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 VFW Auxiliary

## Illinois donates \$85,000 to National Home

*Illinois Day begins with ceremony at cemetery, playground dedication at National Home*

The annual Illinois Day at the VFW National Home in Eaton Rapids, Michigan, Sept. 23 began with a brief remembrance ceremony at a local cemetery to remember the life of an Army Soldier Killed in Action in Vietnam.

The ceremony concluded with Commander Brett Nila and President Lynn Smith placing a memorial wreath at the base of the flagpole.

Following the ceremony, the Illinois VFW and Auxiliary members traveled to the National Home. The events at the National Home began with the dedication of new playground equipment - purchased with funds raised by the Illinois VFW and Auxiliary.

During the afternoon silver march, more than \$85,000 was donated to the home.



Representatives from Post 3873 in Naperville, and Post 805 in O'Fallon present National Home Director Mike Wilson with shirts from each post's .1K event, which raised money for the home.



National Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief Al Lipphardt and National VFW Auxiliary President Carla Martinez were in attendance for the Big Ten Conference, Oct.20-21, hosted by the Department of Illinois VFW and Auxiliary in Itasca, Illinois.

Lipphardt and Martinez are pictured with National Auxiliary Junior Vice President Lois Callahan, National Guard Sandra Uzell, and the Department Commander and President from each of the states in the Big Ten Conference.

Postmaster: Send address changes to V.F.W. Circulation Department, 406 West 34th Street, Kansas City, MO 64111.



**INSIDE THIS ISSUE... TICKETS AND RETURN ENVELOPE**



**VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS.**

## 2024 Illinois Convention Raffle

### Grand Prize \$10,000

Second Prize \$3,000 • Third \$2,000 • Fourth to Tenth \$500



**2024 Illinois Purple Heart Raffle**  
*Proceeds go towards veterans assistance programs in Illinois*  
**Grand Prize \$2,000**



## State Commander

**Brett Nila**

Making a Difference



Throughout the late summer and fall, many Posts and Districts have remained busy, performing the VFW mission of fostering camaraderie, advocating, and serving veterans, the military and our communities. Your Department has been active as well.

The August Council of Administration (C of A) meeting was held in Naperville. Among the typical reports given, three newly appointed officers were on hand to make their reports. Maurice Theriac, the new MOC (Military Order of Cooties) Coordinator, noted his availability to help those interested in standing up new Cootie Pup Tents. Anthony Bellin, the new VFW Riders Liaison, addressed his plan to gather information on various Rider groups, and be a resource for those seeking Riders to support events. Doug Jameson, the new VAC (Veterans Assistance Commission) Liaison, stressed the need for Posts with VACs in their County, to provide their delegate to every VAC meeting.

Also during that meeting, the Council voted to change the location of the Department Con-

vention for the next two years. Convention meetings and dining events will now be conducted at the Springfield Convention Center, located across the street from the Wyndham Hotel and next door to the Abraham Lincoln Hotel. Lodging will be divided between the Wyndham and the Abraham Lincoln. This change was made to offset the significantly rising cost of food and beverages at the hotel. While the Wyndham provided free meeting space, it required purchase of Wyndham food and beverages, with no other options. But while the Convention Center charges for meeting room rental, it also provides a wide choice of caterers that are far more competitively priced. As a result, the Convention Center's total cost for meeting rooms, food and beverage is notably less and offers more menu options than the Wyndham's higher cost for food and beverage alone.

While still early in the year, our Department has done some notable fund-raising. On September 9th, Pier 55 Lounge in Springfield raised \$5,000 for this year's Commander's Spe-

cial Project - the five Illinois Veterans Homes. On September 10, the annual VMS (Veterans & Military Service) Jeep Run raised \$1,000 to support the VFW Unmet Needs Program.

On September 23rd, Illinois Day at the National Home, the Silver March collected over \$85,000. Also that day, a new playground was dedicated. Last February, the Auxiliary proposed partnering with Department to fund a new playground. Many Posts began submitting donations before the end of the 2022-23 year and by September 2023, over \$19,000 had been donated from our Department. The Todd Marriott Memorial Playground was dedicated that day to honor the long-time Facilities Director who passed away this past summer.

As of November 1st, a Joint VFW and Auxiliary effort raised over \$4,175 for Hawaii relief. These donations were collected and forwarded through the Illinois VFW Foundation, our 501(c)(3) non-profit arm. At the August C of A meeting, it was decided that engaging the Foundation in support of such efforts would be the most efficient way to administer them while also providing an ongoing charitable function for the Foundation.

A new, though much smaller fund-raising effort, involves the rank bars for the VFW Membership badges; they can now be purchased for \$15. Profits will go to Department funding.

Until recently, rank bars were only available for District Commanders and certain Department Officers. Now they're available for Post Commanders, Past Post Commanders, and Past District Commanders as well. As of this writing, 45 have been sold so far. If sales continue, the selection will be broadened to include other officer positions as well. Complete information on purchasing the rank bars can be found on the Department website, via a link at the bottom of the home page (near the link to "Commander's shirts"). They will also be on hand for sale during the February 9 - 11 Council of Administration meeting at the Crowne Plaza in Springfield.

During September and October, four of the five Commander's Calls were conducted at four different locations, two in the northern part of the state and two in the southern part. This year, more training was incorporated. Adjutant/QM Joe Bartley explained the new Department Dashboard—now showing every All-State requirement—and how it was re-designed based upon input from the field; he also cited specifics on how to most efficiently use it to report details on activities. Membership Chairman John McGlynn covered Online Membership System (OMS) operation. Both he and Assistant Membership Chairman "Skip" Skipper, who joined in the southern seasons, addressed their ability to provide

lists of unpaid, at-large and expired members upon request. Auxiliary member Tara Skipper has been working as part of the Membership Team and addressed how social media can be used to augment our recruiting efforts. Department Chief of Staff Rob Bailey was on hand to answer questions concerning Inspections. My portion addressed the importance of all members knowing the VFW Mission Statement and how that, along with Core Values, can foster a culture within a Post or District that produces a positive environment that members will enjoy and want to be a part of. I also covered a Retention program focused on "onboarding" new members, getting members involved, training and mentoring, and recognizing members' efforts. Group exercises (similar to Steve Macinnes "edutainment" exercises at last June's state convention) gave attendees a chance to interact and share some of their "best practices" in response to different questions for each group. These best practices will be organized and disseminated before the end of this year.

In late October, we hosted the VFW Big Ten Conference at the Westin Hotel in Itasca. The Big Ten is one of four VFW regional bodies that take turns selecting the Junior-Vice Commander-in-Chief designee each year; that person is subsequently elected National Junior-Vice Commander-in-Chief at the following summer's National

SEE NILA

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## State Senior Vice Commander

**Maurice Bridges**



Happy Holidays! It continues to be an honor for me serving Veterans and their families.

Since the September 2023 Illinois VFW Newspaper edition, I have attended the August Council of Administration meeting held in Naperville, Illinois Day at the National Home in Eaton Rapids, Michigan, District 14 Training, several District meetings, Caseyville Post 1117 85th Anniversary, Commanders Call in Marshall and Collinsville, Membership Dinner at Highland Post 5694, The Scott POW/MIA Council Program at Post 805, Veterans Day Speaker for Post 3480 and more. As you can see, I am working hard for you representing the Department of Illinois.

In addition to travelling throughout the State of Illinois, the Department Leadership Team, under the leadership of Brett Nila, meets every other Friday at Department Headquarters in Springfield. At our meetings, we plan for future events, track and discuss membership challenges, and brainstorm issues that arises.

An event the Department of Illinois hosted in October was the Big Ten Conference.

The Big Ten is one of the

four VFW conferences nationally that serve as an informal intermediary between VFW National and the Departments around the country. A primary function of these conferences is to be a mechanism for selection and nominations for National Officers, streamlining the election process at the National Convention in an organized and clear way.

There are four conferences that divide up the VFW nationwide. They are the Western, Eastern, Southern, Southern and Big Ten Conferences. The Big Ten is made up of the following VFW Departments: Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Nebraska, Iowa, Minnesota, South Dakota and Wisconsin.

Every autumn, the four VFW conferences gather separately to elect their conference leadership, and educate Department leadership of VFW National programs. Each conference will nominate a leader to serve in a position VFW National, either at their annual conference or at the VFW National Convention. Four National positions for nomination rotate between the conferences every four years, allowing each conference to nominate a new position yearly.

