndavin@hotmail.com

Post 5917-18

PATRIOT'S PEN

2025-2026 Theme: "How Are You Showing Patriotism and Support for Our Country?"

Program overview

The Patriot's Pen Program is a 300-400- word essay contest sponsored by the VFW and Auxiliary nationwide for students in grades 6 through 8, including those home-schooled. The VFW appreciates the difficult task that teachers and administrators have to develop curriculum to prepare students for their future. We realize that it is particularly challenging because of the myriad of career choices that lie ahead for students. Regardless of the path they choose, however, one thing that students have in common is that they will, hopefully, all become active U.S. citizens and the next generation of decision-makers and leaders of our great country. For that reason, the VFW believes that students are never too young to ponder the rich heritage of freedoms that they are inheriting from those patriots who have gone before and to begin to formulate their role in preserving and advancing those freedoms. The Patriot's Pen Contest incorporates both academic and good citizenship instruction. In addition, we believe that most would agree that learning to effectively organize and communicate their beliefs and ideas is a skill that will serve students well in all walks of life.

Key information for Posts

Get started in your schools as soon as possible. Be sure to have all the information (entry forms, theme, rules, eligibility requirements, post award information as well as district and state information) when you approach your teachers to help you - maybe even a copy of last year's winning essay. The VFW Store has many supplies to aid you, including posters that can be displayed in libraries and on community bulletin boards. Posts and auxiliaries are encouraged to work together in promoting and conducting the program.

Rules:

The contest is open to all 6th, 7th, and 8th grade students enrolled in a public, private, or parochial school as well as a home-schooled study program within the United States, its' territories and possessions; or enrolled in an overseas school as a dependent of the US Military or US Civilian personnel. (Foreign exchange students are excluded.)

The essay must be the contestant's original work; and the participants cannot refer to their race, disabilities, national origin, or identify themselves, their school, city or state, in any way within the essay. All essays must be typewritten and have to be no less than 300 words or more than 400 words. A one letter word such as (a), will be counted as one word. Essays either under or above requirements will be disqualified. Complete rules and judging criteria are available at <https://vfw.org>

After post judging is complete, the Post Chairman may advance their "winner(s)" based on the following schedule:

- 1-15 essays - One (1) entry to District
- 16-30 essays - Two (2) entries to District
- 31-45 essays - Three (3) entries to District

(NOTE: Each additional 15 essays entitles one additional entry. The number of schools participating does not affect the number of entries allowed.)

Once the post judging is completed, Chairpersons and Commanders should ensure that the winner's materials are properly submitted to the District Patriot's Pen Chairperson. Please follow the District Chairperson's instructions regarding where, when, and how entries are to be submitted. Unless otherwise directed, you will need to submit items 1-4, that are listed below under Key information for Districts. Note that there is a link provided there to access those documents. Do not forget to heap loads of recognition and praise on your post winner(s). Completing a press release for the local paper with a picture, as well as some prize for the winner(s), would be most appropriate.

Deadlines:

- October 31 - Student entries to post
- November 15 - Post judging complete Check on your District's due date
- December 10 - District judging complete
- December 15 - District winners due to the State Headquarters
- January 10 - State Judging will be completed
- January 10 - District Participation Report due to the State Headquarters
- January 15 - Department winners due to National
- January 31 - Department reports due to National
- February 7, 2026 State Voice of Democracy Awards Banquet, Springfield

Key Information for Districts

District Chairpersons are urged to aggressively promote the Patriot's Pen Program. After coordination with your auxiliary counterpart, please reach out to every post and auxiliary in your district. Establish a quick, easy, and effective line of communication between you and the Post Patriot's Pen Chairman/Commander. Consider using email or social media for this purpose. As the District meeting is to be a School of Instruction, it would not be at all out of line for the Patriot's Pen Chairman to ask for time to train Post Patriot's Pen Chairmen and Commanders on the program requirements.

Districts may advance one winner to the State Competition. Be sure to forward your District Winner's entry material to the State Youth Activities Chainnan with a copy to Department Headquarters to arrive no later than December 22, 2024. The winner's package must include the following:

- Typed copy of the speech

- Entry form with all necessary signatures

A glossy 3x5 head-and-shoulder, color photograph of your winner is acceptable but a digital photo is much preferred. Photos taken by a smart phone are acceptable and can easily be emailed.

- Patriot's Pen Introductory questionnaire

(Email is the preferred method of submitting entries! A flash drive with all the information is also perfectly acceptable. If that is foreign to you, please recruit someone to help you - entries submitted the old fashioned way will be accepted as well)

Please understand that all this information is critical both to comply with National requirements and to allow the printing of the program book distributed at the State Awards Banquet. If critical information is not received timely, I may need to contact your student directly even if you have not yet announced your district winner. Please send in a complete entry - including quality photographs - so this action is not required.

The District Report Form and District Participation report form are due by December 30. Those documents are available on following pages.

The following link will allow you to access the documents required for submission of your entry. Email entries are fast and eliminate expensive postage and the risk of lost mail. Documents can also be copied as needed. Documents are available on the slate website at <http://www.vfw11.org> and are located under Programs. Click on Patriot's Pen.

Top 4 entries will receive two nights lodging at the Department of Illinois Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen Awards Banquet and meeting weekend in Springfield. Students will also tour Springfield sites.

The State Awards are:

1st Place - John H. Emery Youth, Pageantry and Patriotism Fund First Place Award in memory of Ronald Hubert \$1,000 Cash
2nd Place - Gaye Hines Memorial Second Place Award.....\$500 Cash
3rd Place Award - William Glenn Britt Memorial Third Place Award.....\$400 Cash
4th Place Award - Raymond L. Moreland Memorial Fourth Place Award.....\$300 Cash

****The winner will be announced at the Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen Awards Banquet and the winner will read his or her winning essay****

District Award

The district sponsoring the largest number of students participating in the PP contest will receive \$100. Because the district is comprised of varying numbers of posts, the award will be calculated by the total number of students participating divided by the total number of posts in the district (regardless of if those post participate or not). This is intended to level the playing field among larger and smaller districts. The award will be known as the "Patriot's Pen Participation Quotient".

State Dashboard Reporting

The Participation entry for the Patriot's Pen Contest will be posted in February based upon the report submitted by each District Youth Activities Chairman to the State Director.

NOTE: Posts can receive credit for Patriots Pen participation by making a cash donation to the Department of Illinois, VFW earmarked 'Patriots Pen' by April 30, 2025. Posts with 100 members or more must donate \$100.00 Posts with less than 100 members must donate \$50.00

The Post sponsoring the State Winner will receive a beautifully engraved plaque at the State Convention.

Smart/Maher VFW National Citizenship Education Teacher Award

(Please note Deadlines)

This Program recognizes teachers who care about America. VFW annually recognizes the Nation's top classroom Elementary, Junior High (Middle Schools) and High School teachers who teach Citizenship Education topics regularly and who promote American History, traditions and institutions. Nominations are submitted by fellow teachers, supervisors, and other interested individuals (not relatives). Self-nominees are not eligible.

National Headquarters mails the brochures out directly to Schools...but posts still need to contact the schools regarding this program.

Posts will need to follow up, and the deadlines are as follows:

- Teacher Nominations to Post October 31, 2025
- Completion of Post Judging November 15, 2025
- Completion of District Judging December 15, 2025
- Completion of Department Judging January 10, 2026
- Department winners to National January 15, 2026
- District participation reports due to Department Chairman - January 1, 2026
- Department Reports to National February 1, 2026

District Chairmen must send the following to Department Headquarters for Judging:

- ▶ Winner's original entry form and essay of 350 words or less
- ▶ Winner's official Post Teacher Entry form with signatures at Post & District Level.
- ▶ One page resume (no more than two sides)
- ▶ Up to 5 (five) pages (both sides) of additional documentation (i.e. news articles, supervisor's recommendations.)
- ▶ Good quality head and shoulders photograph (Digital photos are preferred! Color copies or low-grade computer printouts will not be accepted.)

(Note: No entries will be considered for department Judging if all of the above criteria is not included with the nomination.)

State Awards

The first-place winner in each of the three categories will receive \$100.00 Cash and a special engraved plaque.

A special engraved plaque will also be presented to the winning Teacher's School.

The Categories are:

- Kindergarten through 5th Grade
- 6th through 8th Grade
- 9th through 12th Grade

National Awards: (as shown on our National Headquarters web page, <https://vfw.org>)

Included in this Program is the end-of-the-year Post Report Form that the District Chairman is required to fill out and submit to the State Youth Activities Program Director by no later than January 1, 2025.

PATRIOT'S PEN



2025-2026 Theme

“How Are You Showing Patriotism And Support For Our Country?”

Student Entry Deadline: October 31, 2025

Patriotic Written Essay Competition Grand Prize: \$5,000 Award

What is the Patriot's Pen Program?

Conducted nationwide, this VFW-sponsored youth essay competition gives students an opportunity to write essays expressing their views on an annual patriotic theme. We invite you to join the more than 60,000 students who participated last year in this contest.

Why Should I Enter?

Prizes and scholarships can be awarded at the Post, District, State and national level. Department (State) winners receive a portion of \$55,000 in national awards. National Winners will receive at least \$500. **The first-place national award is currently \$5,000.**

The Internal Revenue Service requires a recipient awarded more than \$599 be given Form 1099 identifying the proceeds as taxable income. This may require the winner to provide their social security number.

How Does the Contest Work?

All entries begin at the VFW Post level. The only exception is where schools/classes/youth groups have large numbers of students and wish to conduct their own competition, submitting one winner for each 15 students to the VFW Post. Individual students may submit their entry directly to the Post.

The contest consists of four levels. The first level (entry) is sponsored by VFW Posts. Post winners advance, one for every 15 entries, to the VFW District (regional) level where one first-place winner is advanced to the VFW Department (state) level. The first-place winner at the Department level is then advanced into the VFW national competition.

Who Can Enter?

Patriot's Pen is open to 6th, 7th and 8th-grade students enrolled by the Oct. 31 deadline in public, private or parochial schools in the U.S., its territories or its possessions; or dependents of U.S. military or civilian personnel in overseas schools. Home-schooled students also are eligible. Although U.S. citizenship is not required, students must be lawful U.S. permanent residents or have applied for permanent residence (the application which has not been denied) and intend to become a U.S. citizen at the earliest opportunity allowed by law. (Foreign exchange students are ineligible.)

How Do I Get Started?

- Ask a teacher or youth group/club adult leader to supervise the Patriot's Pen writing contest.
- Contact a participating VFW Post and indicate your interest in participating.

- Establish a contact person who is a member of that VFW Post or its VFW Auxiliary.
- Make sure that your essay is submitted to the VFW Post before the contest deadline of Oct. 31. You can submit your essay and entry form electronically by email upon the Post's approval. Entries sent to the VFW National Headquarters directly will be returned.

How Am I Judged?

Knowledge of the theme is worth 30 points:

You must show a thorough knowledge of the theme in your work. Demonstrate you have researched the issue extensively.

Theme development is worth 35 points:

Answer all relevant facts about the theme such as the who, what, where, when and why. Relate the theme to your own experiences.

Clarity of ideas is worth 35 points:

Write your essay in an easy-to-understand format. Leave your reader with a clear understanding of your explanation of the theme.

What Is the Theme?

VFW's Commander-in-Chief annually chooses the year's theme. The 2025-2026 theme is:

How Are You Showing Patriotism And Support For Our Country?"

Deadline Information.

To qualify, all entries must be submitted to a sponsoring VFW Post by midnight Oct. 31.

Note:

If you need help finding a participating VFW Post, follow these instructions:

First, visit vfw.org/FindaPost to "Find a VFW Post."

If you don't have success in finding a Post, or if you have trouble contacting them, you can contact your VFW Department (state) headquarters office to see if they can offer any information or assistance. You can visit vfw.org/contactus to look for "Find a State Contact" to get your VFW state office's phone number and email.

