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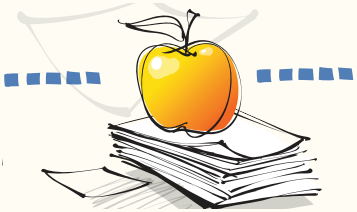


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New Mexico Post Earns Fred C. Hall Award

Deployed Troops and Families Enjoy Weekend Vacations

A New Mexico VFW Post's efforts to help transitioning service members — at no cost to the veterans — earned national recognition at VFW's 118th National Convention in New Orleans.

Post 11999 in Cloudcroft, N.M., received the *Fred C. Hall Memorial Outstanding Post Special Project Award* for its *Warriors in Transition* program. The Post offers a three-day, two-night getaway for veterans returning from or preparing for active duty, and their families. The veterans are members of the Texas-based Fort Bliss Warrior Transition Battalion.

Post Commander Jack Smith said the program was started by previous Post Commander Tom Reilly six years ago. The majority of Post 11999's members are Vietnam veterans, Smith said, and they organize the event on an annual basis the weekend prior to Memorial Day.

"When we came home, there was not a welcoming committee, let's just put it that way," Smith said, "and whether we said it openly or whether we said it to ourselves, what has been done is we've never let that happen again, if we could do anything about it."

The *Warriors in Transition* program sends roughly 30 to 35 veterans to Cloudcroft, which is about 100 miles northeast of Fort Bliss and has a population of 700. During the weekend, veterans and their families are able to golf, ride four-wheelers and participate in other activities. A parade also is held.

"We bring them to town, we put them up in really nice digs for two nights and three days, all expenses paid," Smith said. "We give them 'Warrior Bucks,' which the community vendors have said they will accept."

Vendors can later be reimbursed by the Post.

"Most of the time, they tear it up and throw it away," Smith said. "It's their contribution."

The event, according to Smith, costs the Post roughly \$5,000 per year.

"We've got wonderful people who make donations specifically to have this event happen," Smith said.

Attendees, according to Smith, are mostly Afghanistan and Iraq War veterans. He said they go "to great lengths to let us know how appreciative they were for what we did."

The Fred C. Hall Award honors Posts, County Councils, Departments and Districts for their work in their respective communities.

Email: kwilliams@vfw.org



Veterans attending the 2017 Warriors in Transition event walk along Burrow Avenue to applause from residents in Cloudcroft, N.M., as they make their way to a proclamation reading.

PHOTO COURTESY OF LIZ BEASLEY/MOUNTAIN MONTHLY



Post 11999 Commander Jack Smith addresses veterans who attended the Warriors in Transition event in Cloudcroft, N.M. He read a proclamation from the city's mayor that denoted May 18 as Warriors in Transition Day in Cloudcroft.

PHOTO COURTESY OF LIZ BEASLEY/MOUNTAIN MONTHLY



Sgt. 1st Class Chandra Williams, VFW Post 11999 Commander Jack Smith and 1st Lt. Sammie L. Walker display a declaration from Cloudcroft, N.M., Mayor Dave Venable. Venable named May 18 as Warriors in Transition Day.

PHOTO COURTESY OF JACK SMITH



What to know about Cloudcroft, N.M.

- Population: 693.
- 100 miles from Fort Bliss and the Mexican Border
- Vacation destination with horseback riding, golf, camping and more.
- Area attractions include Apache Point Observatory, White Sands Missile Range and Roswell Symphony Orchestra.
- Home to VFW Post 11999, which was chartered in 2002 and counts 60 members.



CONVENTION HIGHLIGHTS ON YOUTUBE

Did you miss the 2017 VFW National Convention? Watch video highlights from the event in New Orleans online at www.YouTube.com/VFWVIDS.

Highlights include: Jennifer Yuengling, vice president of operations for D.G. Yuengling and Son Inc., presenting \$100,000 to VFW; President and CEO of Twisted X Boots Prasad Reddy donating \$75,000 to VFW; and President and Owner of Henry Repeating Arms Anthony Imperato donating \$50,000.

VFW PROGRAMS RECEIVES \$28,500

During VFW's national convention in New Orleans, participants in the Vander Clute Memorial Motorcycle Ride raised \$28,500, including \$15,000 raised by the Department of Virginia. They presented then-Commander-in-Chief Brian Duffy with a check on July 25 to be used for VFW programs.

VFW ACCEPTING FELLOWSHIP APPLICATIONS

VFW and Student Veterans of America (SVA) are now accepting applications from student veterans interested in participating in the 2018 VFW-SVA Legislative Fellowship program.

Now in its fourth year, the fellowship offers 10 selected student veterans the opportunity to meet face-to-face with members of Congress during the annual VFW National Legislative Conference March 4-9, 2018. The fellowship also provides additional opportunities for awardees to address veterans' issues in their communities.

VFW-SVA Legislative Fellowship opportunities are open to currently enrolled student veterans at colleges and universities with active SVA chapters. Candidates must be VFW members.

All applications must be submitted by close-of-business Oct. 20.

Selected fellows will be notified before Thanksgiving, with a formal announcement of the fellowship class in January 2018 at the SVA National Conference in San Antonio. For full details about the fellowship and to apply, visit www.vfw.org/StudentFellowship.