Positions on this rotation are VFW National Surgeon, Judge Advocate, Chaplain, and Junior Vice Commander.

The new Dashboard display colors are red and green. The color red lets you know the requirement for that program has not been completed. A new change this year with the Dashboard is that there are two Dashboards, one for the Districts and one for the Posts. It is important that the Post knows that they are responsible for inputting the first five Pillars at the Post level. The five Pillars that the post is responsible for are as follows: Community Service, Veterans Assistance, Youth, Legislative and Illinois Specific. The other Pillars can only be turned green by the Department. The following Pillars must be reported to the Department: Program Nominations, Program Donations, Meeting Attendance, Audits, Bond and Inspections. So, lets continue reporting all that we do in the Community, providing Veterans Assistance, mentoring and support our youth.

I get a lot of questions concerning deadline dates. For example, what is the deadline date for the Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen applications to be turned into the District, Scout entries to the Post, etc. All program deadline dates can be found at vfwil.org under the resources tab, Commanders Leadership Manual and Important Dates and Deadlines.

On Saturday, September 24, Comrades and their families

from the State of Illinois visited the VFW National Home. The State donated more than \$85,000 to the National Home. Outstanding job!! The VFW National Home assists military servicemembers or veterans and their families facing a wide variety of challenges, such as reintegration after military discharge, post-traumatic stress, homelessness, rehabilitation from battlefield injuries, and unemployment. If you know any military servicemember or veteran with children who may need a new start in life, please have them contact the VFW National Home at (800) 313-4200.

In October, the Department held its first Council of Administration (C of A) meeting of this fiscal year. At this meeting, a lot of information was provided to District Commanders. District Commanders must pass on the information provided from the C of A at their District meetings and Post Commanders must ensure to pass on the information at their Post meetings. In addition, at this C of A meeting, we had two speakers from two organizations, the Illinois Attorney General's office and Illinois Joining Forces.

The Illinois Attorney General's office has a division called Veterans Rights Bureau which is dedicated to ensuring that veterans and active-duty military service members receive the

SEE BRIDGES

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### ILLINOIS VFW NEWS

USPS 008-251

Official Publication of the Department of Illinois

Volume #61 Issue #2

The Illinois VFW News is published four times per year (September, December, March and June) by the Department of Illinois, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, 3300 Constitution Dr., Springfield, IL 62711.

Periodical Postage paid at Springfield, IL and additional office: Stevens Point, WI.

Postmaster: Send address changes to V.F.W. Circulation Department, 406 West 34th Street, Kansas City, MO 64111.

### SUBSCRIPTION RATE:

\$1.00 of the annual membership dues paid by each member to a Post of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States. Department of Illinois, is for a year's subscription to the Illinois VFW News. Subscription rates for non-members is \$2.00 per year, \$5.00 three years.

### NEWS COPY & PHOTOS:

Send to Illinois VFW News, 3300 Constitution Dr., Springfield, Illinois 62711 or email to bwilson@vfwil.org. Deadline is the 1st of the month before above listed publishing months.

### NEWSPAPER COMMITTEE:

Laurie Emmer, Chairman;  
Bobby Welch; Joe Bartley;  
Editor: Barbara Wilson  
Printer: Berlin Journal Newspapers,  
Berlin, WI 54923

## State Junior Vice Commander

Eugene Blackwell



Greetings fellow Comrades. While attending the Junior Vice Commander Conference and touring the VFW National Headquarters, I was very surprised to learn about its history. It first opened in Pittsburgh, PA, in 1914 and, in 1918, it moved to Union Square in New York City. The move to Union Square was near the end of the Great War and our membership grew from 5,000 to 64,000 during a five-year period – a twelvefold increase.

In 1923, the VFW decided to expand membership westward and southward so it relocated the headquarters to Kansas City, KS. At that time, Kansas City serviced 32 railroad lines, making traveling to its location easier. In 1930, the VFW moved to Broadway and 34th Street in Kansas City, MO where it sits today. The building was previously a medical treatment center with doctors' offices before housing the VFW. Today our VFW continues to modernize to meet the needs of Veterans across the nation.

We are divided into four conferences (Big Ten, Eastern, Western, and Southern) and we now have membership totaling approximately 817,000. Just think, in the five years after

the end of the Great War, our membership increased over twelvefold and focused mainly on the East and Mid-West. Currently, we focus on four conferences. With technology and modernization, we should be able to increase membership by at least one-half and increase sixfold. That would place our membership at approximately five million over the same five-year time period. Just think, five million VFW members voicing our problems and concerns to Congress to ensure that all Veterans obtain all the benefits earned. Just a thought!

As we prepare for the cold weather, snow, wind, and inclement weather, we celebrated Veterans Day on November 11.

This is a time to reflect on where we are now, where we will be in the future and remember those that never returned home. I hope each of you took the time to celebrate Veterans Day with passion and enjoyed all the freebies and discounts offered to us during this time. It's also a good time to learn more about National Veterans Day Ceremonies and other Veterans Day information at <https://department.va.gov/veterans-day/>.

Thank you all for your service!

## BRIDGES

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benefits they have earned. The Bureau provides men and women with assistance, including case advocacy, health outreach and public advocacy forums. For more information on the services this office provides, please use the following link <https://www.illinoisattorneygeneral.gov/Rights-of-the-People/military-and-veterans-rights/>, or contact the Military and Veterans Rights Bureau at the Illinois Attorney General's office.

Illinois Joining Forces is a central point of contact, can direct individuals to core partners and, through them, to service providers in their local communities. The Care Coordination Center receives and processes assistance requests from anywhere in the state. The support center staff are peer-support trained and can help navigate any issue a veteran or their family members have.

Veterans Support Communi-

ties (VSC's) are focused on serving Veterans and their families and play a key role in providing support to transitioning service members returning home and to the Veterans living and working in each community. Each community collaborative works to identify resources in their coverage area. When these collaboratives come together, the community-based model is proven to be a comprehensive and effective way to foster the relationships necessary for an active referral system that meets the needs of the Service member, Veteran, and family (SMVF) community throughout the state.

In closing, Happy New Year and I look forward to attending the Voice of Democracy and Patriots' Pen Banquet at the next Council of Administration in February. **VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES, WE GOT YOU.**



### St. Juvin Post leads Homecoming Parade

St. Juvin Post VFW leads the 2023 Coal City high school homecoming game parade as Jr. Vice Commander Jim Richards braves the rain to greet the crowd standing as the colors pass by. Friday Oct. 6 was a cloudy and rainy day but that didn't stop Coal City Coalers fans from lining both side of Broadway Street in Coal City to cheer on their high school football team for their homecoming game with the Wilmington Wildcats. St. Juvin Post 1336 VFW members Commander James (Hoppy) Phillips, Adjutant/Quartermaster Keith Roseland, Jr. Vice-Commander Jim Richards, and Post members Earl (Shorty) Fatlan, Mike Lareau and Bill Bomba lead the parade displaying the U.S. and VFW flags.

## NILA

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Convention. The Big Ten holds its conference every October, hosted by a different one of the ten member states each year. The last time Illinois hosted was in 2013. Feedback on this year's event has been positive. A new feature that was well-received, was hosting the Friday evening "mixer" at a local Post, with nearby Post #2149 in Wood Dale opening its doors exclusively to conference attendees. During the business session the following day, the Big Ten elected a new Vice-Chairman and a Chaplain. By-Laws were also amended, which included elimination of the requirement for the hosting state to provide almost \$3,000 in complementary registrations to the Conference leadership, beginning next year. I want to thank the volunteers who were on hand along with the full-time staff who were there to ensure the operation ran smoothly. And a special "thank you" to the Planning Committee of John Davin, Barb Wilson and Chuck Ingle, who started the site selection process with me back in September 2021; they too were on hand to see this journey through to a successful completion.

Also in late October, our State Service Officer, Derek Giffin, left our employ to take a position with the VA. We certainly want to thank Derek for his years of service to the Illinois VFW and wish him success in his new position. With Derek's departure, we now have two Service Officer positions to fill. That includes the role of State Service Officer which will ultimately be determined by our Veterans

Service Committee. At the same time, we're also reviewing the positioning of our service officers throughout the state.