**For assistance contact
the VFW National Headquarters
at 816.968.2787
Email: youthscholarships@vfw.org**

2025-2026 Official Entry Form Patriot's Pen Competition

Must Be Completed by All Contestants

Name: First, M.I., Last

Address

City, State, Zip

()

Phone

Email

Date of Birth (mm/dd/yy)

Grade in School

Essay Word Count

School Name, City, State

Teacher's name and Email (if applicable)

To Be Completed by Student's Parent/Guardian

(Required even if student is 18 or over)

Parent/Guardian Name (Printed)

Parent/Guardian Signature

Date

()

Parent/Guardian's Daytime Phone

Parent/Guardian's Email

What Are the Rules?

• You must write your own essay.

• All essays should be typed in English with no color or graphics. 300 - 400 words in length (+ or - 5 word max). Every word is counted regardless of length. The essay title (theme) or added footnotes do not contribute to the word count.

• To ensure fairness and impartiality in judging, essays must be anonymous. Please do not include your name, address, school name, or any other personal identifiers in the body of your essay. Additionally, avoid references to your race, sex, religion, national origin, or other specific personal characteristics that could reveal your identity. General references to nationality or patriotic identity (such as being an American or referencing American values) are permitted if they are relevant to the essay theme. However, personal identifiers tied to your individual background or experience should be avoided.

• Do not put your name on the essay. The entry form is your essays cover sheet. Secure the Official Student Entry Form with a staple or other fastener on top of your essay. Contestants are allowed to enter only once each year if otherwise eligible (one Post competition).

• The essay must be contestant's original work and a product of the contestant's own thinking. Inappropriate use of ChatGPT or other AI tools is not allowed. The approach to the Patriot's Pen theme should be positive and clearly focused. Poetry is not acceptable. Quotations may be used sparingly if plainly identified wherever used. A contestant's teacher, counselor or parent may check the essay for punctuation, grammar and/or spelling, but the content must remain the contestant's. Contestants will be judged on the basis of their essay alone and are not required to present the essay orally. All essays become the property of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. The VFW retains non-exclusive rights to the use of your essay and likeness in the promotion and execution of the organization's programs and activities.

• At any time during the contest additional participant personal information (i.e. SSN, photo, etc.) could be requested by the VFW.

I Have Read and Understand the Contest Rules

Signature of Student Participant

Date

To Be Completed by the VFW Post

I certify that this student has an authorized entry in our VFW Post level Patriot's Pen Competition.

Post Commander/Chairperson Signature

Post#

VFW Auxiliary President/Chairperson Signature (If applicable)

Post Address

City, State, Zip

VFW Post Email

No. of participants

No. of winners

Amt. of Post/Aux. scholarships awards \$

Amt. of Post/Aux. additional expenses (Banquet, Pins, etc.) \$

To Be Completed by the VFW District

I certify that the student named in the previous section is the duly selected winner of the Patriot's Pen Contest District Competition and is our sole entry into the Department.

District Chairperson Signature

Dist. #

Address

City, State, Zip

()

Phone

Email

To Be Completed by the VFW Department Chairperson

I certify that the student named in the previous section is the duly selected first-place winner of the Patriot's Pen Department Competition and is our sole entry into the National Judging.

Department Chairperson Signature

()

Daytime Phone

Email

The winner ☒ has been ☐ will be (check one) notified that they are the first-place Department winner on _____.

Local VFW Post Information:

Contact: _____

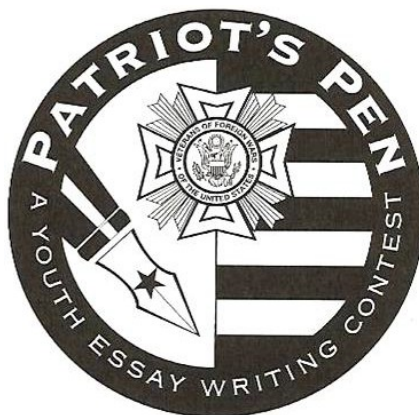
Phone: _____ Best Time To Call: _____

Alternate Contact: _____

Phone: _____ Best Time To Call: _____



Twisted X Brands
A Proud Sponsor



Patriot's Pen Introduction Questionnaire

Representing VFW Post _____ and its Auxiliary,

a _____ at _____
GRADE (6th, 7th or 8th) SCHOOL NAME

in _____
CITY

STUDENT'S NAME

PRONUNCIATION OF STUDEN'TS NAME

The student is the Son/Daughter of

Mother: _____

and

Father: _____

2025-2026 Illinois VFW Commander's Leadership Manual
SUMMARY

**DISTRICT PATRIOT'S PEN
PARTICIPATION REPORT**

DISTRICT NO. _____

DEPARTMENT OF _____, VFW

The VFW Posts and Auxiliaries identified in this report in this District participated in the VFW annual Patriot's Pen Program.

GRAND TOTALS FOR POST COMPETITION: list totals taken from District report form(s)

_____	_____	_____	_____
Posts	Auxs	Students	Post Winners Advanced
\$ _____		\$ _____	
Monetary Awards		Addl. Money Expended	

MONETARY VALUE OF DISTRICT COMPETITION (add County Councils if applicable):

District Monetary Awards \$ _____

District Additional Expenses \$ _____

Signed by: _____ Date _____
District Chairman

***PLEASE ATTACH COMPLETED REPORT FORM(S) AND GIVE
THIS COMPLETED SUMMARY TO YOUR DEPARTMENT
PATRIOT'S PEN CHAIRMAN***

DISTRICT PATRIOT'S PEN REPORT FORM

[illegible]



**SMART/MAHER VFW NATIONAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION
TEACHER AWARD CITATIONS FOR ELEMENTARY, MIDDLE
AND HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS AND THEIR SCHOOLS**

Each year, the Veterans of Foreign Wars selects elementary, middle and high school teachers to participate in the Smart/Maher VFW National Citizenship Education Teacher program. VFW Post Teacher Award Chairpersons may submit one candidate in each grade level to their District by Nov. 15. If your Department does not have a District judging, then submit to your **Department Headquarters and/or Department Chairperson by Jan.1.** The Department may select a single candidate in each grade level and submit them to **VFW National Headquarters, on the Dashboard by Feb.1, for National judging.** Department Teacher winners that are received at National Headquarters By Feb.1 will receive a VFW National citation for both the winning teacher and their school.

Simply visit vfw.org/#login, log in to My VFW, then look under Member Resources, click on VFW Training & Support, then click on Community Service & Youth Programs, then look under Additional Resources. The Teacher Entry form, Instruction sheet, and Chairperson's Guide are up on the VFW website.

Who Is Eligible?

1. Teachers who promote civic responsibility, flag etiquette and patriotism are prime candidates for this award. For example, do you know a teacher who plans field trips to city hall or organizes community volunteer projects? Maybe you know an instructor who invites veterans into the classroom to discuss their military experiences. Perhaps you are familiar with a teacher who fosters the development of democratic values and beliefs through special projects. If you know of such a teacher, honor them today.
2. All current certified/licensed teachers in grades K-12 are eligible. Previous national winners are ineligible. Nominations can be submitted by themselves, fellow teachers, supervisors, family members or other interested individuals.

Documentation Required for all Candidates:

1. All Post-level nominees should provide a one-page resume as a minimum or up to five pages, including the resume, as a maximum of documentation of their teaching experience (for example: resume, references, news articles, etc.) and a head-and-shoulder photo of themselves, if available. These items will be forwarded on to the District, if applicable, and/or the Department with the winning teacher entry form.

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

406 W. 34th Street
Kansas City, MO 64111
Office 816.756.3390
Fax 816.968.1157

WASHINGTON OFFICE

200 Maryland Ave., N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002
Office 202.543.2239
Fax 202.543.6719

info@vfw.org
www.vfw.org

2025-2026 Smart/Maher VFW National Citizenship Education Teacher Award



Entry Deadline: October 31, 2025

What is the Teacher Award Program?

Founded in 1899, the VFW highly supports the education of America's youth. VFW and its Auxiliary have developed a slate of programs dedicated to helping America's educators. VFW Citizenship Education programs stimulate interest in America's history, traditions, Americanism, civic responsibility, flag etiquette and patriotism.

Teachers care deeply about America and its children. They're concerned about the perpetuation of America's noblest traditions and highest ideals. Wouldn't you like to see them get the honor they deserve? Now you can.

Why Should I Enter?

VFW wants to identify and recognize America's best educators who instill a sense of national pride in students. The national awards include \$1,000 Smart/Maher award for each of the top K-5, 6-8, and 9-12 teachers for professional development expenses, \$1,000 award for each winning teacher's school, commemorative plaques and all-expense-paid trip to the VFW National Convention.

Who is Eligible?

All current certified/licensed teachers in grades K-12 are eligible. Previous national VFW winners are ineligible. Nominations can be submitted by themselves, fellow teachers, supervisors, family members or other interested individuals.

How are teachers nominated?

Fill out the official entry form contained on the next page, and provide a one-page resume as a minimum or up to five pages, including the resume, as a maximum of documentation of their teaching experience (for example: resume, references, news articles, etc.) and a head-and-shoulder photo if available.

Please submit your completed entry form signed, along with the required documentation to your local VFW Post. Visit vfw.org/FindaPost for Post locations or call VFW Programs Department at 816.756.3390 ext. 6287 to find the Post nearest you.

What Is the Deadline for My Entry?

All entries competing at the Post level must be in the hands of that VFW Post by midnight, Oct. 31, 2025. It is the responsibility of the nominator to meet this deadline by submitting their entry to the proper location by ensuring it is a participating Post.

What Are the Judging Criteria?

Citizenship (1-25 points): On a scale of 1-25, to what extent does the teacher encourage and/or model good citizenship and community involvement?

Innovation (1-25 points): On a scale of 1-25, how much innovation (new ideas, new tools, new resources, and new approaches) does this teacher utilize in the classroom? Does this teacher's effort reflect an ongoing desire to stimulate the students with new things?

Resources (1-25 points): On a scale of 1-25, to what degree has this teacher demonstrated an ability to identify and utilize new and exceptional resources to fund, facilitate and provide materials for his or her classroom? Does this teacher tap into outside agencies, organizations and individuals to acquire materials and expertise in the classroom? As an example – bringing speakers, finding in-kind and monetary donations, or utilizing local opportunities like museums, field trips and local events.

Passion (1-25 points): On a scale of 1-25, to what degree does this teacher appear to be passionate about the profession of teaching? Are they regularly seeking to upgrade their skills? Do they try and find ways to encourage their students? Do they take a personal interest in their student's individual success?

*If you have any questions, please call
Mary Spencer, 816.756.3390, ext 6287 or
m Spencer@vfw.org.*

Local VFW Post Information:

Contact: Name, Title

Phone

Best time to call

Alternative Contact: Name, Title

Phone

Best time to call

2025-2026 Smart/Maher VFW National Citizenship Education Teacher Award



Entry Deadline: October 31, 2025

2025-2026 Official Entry Form Teacher Award Competition

Please tell us who you are nominating—below in box.

Name: First, M.I., Last	
Address	
City, State, Zip	
()	
Phone	Email
Grade Level (K-5, 6-8, or 9-12)	
School Name	
School Address	
()	
School Phone	School Email

Person Nominating Teacher

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

To Be Completed by the VFW Post

I certify that this teacher has an authorized entry in our VFW Post level Teacher Award Competition.

Post Commander's/Chairperson's Signature _____ Post # _____

VFW Auxiliary President's/Chairperson's Signature
(If Applicable) _____

Post Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

VFW Post Email _____

No. of teachers participating _____

No. of winners advanced to District _____

Amt. of Post /Aux. scholarship awards \$ _____

Amt. of Post /Aux. additional expenses \$ _____
(banquet, pins, etc.)

To Be Completed by the VFW District (If Applicable)

I certify that the teacher named in the previous section is the duly selected winner of the Teacher Award District Competition and is our entry into the Department judging.

District Chairperson's Signature _____ Dist # _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

() _____
Phone _____ Email _____

To Be Completed by the VFW Department Chairperson

I certify that the teacher named in the previous section is the duly selected first-place winner of the Teacher Award Department Competition, is our entry into the National Judging.