A SIMPLE WAY TO HELP YOUR FELLOW VETERANS

There are several easy ways to support the VFW that only take a few minutes, and don't require you to donate any money today. Consider naming the VFW as a beneficiary of your retirement, bank accounts or life insurance policies. For details, visit www.vfw.org/plannedgiving or contact the VFW Planned Giving Office at (816) 968-1119 or email plannedgiving@vfw.org.



KNOW THE FACTS ABOUT VA BURIAL BENEFITS

For veterans, the U.S. government provides burial benefits if you use a national or state veterans cemetery. However, the government provides limited monetary amounts for the funeral or cremation services necessary to get you there. In fact, many veterans still think the VA will pay for their funeral or cremation services, but that is not true. You can learn all the facts from the free Veterans Planning Guide, available at www.dignityveteransvfw.com.

Brian Duffy, Adjutant General

New Structure Will Serve Our Members Well



VFW is entering a new and exciting era in its long and rich history as America's premier veterans service organization. I'm eager to help lead our great organization as your new adjutant general.

Going forward, I want VFW employees to focus on our current members as our direct customers. If we serve them well, then our mission and future members will be better served, too.

We will embrace our role as an international organization that serves the needs of some 1.7 million VFW and Auxiliary members. To do that, new VFW Commander-in-Chief Keith Harman has announced internal changes that align us closer to other

proven, successful organizational structures used by Fortune 500 companies and other large nonprofit associations.

In my 26-year career with the United Parcel Service, I saw how an efficiently run organization becomes and maintains its place as a leader in its field. Adopting some of these basic fundamentals and tactics positions VFW well for the 21st century.

Chief Harman's new structure will allow our employees to offer faster, better and more efficient service to our members. Our members, in turn, will be able to execute VFW's service mission more effectively. An organic byproduct will be an increase in new members. In short, we will be member obsessed, not membership obsessed.

One thing we know about our latest generation of members — those who have served since Sept. 11, 2001 — is that they want to be active in their Posts. They are drawn to service work.

That is encouraging and bodes well for our future. During my nearly 35 years as a VFW member, I've always been proud of what Posts do on the local level. Our members care about their communities and back it up with tangible assistance in many different forms.

Service to others is the essence of VFW. With a new leadership team and philosophy in place, we are here to serve our members.

Debra Anderson, Quartermaster General

VFW Store Supports Programs

NO ONE DOES MORE FOR VETERANS.

VFW has transitioned through many changes over the years, but we stand strong in our commitment that "No One Does More for Veterans."

The success of the VFW depends upon the support and hard work of our leadership and members, as well as a reliable revenue stream to sustain valuable VFW endeavors such as the National Veterans Service department, as well as our support of student veterans, veterans employment, military transition services, and scholarship programs, to name a few. This revenue is received, in part, from our sponsored insurance and benefit programs, sales through the VFW Store, as well as donations from our affiliates and supporters.

VFW offers a variety of quality insurance products, financial services and end-of-life services, as well as discounts on such items as electronics, haircuts, hotel reservations and car rentals.

The VFW Store offers more than 2,000 quality and affordable products, including emblematic merchandise, flags and patriotic items. The VFW Store and its licensed vendors are the only legal source to

purchase apparel and other merchandise with the VFW branding and logo (Cross of Malta).

A reliable revenue stream is vital to ensure our efforts will be adequately funded for years to come. We depend on our leadership at all levels to support and promote the member benefit programs and the VFW Store to assure our organization remains strong to continue our mission.

The reason the VFW continues to succeed is because of you — thank you for your dedication to the VFW and its members.



CHECKPOINT

Editor
Tim Dyhouse

Assistant Editor
Janie Dyhouse

Senior Writer
Kari Williams

Staff Writer
Dave Spiva

Graphic Designer
Sally A. Nemeth

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Correspondence can be sent to the editor at VFW National Headquarters.

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NO ONE DOES MORE FOR VETERANS.

VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS

National Headquarters
406 W. 34th Street, Kansas City, MO 64111
(816) 756-3390 • FAX 816-968-1169
Checkpoint email: tdyhouse@vfw.org

VFW WASHINGTON OFFICE

VFW Memorial Building
200 Maryland Ave., NE, Washington, DC 20002
(202) 543-2239 • Fax: 202-543-6719
Email: vfw@vfw.org

SERVICE OFFICERS

'Trained Experts'

VFW Service Officers Provide Fast and Free Claims Help

One of VFW's most important functions is assisting veterans when they file claims with VA. VFW suggests that veterans seek this free service in order to avoid the confusion and bureaucracy that can be obstacles in the process.

"VFW service officers are trained experts," said Ryan Gallucci, director of VFW's National Veterans Service, which trains and supports VFW's worldwide network of service officers. "They know how to deal with VA and are often the key to the successful resolution of a claimant's case. Furthermore, they won't hesitate to represent veterans before VA and the Board of Veterans Appeals when needed."

Not only are they experienced, accredited and trained, VFW service officers know current laws, pertinent legislation and regulations. They help veterans file for disability compensation, rehabilitation, education programs, pension and death benefits, as well as employment and training services.

And since 2001, VFW has staffed pre-discharge representatives at its Benefits Delivery at Discharge sites. Now on almost two dozen military installations, these sites serve troops who are within 180 days of discharge. These soon-to-be veterans receive assistance in obtaining their VA entitlements and benefits.

VFW service officers at BDD sites helped more than 15,000 troops last year obtain more than \$147 million.

