

# GOPHER OVERSEAS

Volume 78, NO. 3

Official Publication of the Veterans of Foreign Wars - Department of Minnesota Celebrating 103 Years 1921-2024

October 2024 - January 2025

## VFW Auxiliary 100 Years Still Serving

By Karen England,  
Department Auxiliary President

The VFW Auxiliary Mission Statement has not changed in the past 100 years. "The objects of this organization shall be fraternal, patriotic, historical, charitable and educational; to assist the Posts and members thereof of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, and its own members whenever possible; to maintain true allegiance to the Government of the United States of America and fidelity to its Constitution and Laws; to foster true patriotism, to maintain and extend the institutions of American freedom and equal rights and justice to all men and women; to preserve and defend the United States of America from all her enemies."

The National VFW Auxiliary was established in 1914 to serve veterans, their families, and our communities in honor of the sacrifice and commitment of every man and woman who received a campaign medal for overseas service, served in Korea, or received hostile fire or imminent danger pay. Originally the "Ladies" Auxiliary, the word "Ladies" was later dropped from the **Anniversary - Cont. on Page 6**



Florence Lufkin Hiland,  
first MN Auxiliary President

## Midwinter Conference Jan. 10-12, 2025

By Cheryl Burton, Department Office Manager

The Department of Minnesota VFW's Annual Midwinter Conference has a great deal in store for all members that attend. If you have never been to a Midwinter Conference, this would be the year! Whether you come for the whole weekend or just Saturday.

The event will be held Friday, January 10 through Sunday, January 12, 2025 at the Marriott NW in Brooklyn Park - free parking. You need to purchase your banquet ticket or reserved your room at your earliest convenience as time is going by quickly. The Conference will be here before you know it. There will have four \$50 Raffle drawings during the Banquet. Fill out your raffle ticket when you register in the Northland Foyer for both VFW and Auxiliary.

You must be present to win.

During the Conference, the VFW will welcome National Council Member, Dale Hoogeveen and the Auxiliary will host their National Guard, Janey Feher.

There will be two new seminars introduced on Saturday morning, January 12th. **Scholars App Class: VOD/PP Introduction for 2025-26** with State VOD/PP Chairman, Dewey Hermanson. He will explain the expectations for VOD/PP in 2025-26 when receiving, judging and submitting applications for VOD/PP using the "Scholars App". **Annual VFW Day of Service** with ADJ/QM Barry Henriksen. He will explain what is required to conduct and organize the VFW Day of **Midwinter - Cont. on Page 7**



## 2024-2025 State Commander David Staehlin

Member of  
VFW Post 8752  
Cottage Grove, MN

Greetings to my fellow veterans. On Veterans Day, I had the honor of participating in Minnesota's official Veterans Day observance in Arden Hills. It was a privilege to also serve as the guest speaker at the Minneapolis State Veterans Home observance, where we were joined by Governor Tim Walz and Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) Commissioner Brad Lindsay. These events were a powerful reminder of the importance of honoring and supporting our veterans who have given so much for our freedom. Thank you to our Post, Auxiliaries, and members for

## Browerville Aux. Scores Big at VFW Nat'l Convention

By Laurie Dale, Treasurer/Secretary MN VFW Auxiliary

The Browerville Post 8391 Auxiliary took their VFW Poppy display to the 2024 VFW National Convention and took 1st place in

Category 1 (Promotional Use of Poppies). That Patriotic Gnome took 50 hours to make and contains 2,594 poppies.



(l to r) Sue Wiersgalia, Post 8391 Auxiliary Historian and Deb Wieshalla Post 8391 Auxiliary President



(l to r) MDVA Commissioner Brad Lindsay, MN Governor Tim Walz, MN VFW Cmdr. David Staehlin

**COMMANDER - Cont. on Page 10**

"Preserving and Extending Veterans Rights, Advocating a Strong National Defense, Promoting Patriotism and Serving Local Communities" - Veterans of Foreign Wars Founding Principles

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## Save The Date!!

<p><b>VFW Boys State Hockey Tournament</b> February, 7-9, 2025 <i>Alexandria</i></p>	<p><b>VFW U15A Girls State Hockey Tournament</b> March 7-9, 2025 <i>Alexandria</i></p>	<p><b>State Convention &amp; Training Schools</b> June 5-9, 2025 Best Western Kelly Inn St. Cloud</p>
<p><b>National Legislative Committee</b> March 2-6, 2025 Washington, DC</p>	<p><b>Minnesota Veterans Day on the Hill</b> (Day TBD), 2025 St. Paul</p>	<p><b>National Committee</b> August 9-13, 2025 Columbus, OH</p>

Upcoming VFW Events

\*\*Red Events are Department Events\*\*

## Top News

### Dept. of MN Color Guard at Arlington Nat'l Cemetery

By Todd Roberts, Cmdr of the Grand of MN

The Military Order of the Cootie is recognized as a subordinate and auxiliary order to Veteran of Foreign Wars of the United States. It shall be considered as the "Honor Degree" of the parent organization and shall be governed by and under the control of the National Convention, the National Council of Administration and the Commander-in-Chief.