Department Chairperson's Signature _____

() _____
Daytime Phone _____ Email _____

The winner ☒ has been ☐ will be (check one) notified that they are the first-place Department winner on _____.

Where Do I Submit My Entry?

All entries will begin at the local VFW Post level. Individual nominees may submit their entry directly to the Post. This VFW Post should be within your local area and within your U.S. state of residence. Entries sent to VFW National will be returned. One Post winner can be submitted for each level, and to District by Nov. 15. If your Department does not have a District judging, then submit to your Department Headquarters by Jan. 1. Otherwise, one District winner, at each level, may advance to the state (Department) competition. If you need help finding a participating VFW Post in your area, follow these instructions: First, visit vfw.org/FindaPost to find your local VFW Post. Be sure this Post is within the state you reside in. If you do not have success in finding a Post, or if you have trouble getting in touch with them, you can contact your VFW Department (state) office to see if they can offer any information or assistance. You can visit vfw.org/ContactUs and look for "Find a State Contact" to get your VFW state office's phone number and email. If you still need assistance, please email us at VFW National Headquarters at mspencer@vfw.org.

VFW DISTRICT CHAIRMEN ONLY

**DISTRICT REPORTING GUIDELINES FOR THE
SMART/MAHER VFW NATIONAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION TEACHER AWARD**

USE THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION TO COMPLETE THE ATTACHED:

The guidelines listed below are intended to help clarify the Smart/Maher VFW National Citizenship Education Teacher Award reporting process and to ensure that all participation and expenses incurred by Posts/ Auxiliaries are completely and accurately reported for proper credit:

TOTAL POST PARTICIPATION

List Posts in your District that had a declared winner. Please list the participating Posts in numerical order on the report form.

TOTAL AUXILIARY PARTICIPATION

If Post has an Auxiliary, credit their participation by indicating *YES* or *NO*.

TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS

Number of schools that had teachers nominated.

TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPATING TEACHERS

Number of teachers that actually were nominated.

AWARDS AND MONEY EXPENDED

Total dollar values of awards presented to teacher participants at Post & District level. All additional moneys allocated and expended in conducting their program. (Banquet, gifts, medals, citations, etc.)

**Forwarding Smart/Maher VFW Natl Citizenship Education Teacher Award
District Winners to Department**

District Chairman: The District winner's materials that should be forwarded to the Department Chairman (immediately after the District judging is completed) are:

1. District winner's original nomination form and essay of 350 words or less signed by person nominating the teacher.
2. District winner's official Post Teacher Entry form w/ signatures at Post & District level.
3. One page resume (**no more than two sides**).
4. Up to 5 pages (both sides) of additional documentation (i.e. news articles, supervisor's

YOUTH CADETS AWARDS

VFW awards for special recognition of outstanding achievement and exceptional leadership are available for Junior and Senior ROTC programs, Naval Sea Cadets and Civil Air Patrol Cadets. If any of these programs exist in your community, these awards provide your Post an outstanding opportunity to honor these patriotic young people.

JROTC

(Junior Reserve Officer Training Course)

Why should a Post become involved?

Few youth programs provide a greater benefit to a Post than involvement with a Scouting or JROTC unit. Both programs annually produce individuals with an appreciation for patriotism, civic responsibility, and the likelihood of future military service. As Boy and Girl Scouts, Sea Scouts, Venture Scouts and JROTC cadets, these individuals are often a tremendous asset to a Post by helping with Post projects such as placing flags on graves on Veterans Day and Memorial Day, helping with Post maintenance and fix-up efforts, helping distribute "Buddy"® Poppies, providing color guards and assisting with VFW public events.

As young adults, participants in these programs are much more likely than others of their age group to enter the military and, ultimately, become eligible for membership in the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Awards Administration

Cadet awards may be initiated by the local VFW Post or directly by the cadet's unit. In either case, documentation should come from the unit as follows:

- Naval Sea Cadets: from the unit commanding officer in a letter with copy to NSCCHQ.
- Civil Air Patrol Cadets: from the candidate's squadron by submitting a CAPF-120.
- JROTC/SROTC Cadets: from the unit by submitting a letter documenting the criteria.

Criteria for Civil Air Patrol and Naval Sea Cadets

- Good academic standing
- Satisfactory progress in the cadet program
- Outstanding achievement in community service and/or the cadet program
- Outstanding leadership in the cadet program
- High moral character
- Exceptional professionalism in appearance and actions (Officer Award)
- Outstanding military bearing and conduct in and out of uniform (NCO Award)
- Involvement in patriotic programs, drill team, color guard, etc.
- Demonstrated potential and willingness to assume higher levels of responsibility

Additional criteria for JROTC & SROTC awards:

- Positive attitude toward the ROTC program
- For JROTC, must be enrolled as a 10th - 12th grade JROTC student
- For SROTC, must be an undergraduate student enrolled in Military Science I through IV
- Must maintain a "B" average in ROTC curriculum and a "C" average in all remaining subjects with no failing grades in the previous semester
- Active in at least one other student extracurricular activity (music, athletics, government, etc.)

Upon receipt of the letter and documentation, VFW Programs Department personnel will review the submitted materials, approve and contact the VFW Department. The Department or Post may then purchase the award(s) through the VFW Store for presentation.

The VFW has many other opportunities that you can be involved with Youth Activities in your community. Remember, this is a win-win situation for the Post. The Post can support youth in the community.

Here are some other examples of how you can support Youth Activities. This list is not all inclusive. Talk to your community leaders, youth leaders, churches, and other community groups on how you Post or District can become involved and support the Youth of America

Support of Community Youth Activities

- o Coach or sponsor a Youth Team (baseball, soccer, football, basketball, soccer, etc)
- o Host a youth activity or event at your post
- o Work with a youth group on community event (food or clothing collection)
- o Meet with Key Club or National Honor Society at HS on community project
- o Sponsor a pizza party or ice cream for youth group

Youth Recognition Programs

- o Recognize an outstanding young person in your community
- o The VFW Store has numerous certificates that you can purchase to recognize youth
- o Leaders of Youth Program
- o Individual Patriotic Services
- o Individual Appreciation for Community Service
- o Honor Certificates for Youth

Post Scholarships

- o If your Post is one of the lucky Posts that have sufficient funding, you may consider awarding a scholarship to a local High School Student
- o Talk to Key Club or National Honor Society and see if they have any students needing financial assistance to attend leadership conference

VFW in the Classroom

Every day, we strive to thank America's educators by providing them with helpful resources and encouraging our members to visit local classrooms. Let us help you educate America's future leaders and bring history to life!

Veterans play an important role in educating our nation's youth about the founding principles upon which America was founded. As combat veterans, VFW members can provide students with a unique perspective about the sacrifices America's service members make to maintain freedom for all of us.

When visiting a classroom, a VFW member will prepare a brief introduction, a main presentation and a Q&A session. Depending on the topic, a member may bring appropriate memorabilia, uniforms, photographs and other relevant material.

American history is something we all share, and there's no one better to help tell that story than someone who's had a great part in shaping it.

If you are a VFW member or Post interested in becoming active with your local schools, see the tips and suggestions on the following pages.

SCOUTING PROGRAM

Scout of the Year Program



Ron Milton
Chairman

209 Taurus Dr
Shiloh, IL 62269
Phone: 618-604-0423
Email: usafret1@att.net

Post 1739-14

Annually, the VFW honors Scouts who have been the recipient of one of the following awards: Eagle Scout Award, Girl Scout Gold Award, Venture Summit Silver Award, or Sea Scout Quartermasters Award. Also, in order to be eligible for the honor, the Scout must be a Registered, active member of a Scout BSA Troop, Girl Scout Troop, Venturing Crew, or Sea Scout Ship who has risen above their peers in exemplifying the exceptional qualities of their rank.

The Department of Illinois will be making an Award to the First Place nominee from the Scouting America programs and the First Place Girl Scout of America nominee in the following amount however, only one Scout will be advanced to the National Competition:

\$300.00 Cash Award - Scouting America Scout of the Year
\$300.00 Cash Award - Girl Scouts of America Scout of the Year

This is a natural fit for the VFW, and will afford your Posts and Districts an opportunity to create activities that promote good Citizenship and Americanism. Each Post and District is urged to assign a liaison person to work closely with scout groups in your area.

On the Post level you can establish a Post Award of maybe a plaque or cash. Then advance your Scout of the Year entry or entries to your District or directly to the Department if no District program is offered. Districts are encouraged to honor entrants as well, but are not required.

Deadline dates for the Scout of the Year Award:

Student Entry to Post – March 1, 2026
Post Entry to State Headquarters – April 1, 2026
State Winner to National – May 1, 2026

The necessary forms can be found on the state website at www.vfwil.org. Click on resources tab and scroll down to Scout of the Year. Make an extra effort to involve scouts in your Post and District programs and activities. The rewards are great for you as well as the Scouts. By working with your local scouting groups, you may also be able to assist and promote the scouts to work toward achieving all of their scouting goals, not just those that qualify them to enter the Scout of the Year contest.

Let's plan to make Youth Activities a priority in our Posts and Districts. These programs will give your post more visibility in your community, will allow you more opportunity for new member recruitment, as well as encouraging current members to get involved because they have children and grandchildren. Remember too, the Patriot's Pen and Scouting programs can be a precursor for the Voice of Democracy Contest.

I sincerely hope that your involvement with youth activities this year will be a pleasant and rewarding experience for all involved. Always remember that you are invited to call if you have any questions or need any help.

Other Scout Programs

If your Post doesn't have anyone in your area that qualifies for Scout of the Year, there are still plenty of ways you can still meet the requirements to get the green on the dashboard. Here are some examples. The list is not all inclusive but is an example of how other Posts are supporting the Scouting Program. Contact Scout packs or troops in your area and see how you can help.

- Allow a boy scout or girl scout troop to use your facility for meetings
- Volunteer to be a scout leader
- Work with a local scout on their Eagle Scout or Gold Award project
- Teach a class or help the scouts to receive a merit badge
- Work with the scouts on a flag retirement ceremony
- Work with the scouts on a food drive or clothing drive

Don't think that you can't get credit on your dashboard just because you don't have an Eagle Scout in your area. There are lots of ways to be involved with scouting. Remember, you have to fill out the Program Reporting Form and tell what you did to support scouting. I recommend you submit a report after each activity just so you don't forget about it.

VFW SCOUT OF THE YEAR

Judges Score Sheet

DEPARTMENT/STATE _____ DATE OF JUDGING _____

JUDGE'S NAME & SIGNATURE _____

Instructions to Judges: Read and review all letters and data submitted by each applicant with the criteria listed below in mind. Use the input data to develop an overall presentation of the scout's personality that is consistent through all the data and letters submitted and grade each scout in each character areas. Grade each candidate using the following scoring system:

EXCEPTIONAL = 6-10 pts. AVERAGE = 4-5pts. LOW = 1-3 pts.
Ten (10) points are the maximum for each of the sub-elements.

SECTION A: HIGH SCHOOL PARTICIPATION

- _____ Academic achievement
- _____ Extra-curricular activities
- _____ Demonstrated leadership
- _____ Significance of participation
- _____ **Sub-Total** (40 pts. Max.)

SECTION B: SCOUTING RECORD

- _____ Timeliness of achieving rank
- _____ Demonstrated leadership
- _____ Participation in events
- _____ Quality of Eagle, Gold, Summit, or Quartermaster Project
- _____ Demonstrated adherence to Scout Code
- _____ Exemplary moral/spiritual character
- _____ **Sub-Total** (60 pts. Max.)

SECTION C: COMMUNITY SERVICE RECORD

- _____ Evidence of regular participation
- _____ Impact on the community
- _____ Demonstrated leadership
- _____ Demonstrated achievement (awards, etc.)
- _____ **Sub-Total** (40 pts. Max.)

SECTION D: CONTENT OF THE LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

- _____ Evidence of exceptional character
- _____ Evidence of leadership qualities
- _____ Willingness to accept responsibility
- _____ Evidence of self-confidence
- _____ Evidence of serving others
- _____ Evidence of respect for authority
- _____ Evidence of patriotism and respect for this nation and its symbols.
- _____ **Sub-Total** (70 pts. Max.)