At the end of October, our Membership Team began a Facebook campaign to connect with Posts. Through that connection, more Posts learned about acquiring lists of expired, unpaid, and relocated members, as well as members-at-large, targeted to the zip codes they request. Many Posts have made contacts and gained new members from these lists. If we're to reach 102% in strength, we need to employ every strategy to grow our membership. Those who haven't obtained their lists can reach out to John McGlynn or "Skip" Skipper, or just contact Department Headquarters.

With the start of November, many Posts are selecting their Voice of Democracy (VOD) and Patriot's Pen winners. Districts meanwhile are preparing to select their winners and planning their awards functions. The Department VOD and Patriot's Pen Banquet will be on Saturday evening, February 10 in Springfield at the Crowne Plaza Hotel. Ticket prices will be \$45 per person. The sky-rocketing hotel menu prices—which we also experienced at the state convention and at the Big Ten Conference—have necessitated this increase. Watch for more details in the General Orders.

As I said at the start, there's a lot going on at Department. And I know there's a great deal going on in the field, so I encourage Posts to share the things they're doing. A good way to recognize and acknowledge the efforts of

Post members is to submit an article for publication on what they've done. The next deadline for this newspaper is February 1, 2024. Provide a good quality photo or two. Give the basics of who, what, when and where. Who was involved? What happened? When and where did it happen? And it would help to mention the "how" and "why." How did the event come about? Why was it important and/or significant? People appreciate having their efforts publicized and enjoy seeing and reading about the things in which they participated. Of course everyone enjoys reading about what's happening at other Posts. And I would be happy to proofread your article before you submit it; just email it to me at [bnila@vfwil.org](mailto:bnila@vfwil.org)

I want to thank all of our members who are out there performing the work of the VFW, volunteering their time and skills. With veterans comprising less than 7% of the population, it's important that we make ourselves visible within our communities. There was a time years ago, when everyone in our society knew a veteran, if not several. Now, there are many people who don't even know one. It's not healthy for a society to become detached from its veteran population. It's important that our communities know veterans as real people, and not simply as what they see on TV or the movies. The public needs to know veterans as people they can approach and relate to, if we're to help them understand the challenges that some of us face. And if we're to help them understand that many of us still have much to offer and are still determined to make a difference.

### Illinois VFW News Deadline

The deadline for the March 2024 issue of the Illinois VFW News is Feb. 1, 2024.

The deadline for the May 2024 issue is April 1, 2024.

Email items to: Barb Wilson - [bwilson@vfwil.org](mailto:bwilson@vfwil.org)

# Kahokian Memorial Post hosts PACT Act Resource Fair

By Stephanie Malench

On Sept. 26, Kahokian Memorial VFW Post 5691, Collinsville, held a successful PACT Act Event/Resource Fair, organized by Senior Vice Commander and acting Post Commander Andy Frisby, a U.S. Air Force veteran of Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

Frisby organized the event ahead of the Sept. 30 deadline for all veterans who were deployed to combat zones, regardless of VFW membership, and their families to get signed up for health care enrollment and have other questions handled in person without having to drive or get a ride to St. Louis. His original plan was to organize a Stand Down at Post 5691, but it did not pan out. Marcena Gunther, Public Affairs and Volunteer Services Director for the St. Louis Veterans Administration suggested the resource fair instead.

This fair was the first of its kind in the Metro East that is covered by the St. Louis VA, which covers Madison and St. Clair Counties. Veterans or their family members were even able to have their DD-214 printed off to prove their military credentials for services.

Gunther and Lulu Liang, center for develop-

ment and civic engagement specialist with the St. Louis VA served as liaisons with the St. Louis VA. Twelve departments were available to answer questions and help Veterans or their family members sign up for benefits including:

- Veterans Health Administration
- Veterans Benefits Administration
- VA Family Caregiver Assistance
- VA Center for Development and Civic Engagement
- VA Mental Health Services
- Toxic Exposure Screeners
- Madison County Veterans Assistance Commission
- PACT Act and Camp Lejeune Claims
- VA Burial Benefits
- VA Housing Assistance and Veterans Home Coordinator
- Veterans Outreach Program Representative

The event was successful, with nearly 40 claims being filed by participants, as well as assistance given to veterans who had filed but had issues with their applications. Most of the veterans that filed claims at the event have already had their compensation and pension meetings with outside providers set.

One example of a success story from this in-

augural event included a US Navy veteran who was able to speak to a VA disability processor at the fair regarding her open claim she believed was stuck. The processor was able to access the claim, saw what was causing the problem, corrected the problem, and the veteran reports that she now has forward movement on the claim. Another success story comes from another US Navy veteran with a claim the VA was requesting a duplicate of medical records from the primary doctor that had already been sent but had now misspelled the doctor's name. The claims processor was able to delete the duplicate request and forward movement has now been made on the veteran's disability request.

Frisby is planning on permanently holding the event at the Kahokian Memorial VFW Post 5691 so the local veterans community can attend the event two- or three-times next year and growing the event to include more veterans service organizations, both governmental agencies and private sector and transportation for homeless veterans in the area.

Upcoming events will be posted on the Collinsville VFW's Facebook page and the post website, [vfw5691.org](http://vfw5691.org).



Veterans and family members visit a vendor at the recent Kahokian Memorial Post 5691 PACT Act Resource Fair. (Photo by Richard Lawrence)



Veterans and family members visit a vendor at the recent Kahokian Memorial Post 5691 PACT Act Resource Fair. (Photo by Richard Lawrence)

## Teen Eagle Scout organizes Villa Park memorial ceremony for 7 veterans whose remains have gone unclaimed

There was a tribute on June 17 to honor several military veterans in the western suburbs. The memorial, held to say goodbye to soldiers from both world wars and the Korean War, was all planned by 16-year-old Eagle Scout Cooper Merrinette. He started the project after learning about unclaimed cremated remains of military veterans at funeral homes around the country. So he got to work, organizing the ceremony.

Cooper, born himself in Korea and adopted at 6 months old, felt a personal connection to the men who have long been gone, but not forgotten.

"I just felt that especially because one of these men was a Korean War veteran. Had it not been for them fighting for their freedom of this country that I myself, and many included, wouldn't have the chance to come to America," Cooper said.



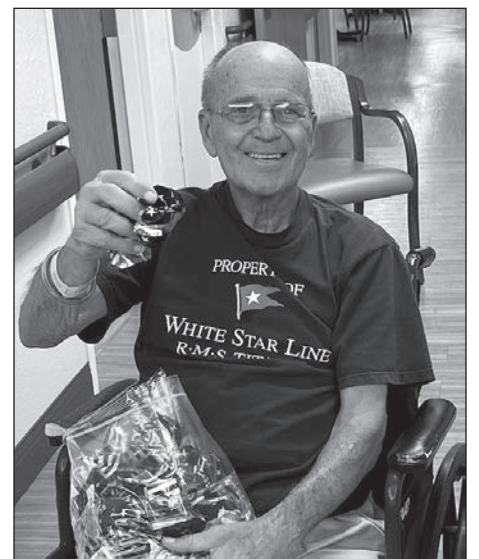
Villa Park VFW Post was honored to have been a part of this beautiful memorial service on June 17. Seven urns containing the ashes of Veterans from World War I, World War II and Korea were found and the desire to honor them in the way they deserved became the goal. Eagle Scout candidate Cooper Merrinette from Troop 99 Tall Grass district, coordinated this beautiful event as well as the woodworking of the elegant boxes for each Veteran. Veterans honored were Charles Doswell, Frank Bonfield, and Stanley Ohlman, from World War I, William Hruska, Stanley Moldenhauer, and Edwin Forsberg, from World War II, and Floyd Haynes, from Korean War. The Villa Park VFW, Lombard VFW Honor Guards and Naperville VFW Color Guard participated in the event.

## All treats, no tricks for Florida-based veterans from St. Juvin Post 1336

It was all treats but no tricks at the Douglas T. Jacobson Veterans Home in Port Charlotte FL thanks to the generosity of the members of the Floridian Club of Sarasota.

Candy, and snack items along with articles of clothing donated by Floridian Club members and delivered to the home by St. Juvin Post 1336 VFW members Warren Benson and Charlie Brown assisted by National Guard vet Gregg Casagrande.

The Floridian Club also hosts a media collection for the Veterans Home where club members donate books, magazines, CD's and DVD's for the home's library delivered by members of the Floridian Club's Veterans Group.