"VFW is proud to offer these free services," Gallucci said. "When a veteran or active-duty service member needs help filing a claim, our service officers are there to help from start to finish."

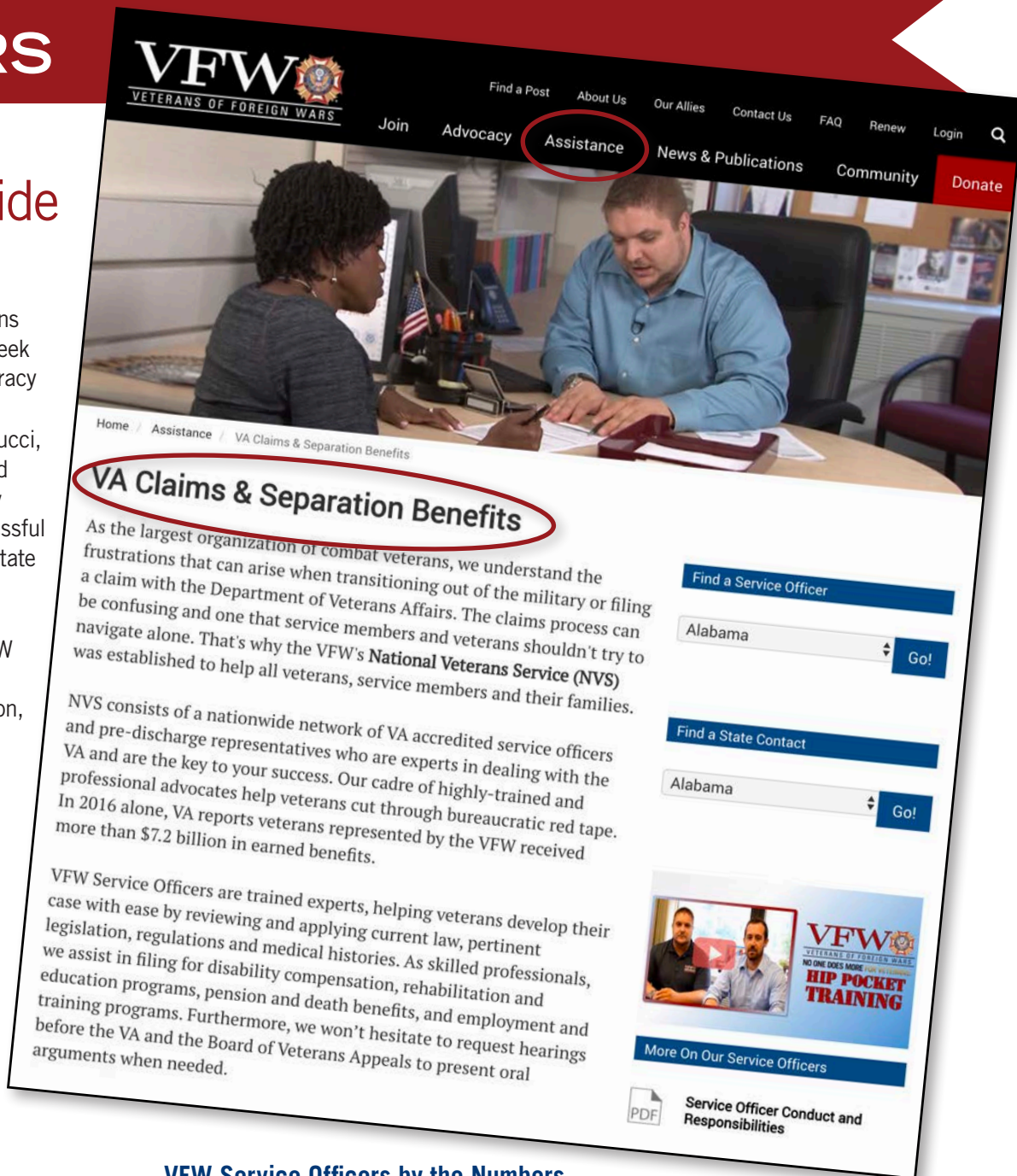
Find Your Service Officer and VFW's BDD Sites

If you need help locating a VFW service officer, the solution is at VFW's website, www.vfw.org. Once there, click on the "Assistance" tab and then "VA Claims and Separation Benefits" from the drop-down menu.

On the right hand side of the page is the "Find a VFW Service Officer" locator tool. Enter your state, and contact information for the VFW Department service officer in that state will appear. There's also a similar locator for each state's Department headquarters.

Additionally, there's helpful information and links about the claims process.

You also can locate all 22 BDD sites around the country, along with helpful information.