_____ **TOTAL SCORE (210 PTS. Max.)**

**JUDGES HAVE THE OPTION OF INTERVIEWING TOP FINALISTS
PRIOR TO FINAL SELECTION.**

SCOUT OF THE YEAR Program



WHAT IS THE SCOUT OF THE YEAR PROGRAM?

Annually, the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States recognizes individuals who are: Eagle Scouts, Girl Scout Gold Award recipients, Venture Summit Award recipients and/or Sea Scout Quartermasters who have risen above their peers in exemplifying the qualities of that rank.

AM I ELIGIBLE?

To be eligible for the award, the candidate must:

- Be the recipient of the Eagle Scout Award, Girl Scout Gold Award, Venture Summit Award or Sea Scout Quartermaster Award.
- Be a registered, active member of a Boy or Girl Scout Troop, Venturing Crew or Sea Scout Ship at the time the above reward was received.
- Have demonstrated exemplary citizenship in school, Scouting and community.

Prior National Scout of the Year winners are ineligible. There is no minimum age requirement for applicants as long as all other eligibility criteria has been met. The maximum age requirement for applicants is 18 years old. If an applicant reaches their 18th birthday during the nomination year, they remain eligible as long as they are still in high school at the time of the submission deadline. A Scout may enter through only one VFW Post. A local Post can be identified by zip code at vfw.org/FindaPost.

WHAT ARE THE DEADLINES?

- Deadline for entry to VFW Post is **March 1**.
- One candidate with full entry criteria must be submitted by a VFW Post to the next level of judging by **April 1**. The VFW Department Scouting Chairman can provide this information.
- The Department winner must be selected and submitted by their Department Scouting chairman to the VFW National Headquarters by **May 1**.

Questions should be directed to 816.756.3390, ext. 6787 during normal business hours Monday through Friday or emailed to scouting@vfw.org.

Official Entry Form

SCOUT OF THE YEAR Program

MUST BE COMPLETED BY EACH CONTESTANT
and submitted directly to a VFW post in your community.

Name: First, M.I., Last

Address

City, State, Zip

()

Home Phone

Email

Date of Birth (dd/mm/yyyy)

Scout Troop Number

SCOUT/VENTURE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that the foregoing information is accurate and if I am the winner, I will make myself available to receive the award at a presentation ceremony as designated by the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Scout/Venture Signature

Date (mm/dd/yyyy)

UNIT LEADER'S CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that the above-named Scout/Venture is an active member of our unit or was when the award was received and the information supplied by the candidate is accurate to the best of my knowledge.

Unit Leader's Signature

Date (mm/dd/yyyy)

PARENT'S CONSENT

I hereby certify that all information on this application is correct. I willingly submit this name for consideration as the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States' Scout of the Year. If this individual is selected as the winner, I will ensure that he/she is allowed to attend a presentation ceremony as designated by the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Father, Mother or Guardian Signature

Date (mm/dd/yyyy)



SCOUT OF THE YEAR Program

VFW DEPARTMENT SCOUTING CHAIRMAN

PHONE: _____

SPONSORING VFW POST

POST NUMBER: _____

ADDRESS: _____

POST COMMANDER'S SIGNATURE: _____

DISTRICT CERTIFICATION IF APPLICABLE, CHECK WITH THE VFW DEPARTMENT SCOUTING CHAIRMAN

DISTRICT #: _____

DISTRICT CDR.: _____

DEPARTMENT CERTIFICATION MUST BE COMPLETED BY DEPARTMENT VFW SCOUTING CHAIRMAN OR DEPT. COMMANDER

DEPARTMENT: _____

SUBMITTED BY: _____

SIGNATURE: _____

WHAT DOCUMENTATION IS REQUIRED?

The following documentation should be submitted:

- **Photograph of the Scout** — must be attached to this form. The Scout must appear in correct, complete uniform for their current rank. Recommended size 3" x 5".
- **School Participation Record** — a single page, one-sided resume of the candidate's school activities indicating academic achievements, offices held, honors received and significant participation in other activities.
- **Scouting Record** — maximum of three pages, one side only, listing of all Scouting participation beginning with Cub Scouts or Brownies - years of participation, unit numbers and sponsors. Also include when Eagle, Gold, Summit or Quartermaster Award was received and Palms. Identify leadership positions held at all levels, participation in Scouting activities (jamborees, Order of the Arrow conferences, etc.) and the candidate's Eagle Scout, Girl Scout Gold Award, Venture Summit or Sea Scout Quartermaster Project.
- **Community Service Record** — a single page, one-sided resume listing participation in community and religious service organizations (excluding Scouting and school), noting leadership positions held and any recognition received.
- **Letters of Recommendation** — Submit three letters, no more than two pages in length from:
 - A scout leader.
 - A community member.
 - A teacher/faculty member (if homeschooled, a parent letter is allowed).
 - In addition, you may include one or two additional letters, no more than two pages in length from local community members who have special knowledge of the candidate's abilities/accomplishments.
- **Completed Entry Form** — submitted to a local VFW Post. Local Posts can be identified by zip code at vfw.org/FindaPost.

WHO MAKES UP THE VFW SCOUTING TEAM?

The backbone of Scouting in the VFW is the VFW Scouting Team. These VFW members are deeply involved in Scouting, most with decades of experience.

Appointed by their Department Commander, they are responsible for promoting scouting in their state. They are available to encourage Posts to sponsor units, support units and individual Scout projects. They should be the Department's "expert" on all phases of scouting. Many Departments have multiple members of the VFW Scouting Team, but every Department should have at least one individual to promote the values of scouting to youth and to the VFW itself. For more information on the VFW Scouting Team call 816.756.3390, ext 6787, or email scouting@vfw.org



Scouting Tracking Form

The attached scouting tracking form will assist posts and districts in tracking scouting activities and entries into the State dashboard.

Record your scouting contacts as they happen and while they are fresh on your mind. Some of your contacts can also be used for community service and Americanism.

Your contacts will also help in promoting the Scout of the Year Program. If you have any questions or assistance, please contact me at usa-fret1@att.net.

Ron Milton
State Scouting Chair.



Veterans of Foreign Wars State of Illinois

Scouting Activity Report Form

Due Quarterly: July 31, October 31, January 31, April 30

Post #	Post Name	Dist.	Quarter Ending			
Scouting America Programs		Members	Hrs	Money	Milage	
List only things that you do in support of Scouting America						
Girl Scout Programs		Members	Hrs	Money	Milage	
List only things that you do in support of Girl Scout, USA						
Donations to Scouting Programs		Members		Money		
List only donations made by your VFW or Auxiliary Unit members						
Scouting America						
Girl Scouts						
USE OF BUILDING		Members		Money		
Total Members this Report			Total Monies Donated			
Total Hours this Report			Total Miles			
VFW State Headquarters 217-529-6688						
3300 Constitution Drive						
Springfield IL 62711						

Also report VFW Scout Activity on your Community Service Report



LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY

LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY

☐ **National**

- **National Action Alerts**
- **Meeting with National Representative**
- **Attend VFW Legislative Conference**

☐ **State**

- **State Action Alerts**
- **File witness slips on bills**
- **Meeting with State Representative**

☐ **Local**

- **Meeting with local elected officials**
- **Participating in County Veterans Assistance Commission**

LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY PROGRAM

The VFW with our coalition partners were very successful in the first session of the 103rd Illinois General assembly. This year, our grassroots lobbying efforts in Illinois has produced some key pieces of legislation.

Working with State Senator Porfirio and State Representative Kifowit, the VFW led the charge is supporting SB3479, which is Illinois version of the "Claim Shark Bill" This bill has passed both houses in the Illinois General Assembly and is awaiting the Governor's signature. This bill will protect our veterans from the unscrupulous law firms and organizations that are charging excess fees for filing initial VA disability claims.

Much of our grassroots efforts are focused on witness slips throughout the legislative process. When we send out a call for action on state legislation, we ask that you take 2 minutes to complete a witness slip. You don't have to be a VFW member to complete a witness slip. Get your family and friends to also submit witness slips on key veteran bills. The number of witness slips help to solidify our position for or against a bill.

The committee will constantly update the District legislative chair on events in Springfield and Washington. What we need from the district is that they communicate with the post on these issues and conduct training sessions to ensure that each post knows how to submit a witness slip in support of our legislative agenda. we also request that the post commanders introduce themselves to their state senator and state representative. You are the subject matter expert to assist them in veterans Legislation.

This year, we hosted the "Veterans Lobby Day" in Springfield. About 50 veterans from multiple veteran organizations went to the State Capitol and met with the Senators and Representatives to discuss veteran issues and request their support on key veteran legislation. We plan to host "Veterans Lobby Day" again in this upcoming year and tentatively have it scheduled for March 11, 2026. Mark your calendar now and plan to join us.

ACTION CORPS

The VFW Action Corps is our national grassroots advocacy network comprised of more than 300,000 VFW members and patriotic supporters of veterans. This group stays up-to-date on the issues facing our veterans, our military and their families, standing ready to email, write, call and visit our nation's law-makers to make their voices heard. The VFW Action Corps is free and open to all patriotic Americans who care about the military and veterans' communities.

Join the VFW Action Corps today and add your voice to the thousands of veterans' advocates making a difference every day, and if you're already a member of the VFW Action Corps, encourage your friends and neighbors to join the effort!

Participants receive:

- The VFW Action Corps Weekly, an easy-to-read electronic newsletter that highlights the VFW's advocacy efforts on Capitol Hill.
- Immediate access to a nationwide database of contact information for all elected officials, a congressional directory.
- Regular VFW "Action Alerts" on how to get involved when our nation's veterans, service members and their families need their voices heard on Capitol Hill.

The VFW Action Corps is what gives the VFW its strength in advocating for our nation's heroes. Working hand-in-hand with the VFW's National Legislative Service -- whose office is in eye-shot of the Capitol dome in Washington -- members of the VFW Action Corps are armed with all of the tools and information they need to help the VFW in its mission to support our nation's veterans.



2022 PRIORITY GOALS

Support Today's Veterans and Military

Please contact or visit your congressional representatives and stress that these are the issues we will be fighting for in the 117th Congress. These priority goals reflect the resolutions passed and supported by the men and women of the VFW and its Auxiliary. To find your congressional representatives, visit www.vfw.org/ActionCorps.

Play a Role in the Process

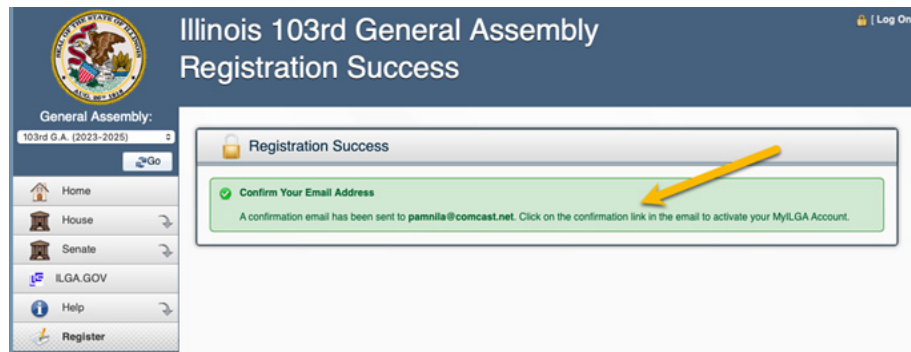
Be engaged and help us ensure that these priority goals are enacted. Sign up today for the VFW Action Corps Weekly and VFW Action Alerts:

- Visit vfw.org/JoinActionCorps
- Text "VFW" to 50457
- Scan the QR Code

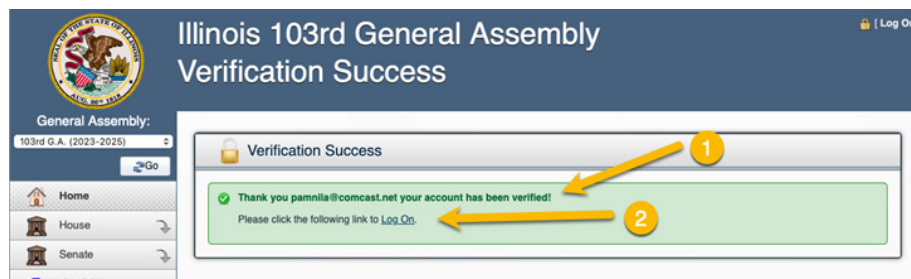


NO ONE DOES MORE FOR VETERANS.