Above, one of the Douglas T. Jacobson's residents with his Halloween treat bag. At left, from left, St. Juvin Post 1336 members Charlie Brown, Warren Benson and Megan Kirkpatrick, Jacobson Therapy Supervisor and Gregg Casagrande with some of the treats for Jacobson residents for their Halloween celebration.



# Flag Day Monument dedicated in Batavia

By Robert J. Welch  
State Historian,  
Department of Illinois VFW  
Past State Commander  
Board Member, FVPO

On October 1, 2023, at 2 pm, American patriots gathered in Batavia, IL to honor a local and National hero on his 157th birthday as well as unveil a monument to the American Flag and the rich history it stands for.

Dr. Bernard Cigrand (October 1, 1866 – May 16, 1932) Born in Waubeka, Wisconsin, Cigrand practiced dentistry in Chicago, Batavia, and Aurora; but that is not what he is most known for, Dr. Cigrand is known as the “Father of Flag Day.” From the late 1880s on, Cigrand spoke around the country promoting patriotism, respect for the flag, and the need for the annual observance of a Flag Day on June 14, the day in 1777 that the Continental Congress adopted the Stars and Stripes.

He became president of the American Flag Day Association and later of the National Flag Day Society, which allowed him to promote his cause with organizational backing. Cigrand once noted he had given 2,188 speeches on patriotism and the flag. In June 1886, he first publicly proposed an annual observance of the birth of the United States flag in an article titled “The Fourteenth of June,” published in the Chicago Argus newspaper.

After 30 years of Cigrand’s advocacy, to include writing letters to seven sitting US Presidents on the subject, President Woodrow Wilson proclaimed June 14 as Flag Day in 1916. Congress would eventually make the proclamation law in August 1949.

The Flag Day Monument, a project that started as a con-

versation in 2016 (the 100th anniversary of Flag Day) about how to celebrate Flag Day every day, is a tribute to the American Flag, and so much more.

The flag tells the story of our nation’s history. It celebrates the arrival of new states, is lowered to honor our dead, and it marks noteworthy events in time.

The monument unfolds our nation’s history beginning in 1776 and continuing into the future, marked by 25-year increments. The design features a 40’ diameter helix monument with a 6’ wide walkway around the perimeter. The flagpole is 50’ tall and will display a 10’ x 18’ flag.

The next phase is to create an educational station on the outside of the main structure, this will be where youth and civic groups can come and learn about America’s history and the monument prior to entering. The monument is still in need of funding for future plaques, benches, and routine maintenance. Please consider donating through the purchase of a brick on the entry walk into the monument. Bricks can be bought by going to [www.flagdaymonument.com](http://www.flagdaymonument.com), it would be nice to see the walkway over-

flow with VFW bricks.

The Fox Valley Patriotic Organization (FVPO), who was responsible for the construction of the monument, was joined by local residents, Veterans Organizations (most notably Batavia Overseas Post 1197), the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Sons of the American Revolution, the Batavia Community Band and so many more for the unveiling of the monument.

Medal of Honor Recipient and Emeritus FVPO Board Member, Allen J. Lynch, was the guest speaker at the dedication and gave a rousing speech on patriotism, the flag, and our future as a country.

The Ceremony was outstanding, the weather was perfect, and it was great to see so many patriotic Americans celebrate their Flag. Since the monument was made with the intent that more content could be added to it, I will leave you with this quote from the last plaque on the helix. “The future is yours... it is yours to decide the culture we embrace, the peace we achieve, and whether our nation grows or diminishes.”



The bronze plaque on the monument.



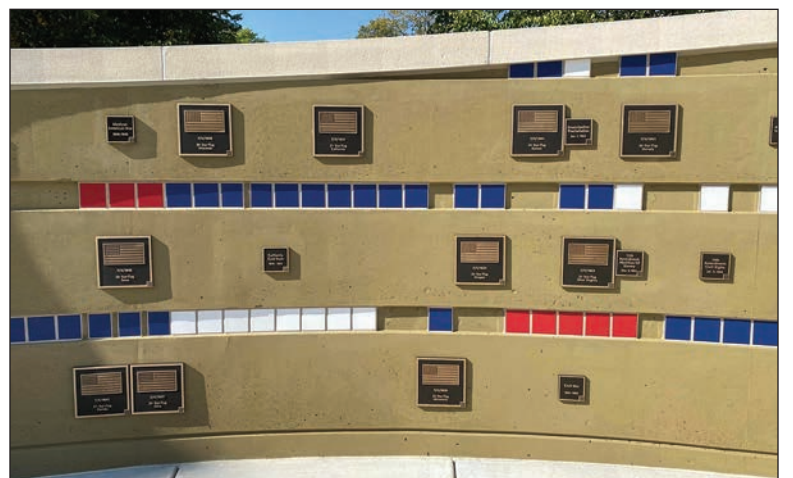
The Flag Day Monument



Dr. Bernard Cigrand (October 1, 1866 – May 16, 1932) is known as the “Father of Flag Day.”



Past State Commander Robert J. Welch (right) talks with Medal of Honor Recipient and Emeritus Fox Valley Patriotic Organization Board Member, Allen J. Lynch. Lynch was the guest speaker at the dedication.



Education is a key component of the Flag Day Monument. The Monument tells the story of the Flag and our Nation. Our history is told through the bronze plaques and color tiles. Each color tile represents one year. Blue tiles represents the 27 official United States Flags. Red tiles represent Armed Conflicts. White tiles represent Civic, cultural or Flag related facts. Each bronze plaque contains a QR code that scan with your phone that takes you to our Content pages where you can learn more.





**Feeding the Olney Fire Department**

Olney Post 4226 and its Auxiliary honored the Olney Fire Department Sept. 7 with a home-cooked meal. Pictured, from left, Jerry Harper, Nancy O'Connell, Ron Stephens, Tena Anderson, Tim Anderson, Billie Miller, Sherri Taylor, Daron Harmon, Justin Michels, Jacob Beam and Tyler Steber. A huge thank you to Billie Miller for the homemade noodles and all the cooking!



During the July meeting VFW Post 1304, Stockton, voted to donate \$2,500.00 to the Stockton Police Department K-9 Fund. VFW member Jeff Altfillseh who is also a SPD Officer, was on hand to explain the needs and benefits to the community of having a K-9 Officer. VFW Commander Ryan Bartel along with Quartermaster Kevin Schubert present the check to Altfillseh.



Students from the Lewistown High School Civics class unfold a new flag to be installed on the new flagpole.

**Lewistown students install new flagpole, flag at Veterans Memorial**

The Lewistown High School Civics class, in conjunction with the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW) Post 5001, installed a new flagpole and flag at the Veterans Memorial located in Oak Hill Cemetery in Lewistown.

The old steel pole had served its duty for many years and needed to be replaced. After its removal, Mr. Matthew Peirce's 2nd hour Civics class walked the new 30-foot aluminum pole from Lewistown High School to Oak Hill Cemetery. With the assistance of school maintenance employee Jared Mathis, the new pole was erected. The American flag, proudly carried by the group, was unfurled and attached to the new pole. The class stood at attention with hands over their hearts as the flag was raised.

The Civics classes in Lewistown conduct service learning projects throughout the year. In the past, they have undertaken projects such as raking leaves in front of the cemetery and around the Fulton County courthouse, packing Christmas packages for children in need around the world, and helping local organi-



Lewistown High School Civics class installed a new flagpole and flag at the Veterans Memorial in Oak Hill Cemetery.

zations, such as the Lewistown Historical Society, clean and beautify local attractions.

The replacement of the flagpole was a wonderful project that was much needed. We are grateful

to Dan Sandman for the loan of the generator that provided the power necessary for us to complete our task. Thank you, Mr. Peirce and your 2nd hour class, for helping the VFW with the project!

State Senior Vice Commander Maurice Bridges presents Doug Jameson with the Meritorious Service Medal with Silver Star, denoting Jameson's selection as the Veteran of the Quarter.



District 4 Commander Kermit Morales and Joshua Harris VFW Post 2868 Commander Evamarie Duff joined 17 other vendors to participate in the Trunk or Treat event at the Illinois National Guard's North Riverside Armory in North Riverside, Illinois Oct. 29. Approximately 35 children participated in the event.