VFW Service Officers by the Numbers

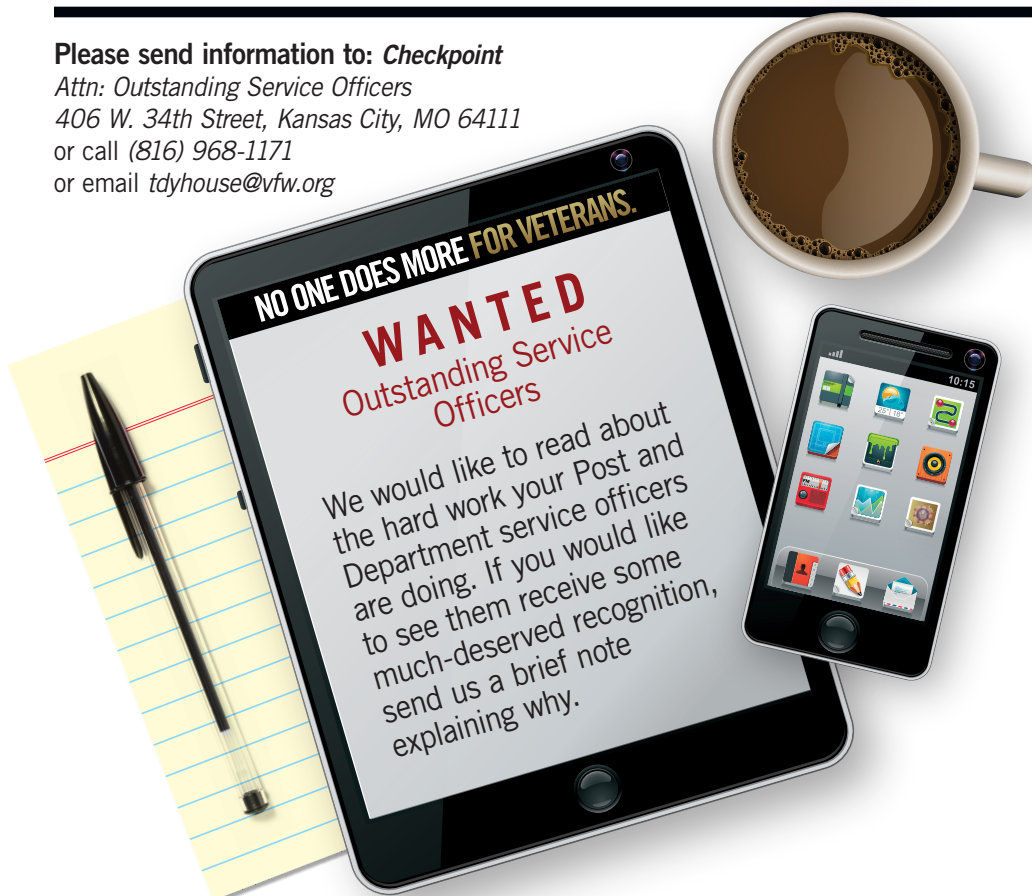
VFW accredited service officers provide veterans with unmatched knowledge and experience when it comes to filing a VA claim.

In addition to offering extensive understanding of the latest laws and regulations related to VA benefits, service officers know the correct channels to follow up on a claim's status and how to file a Notice of Disagreement with VA should the claim decision come back unfavorably.

Here are some of the statistics compiled over the past year by VFW's National Veterans Service:

- 1,900 VA-accredited service officers in the VFW network.
- 500,000 veterans represented.
- \$7.2 billion recovered for VA claimants.
- 22 BDD sites on military installations.

Please send information to: **Checkpoint**
Attn: Outstanding Service Officers
406 W. 34th Street, Kansas City, MO 64111
or call (816) 968-1171
or email tdyhouse@vfw.org



NATIONAL VETERANS SERVICE

Do you need help filing a claim?

VFW's National Veterans Service has a VFW Department service officer locator on its website. To find a service officer near you, just follow these easy steps:

1. Visit www.vfw.org/nvs.
2. Select "ASSISTANCE" from the menu.
3. Select "NATIONAL VETERANS SERVICE" from the pull-down menu.
4. Locate the "FIND A SERVICE OFFICER" box on the right-hand side of the screen.
5. Select your state and hit "GO".

FIND A SERVICE OFFICER

State

GO >>



Man on the Street

Women and Younger Vets Needed

While attending the 118th National Convention in New Orleans, VFW members offered opinions on a variety of topics. They explained why they attend the national convention, how it and VFW as a whole could be improved and predicted when they believe a female commander will be elected. Here are their responses:

Lupita Perez, 53, Post 7473, Elsa, Texas



The All-American Post commander earned her VFW eligibility in Iraq serving with the 920th Eng. Bn., 4th Bde., 1st Cav Div., in Taji, Iraq.

"It's important for VFW members to attend convention to see what VFW does for them," Perez said. "Younger members don't know what is available and how VFW lobbies [for veteran-friendly legislation]."

Perez said she wouldn't change anything about convention other than getting more members to attend.

"The information and experiences are priceless," she said. "There's walking history all around us."

Perez said she most likes the camaraderie VFW provides because that is something she misses about the military.

Fighting for veterans' entitled benefits is VFW's most important role, according to Perez.

"There are plenty of other areas the government can cut from," she said. "They should never touch vets benefits."

While Perez believes VFW will remain a strong organization, she said it must attract younger people.

"Tell them about community service and youth programs," she said. "They want to help, they look for opportunities, and we have that for them."

Perez said that "pretty soon," VFW will be led by a woman. "I'm gonna fight for it for all of my friends," she said with a laugh.

Edwin Tufts, 61 Post 3433, Summerville, S.C.



Tufts earned his VFW eligibility during *Operation Desert Storm*, where he served in 1990 and 1991. He said it's important for VFW members to attend national convention because "there's so much they can learn."

"There's also networking with other Posts," Tufts said. "You learn so much more about what they're doing. You can compare notes and maybe find out something you're not doing well that somebody else can help you with."

Tufts suggested inviting representatives from the website the Veterans News Network to convention, along with hosting more "training-type classes."

Camaraderie is what he enjoys most about being a VFW member, but he said the organization's most important function is "to keep the VA on track."