If you wish to support our legislative efforts on an ongoing basis, you may wish to create an account on my.ilga.gov. Once you create an account, Witness Slips may be completed much more quickly.



Once you click on the link in the email your account will be activated, and you will receive a notice that your account has been verified and you will be asked to LogOn.



Once you've completed your profile, you will need to locate the bills that you wish to complete Witness Slips for. The simplest way to do this is to use the link provided by the VFW Illinois Action Corps. Using this link will take you to the bills that the VFW is asking you to support.

The fifth step will take you to the lists of bills that require your attention. From this page, you can view create a new Witness Slip or view who has already completed a Witness Slip. Click on the Create Witness Slip Icon.

Illinois 103rd General Assembly
Senate Hearing Details

Welcome pamnla@comcast.net! [Log Off]

General Assembly:
103rd G.A. (2023-2025)

Electronic witness slips can be submitted up to the end of the day of the committee's scheduled date.

Senate Veterans Affairs Hearing Details

Scheduled Date : 4/27/2023 - 9:00 AM
Location : 400 - Capitol - - Springfield, IL
Posting Date : 4/20/2023 - 3:10 PM

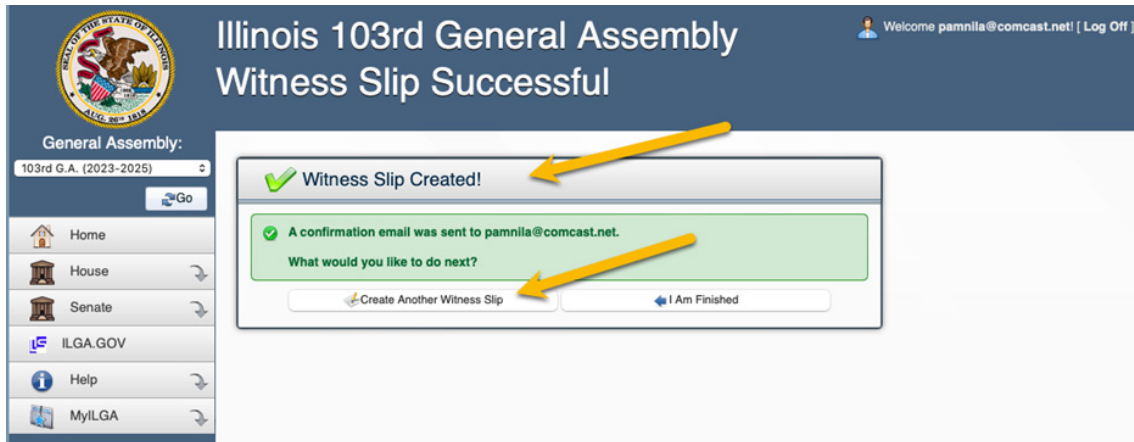
Items Posted To Hearing

Bill #	Sponsor Name	ABR - Short Description	Witness Slips
SR66	Tom Bennett	ATOMIC VETERANS DAY	[Icon]
HB925	Mike Portilio	MILITARY SERVICE-TECH	[Icon]
HB2500	Meg Loughran Cappel	ANIMAL ADOPTION-FEE WAIVER	[Icon]
HB2856	Suzy Glowiak Hilton	VITAL RECORDS-VETERAN DEATH	[Icon]
HB3295	Julie A. Morrison	DFPR-MILITARY FEE WAIVER	[Icon]

Displaying Items 1 - 5 of 5

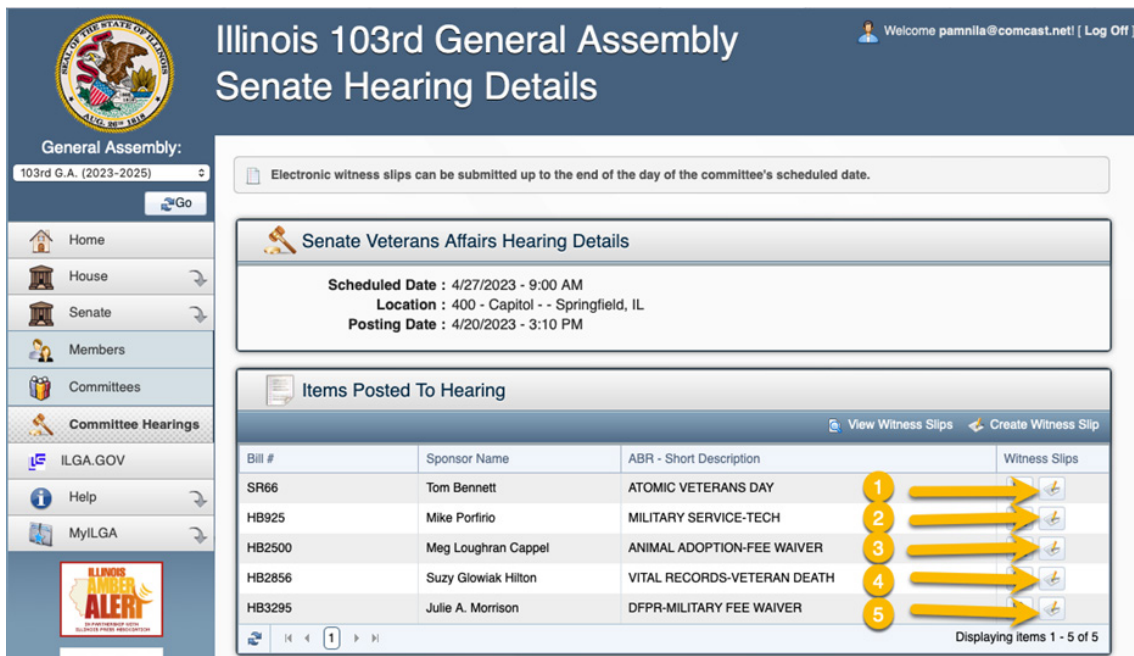
If you have registered on the my.ilga.gov website, Section I, Identification will be completed for you. Complete the remaining steps per the diagram below.

You will then receive a notice that you will be sent an email confirmation the a Witness Slip was created. And you will be asked if you would like to Create another Winess Slip or select that I am Finished. Selecting Create Another Witness Slip will return you to the list of bills where you would like to creat Witness Slips.



The website does not remove the bill that you have already created a Witness Slip for. If you select View Witness Slips, you will find that your Witness Slip is on the last page. Although you may filter Witness Slip the default filing is my date and time created.

Continue with the process above until you have completed Witness Slips for all of the bills. If you have registered on the site, each bill should only take a minute or so to complete





ILLINOIS SPECIFIC PROGRAMS

ILLINOIS SPECIFIC PROGRAMS

☐ **Poppy Program**

- *Poppy Order Form*
- *Poppy Display Entry Form*
- *Poppy Display Rules*

☐ **Blood Donor Program**

☐ **Program Donations**

- *Homeless Veterans*
- *National Home*
- *Military Assistance Program (MAP) Unmet Needs*
- *Service Office Support*
- *Commander's Special Project*

POPPY PROGRAM

Please read the program carefully. The Buddy Poppy Program and Buddy Poppy Display Contest are separated into sub-categories. Please contact me with any questions you may have.

A SYNOPSIS OF BUDDY POPPY

The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States was the first veteran organization to promote a nationally organized campaign for the annual distribution of Poppies assembled by disabled and needy veterans. The Poppy movement was inspired by the poem, "In Flanders Fields" written by Colonel John McCrae of the Canadian forces before the United States entered World War I. The VFW conducted a Poppy campaign prior to Memorial Day 1922, using only Poppies that were made in France.

It was during the 1923 campaign that the VFW evolved the idea which resulted in the VFW Buddy Poppy fashioned by disabled and needy veterans who were paid for their work as a practical means of providing assistance for these comrades. Immediately thereafter the VFW Buddy Poppy Factory was established in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where all VFW Buddy Poppies for the 1924 campaign were assembled by disabled veterans.

In February 1924, the VFW registered the name "Buddy Poppy" with the United States Patent Office, and a certificate was issued on May 20, 1924, granting the VFW all trademark rights in the name of "Buddy" under the classification of artificial flowers. The VFW has made that trademark a guarantee that all Poppies bearing that name and the VFW label are genuine products of the work of disabled and needy veterans. No other organization, firm or individual can make legal use of the name "Buddy Poppy". It has been noted that all Presidents since Warren G. Harding (1921-1923) have conveyed to the nation at large, endorsement and recognition of the VFW effort.

Today, VFW Buddy Poppies are no longer assembled by disabled, needy and aging veterans. The demand was greater than what could be assembled by disabled veterans. The majority of proceeds derived from each campaign conducted by VFW Posts and their Auxiliaries are retained locally to provide for veteran services and welfare. Buddy Poppy proceeds represent no profit to any VFW unit. All money contributed by the public for Buddy Poppies is used in the cause of veterans welfare, or for the well being of their needy dependents and the orphans of veterans.



Stephanie Kirksey
Chairman

7 Carol Dr.
Waterloo, IL 62298
Phone: (618) 973-0153

Email:
kirksey714@gmail.com

Post 6504-14

BUDDY POPPY PROGRAM

When VFW Posts acquire Poppies, they distribute these Poppies to the public for donations and those funds support the Relief Fund in the local VFW Posts. Recognition and Appreciation is noted for their displaying of the flower. All money received is used in the Post's Relief Work. All Posts should acquire extra Poppies that will not be distributed to the public so they can participate in our annual Buddy Poppy Display Contest.

The following rules apply toward our annual Buddy Poppy Distribution/eligibility for Contest:

- **When ordering** Buddy Poppies from the VFW State Headquarters, you have the option to pay when ordering or after your set date of distribution plus your Post will receive credit on the Programs Dashboard at the time the order is placed.
- **Be Advised** our Buddy Poppy Distribution Year runs from July 1, 2025 to June 30, 2026 and is based on the number of Poppies purchased by the Post and/or Auxiliary with its purchases through the Post from the VFW State Quartermaster and covers any and all donations and other uses of the Buddy Poppy such as displays, floats, etc. by the Post and/or Auxiliary.
- **Remember** that when ordering your Poppies, our 2025-2026 Membership Program will require that Posts order a minimum of 3 poppies per member with a minimum order of 1,000 poppies to be considered for All-State. Also, Posts should order extra Buddy Poppies if needed for their Poppy Display requirements. It is also important to put your Poppy Sale Date on your Order Form to make sure you receive your Poppies when they are needed.
- **Be sure** to check your order upon delivery for a shortage in Poppies/multiple damaged Poppies because adjustments will be made only within 30 days of delivery.
- **Checks** will be presented to the Post and/or Auxiliary showing the greatest numerical increase in Poppy purchases. Cut-off for determining winners will be April 30, 2026. A Check will be presented to one Post in each Membership Category listed below. (Must have purchased poppies during the previous year to qualify for this award). In the event of a tie, the winner will be selected by the Director.

Membership Category 1 - Up to 150 Members

Membership Category 2 - 151 to 300 Members

Membership Category 3 - 301 Members and Up

- A **Special Award** will be presented during State Convention to any Post who orders a total of 25,000 poppies or more during this Fiscal Year.
- **Special Citations** will be presented to individuals recommended by Post or Auxiliary Poppy Chairman recognizing those individuals for their outstanding services to promote the Buddy Poppy Program. Individuals can include local bankers who may voluntarily set up a display in his/her bank a week or so prior to Buddy Poppy Day, urging the community's participation; another could be a theatre manager; an editor, a printer or sign maker; or anyone who promotes the program where it is not already advertised. Citation distribution to those concerned will be conducted by the Post Commander or the Post Poppy Chairman.
- **All New Post(s)** starting during the 2025-2026 Fiscal year will receive 500 free Poppies to begin their program.
- **ANNIVERSARY POPPIES** - Posts celebrating milestone anniversaries can order special poppies. Ordering requirements are the same - place your order through State Headquarters. Remember to allow 8-12 weeks for delivery.