# Naperville Post 3873 Fundraiser for the VFW National Home

Naperville's Judd Kendall VFW, its Auxiliary members, and community members anxiously awaited the 10th annual Judd A Thon.

The 0.1K run, a walk for 98

percent of the participants, has all the trappings of a major charity race but is easily completed by all.

The race is a fun experience that supports the VFW National

Home. Race Director (past post commander) Pablo Araya and co-director (and longtime post-life member) Jennifer Slown organized the event.

An early morning heavy rain almost forced a cancellation, but the rain wasn't a problem when the race began. However, the flyover by a Lima Lima plane, a medley of patriotic songs by a local choral group, and the famous warm-up calisthenics were canceled. A little rain did not stop the participants from surviving the grueling event!

The Judd Kendall community was pleased to have a staff member from the National Home participate, as did Paul and Sharon Zink from the O'Fallon Post 805. Paul and Sharon originated the concept of a .1K run to benefit the Home, and they encouraged the post to start a similar event.



Even St Patrick (AKA Mike McGrath) participated in the Judd A Thon. With him are members Phil Maughan and Glen Granat.

With all the advance work of Araya and Slown to line up sponsors and participants, this year's donation was \$40,225.

During the 10-year history of the Judd A Thon, the post and Auxiliary have contributed over \$250,000 to the Home. Araya has turned over the Race

Director title to Slown.

With energy and dedication and the full support of Judd Kendall Post 8373, the Auxiliary and the Naperville community are excited to continue to provide meaningful contributions to the Home.



Illinois National Home Chair, Kyna Simpson prepared for the otherwise dreary day.



Assembling the crowd for the race. (Photos courtesy of Jim Hoch)



She made it all the way.

## Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!

How do I say thank you to EVERYONE who contributed in any way to make the Big 10 Conference the success that it was! This was teamwork at its best!

There is no way we could have accomplished this without all of you. The ditty bags were fantastic with all the wonderful items that you were able to have donated. People from the other states were raving about them and wanted to talk with me on how we did it.

Of course, my response to them was "it was all due to the dedicated Auxiliaries/Members in Illinois who either got donations or purchase items themselves to make sure the bags had lots of goodies".

And how do I describe how overwhelmed I was with not only the number of Raffle Baskets that were donated but how beautiful they all were! We ended up with 43 baskets thanks to every District in the State and many individual members.

And then there are all those who were in attendance and volunteered wherever they were needed the entire weekend! You are all ROCK STARS!! Again, THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU!!

Cheryl Michel  
Dept. Auxiliary Big 10 Chairman

## 80th ANNIVERSARY of D-DAY

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# Belvidere honors Marine veteran killed in action in Vietnam

By Robert R. Ryder

On Aug. 12, Vietnam War veteran Jeff Smith who was killed in action, was honored by his hometown of Belvidere for his sacrifice and his service.

The ceremony, arranged by Belvidere Mayor Clint Morris, took place at the Belvidere Veterans of Foreign Wars, Post 1461 with close to 100 people attending along with members of Smith's family.

Jeff Smith was the only known Belvidere, Illinois resident to have died while serving in Vietnam.

"I want to say thank you to everyone who came out today," stated Smith's older brother Jedwin while speaking at the ceremony. "Our family is greatly honored. I'm speechless."

Jedwin Smith is a former Marine who served in Vietnam himself. He authored the book "Our Brother's Keeper" about the death of his younger brother Jeff and the devastating impact it had on his family.

Jedwin recalled that his brother Jeff put aside his anti-war sentiments and joined the Marines in July of 1967 much to his family's surprise. 4 months later he was sent to Vietnam to serve in the infantry as a member of Foxtrot Company, 2nd Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment, 3rd Marine Division.

On March 7th, 1968, while on patrol near the village of Mai Xa Thi in the Quang Tri Province of South Vietnam, Jeff Smith was killed during an ambush by the Viet Cong.

"Jeff is my best friend and has been since that horrible day in Vietnam," Jedwin Smith declared. "55 years ago Jeff died but he'll live forever in my heart."

Belvidere Mayor Clint Morris came up with the idea for memorializing Jeff Smith and helped arrange the ceremony.

A major part of the memorial was renaming one of the major streets in Belvidere from Logan Avenue to Jeff Smith Memorial

Avenue.

"Vietnam veterans as we know were not welcomed home on their return very graciously," pointed out Mayor Morris after the ceremony. "I always thought that was wrong. And Jeff was certainly one of the 58,318 service members who lost their life and I thought we should memorialize him, and so we have."

After the ceremony Jedwin Smith commented on how he and his family were thankful to Mayor Morris and the entire Belvidere Community for the ceremony honoring Jeff, and that it would help the family to heal emotionally. He added his brother would have been surprised by all the attention.

"Jeff would be smiling from ear to ear. He didn't have an ego. He'd be tickled but he'd also be saying what's the big deal? I know he would have been honored."



Jeff Smith, of Belvidere, enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps in July 1967 and was sent to Vietnam four months later. He was killed in action March 7, 1968 in Mai Xa Thi, Quang Tri Province.

## Oswego dedicates road in memory of Luckinbill

The ceremony to dedicate a portion of Route 30 in Oswego as Herschel Luckinbill Road in memory of the late U.S. Navy veteran was held Oct. 13 at Route 30 and Douglas Road in Oswego.

"Herschel's unwavering dedication to his country, his fellow veterans and our community is an inspiration to us all," said state Rep. Stephanie Kifowit, D-Oswego, in a press release about the ceremony. "As we dedicate Herschel Luckinbill Road we ensure that his legacy lives on for generations to come, a reminder of the profound impact one individual can have."

Earlier this year, the Illinois General Assembly unanimously passed House Joint Resolution 79 to designate a section of Route 30 in Kendall County in memory of Luckinbill, a former Montgomery resident and long-time advocate for Fox Valley veterans who died in 2021.

"Herschel Luckinbill was my best friend," said Roosevelt-Aurora American Legion Post 84 Cmdr. Mike Eckburg in the re-

lease. "I'm thankful we crossed paths and then ran together with each other at countless events and activities, all veteran-related, for 15 to 20 years. I'll never meet another one like him. It's very appropriate that he is recognized. He was a good family man, a patriot and an American hero."

"Herschel was a proud veteran," remembered Rick Gardner, co-leader of the Fox Valley Veterans Breakfast Club.

During his military service, Luckinbill served in the Vietnam War aboard the USS O'Brien, a destroyer, completing two tours of duty. Two days before Christmas in 1966 his ship was hit by direct fire from the North Vietnamese.

As the general quarters alarm was sounded and he and his shipmates poured out of the sleeping compartment, 19-year-old Luckinbill got topside just as an incoming shell hit, killing two of his friends right behind him and wounding four more.

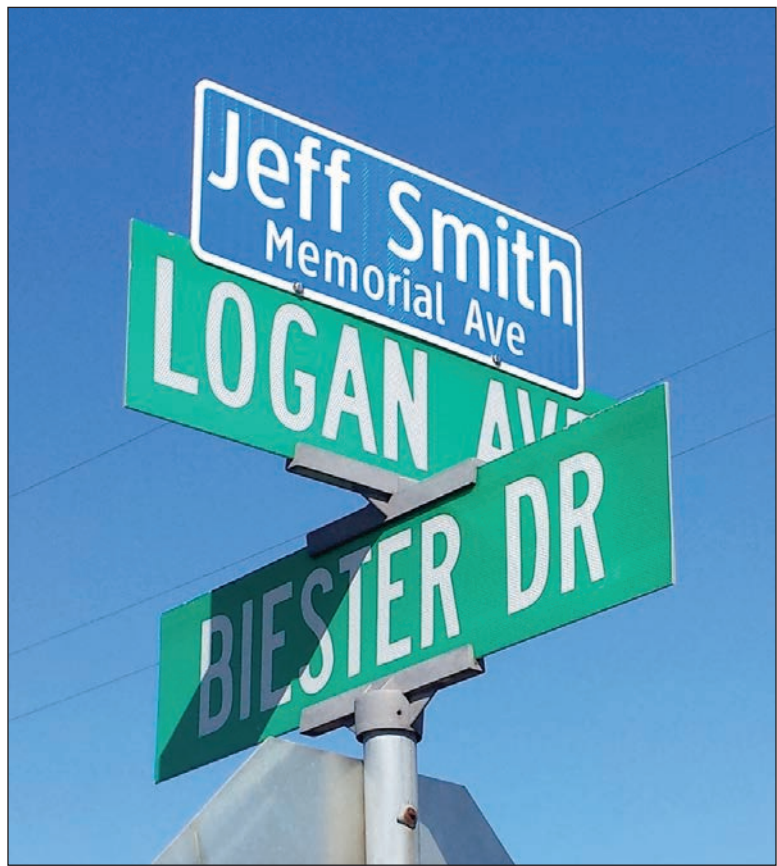
Luckinbill dedicated the last decades of his life to promoting

veterans' causes in memory of those who did not make it home, according to the release.