In 10 years, Tufts said, he sees VFW membership declining.

"Until we can get somebody younger, get them in there and pushing the programs, I think we're going to be declining," Tufts said. "I think we'll come back. But we're going to drop pretty low until the younger guys, those in the 22, 23, 24 age range get up into their 30s. I was able to be a member of the VFW in 1990 but I didn't join until 2004."

He also said he believes VFW will elect its first female national commander "as soon as one becomes available."

"And by available, I mean as soon as one decides — a female decides she wants to run — I think we're going to do it," Tufts said. "I don't see any reason why a female shouldn't be a commander. I've had two Post commanders who are female, and I've had a department commander that was female. And they can do the same job. I think they could do it better."

Within 10 years VFW will see 'tons of women' in its ranks and will have its first woman commander.

— Dawn "Dusty" Napier, California's Surgeon General, Post 9561

Ray Fairbank, 74 Post 6599, Seattle, Wash.



Fairbank earned his VFW eligibility serving in the Navy from 1966-67 and in 1968 during the Vietnam War.

He said it is important for VFW members to attend the national convention for the education and camaraderie.

"You meet people from Thailand to Turkey, South America to Alaska, and everything in between," Fairbank said. "Plus, it makes you proud to know

all of the organizations that support veterans, as well as listening to the young people that we award, for example, the Patriot's Pen or Voice of Democracy."

Fairbank said sharing military experiences is what he likes best about being a VFW member.

"When we go out to distribute poppies... invariably, someone will come up and start talking," Fairbank said. "It may be World War II, it may be Vietnam. It may be Desert Storm, and they will say things and I will say, 'Wow, I never heard that before.'"

The organization's most important function — "beyond a shadow of a doubt" — is representing veterans before Congress, state legislatures and local governments "that either don't appreciate veterans or don't realize the things they can do to help us," Fairbank said.

The Vietnam veteran said the outlook for VFW in 10 years is "worrisome," but he doesn't believe the organization will disappear.

"Vietnam is the backbone of the organization, yet there are so many that are just so upset they won't join," Fairbank said. "What worries me is that we don't have the dedication of those coming back from Afghanistan," Fairbank said.

He also said he expects that "any year" a woman who has been a state commander will "step up" to the national commander role.

Dawn "Dusty" Napier, 61 Post 9561, Willow Creek, Calif.



Napier, California's surgeon general, is a Persian Gulf War vet who served on the *USS Acadia*.

"This is my first time here," Napier said. "We need to be here because there is a lot to learn."

Napier jokingly said that to improve the convention, VFW should consider having it in her home state of California.

For 25 years, Napier has been a VFW member because of the organization's advocacy and legislative work.

Within 10 years, Napier said, VFW will see "tons of women" in its ranks and will have its first female commander.

Napier started a Facebook page for VFW surgeons general, an endeavor for which she is particularly proud.

Kapell Eugene, 48 Post 7175, Millington, Tenn.



As a Marine, Eugene deployed twice to Iraq and once to Afghanistan.

A member of just three years, Eugene said he most likes the camaraderie VFW offers him.

"We can all relate to one another," he said.

Eugene said that "supporting widows and orphans" is VFW's most important function.

He hopes to see VFW experience a growth surge as more and more Iraq and Afghanistan veterans join the ranks.

"In 10 years, I think we'll really be growing," he said.

With regard to when the organization might swear in its first female commander, Eugene said it should all come down to "finding someone who is capable."

VFW Convention Health Fair Offers 'One-Stop' Screenings

VFW and Auxiliary members had the opportunity to check their blood pressure levels, test out shoe insoles and be screened for aneurysms at the VFW Health Fair during the 118th VFW National Convention in New Orleans, La.

The Humana-sponsored fair has been a staple at VFW conventions, and this year included nearly 30 exhibitors.

Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm (AAA) Outreach participated in the fair for the first time, and conducted more than 1,000 screenings. Sixteen aneurysms were discovered during convention.

AAA Outreach Executive Director J B Hunt said her team had four ultrasound machines set up at the health fair. The group also offered blood-pressure checks and distributed information cards.

"This is the first mass screening event for AAA, and we are very appreciative of the VFW for this opportunity to provide service to so many people," Hunt said.

Jim Tardie, a VFW Department of Louisiana member and New Orleans VA Hospital employee, visited the Massaging Insoles booth.

"I love to stay abreast of what's new so that when our veterans are asking about things, [I'll] have a [greater] knowledge base," Tardie said.

The health fair, according to Tardie, allows veterans to get a more personal look at available health and wellness options.

"I think what's good about the VFW putting the health fair on for the convention is that it provides our veterans, like myself, an opportunity to see a number of different organizations that we can [visit in] a one-stop shop [setting] versus being online," Tardie said. "I'm a people person."

Walgreens also provided blood-pressure screenings for attendees. George Schamberger, store manager at the company's 3227 Magazine Street location in New Orleans, said Walgreens employees provided 125 screenings on the first day of the health fair, with a goal of averaging 100 per day.

"Walgreens is involved with VFW because we definitely love our veterans and believe it or not, everybody here supporting the VFW today actually is a veteran," said Schamberger, who served in the Army as an engineer from 1997 to Nov. 30, 2004. "I think it's important to definitely support our veterans, to let them know that we're not just a pharmacy, we're not just a retail establishment, to show that we actually care, and we're thankful for the contributions."
Email: kwilliams@vfw.org



Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm (AAA) Outreach provides screenings and blood-pressure checks during the VFW Health Fair in July at VFW's national convention in New Orleans.