Note: Should there be any need for clarification, contact the State Poppy Director.

ORGANIZING A POPPY DISTRIBUTION DAY

A successful V.F.W. or Auxiliary Poppy Chairman must be a special person. He or She must be a combination executive salesman, public relations expert, accountant and advertising specialist. They must be ever ready to cooperate with and assist their partner and counterpart in the Auxiliary (or Post) and have the leadership ability to make others want to work with them. They must be **ENTHUSIASTIC, AND ANXIOUS TO WORK** and have a thorough knowledge of the Program. To assist you in promoting your upcoming distribution, we offer these tips... Perhaps you are using them already, perhaps you use others more adaptable to your circumstances. In any case, follow these few guidelines in preparation:

A. **FIND POSSIBLE LOCATIONS:** for distribution and lock in your dates. If need be, contact the Bureau of permits at City Hall or the County Clerks Office. Insurance is also required for distribution in the streets at intersections.

B. **GET VOLUNTEER COMRADES** from your membership.

C. **START A SIGN IN SHEET** at your Post for comrades to be posted at specific locations so they know you know and that you will be looking for their presence at the time they specify.

1. **Obtain your workers.** If possible, invite the Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts to help assist in your distribution of Poppies. Just remember that a VFW member must be at the same location with the scout(s).
2. **Make sure** you have only one (1) or two (2) at a location distributing poppies.
3. **Allow** two (2) to four (4) hour shifts for distributors before relief. Relief is necessary because we are not getting any younger. You may even want to have a chair at each location for a rest period.
4. **Instruct your workers.** They must know why they are distributing Poppies, what they are expected to do and how to approach the public without scaring them off or getting their dandruff up for an argument.

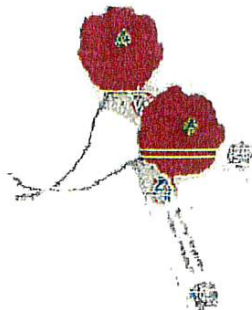
PROMOTE THE EVENT

Advise the public of your upcoming Poppy Day(s) through various sources. Example:

1. VFW Newsletters
2. Flyers
3. Newspapers
4. Radio & TV Announcements
5. Social Media
6. And of course... "Word of Mouth"

If you can think of any other way to attract attention of the public... do it!!

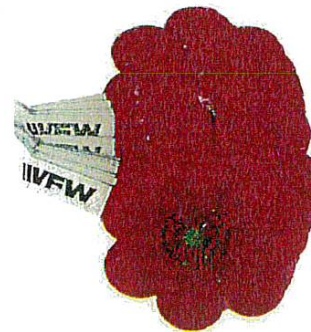
REMEMBER...When ordering Buddy Poppies, please allow twelve (12) weeks for delivery. If the State Headquarters has Poppies on hand, they will ship them to you immediately if needed right away. All Poppy accessories such as Poppy Cans, Easel Boards, Poppy Seller Caps, I.D. Cards, etc. are to be ordered directly from our National Emblem & Supply Catalog. Keep in mind that poppies can be paid for with a credit card by clicking on "Donations" on our Department Website and identifying your payment as Poppy Order.



Traditional Poppy

POPPY ORDER FORM

HEADQUARTERS
DEPARTMENT OF ILLINOIS
VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE U.S.
3300 CONSTITUTION DRIVE, SPRINGFIELD, IL 62711
FAX: 217-546-3415



Metal Poppy

ORDER DATE _____ DATE OF POPPY SALE _____

(Do not leave blank)

POST/AUX NAME _____ NUMBER _____ DISTRICT _____

PLEASE PLACE OUR ORDER FOR THE FOLLOWING:

_____ TRADITIONAL BUDDY POPPIES (\$280.00 PER THOUSAND)\$ _____

_____ METAL BUDDY POPPIES (\$140.00 PER THOUSAND)\$ _____
(ORDER IN INCREMENTS OF 500 ONLY)

(POPPY CANS, POSTERS, ETC. CAN BE ORDERED DIRECTLY
FROM THE VFW STORE AT NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS)

SHIP THE ABOVE TO: _____

(Name - PLEASE PRINT OR TYPE)

(Title)

(Poppies can only be ordered using a person's name, not the name of the Post or Office)

ADDRESS (UPS Address - **Please no P.O. Box No.**) (City) (Zip Code)

AMOUNT OF ORDER.....\$ _____

SHIPPING AND HANDLING.....\$ _____

AMOUNT INCLUDED WITH ORDER\$ _____

BALANCE DUE.....\$ _____

For Department use only:

Date Received	Date Recorded on X Sheet	Date Ordered	Date Shipped or Picked Up	Date Invoiced	Date Paid

PLEASE ALLOW 8 WEEKS WHEN ORDERING YOUR POPPIES!! YOUR POPPY ORDER WILL BE PROCESSED BY STATE HEADQUARTERS THROUGH THE PROGRAMS DEPARTMENT AT NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS. ONLY RUSH ORDERS WILL BE SHIPPED FROM STATE HEADQUARTERS IF AVAILABLE.

YOU MAY ALSO ORDER ONLINE AT www.vfwil.org

POPPY DISPLAY CONTEST GENERAL RULES

1. The rules governing the poppy displays for the 2025-2026 year will be in accordance with the national poppy display contest. All entrants will comply with these rules. Your entry will be judged by them. All Districts are requested to follow these rules as closely as possible when holding your display judging.

RULES

CATEGORY 1 - Public promotion of poppy sales: (Window, booth, parade, or poster displays, sales promotion, etc.)

A. Displays must be designed for public exposure and must bear a message urging the buying and wearing of the VFW Buddy Poppy.

B. At least one (1) of the poppies used in the display must be in their original form and color, with labels attached.

CATEGORY 2 - Memorial or inspirational displays: (wreaths, memorial tablets or plaques, patriotic or devotional themes.)

A. Displays must be designed to honor the dead, to inspire devotion to God and country, or to dramatize the activities supported by the Buddy Poppy Program.

B. At least one (1) of the poppies used in the display must be in their original form and color, with labels attached.

CATEGORY 3 - Artistic or decorative use of poppies: (Post home displays, table centerpieces, corsages, pictures, plaques, models, scenes, hats, novelty pieces, etc.)

A. Display not meeting the qualifications for categories 1 or 2 shall automatically be entered in Category 3.

B. Complete freedom shall be permitted in the use of poppies, poppy parts or poppy labels, and in the use of dyes or paints in achieving the desired artistic effect.

C. At least one (1) of the poppies used in the display must be in their original form and color, with labels attached.

2. The scoring of the displays will be in accordance with the national rules. Originality - 25 points; Composition - 25 points; Neatness - 25 points; Poppy Story - 25 points; for a total of 100 points maximum. The Originality, Composition, and Neatness are self-explanatory, with the Poppy Story as outlined in the Buddy Poppy Story.

3. Awards - First place Poppy Displays will be awarded a \$100 gift certificate to the VFW Store. Second place Poppy Displays will be awarded a \$75 gift certificate to the VFW Store. Category One (1) must have been on display at least three days.

4. A report of District judging must be sent to the Department Buddy Poppy Display Director prior to the Department Convention. Any display not accepted at District level, or not entered in District judging, will be ineligible for State judging.

5. All Displays entered and accepted at District level will be accepted for Department judging during the Department Convention.

6. Forms for judging and reporting results will be passed out to the District Commanders at the February Council of Administration Meeting, to be forwarded to each District Chairman.

7. Poppies to be used in display contests are to be ordered from VFW Department Headquarters, 3300 Constitution Dr., Springfield, Illinois 62711.

ALL DISTRICT CONTESTS SHOULD BE COMPLETED BY MEMORIAL DAY!!

The Districts will award prizes to their winners at their discretion. Each District entry will be allowed to enter in the Department Contest, in each of the three categories. However, they must remain in the category and division as entered in the District judging.

Who may enter the contest? Any person or group of persons (except professional display builders.) The display must be entered by Post or Auxiliary.

All previous District or Department entries are ineligible for this contest.

Categories 1-2-3

A. Originality - Your own thoughts, ideas, notion, lighting, or sound in setting up a display.

Categories 1-2-3

B. Neatness - Self-Explanatory

Categories 1-2-3

C. Composition - The manner in which display is composed, and use of Buddy Poppies for effect.

Categories 1-2

D. Poppy Story - Ability to display to sell and induce the public to buy and wear poppy; tells the story of the Buddy Poppy, its use of Poppy funds, by use of words, pictures or use of toys.

NOTE- No Poppy story included in category 3.

Judging-Point System - Categories 1 and 2 can earn up to 25 points in each of the above for a top score of 100 points. Category 3, which isn't judged with a poppy story can earn up to 25 points in the other categories for a top score of 75 points.

All ties will be broken by largest Buddy Poppy count.

POPPY DISPLAY CONTEST - STATE CONVENTION

All entries in the National Display Contest must be approved and sponsored by the Department Headquarters. No other entries will be accepted by officials of the National Contest. The number of entries allocated to Illinois by National Headquarters may be flexible, and in accordance with National's rules. Department display contest winners will be notified by Department Headquarters soon after the Department Convention. Special forms will be sent to those eligible for entry in national competition. Do Not, Do Not.... take any entry to National without the proper forms as it will not be accepted.

JUDGING:

There will be four (4) judges, one of whom must be a member of the V.F.W. The other three (3) judges should not be affiliated with the organization in any manner. Each judge will be assigned a specific area to judge. It is suggested the V.F.W. Judge be assigned to the Poppy Story. All judges should be residents of the convention city.

The decision of the judges and that of the Buddy Poppy Director, and her assistants, will be final. During the judging the entire area will be closed to all except the judges so as to insure impartial judging.

Let's show that No One Does More for Veterans, and have another great year in the Buddy Poppy Display Contest. Displays will be accepted at the Department Convention from noon to 4 p.m. Thursday and Friday of Convention Week. No entries accepted after 4 p.m. Friday. Awards to be presented during the Saturday business session.

**VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES
PROGRAMS DEPARTMENT
“BUDDY”[®] POPPY PROGRAM**

NATIONAL CONVENTION BUDDY POPPY DISPLAY CONTEST

These guidelines have been designed to place emphasis on the purpose and effectiveness of the displays. It is suggested and recommended that Department (State) contests rule be established in a like form.

RULES

- (1) Displays will be presented and judged in three categories:

CATEGORY 1. **Public Promotion of Poppy Campaign** (Window, booth, parade, poster displays, campaign promotions, etc.)

- (a) Displays must be designed for public exposure and must bear a message soliciting a donation for and wearing of the VFW “Buddy”[®] Poppy.
- (b) At least one (1) of the poppies used in the display must be in its original form and color, with label attached.

CATEGORY 2. **Memorial or Inspirational Displays** (Wreaths, memorial tablets or plaques, patriotic or devotional themes)

- (a) Displays must be designed to honor the dead, to inspire devotion to God and Country, or to dramatize the activities supported by the Buddy Poppy.
- (b) At least one (1) of the poppies used in the display must be in its original form and color, with label attached.

CATEGORY 3. **Artistic or Decorative Use of Poppies** (Post Home displays, table center-pieces, corsages, pictures, plaques, models, scenes, hats, novelty pieces, etc.)

- (a) Any display not meeting the qualifications for Categories 1 or 2 shall automatically be entered in Category 3.
 - (b) At least one (1) of the poppies used in the display must be in its original form and color, with label attached.
- (2) Departments purchasing over 250,000 poppies will be allowed two (2) displays in **each** of the three (3) categories for the National Display Contest all others will be allowed one (1) display in each of the three (3) categories, no deviations.
- (3) The National Programs Committee shall have no responsibility in setting up, taking down or returning displays.