He served as a guardian to veterans for Honor Flight Chicago 25 times, escorting them to Washington, D.C., to visit the memorials there. In addition to his work with Honor Flight Chicago, he was instrumental in bringing the Vietnam Moving Wall to Aurora and Oswego, as well as the Middle East Conflicts Wall to Oswego, officials said.

In 2008, he took on the leadership of the Fox Valley Veterans Breakfast Club. He also actively participated in numerous youth sports and area organizations, officials said

"Herschel was a tremendous community leader who dedicated his time and talent to serving veterans throughout our area," said Oswego Village President Ryan Kauffman. "His steadfast commitment to improving the lives of others was truly remarkable and this road dedication will remind us of his legacy."



Logan Avenue in Belvidere was renamed the Jeff Smith Memorial Avenue.

**UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE® (All Periodicals Publications Except Requester Publications)**

1. Publication Title: Illinois VFW News

2. Publication Number: 088-351

3. Filing Date: 09/30/2023

4. Issue Frequency: Aug - Dec - March - May

5. Number of Issues Published Annually: 4

6. Annual Subscription Price: \$1 Members \$2 NonMembers

7. Complete Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication (Not printer) (Street, city, county, state, and ZIP+4®): VFW Department of Illinois, 3300 Constitution Drive, PO Box 13206, Springfield, IL 62791

8. Complete Mailing Address of Headquarters or General Business Office of Publisher (Not printer): 3300 Constitution Drive, PO Box 13206, Springfield, IL 62791

9. Full Names and Complete Mailing Addresses of Publisher, Editor, and Managing Editor (Do not leave blank): Publisher (Name and complete mailing address): VFW Department of Illinois, 3300 Constitution Drive, PO Box 13206, Springfield, IL 62791; Editor (Name and complete mailing address): Barbara Wilson, 3300 Constitution Drive, PO Box 13206, Springfield, IL 62791; Managing Editor (Name and complete mailing address): Barbara Wilson, 3300 Constitution Drive, PO Box 13206, Springfield, IL 62791

10. Owner (Do not leave blank. If the publication is owned by a corporation, give the name and address of the corporation immediately followed by the names and addresses of all stockholders owning or holding 1 percent or more of the total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, give the names and addresses of the individual owners. If owned by a partnership or other unincorporated firm, give its name and address as well as those of each individual owner. If the publication is published by a nonprofit organization, give its name and address.): Full Name: Veterans of Foreign Wars Department of Illinois; Complete Mailing Address: 3300 Constitution Drive, PO Box 13206, Springfield, IL 62791

11. Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages, or Other Securities. If none, check box:  None

12. Tax Status (For completion by nonprofit organizations authorized to mail at nonprofit rates) (Check one):  Has Not Changed During Preceding 12 Months;  Has Changed During Preceding 12 Months (Publisher must submit explanation of change with this statement)

PS Form 3526, July 2014 (Page 1 of 4) (see instructions page 4) PSN: 7530-01-000-9931

13. Publication Title: Illinois VFW News

14. Issue Date for Circulation Data Below: 05/01/2023

15. Extent and Nature of Circulation

	Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date
a. Total Number of Copies (Net press run)		
(1) Mailed Outside-County Paid Subscriptions Stated on PS Form 3541 (Include paid distribution above nominal rate, advertiser's proof copies, and exchange copies)	33296	32864
b. Paid Circulation (By Mail and Outside the Mail)		
(2) Mailed In-County Paid Subscriptions Stated on PS Form 3541 (Include paid distribution above nominal rate, advertiser's proof copies, and exchange copies)		
(3) Paid Distribution Outside the Mails Including Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, Counter Sales, and Other Paid Distribution Outside USPS®		
(4) Paid Distribution by Other Classes of Mail Through the USPS (e.g., First-Class Mail®)		
c. Total Paid Distribution (Sum of 15b (1), (2), (3), and (4))	33296	32864
d. Free or Nominal Rate Distribution (By Mail and Outside the Mail)		
(1) Free or Nominal Rate Outside-County Copies Included on PS Form 3541		
(2) Free or Nominal Rate In-County Copies Included on PS Form 3541		
(3) Free or Nominal Rate Copies Mailed at Other Classes Through the USPS (e.g., First-Class Mail)		
(4) Free or Nominal Rate Distribution Outside the Mail (Carriers or other means)	316.25	310
e. Total Free or Nominal Rate Distribution (Sum of 15d (1), (2), (3) and (4))	316.25	310
f. Total Distribution (Sum of 15c and 15e)	33612.25	33174
g. Copies not Distributed (See Instructions to Publishers #4 (page #3))	1075.25	1076
h. Total (Sum of 15f and g)	34687.5	34250
i. Percent Paid (15c divided by 15f times 100)	99.1%	99.1%

\* If you are claiming electronic copies, go to line 16 on page 3. If you are not claiming electronic copies, skip to line 17 on page 3.

**UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE® (All Periodicals Publications Except Requester Publications)**

16. Electronic Copy Circulation

	Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date
a. Paid Electronic Copies	0	0
b. Total Paid Print Copies (Line 15c) + Paid Electronic Copies (Line 16a)	33296	0
c. Total Print Distribution (Line 15f) + Paid Electronic Copies (Line 16a)	33612.25	33174
d. Percent Paid (Both Print & Electronic Copies) (16b divided by 16c x 100)		

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17. Publication of Statement of Ownership:  If the publication is a general publication, publication of this statement is required. Will be printed in the 12/1/23 issue of this publication.  Publication not required.

18. Signature and Title of Editor, Publisher, Business Manager, or Owner: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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PS Form 3526, July 2014 (Page 3 of 4) PSN: 7530-01-000-9931



# 2023 proves to be busy, productive year for Lemont 22 Honor Post

2023 has been a busy and exciting one for Lemont 22 Honor VFW Post 5819 of Lemont, Illinois.

The Post has much to be proud of, from award nominees and winners, to a special community project and post hall improvements for its members.

Here's a look at all that VFW Post 5819 has accomplished during this banner year.

### Awarding Exemplary Individuals

VFW Post 5819 was lucky to sponsor a couple of amazing candidates for some special awards this year.

The post sponsored National Teacher of the Year, Javier Martinez, a Marine Corps veteran and history teacher from Kaneland High School in Maple Park, Illinois. Martinez won the VFW District 19 Award and the VFW Illinois State Award, which brought him to the national level.

He was honored with the Teacher of the Year Award for his exceptional commitment to teaching patriotism and civic responsibility to his students.

He immerses his students in military history by organizing several field trips to national battlefields and military museums. Martinez received \$1,000 for professional development as well as \$1,000 for his school as part of this honor.

Another award winner that VFW Post 5819 was proud to sponsor this year was high schooler Andrew Kula, a senior at Lemont High School. Kula won the Lemont VFW 5819 Voice of Democracy Award, with this year's theme, "Why

is the veteran important?". He won Lemont's 19th District Award and continued on to win the VFW Illinois State Award. He beat 16 other competitors at this level, securing a \$2,600 scholarship. He then advanced on to the VFW National Awards in Washington, D.C.

Finally, VFW Post 5819 awarded some local heroes with the National Firefighters Public Servant citation to Firefighter David Gubbins and the National Emergency Medical Technician Public Servant citation to EMT Lt. Rami Elsharief, both of the Lemont Fire Protection District. These men were recognized by their colleagues and the fire service for their consistent excellence in the performance of their duties. They were selected by retired Fire Chief Francis Jareczek as worthy nominees for this prestigious award. Lt. Elsharief is a licensed registered nurse as well as a certified paramedic and has devoted countless hours to the district. Firefighter Gubbins is also a certified paramedic and the Local IAFF #3966 president. He was also recognized at the 2022 Best of Lemont awards ceremony as Firefighter of the Year.