AAA Outreach conducted more than 1,000 screenings and discovered 16 aneurysms.

PHOTO BY KARI WILLIAMS

Health Fair Features 30 Exhibitors, Thousands of Screenings

- Humana: 2,774 visits/ 1,700 screenings
- VA Office of Research & Development/Million Veteran Program: 2,000 visits/175 screenings
- Walgreens: 1,700 visits
- Oticon Inc.: 1,175 visits
- Vet Vites: 1,000 visits
- Elizabeth Dole Foundation: 1,018 visits
- New Orleans VA Medical Center: 1,646 visits
- Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm Outreach: 998 screenings
- Hep C Hope: 774 visits



Women and Younger Vets Needed, *continued from page 4*

Dennis Kocielko, 71 Post 10087, Beverly Hills, Fla.

Kocielko earned his VFW eligibility in Vietnam, serving in 1965 and 1966. A first-time attendee at the national convention, he said it's important to attend to "acquire information."

"When I go to state conventions, I usually learn a couple things," Kocielko said. "So that's usually why I go, [to] try to get something out of it," Kocielko said.

However, he said he would add more accommodations for the national gathering.

"The fact that the hotels are so far away with the shuttle, it's an inconvenience to have to wait for a shuttle back and forth," Kocielko said. "[Hotels] within walking distance, sometimes it's an elevator ride and you're right there. To me, that makes a big difference."

For Kocielko, camaraderie and pride are what he enjoys about being a VFW member.

"It's also a learning experience because I learn from other veterans," Kocielko said.

The most important function VFW has is to provide information, according to Kocielko.

"Information that you wouldn't have known about," Kocielko said. "Taking care of troops, today's troops and remembering the past to help the future, that kind of thing."

In 10 years, Kocielko said, he sees VFW membership declining, but "only because there's less military people."

"The numbers aren't there," Kocielko said. "The old timers are dying off and the young people, even if they all joined, there's just less of them, so to maintain 100 percent is going to be very difficult."

He also said he expects VFW delegates to elect a female national commander in "six or eight years."



PHOTOS BY CHECKPOINT STAFF

Michael King, 45 Post 4647, North Highlands, Calif.

King, who earned his eligibility in the Persian Gulf War with the 101st Airborne Division, is the junior vice commander in his state.

"When I become commander, I'll be the youngest in California history," he said.

He added that it's important for members to attend convention so that they participate in classes and committee meetings and take all of that information back to their Posts.

Having attended five conventions, King said he thinks there needs to be more buses offered to get from the hotels to the convention center.

Taking care of veterans and reaching out to younger veterans should be VFW's top priority, King said.

"Mentorship and explaining the organization at the lower levels is very important," King said. "It really broadened my horizons."

In 10 years, King said he hopes to see VFW have a greater presence on social media.

King believes as soon as a woman runs for the top slot as commander of the organization, VFW will welcome her.

"I'd follow her," he said.

Oklahoma Post Raises \$1,600 for Law Enforcement Dogs

VFW Post 8798 in Eufaula, Okla., raised \$800 for two GPS collars for local law enforcement K-9s, as well as an additional \$600 to go toward the care of the animals.

John Petras, then-commander of VFW Post 8798 in Eufaula, Okla., hosted turkey shoots to raise the funds. The Post met its goal of \$1,600 in less than a month.

Petras, a Vietnam War veteran who was a machinist's mate in the Navy from 1963 to 1967, got the idea to raise money for the GPS collars after a K-9 was shot on duty in August 2016. The K-9, with the Greenwood (Ark.) Police Department, was shot twice by a murder suspect in Fort Smith, Ark., located about 80 miles east of Eufaula. After being shot, the dog ran from the scene and was not found for two days.

The dog was found alive, but Petras said it could have been found "immediately."

"If it had a GPS collar, it would have gotten faster medical care than it did,"



Petras said.

He raised the funds for two K-9s – one with the McIntosh County (Okla.) Sheriff's Office and the other with the Eufaula Police Department.

Petras said the members of Post 8798 have a "great" relationship with the local law enforcement agencies.

"Whatever it is they need, we try to provide for them," he said, adding that the police officers have to provide from their "own expenses" to cover veterinarian costs, among other expenses, for their dogs.

Petras said the law enforcement agencies were "thrilled" to receive the GPS collars.

"They knew they couldn't afford [the collars]," Petras said. "We stepped up to the plate to raise money for them."

Email: dspiva@vfw.org



(From left to right) Eufaula Police Detective Casey Torix, with his dog, Gino; John Petras, then-commander of Post 8798 in Eufaula, Okla.; and McIntosh Sheriff's Deputy Kevin Branscum, with his dog, Bruno, show off new GPS dog collars the Post donated to the law-enforcement agencies. Post members raised \$1,600 for the collars and care of the dogs.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE EUFAULA INDIAN JOURNAL

Risking 'Life and Limb'

New York Post Members Honored for Rescue Mission

Four New York Air National Guardsmen and members of VFW Post 5350 in Westhampton Beach, N.Y., were recognized for their efforts during an air rescue mission on April 24 by their congressman and the president of Slovenia.