- (4) Displays shall be set up in space provided in the convention facility. Prior to setting up the display, the responsible person must register with the Buddy Poppy desk and complete an entry form (unless one was forwarded earlier, approved by Department) which will show the category of competition, the number of poppies used, the purpose of the display, the Post and/or Auxiliary number and location, and the name of the person who will dismantle and remove the display at the close of the convention. **(Please be advised, all displays must be removed by 4:00 p.m. on Tuesday or it will be disposed of by convention center personnel.)**
- (5) Displays may or may not be accompanied by a white card, not to exceed 4 inches by 6 inches in size, on which is lettered in black ink an explanation of the theme for the display or other information of interest to the viewers or the judges.
- (6) Post name, number, city or state (including the shape of your state) may **not** be visible on the displays. Failure to comply will result in disqualification.
- (7) (NEW) Any use of non VFW trademarks or copyrighted material on your display must have prior approval from the trademark or copyright holder. These include but are not limited to names, logos, audio/visual graphics, images and/or props. The VFW and Buddy Poppy logo and name is authorized but use of any outside organization trademark or copyrighted material and/or logos must have prior approval through their respective organization.

JUDGING

Judging of displays will be on the basis of effectiveness, purpose, clarity of theme, suitability, originality, beauty and number of poppies used. Where a sample of a large number of identical items (such as corsages or wreaths) is entered, full credit shall be given for the total number of poppies used. Judging will be completed by Monday evening and the winning displays will have the appropriate ribbons placed on the display on Tuesday morning.

PRIZES

Plaques will be awarded to the first, second, and third place winners in each of the three categories, and will be mailed to the winning Department's adjutant after convention.

NOTE

The Department adjutant will have to notify the Programs Director, in writing, by **June 30** of the Posts that will represent the Department in each category. This will allow us the time necessary to ensure each entry has sufficient space to set up at the National Convention.

Please be advised, the Programs Committee cannot guarantee against theft of personal items placed on the displays. The exhibit hall is secured at night and monitored by security guards; however, they monitor a large area and are not assigned to one specific area. We strongly discourage using items of sentimental value, items of value or items considered to be irreplaceable on the Buddy Poppy displays.

Thank you and good luck!

(Revised 1/8/2019)

OFFICIAL ENTRY BLANK FOR DISTRICT AND STATE DISPLAY CONTESTS
TO BE FILLED OUT BY ENTRANT:

POST #	AUXILIARY #
NAME OF BUILDER OR BUILDERS	
HOME ADDRESS	
NUMBER OF POPPIES USED IN DISPLAY	

THIS DISPLAY IS ENTERED IN THE FOLLOWING CATEGORY:

Circle Category and Division:

STORE OR WINDOW DISPLAY

Category #1	Division A	Division B	Division C	Store or
Poppies used in Display	100 to 750	751 to 1500	1501 and up	Window

MEMORIAL or INSPIRATIONAL DISPLAY

Category #2	Division A	Division B	Division C	Memorial or
Poppies used in Display	100 to 750	751 to 1500	1501 and up	Inspirational

ARTISTIC OR DECORATIVE DISPLAY

Category #3	Division A	Division B	Artistic or
Poppies used in Display	10 to 1000	1001 and up	Decorative

CATEGORY #1, Please have this certification form completed before entering contest

I certify that this Poppy Display was on exhibit in my place of business for a period of not less than three (3) days.

Name of Store or Business: _____

City: _____

(To be filled in by Poppy Display Chairman:)

District# _____ Display # _____

Location of Display Contest: _____

Your Display was graded	<u>ORIGINALITY</u>	<u>POINTS</u>
	<u>NEATNESS</u>	<u>POINTS</u>
	<u>COMPOSITION</u>	<u>POINTS</u>
	<u>POPPY STORY</u>	<u>POINTS</u>
	<u>TOTAL SCORE</u>	

Your Display Finished
_____ **Place**

Attest: Buddy Poppy Display Chairman _____

DISTRICT BUDDY POPPY CHAIRMAN: You must submit one copy of this ENTRY BLANK for each display entered in your District to the State Poppy Display director by June 1

Send to: Stephanie Kirksey, 7 Carol Dr., Waterloo, IL 62298 • If you need more copies, please photocopy

BLOOD DONOR PROGRAM



Robert Bland
Chairman

2512 W Farmington Ct
Belvidere, IL 61008
Phone: 815-685-1611

Email:
robert.b.bland@outlook.com

Post 1461-6

During 2024-2025, the Department of Illinois saved as many as 8,364 lives!

2024-2025 Year Reporting by the Numbers:

3,388 hours donated, up 842 from 2023-2024
4,261 miles driven, up 822 from 2023-2024
1,577 members participated, down 1,457 from 2023-2024, more good with less members reported
\$29,972 spent or in-kind donations, up \$9,782 from 2023-2024
113 blood drives hosted or supported, down 25 from 2023-2024, more efficient drives
2,788 pints donated, up 916 from 2023-2024
Let's see how many lives we can save in 2025-2026!

Reporting Requirements:

The Blood Donor Program has two parts: Blood Donations and Blood Drive. Posts and Districts must report both in the Dashboard Report.

Dashboard Report Requirements:

Post Blood Donation. To receive credit on the Dashboard Report the Post must report blood donations. Each blood donation from a Post member, Auxiliary member, or someone donating on the Post's behalf at a blood drive hosted by the Post will count as one unit for the report. Posts will also receive credit for donations if a Post member donates with another organization, for example a Post member donates at a drive with the VA the Post will receive credit for the donation.

Posts will receive one donation for a whole blood donation, one donation for a platelet donation and receive two donations for a double red donation. Only donations count for credit.

Being paid for plasma at a plasma center is not a donation and does not count for blood donation. Receiving a small in-kind gift is acceptable, such as a T-shirt or gift card. Posts may report number of hours

for donations by individual and other incidentals such as mileage to get to the donation site.

Post Blood Drive: To receive credit a Post must host a blood drive. There are many ways that you can achieve this. A Post can have a Blood Center come out to the Post and hold a drive at the Post. A Post can work with another organization has have a blood drive at the other organizations location. A Post may also work with a Blood Center and adopt the site for a day and get Post and Auxiliary members to go there and donate. When reporting add the number of hours volunteers assisted and any in-kind donation, such as using your building.

District Blood Donation: A District will receive credit on the Dashboard Report for blood donation if a member of the District Leadership reports one donation, that donation will not be counted under the Post Donations, no double counting of donations.

District Blood Drive: A District will receive credit on the Dashboard Report for Blood Drive by coordinating more than one Post in the District to have a blood drive with in the same month. For example, for Veterans Day coordinate for two or more of your Posts will hold a blood drive that week or month.

Program begins on May 1, 2025 and will end on April 30, 2026.

At the District level, a Cash Award of \$50.00 will be presented if 100% of the Posts have reported blood donations and blood drives by January 15th 2024.

At the Post level, a \$50 Cash award will be awarded to the Posts who donates the most pints of blood in one of the following membership categories:

Category 1: Up to 150 Members
Category 2: 151 to 300 Members
Category 3: 301 Members and up

As your Blood Donor Chair I would like to thank all of those you have donated and held blood drives in the past and for your future support. December 2022 my Mother had a hole in her aorta, she needed 30 blood products to save her life and allow her to have another Christmas with family. When you donate you are not just saving that person's life, you are impacting the entire family, co-workers and maybe a fellow Veteran. I am passionate about helping Veterans and getting blood, please reach out to me if you have any questions. I also used to work for the Rock River Valley Blood Center and can talk to other Blood Centers to assist in setting up blood drives.

Blood is a product that cannot be manufactured, the only source if blood donations. We as Veterans that have stepped up to put our lives on the line have another opportunity to step up and save our fellow citizens. Blood products are needed every day, from helping a new born child fight for life, to helping accident victims, to help cancer patients fight another day. We have fought before, so now we will help others fight.

Illinois Blood Centers

Please work with your local blood centers and see if they have any programs that can assist us with community support. For example, many of the blood centers have a scholarship program for high school students. High school students run the blood drive and have a chance to earn money. This is an easy way for us to provide a place for the drive and the students run the blood drive.

The Blood Centers are listed below:

Versiti Blood Centers of Illinois

Versiti (formerly Heartland Blood Center) provide blood products to all three of our Chicagoland VA Hospitals: Jesse Brown VA Medical Center, Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital, and Captain James A Lovell Federal Health Care Center. Across Chicagoland we serve over 80 hospitals and work with partners to collect 600 units of blood daily for local patients in need.

Point of Contact is:

Emily Alanis

Regional Manager, Donor Recruitment

Email: ealanis@versiti.org

Rock River Valley Blood Center (RRVBC)

RRVBC provides blood products to 13 local hospitals in the Rockford Area.

Point of Contact is:

Elizabeth Costa (Post 1461 Auxiliary Member)

Donor Recruiter

Email: ecosta@rrvbc.com

American Red Cross

Point of Contact is:

Anna Feltham

Account Manager II – American Red Cross Blood Services

Anna.feltham2@redcross.org

Vitalent

For information and to apply to host a blood drive go to their website at <https://vitalant.org>.

Impact Life

For information and to apply to host a blood drive go to their website at <https://www.bloodcenter.org>.

POC is Rob Bland at robert.b.bland@outlook.com or (815) 685-1611

PROGRAM DONATIONS

We ask every Post to support 5 programs that have been selected by the IL Veterans of Foreign Wars as vital programs that provide assistance to veterans, families, and communities. Below are the 5 programs that you are being asked to support and what your donations support.

The Program Year for these donations is July 1, 2025 to June 30, 2026. Donations **MUST** be received during the dates of the Program Year to get credit on the dashboard. Donations are posted to the dashboard as the donations are received and processed by State HQ.

HOMELESS VETERANS

Minimum Donation \$50

This donation must be sent to State HQ and marked as Homeless Veterans to get credit on dashboard.

This money supports Homeless Veterans Programs throughout the State of Illinois. Types of programs supported include:

- o Homeless Veterans standdowns
- o Purchase equipment or supplies for Homeless Veterans shelters
- o Support building projects that benefit Homeless Veterans
- o Support programs that assist veterans transitioning from Homeless to Housing

NATIONAL HOME

Minimum Donation \$50

This donation can be sent to State Headquarters 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 Headquarters and you will get credit on dashboard.

This money supports the VFW National Home in Eaton Rapids, MI. The IL VFW has 2 homes that we sponsor at the National Home (Illinois 1 and 2). We have also worked with the National Home to sponsor or support fundraising to fund a specific item or special need. All donations will be forwarded to the National Home to provide funds according to the following priorities.

1st – Fund the operations, maintenance and upkeep of Illinois Home 1 and Illinois Home 2

If the reserves required for Illinois 1 and 2 are sufficient, then money will go to:

2nd – Fund any special item or need that the IL VFW has agreed to sponsor or support at the National Home. For example, during this last year, we agreed to support raising money for a new playground and golf carts.

Final priority at National Home

3rd – General Operating Fund

Military Assistance Program (MAP)/Unmet Needs

Minimum Donation \$50

This donation must be sent to State Headquarters and marked as Military Assistance Program (MAP)/Unmet Needs to get credit on dashboard.

This money supports veterans that needs financial assistance to meet their essential needs throughout the State of Illinois. Request for assistance can be emailed to vfwil@vfwil.org and must include a specific request outlining what type of assistance is needed, the circumstances that caused the need, and total amount requested. If the veteran is not a VFW member, they must provide proof of veteran status. They must also submit copies of invoices or bills that need paid. Assistance will be paid directly to the vendor and not to the veteran. All request are approved on a case by case basis following the same guidelines as National VFW Unmet Needs programs. Types of programs supported include:

- o Assist with rent or house payment
- o Assist with utilities (electric, gas, water, sewer, phone)
- o Assist with funeral expenses for a veteran
- o Provide gas for vehicle or food for veteran

Service Office Support (SOS)

Minimum Donation \$50

This donation must be sent to State Headquarters and marked as Service Office Support (SOS) to get credit on dashboard.