### Honoring Past Veterans with Restoration Project

In conjunction with other local civic organizations in Lemont, VFW Post 5819 took part in a community project this year to help restore and renovate the Old Danish Cemetery.

The cemetery holds the remains of several veterans, going back to World War I, as well as the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, whose remains were

found floating in the I & M Canal in 1919.

The project involved the restoring and resetting of monument markers, placement of a new lighted flagpole, and an overall cleanup after several years of neglect.

VFW Post 5819 conducted a rifle salute at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier as part of the rededication ceremony on July 3.

As part of the restoration and rededication of the cemetery, a monument was erected to honor those who have died, along with a plaque showing the Lemont VFW Post 5819 as a major contributor.

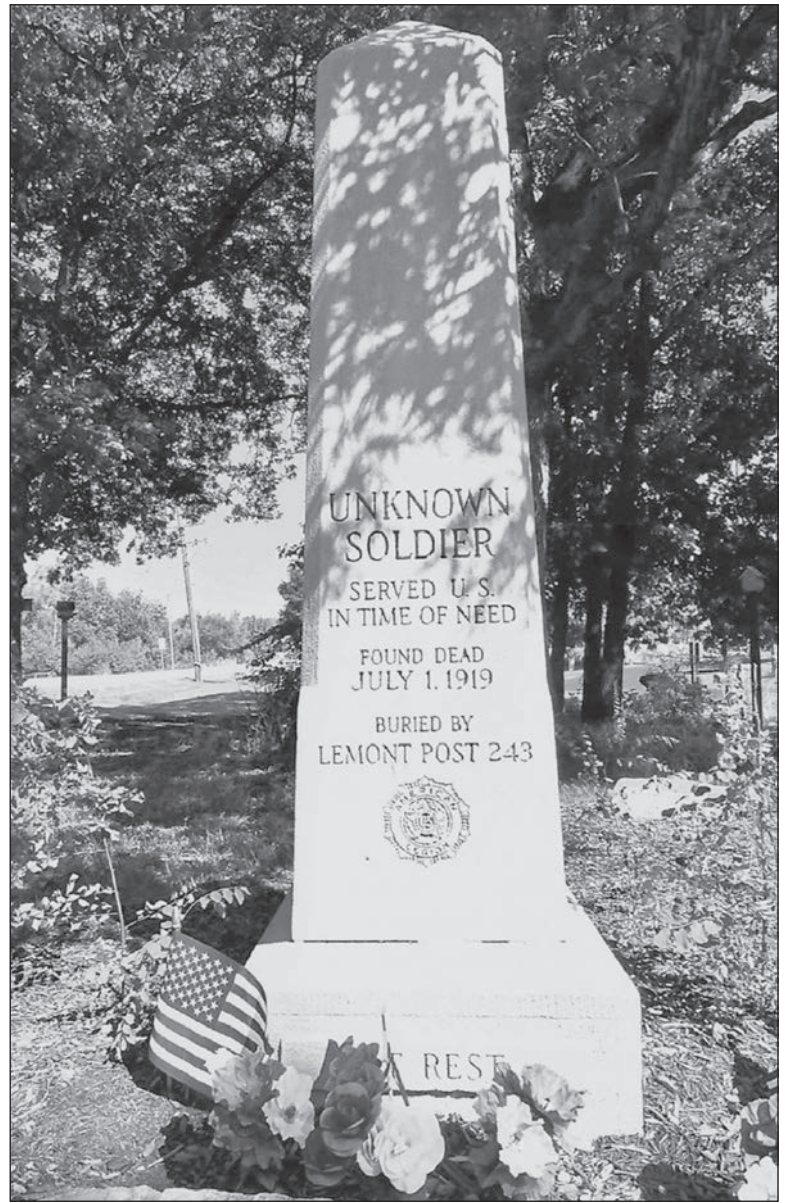
### Improvements to VFW Hall

Not only was VFW Post 5819 busy helping to improve its community and honoring its citizens, it also turned to its very own VFW hall to make the building more comfortable for its members and to honor past Lemont veterans.

The post remodeled its Wall of Honor in its large banquet hall, which holds the pictures of 22 Lemont veterans killed in action (KIA) during World War II, which is how the post received its official title, Lemont 22 Honor VFW Post 5819.

Included in the Wall of Honor are a couple of pictures of Lemont veterans KIA in the Korean and Vietnam wars. The Wall of Honor also depicts the name of its post and the nation's Branches of Service, along with pictures of past Post Commanders.

Earlier this spring, VFW Post 5819 completed work on its patio by adding a roof with lighted fans, as well as a televi-



Post 5819 participated in a community project to restore, renovate the Old Danish Cemetery.

sion, so that it can be enjoyed by its members during inclement weather.

To demonstrate to the public what the VFW stands for and its dedication to flag and country, the post had a mural painted on the outside wall of the patio

depicting an American flag, the Branches of Service, and an American eagle.

"This past year has been fortuitous to our post," says Post Commander, Robert Rose. "In the future, we hope to be able to continue our good works."



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VFW Post 5819 completed work on its patio by adding a roof with lighted fans, as well as a television, so that it can be enjoyed by its members during inclement weather.



### Operation Firm Shake

St. Juvin Post 1336 Adjutant-Quartermaster Keith Roseland advised vets about their benefits at the 10th annual Operation Firm Handshake Veterans event, held Sept. 9 at the Coal City Area club. The event's founder and organizer Max Valdez estimated the attendance at 1,200 veterans and family members who enjoyed entertainment by several DJs, a fly over, military vehicle and car show, a pig roast, hot dogs and hamburgers and a corn boil. Santa made a stop with gifts for the children. St. Juvin Post manned their Veteran's information tent with members Commander James (Hoppy) Phillips, Jr. Vice Commander Jim Richards, Adjutant/Quartermaster Keith Roseland, Sr. Vice Commander Irv DeWald, Ron Berta, Al Diaz, Jim Muntefering and Randy Brown in attendance.

# VFW Auxiliary

## Auxiliary President

Lynn Smith



Big Ten – What a great job everyone did. Thanks to the VFW Officers and staff for being easy to work with. To the Chairman Cheryl Michel and the ALL the volunteers, YOU were great. To the Districts and Auxiliaries that donated baskets and items for the swag bags, everyone was so impressed. We could not have done this without you.

To the Upstate and Downstate Districts that hosted my luncheons, what a wonderful time. Upstate for the generous donation to Project Diehard and the Downstate for the Indian Blessing from CooperHawk. I know that we will have a successful year.

How time flies. Half the year is over. We are working hard, but I know we can do better. Together Every Auxiliary Member. We are a team. There are some things that we are lacking in. Chain of Command. If you

have a problem, talk to your District President, if they don't have an answer they will go to the Department. If you notify a Line Officer, they will discuss it with the Department President. Don't go to National. If you do, National will send it back to the Department President. This only prolongs answering the question.

Membership is moving along. I love to hear about the membership drives. Are you reporting that to the Membership Chairman Rhonda Borkgren? If you have ideas run them by Rhonda, I know she would love to hear them and might have some thoughts. Remember teamwork, that's how we get everything done.

The Member of the Year- I know we all know someone who goes above and beyond. They never stop working for our Veterans. Please be sure to get your nominations to Barb Howard.

## Auxiliary Membership

Rhonda Borkgren & Paula DeDoncker



VFW Auxiliary Membership can be very complicated at times. In order to belong to the Auxiliary, we need to have a qualified Veteran. Our eligibility wheel is parents, grandparents, siblings, spouses, children, or grandchildren of a qualified Veteran. Once we establish our veteran qualifies, we need to get proof of his service. That's where the problem starts. Many times the veteran is deceased and it takes a lot to find his DD214.

It would be a great idea and help our membership greatly if veterans gave a copy of their DD214 to a child. When a Veteran passes away, the child needs DD214 for his funeral. It seems like so many times we don't want to join the Auxiliary when we are young, because we are busy with our children. When we get to the age we want to join, many times our Veteran is deceased. While we are talking

about it, give a copy of your paperwork to your child. Every week I get calls on finding a parent's eligibility. Now our Vietnam Veterans are getting older, and it would be a great idea to make sure family members know your story and have proof of your service. If we all work together, we can keep our organizations stronger.