Among the airmen of the 106th Air Rescue Wing in Westhampton Beach, N.Y., were Post 5350 members: Senior Airman Mike Hartman, Technical Sgt. Joseph Piccoli, Master Sgt. Sam Prescott and Senior Master Sgt. Erik Blom.

During a July speech on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives, Rep. Lee Zeldin (R-N.Y.) told the story of an explosion that occurred on the cargo ship *Tamar* in April about 1,300 miles off the coast of Cape Cod, Mass. It resulted in two deaths and severe injuries to two others. The 106th Air Rescue Wing was called into action to save the *Tamar's* remaining crew members – about 20.

Zeldin said a team of pararescuemen — including Piccoli, Hartman and Blom — completed a "night parachute insertion of equipment and personnel into the water and then made their way to the stricken vessel," following a five-hour flight to the ship.

"After making it on board, [the team] provided medical care for the next two days, until a Portuguese rescue helicopter could hoist off the team and airlift the injured seamen to a higher level of medical care," Zeldin said.



Airmen of the New York Air National Guard's 106th Rescue Wing – including VFW Post 5350 members Senior Airman Mike Hartman, Technical Sgt. Joseph Piccoli, Master Sgt. Sam Prescott and Senior Master Sgt. Erik Blom – received the Slovenian Medal for Merit from Slovenian President Borut Pahor in a May 2017 ceremony at the U.N. Building in New York. U.S. AIR NATIONAL GUARD PHOTO BY CAPT. MICHAEL O'HAGAN

During the speech, the congressman recognized the 106th Air Rescue Wing's "brave actions" to save crew members of the *Tamar*.

"These pararescuemen risked life and limb to save these crew members,

and have more than earned our respect and admiration," Zeldin said.

In May, airmen who were a part of the mission, including the four VFW members, were awarded the Slovenian Medal for Merit by the Slovenian President Borut Pahor.

"It was an amazing presentation," said Piccoli, a 17-year Air Force veteran who served in Iraq in 2006 and 2009, as well as in Afghanistan in 2007 and 2010. "The recognition is something we're not used to, and the gratitude was greatly appreciated."

Email: dspiva@vfw.org

VFW Recognizes Teachers of the Year in New Orleans

VFW recognized three teachers at its national convention in July for instilling citizenship values and patriotism in their classrooms.

VFW's annual Smart/Maher National Citizenship Education Teacher of the Year program awards the nation's top elementary, middle- and high-school teachers for their work in the classroom. Each teacher was awarded \$1,000 for his or her personal development. Each of the teachers' schools also received \$1,000.



Theresa Early

Grade level K-5
Laurel Ridge Elementary School
Fairfax, Va.

Early, a fourth-grade teacher who has been teaching special needs students for almost 30 years, instituted a classroom color guard, in which students present the U.S. flag for the Pledge of Allegiance.

"All students stand still and respect the flag in my class," Early said. "I lead by example, and they know how I feel about respecting our colors."

Sponsored by Post 8469 in Fairfax Station, Va., Early said it is important to teach and promote patriotism because the U.S. has a "participatory" democracy.

"In order for it to work most effectively, all citizens need to participate so that all voices are heard," Early said. "Children need to understand the country they live in and its values so that they can take up their role as adults when that time comes."

Kim Pryor, assistant principal at Laurel Ridge Elementary School in Fairfax, Va., wrote in Early's nomination letter that the fourth-grade teacher takes her responsibility of teaching her students patriotism and civic responsibility "very seriously."

"Ms. Early always goes above and beyond to make curriculum come alive," Pryor wrote. "She continually provides her students with experiential learning that instills a respect for our country and community."

Early said she will use her award money to add items, such as "books and games," to her classroom. She also said she is not sure what the school is going to do with its funds.

"In order for it to work most effectively, all citizens need to participate so that all voices are heard. Children need to understand the country they live in and its values so that they can take up their role as adults when that time comes."
— Theresa Early, Laurel Ridge Elementary School



Jeffrey Benes

Grade level 6-8
Antioch Middle School
Gladstone, Mo.

Benes, a life member of VFW Post 7397 in Lenexa, Kan., is a geography teacher from Westwood, Kan. He served in Baghdad, Iraq, from November 2005 to October 2006 with the Kansas National Army National Guard.

"[His] military experience along with his teaching background in both public and parochial schools since 2001 sets him uniquely above his peers," wrote William Driscoll, commander of Post 10906 in Gladstone, Mo., in Benes' nomination letter.

Driscoll also noted that Benes is the school's Veterans Day activities coordinator. Activities include having a veteran in each classroom to talk with students prior to a schoolwide assembly that features all the attending veterans.

"A focus of Antioch is devoted to strengthening relationships with our surrounding community," Benes said. "As a veteran myself, having contacts at the local veterans service organizations allows me to bridge that separation between the community that may not have students in our building and the community within our building."

For his classes, Benes plans a field trip to the National World War I Museum and Memorial in Kansas City, Mo. He teaches his students about the war because it caused several national borders in Europe and Africa to change.

"The kids engage real world issues and are put into discussions that humanize the event, the responses and the outcomes," Benes said. "In that, I hope that they take away a more lasting sense of patriotism."

Benes said he wants to use his award money to build a green house on the school property.

"The harvested crop will be shared with the students," Benes said, adding that community members will be invited to help mentor the students with the gardening.



Steve Johnson

Grade level 9-12
Churchill County High School
Fallon, Nev.

