

**State Senior Vice Commander**

**Eugene Blackwell**



Greeting Comrades,  
 During my recent visits to three different VFW posts—one of them in Indiana—an interesting moment arose. Each time I mentioned the “Big Ten Conference,” the immediate response was to assume I was talking about college sports. It became clear that many comrades aren’t aware of the VFW’s regional structure, and that much of the Midwest is part of our own Big Ten Conference.  
 To clarify, the VFW is divided into regions known as conferences, which serve to bring comrades and auxiliary members together across member states or departments. Unlike in our National By-laws, these conferences aren’t mentioned there because they serve primar-

ily to help select members for national leadership roles at the National Convention. Also, each conference has its own By-laws. Here’s a brief breakdown of our conference regions:  
 Big Ten: Departments include Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.  
 Eastern: Departments include Connecticut, Delaware, Europe, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont.  
 Western: Departments include Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, Pacific, Utah, Washington, and

Wyoming.  
 Southern: Departments include Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia.  
 At this year’s Big Ten Conference, held in October 2024, our past State Service Officer, Barry Walters, was elected Adjutant/Quartermaster for the Big Ten Conference. Congratulations, Barry!  
 As we head into the holiday season, with Veterans Day, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year’s, we’re also preparing for the Council of Administration meeting. This meeting aligns with the celebrations for our VOD (Voice of Democracy) and Patriot Pen award winners, so keep an eye on deadlines for these programs as well as other items on the VFW Dashboard.  
 The VFW celebrates its 125th anniversary this year, and it’s a perfect time to reaffirm our commitment to our communities and embody our VFW values. The

national VFW website offers resources and communication tools to help promote this significant milestone in our history, with the anniversary campaign running through Aug. 15, 2025.  
 This season also serves as a reminder to take care of our health. I recommend considering the following vaccinations:  
 COVID-19: This contagious virus can lead to severe complications, including pneumonia and long COVID.  
 Influenza (Flu): A common

virus that can worsen existing health conditions, with risks of severe infections.  
 RSV (Respiratory syncytial virus): Particularly serious for young children and older adults, RSV can result in pneumonia and lung inflammation.  
 I personally chose to get all three vaccines at once at my local pharmacy. I encourage everyone to protect their health, so we can continue serving our communities in good health.  
 Wishing you all a safe and joyful holiday season.

**Gold Star 500 pays tribute to fallen service members**



The Gold Star 500 traversed the State of Illinois during the 500-mile bicycle ride.



The Gold Star 500 started this year in Metropolis.



The Gold Star 500 stopped at various stages throughout the bicycle ride, including VFW Posts.



Members of VFW Rhone Post 2729, Chicago, gathered to present a donation to Caring Patriots’ Mike Cozzi before a recent post meeting. The post donated \$2,500 dollars towards their food drive in December helping veterans. Caring Patriots has been conducting food drives for more than 12 years. Post Commander Charlie Johnson presents the check to Cozzi. The post also donated \$500 dollars earlier in the year to this non-profit organization at a fundraiser they conducted.



**Poppy Proceeds Help Veteran Support Groups**

Members of the Arlington Heights and Buffalo Grove communities became aware of Arlington Post 981 on the two Saturdays preceding Memorial Day as post members distribute red poppies and accept donations. The post is given permission by supermarkets, drugstores, and hardware stores to greet the public.  
 Post 981 sets all donations aside in a fund separate from its operational account. It strives to dis-

tribute all the moneys during its fiscal year of July 1 to June 30. At the August 2024 post meeting three veteran-helping organizations were welcomed and each received a check for \$1,500. These were: K9s For Veterans, which provides service dogs; Bravehearts Therapeutic Riding and Educational Center, which connects veterans and their families with horses; and Midwest Veterans Closet, which helps veterans needing furnishing for their dwellings.