I watch Skip and Tara work membership and I am so excited for the future of our organization with VFW and Auxiliary working together on membership. If your Post is knocking on doors of former members, ask auxiliary members to go with. Most of those veterans have a spouse or child who is eligible. If we all work together, we can grow Illinois. If you want a list of at large members in your area, give me a call. I will get them for you. Let's all work together to grow Illinois!

## Auxiliary Photos needed

The 2024 State Convention will be the Illinois VFW Auxiliary's 100th Convention. Editor Barb Wilson would like to include historical photos of the Illinois VFW Auxiliary throughout the past 100 years to kick off the 100th Anniversary celebration.

High resolution photos can be scanned and emailed to Barb Wilson at [barb.wilson2@outlook.com](mailto:barb.wilson2@outlook.com) (if emailing, please cc Department Secretary Jo Lynn Altvatter). If you are unable to scan and email photos, please mail to Barb Wilson, 3300 Constitution Dr., Springfield, IL 62711. She will scan the photos and return originals through the mail system.

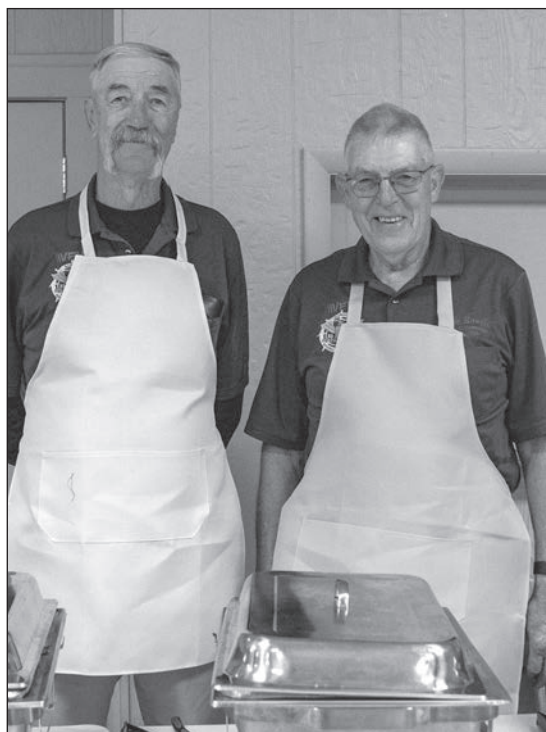
## Downstate Bruncheon honors Smith



Department Conductor Terry Adams escorts Department President Lynn Smith through the aisle of flags at the Downstate Bruncheon.



The District Presidents from Districts 12, 13, 14, 15, and 17, present Department President Lynn Smith with a print of the Dignity sculpture in South Dakota.



Chief Big Bird and Chief Home Depot, also known as District 15 Senior Vice Commander Clarence Caraker and District 14 Commander Clyde Rowold, were on hand to serve the brunch to attendees.



CooperHawk presents an Indian Blessing to Department President Lynn Smith.

Illinois VFW News Deadline  
 The deadline for the March 2024 issue of the Illinois VFW News is Feb. 1, 2024.  
 The deadline for the May 2024 issue is April 1, 2024.  
 Email items to: Barb Wilson - [bwilson@vfwil.org](mailto:bwilson@vfwil.org)

# Post 5691 honors Home Depot

Prior to the beginning of the regular business meeting for the month of October, acting post commander Sr Vice Commander Andy Frisby presented a token of appreciation to the Collinsville Home Depot manager, Chris Wendling for all their continued dedication and help with two separate grants for a beautification of the post.

While at the same meeting, the Home Depot called out Don Digirolamo to receive a Veterans Day beautification grant at his home. This was a great surprise to Don. Don is a Vietnam veteran who is an active member of Post 5691 Honor Guard and trustee. Two of his children Chris and Jason were in attendance to see Don receive this veteran's day award.



Senior Vice Commander Andy Frisby presents a token of appreciation to the Collinsville Home Depot.



Chris Wendling, Home Depot, announces Don Digirolamo will receive a Veterans Day beautification grant.



Benjamin O. Davis Post 311 held its annual Stand Down Aug. 26 with many vendor partners in attendance.

# Post 311 hosts annual Stand Down

The Benjamin O. Davis VFW 2023 Stand-Down event held on Aug. 26 at VFW Post 311 was an outstanding success led by Post Commander Aretha Spurlock.

We accommodated over 160 guests, including 80 registered Veterans, 40 VFW members, 32 Vendors manning one, two, and three person organization stations.

Thanks to the remarkable collaboration of several organizations, including Senator Patrick Joyce, Jesse Brown VA, Humana, Rich Township Supervisor Calvin Jordan, Cook County Clerk's Office, Prairie State College, and an array of dedicated organizations this event not only provided crucial services and resources to our esteemed veterans but also offered a memorable experience for families.

Children were particularly enamored with the horseback riding provided by Shoney the Cowgirl, while Truckin for Veterans



Shoney the Cowgirl provided horseback riding opportunities for the children in attendance.

provided an impressive display of weapons from different eras in our nation's history.

The Daughters of Judah made a significant contribution by helping the Post serve our veterans and vendors, ensuring that no one left hungry. Additionally,

Life Coach JaHana Holloway's inspirational session resonated deeply with our women veterans, offering them valuable insights and motivation.

This event truly showcased the power of community support and appreciation for our veterans.

VFW Post 1739 relief fund received donations for 776 poppies which will be used to serve programs for veterans, surviving spouses, and children in need. Donations were collected at the FCHS Midgets football game Sept. 1. Veterans, first responders, and active military members were honored on the FCHS football field prior to the game. Members from Post 1739 who collected are, from left, John Lawson, Adjutant Ken Montegross, and Mike Shearon.



# Post 998 celebrates 100 years

On the evening of September 12, 2023 Moseley Loewe Post 998, Freeport, celebrated its centennial anniversary during an event Sept. 12.

That's 100 years of continuous operation of serving veterans, and their community.

Post Commander Harlow Pues served as the master of ceremonies. Guests included State Commander Brett Nila, District 6 Commander John Coulter, Freeport's City Manager and Mayor and Reverent Kieth Johnson of First Lutheran Church, Freeport.

More than 100 veterans and their spouses along with special guests attended. A number of



State Commander Brett Nila presents a certificate to Post Commander Harlow Pues.

organizations who partner or benefit from a working relationship with VFW Post 998 displayed their products and services.



Post 998 had a display of memorabilia out during its 100th anniversary celebration.



Newly-elected Post 3480 Commander Valerie Young has hit the ground running during the 2023-24 term. Among the many events she has participated in she held a membership drive in September, as well as supported the Coulterville Fall festival.



# Illinois VFW, Auxiliary partner to raise funds for playground

Little ones dangling from the monkey bars, swooshing down the slide, or balancing on the swing probably won't give much thought to how their new play place arrived at the VFW National Home or to whom it memorializes. For years to come, they'll just gather with their young friends and play

freely as children are meant to do. And that's exactly the point.

The Department of Illinois VFW and Auxiliaries joined together to provide a first-class playground for National Home children to let loose, forget their cares, and enjoy the fresh air.

When it came time to decide

on a name for the park the choice was clear after the sudden passing of Facilities Director Todd Marriott this summer, who had served the home since 1986.

"We worked with Todd on a lot of our projects for the VFW National Home. This wasn't a job for him, but a calling. He

loved the home and what it stood for, so we named the park the Todd Marriott Memorial Playground," said Lynn Smith, Dept. President for the State of Illinois Auxiliary.

The Illinois Auxiliary partnered with the Illinois VFW to fund the project, an effort that

State Commander Brett Nila said came easily.

"The auxiliary proposed it to us this past February and it picked up steam pretty quickly. We were pleasantly surprised at how the donations just poured in from posts all over the state," he explained.



State Commander Brett Nila, above, and Department President Lynn Smith, at right, address the Illinois VFW and Auxiliary members gathered at the VFW National Home playground dedication ceremony Sept. 23. The Illinois VFW and Auxiliary partnered to raise the funds to build the playground.



The Illinois VFW and Auxiliary were well represented during Illinois Day at the VFW National Home Sept. 23.



Above, State Commander Brett Nila and Department President Lynn Smith present the money raised to build the new playground equipment at the VFW National Home. At right, Smith and Nila present a wreath at the Rose Hill cemetery during the remembrance ceremony.