Johnson, a science teacher at Churchill County High School in Fallon, Nev., displays a Wall of Heroes, which features many of his former students who have served in the military, in his classroom.

"Since the tragic events of Sept. 11, 2001, Steve has been active in respecting and promoting appreciation for those who serve in the military," wrote Alan Kalt, Churchill County chief financial officer, and Kieran Kalt, a first-grade teacher at Lahontan Elementary School in Fallon. "He has developed a community presentation that highlights those who serve and the impact of their military service."

The Kalts wrote that Johnson's Wall of Heroes recognizes the "sacrifices and accomplishments" of service members.

"He has inspired his children and many students to serve in the military and graduate from the academies," they wrote.

Johnson also inspired his son, Nick, who serves at Vance Air Force Base in Enid, Okla., as a Navy pilot.

Sponsored by Post 1002 in Fallon, Nev., Johnson also has organized community donation drives to send holiday care packages to troops.

The Kalts wrote: "It is rare to find a teacher with such diverse talents and a passion for academics, leadership development, community involvement and positive attitude that shines so brightly for our high school students."

Email: dspiva@vfw.org



VFW Honors Tuskegee Airmen

Members of VFW Post 418 from McKees Rocks, Pa., lead the procession at a ceremony in July at the Pennsylvania Tuskegee Airmen Memorial at Sewickley Cemetery. The rifle escort from the VFW detail fired a rifle salute, followed by the playing of "Taps."

During the ceremony, George Spaulding, a 95-year-old WWII veteran who served in the Army during the invasion of Algeria during *Operation Torch*, was presented a quilt, courtesy of North Pittsburgh Quilts of Valor.

Post Commander Charles Maritz weighed in on the importance of memorializing the Tuskegee Airmen.

"The fact that this group of patriots who we are honoring today had to overcome racial prejudice like they did, just to be able to fight for peace and freedom for others, is a testament to their personal and collective character," he said. "We are all proud to have the opportunity to pay tribute to these airmen, these American heroes."



SEPTEMBER | OCTOBER 2017

CHECKPOINT

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VFW

Posts with the Most

VFW POSTS OF 1,000 MEMBERS OR MORE AS OF AUG. 21, 2017

Rank	Post No.	Location	Members	Rank No.	Location	Members	Rank No.	Location	Members
1	1503	Dale City, VA	2,861	11	76 San Antonio, TX	1,588	28	9399 Apache Junction, AZ	1,176
2	27	Wiesbaden, Germany	2,621	12	7968 Apache Junction, AZ	1,560	29	56 Leavenworth, KS	1,159
3	1114	Evansville, IN	2,175	13	10047 North Las Vegas, NV	1,445	29	2111 Chula Vista, CA	1,159
4	9972	Sierra Vista, AZ	2,162	14	6506 Rosedale, MD	1,444	31	549 Tucson, AZ	1,152
5	392	Virginia Beach, VA	1,996	15	4647 North Highlands, CA	1,416	32	1512 Lemon Grove, CA	1,120
6	8862	Vicenza, Italy	1,907	16	63 Boise, ID	1,368	33	3282 Port Orange, FL	1,105
7	10692	Grafenwoehr, Germany	1,829	17	4809 Norfolk, VA	1,366	34	2503 Omaha, NE	1,098
8	4709	Conroe, TX	1,807	18	9342 Ansbach, Germany	1,357	35	972 Terre Haute, IN	1,093
9	9785	Eagle River, AK	1,742	19	628 Sioux Falls, SD	1,343	36	7686 Alamogordo, NM	1,089
10	2485	Angeles City, Philippines	1,672	20	2391 Saint Augustine, FL	1,335	37	10281 Radcliff, KY	1,075
				21	7234 Ocean View, DE	1,328	37	1170 Middletown, KY	1,075
				22	6873 Abilene, TX	1,261	39	7564 West Fargo, ND	1,063
				23	4372 Odessa, TX	1,245	40	969 Tacoma, WA	1,035
				24	10097 Fort Myers Beach, FL	1,244	41	2866 Saint Charles, MO	1,029
				25	10216 Songtan-Si, Korea	1,218	42	1273 Rapid City, SD	1,027
				26	1146 St Clair Shores, MI	1,209	43	1326 Bismarck, ND	1,025
				27	8951 West York, PA	1,194	44	10436 Kitzingen, Germany	1,003

Post Helps Raise Awareness for Boy in Need of Kidney

Isaac Shore receives a U.S. flag from his great-uncle, William Trivette, who is a member of VFW Post 10346, on April 8 in Hamptonville, N.C. Also pictured next to Isaac is Evan Shore with Cub Scout Pack 699 and Carolyn Shore, Isaac's grandmother. Members Pete Knight, Billy Waddell, Ricky Johnson and Larry Crews (Post commander) surround Isaac, who has end-stage renal failure in both kidneys.

More than 700 people turned out for the "Mission Isaac" event, which helped raise money for a much-needed kidney transplant. Many attendees registered with Donate Life America.

Isaac's aunt, Nicole Shore, noted that her nephew is a "history buff." With that in mind, Post members presented Isaac with a U.S. flag and a replica of a WWII M-1 Garand bayonet after spearheading the opening ceremonies.

During the event, people who have had transplants provided testimonials, along with comments from a kidney donor.

Isaac received a new kidney in May. At press time, he was doing all the activities one would expect of a healthy 13-year-old boy.