This money supports the Illinois VFW Veterans Service Offices. The Illinois VFW has 3 VSOs and 2 clerical personnel in Chicago, 1 VSO in Danville, 1 VSO in Marion, and 1 part time VSO in O'Fallon. The VSO supports veterans with VA claims, VA healthcare, funeral benefits, education benefits, employment counseling, military records and other federal and state veterans benefit programs. The VSO are a resource that Posts and Districts can use to support their activities and provide those VSO services on an outreach basis. These funds support the specialty requirements of the office and supports the outreach and marketing so that the VSOs can expand their reach and assist more veterans. The SOS donations and the Red, White, and Blue Program supports all of our VSO throughout Illinois.

Minimum donation for dashboard credit is \$50

SOS Support is \$50 to \$249

Blue Level Support \$250 to \$499

White Level Support \$500 to \$999

Red Level Support \$1,000 or more

Supporters at the Red, White, or Blue Level will receive a beautiful plaque denoting their level of support, and special recognition at State Convention. Supporters donating to all three levels will receive a special plaque noting their support at all levels.

2025-2026 Commander's Special Project

Minimum Donation \$50

The Commander's Special Projects for this year will be a little different from years past as it will involve two joint projects with the Auxiliary.

Both Projects will benefit the VFW National Home.

Project #1

Department of Illinois Commander Eugene Blackwell and Department President Diane Ahrens will have a joint project to raise funds for the purchase of a UTV.

The Facilities Department requests a 4-Wheel UTV with a dump box to enhance general maintenance across the campus. This vehicle would be utilized for transporting mulch, rock, and other landscaping materials, as well as providing essential support for snow plowing operations. Its addition would significantly improve the efficiency and effectiveness of campus upkeep.

Estimated cost: \$28,000

- 2025 Base Machine GATOR XUV825M S4	\$20,899.00
- Options:	\$ 4,347.00
Roof, full enclosure doors, winch, dump box, windshield with wiper	
- Attachments & Accessories	\$ 2,822.65
Winch and snowplow	
Total Cost	\$28,068.65

Project #2

The second part of the Commander's Special Project is a Joint Project with National Commander in Chief Carol Whitmore and National Auxiliary President Lois Callahan. "Let's Do More for the Store" (see flyer on the next page)

This project consists of purchasing equipment for the retail section of the National Home Store currently under construction for residents, including coolers and freezers for fresh and frozen food, and beverages, dry goods and other sundries that are deemed most useful to residents.

Both of these projects need the support of every Post and District. Post and Districts are encouraged to give generously to both of these worthy causes. The normal minimum donation of \$50.00 won't even begin to cover the costs. The minimum donation will not be increased but your support is appreciated as much as it is needed.

To obtain credit for donating to the Commander's Special Project, a Post or District must send a \$50 donation to Department HQ; once received and processed the staff will change the dashboard from red to green.

Whitmore's Warriors Class of 2025-2026 Project



LET'S DO MORE
STOCK THE STORE



V F W
N A T I O N A L H O M E



Whitmore / Callahan 2025 / 2026

Store Equipment (Refrigerators, freezers, etc and Food)
Consists of purchasing equipment for the retail section including coolers and freezers for fresh and frozen food, and beverages, dry goods and other sundries that are deemed most useful to residents. This fundraiser will also purchase an honor system point of sale program that allows residents to enter the store with a swipe card, pick out items and pay for them with a credit or debit card both during and after business hours.



SCAN ME



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IMPORTANT DATES & DEADLINES

Calendar of Events

2025

July 4, 2025	Independence Day.
Aug. 9-13, 2025	National Convention, Columbus, OH
Aug. 22-24, 2025	Council of Administration Meeting, Tinley Park, IL
Aug. 23, 2025	State Commander's and Auxiliary President's Homecoming Banquet, Tinley Park, IL
September 11, 2025	Patriot Day
September 19, 2025	Prisoner of War/Missing In Action Recognition Day
September 20, 2025	Illinois Day at the National Home (Eaton Rapids, Michigan)
October 17-19, 2025	Big 10 Conference Bettendorf, IA
November 11, 2025	Veterans Day
December 7, 2025	Pearl Harbor Day

2026

February 6-8, 2026	Council of Administration meeting in Springfield, Illinois
February 7, 2026	State Voice of Democracy & Patriot's Pen Banquet in Springfield, IL
February 28-March 5, 2026	National Legislative Conference, Washington DC
May 1, 2026	Loyalty Day
May 25, 2026	Memorial Day
June 11, 2026	District Commander-Elect Training, Springfield, IL
June 11-14, 2026	State Convention, Springfield, IL
June 14, 2026	Flag Day
August 15-19, 2026	National Convention, Salt Lake City, UT

2027

Feb 5-7, 2027	State VOD Banquet and Council of Administration Springfield, IL
June 10-13, 2027	State Convention, Springfield, IL
July 31-August 5, 2027	National Convention, Milwaukee, WI

2028

June 8-11, 2028	State Convention, Springfield
August 5-10, 2028	National Convention, San Antonio, TX

Deadline Dates to Remember for 2025-2026

July 31, 2025	Audits for quarter ending June 30 due to State HQ
August 1, 2025	Deadline to submit articles for Illinois VFW News
August 31, 2025	Quartermaster bonds issued through State HQ expire
August 31, 2025	Fall Program book ads due to State HQ
October 15, 2025	Deadline to submit articles for Illinois VFW News*
October 31, 2025	Audits for quarter ending September 30 due to State HQ
January 31, 2026	Audits for quarter ending December 31, 2025 due to State HQ
February 1, 2026	Deadline to submit articles for Illinois VFW News
April 1, 2026	Deadline to submit articles for Illinois VFW News*
April 15, 2026	Ads for Convention Book due to State HQ
April 30, 2026	Post Election Reports due.
April 30, 2026	Audits for the quarter ending March 31, 2026 due to State HQ
April 30, 2026	Any proposed By Law Changes for IL VFW By Laws due to State Adjutant
May 31, 2026	Any proposed Resolutions for consideration at State Convention due to State Adjutant
June 1, 2026	District election reports due to State HQ

VFW PROGRAMS DEADLINE DATES

NOTE: Updated for the 2025-2026 VFW Program Year

Membership

December 31, 2025	Post membership at 99% to receive certificate and \$100
February 1, 2026	District Membership at 99% to receive \$250 cash award
February 28, 2026	Post membership at 101% to receive \$150 Check for member meal
April 1, 2026	Districts with 101% in membership receive additional \$250 cash award
April 30, 2026	Deadline to determine winner of Cramer-Soden Award
April 30, 2026	Deadline to complete All-State Post Criteria to receive award at State Convention
April 30, 2026	Post with largest increase of Legacy Life Memberships (minimum 4) receives \$100 gift certificate to VFW Store
April 30, 2026	Deadline for Districts to have completed all Post Inspections and Inspections approved by State Inspector
June 1, 2026	100 new or reinstated members to receive \$500 to attend 2026 National Convention
June 15, 2026	Deadline to qualify for All State Post/District
June 30, 2026	Deadline to qualify for All American Post/District

Public Relations/Marketing

February 28, 2026	Deadline to submit nominations for State Publication Contest to State HQ
April 30, 2026	Deadline to submit nomination for News Media Professional of the Year to State HQ

Community Service

March 15, 2026	Deadline to submit Community Activities Report to State HQ in order to qualify for National Certificate of Recognition
April 1, 2026	Deadline to submit nomination of Volunteer of the Year to State HQ
May 1, 2026	Deadline for Post to submit Community Activities Recordbook to State HQ for judging
June 30	Community Service Reports deadline (National Dashboard)
July 1	National Community Service Posts of the Year (NCSP). The National Programs office will determine the top National Community Service Post of the year. Each Conference will have a ONCSP Winner based on total impact from July 1 to June 30 of the previous year

Americanism Program

April 30, 2026	Deadline to submit reports for Americanism Program to State HQ
April 30, 2026	Deadline to submit reports for POW-MIA Program to State HQ

Safety Program

April 30, 2026	Deadline to submit reports for Safety Program to State HQ
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Public Servant Recognition

January 1, 2026	Deadline to submit nominations for Law Enforcement Officer, Firefighter, Paramedic, Dispatcher of the Year to State HQ
February 1, 2026	Deadline for State to submit Law Enforcement Officer, Firefighter, Paramedic, Dispatcher of the Year to National
April 30, 2026	Deadline to submit nominations for Outstanding Legislator, Outstanding Patriotism, Government Service, Clergy, Citizen, News Media, Employer, JROTC Cadet of the Year and Life Saving Award to State HQ

Veteran's Assistance

April 30, 2026	Deadline to submit donation (\$50 min.) for MAP Program to State HQ
April 30, 2026	Deadline to submit donation (\$50 min.) for Homeless Veteran donation to State HQ
April 30, 2026	Deadline to submit donation (\$50 min.) for National Home to State HQ
April 30, 2026	Deadline to qualify for National Home Awards
April 30, 2026	Deadline to submit reports for Hospital/VAVS Program to State HQ
April 30, 2026	Deadline to order Buddy Poppies
June 30, 2026	Deadline to submit donation (\$100 min.) for VMS Program to National HQ

Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen

October 31	Student entries to the Post
November 15	Completion of Post judging
December 1	Sponsorship money due at State HQ for Posts or Districts wishing to sponsor VOD/PP Scholarships, Pizza Party, or Ice Cream Social
December 15	District winners due to the State Headquarters
January 10	State Judging will be completed
January 10	District Participation Report due to the State Headquarters
January 15	Department winners due to National
January 31	Department reports due to National
April 30	Deadline to submit donation for VOD/PP to State HQ for Posts that had no nomination for VOD/PP

Smart/Maher Citizenship Education Teacher Award

October 31	Entries to the Post
November 15	Completion of Post judging
December 15	District Winners due to State HQ
December 29	District participation reports due to State HQ
January 10	Completion of Department judging
February 1	Department winners and reports due to National (to guarantee receipt for Department Convention presentation)

Scout of the Year

March 1	Scout entries to the Post
April 1	Post entries to Department Scouting Chairman or Department HQs
May 1	Department entry to National from Department Scouting Chairman or State HQs

Legislative Advocacy

May 31	Resolutions to be considered at State Convention due to State HQ
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Poppy Display Contest

April 30	Deadline for Convention Awards for Poppies
May 29	District judging of Poppy displays completed
June 8	District winners' Poppy Displays delivered to State Convention
June 30	Department sends State winners list to National HQ

Illinois Specific Programs

April 30, 2026	Deadline to submit reports for Blood Donor Program to State HQ
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April 30, 2026	Deadline to submit donation (\$50 minimum) for Commander's Special Project to State HQ
April 30, 2026	Deadline to submit donation (\$50 minimum) for Service Office Support to State HQ

"Required deadline (by VFW National Headquarters.) All other deadlines are suggested, and can be internally set at the discretion of the VFW Department leadership. Post Chairperson, be sure to communicate with your District Chairperson to find out their official deadlines, and District Chairperson need to communicate with their Department Chairperson to find out their deadlines.

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OUR VFW STATE HEADQUARTERS



Our State Headquarters is located at 3300 Constitution Drive in Springfield. If you are ever in the area, please stop by to say hello.

Our dedicated staff is there daily to help make your year easier and to answer questions that might arise throughout your term of office. Our State Adjutant, Scott Swinford is always available via e-mail or telephone and makes serving veterans his top priority.

All communications to State Commander Eugene Blackwell shall be mailed to our State Headquarters, 3300 Constitution Drive, Springfield, IL 62711.

Correspondence dealing with VFW procedures shall be directed to the State Adjutant at State Headquarters.

All money due to State shall be made payable to the State of Illinois, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and shall be transmitted to the State Quartermaster.

Poppies: All correspondence having to do with Poppies should be directed to the State Quartermaster.

STATE HEADQUARTERS

3300 Constitution Drive

Springfield, Illinois 62711

Phone: (217) 529-6688 • Fax: (217) 546-3415

E-mail: vfwil@vfwil.org • State Website: <http://www.vfwil.org>