Only active members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States shall be eligible for membership in the Military Order of the Cootie, and such membership shall be continued and conditioned upon retaining active membership in the VFW. The objectives of the organization are to promote social and reunion features among the members of the order and to keep alive therein the spirit of optimism and humor so characteristics of the American servicemen.

#### Annual Trek to the Tomb of the Unknowns, Arlington National Cemetery

The Military Order of the Cootie has gathered on a yearly basis for over 89 years to pay tribute to those who answered the call of our nation at the Tomb of the Unknown, Arlington National Cemetery. Each year a maximum of 450 wreaths are presented at the Tomb of the Unknown and the Argonne Cross

by units of the Military Order of the Cootie. Arlington National Cemetery will always be a place of hallowed memories and a Shrine of Each Patriot's Devotion.

The Department of Minnesota Color Guard team is also the Supreme (National) Color Guard team. Therefore, we make the trip to Washington, DC to have the HONOR of receiving the wreaths from the Military Order of the Cootie (MOC) and Military Order of the Cootie Auxiliary (MOCA) members to be placed at the Argonne Cross. This is a great honor that I have been able to participate in, along with some very great people on this team. Unfortunately, not all members of the Color Guard are able to go every year to participate in this great honor.

During our visit to Washington, DC, we attend the Supreme C of A, training provided by our Supreme officers, and have time to see the sites. Typically, we go see the sites in small groups, as many members have been going for multiple years. We make sure that members get to see what is on their list such as the Monuments in the Mall, Smithsonian Museums, or many other things. We do make sure our Color Guard team has at least one gathering for a meal somewhere in the area since we are a very close group that makes up our Color Guard team.



(l to r) Front Row: MOCA Grand Sr. Vice President Paty Thrand and MOC Grand Seam Todd Roberts; Second Row: Dennis Maddow, Ed Eibon, Curt Hermanson, Bill Manor, Gary Anderson and Doug Doerfler. Back Row: Jim Dalziel, Martin Adams and Jarrod McReynolds

## Breaking News

### Nat'l VFW forms Nat'l Women Vets Committee

The National VFW has decided to form a National Women Veterans Committee to better address efforts to recruit and retain women veterans. 'State Commander David Staehlin appointed Jennifer Warren to serve on the new Committee at their first meeting July, 2025.

### MN VFW Members Receive National Appointments

#### CONGRATULATIONS ARE IN ORDER!

Every year, each Department Commander has the option to recommend to the VFW National Commander Tim Borland members of the MN VFW for consideration to National VFW Appointments for the year 2024-2025.

These recommendations are made to recognize individual members that have toiled in the background on behalf of the VFW and may never have been recognized for their efforts. They are as follows:

#### National Deputy Chief of Staff

Joy Ausman, Post 3979  
Charles Dresen, Post 620  
Sean Gustafson, Post 7555  
Curtis Hermanson, Post 3289  
Duane Hermanson, Post 4452

#### National Aide-de-Camp

Jake Berndt, Post 8144  
Charles Cossette, Post 8144  
Larry Dahl, Post 3979  
Shannon Frost, Post 4297  
Jonathan Kuch, Post 210  
Erik Larsen, Post 3044  
Rachel Maloney, Post 6208  
Carl Schenk, Post 3979  
Joseph Schirmers, Post 4847  
Mark Schutts, Post 7555  
Edward Speiker, Post 6208  
Gerald Tews, Post 906  
David Thompson, Post 6208  
Jennifer Warren, Post 3869

#### National Assistant Inspector General

Glen Carlton, Post 11543  
Gretchen Larsen, Post 3044  
Bruce Malterud, Post 1260  
Krystal Schmidt, Post 7555  
Ronald Widell, Post 8731

#### National Special Aide-de-Camp

Curtis Anderson, Post 1260  
David C. David, Post 4258  
Donald Lohse, Post 1647  
Edward Lozinski, Post 5334  
Melissa Medbery, Post 9073

### Minnesota VFW Office Locations

#### Department Headquarters:

Barry Henriksen, Adjutant/QM  
B5 Veterans Service Building  
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St. Paul, MN 55155  
Phone: (651) 291-1757  
Fax: (651) 291-2753  
Email: adjutant@vfwmn.us  
Webpage: www.vfwmn.org

#### Department Claims Office:

Jon Gohn, Claims Director  
Whipple Federal Building, G900  
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St. Paul, MN 55111  
Phone: (612) 970-5669  
Fax: (612) 970-5404

#### Auxiliary Headquarters :

Veterans Service Building  
20 West 12th Street  
St. Paul, MN 55155  
Phone: (651) 291-1759  
Fax: (651) 291-7932

#### Minneapolis VA

Jeffrey Cowell  
VFW Hospital Representative  
Minneapolis VAMC  
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Phone: (612) 725-4448

## GOPHER OVERSEAS

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Publications Committee:  
David Staehlin, Commander; Edward Keogh, Jr., Sr. Vice Commander;  
Charles Hawkins, Sr., Jr. Vice Commander;  
Mary Thompson, Judge Advocate; Ken Schroepfer, editor

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To: VFW National Headquarters  
Data Entry Department  
406 West 36th Street  
Kansas City, MO 64111

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# 2024-2025 Department Officers

## Senior Vice Commander

By Ed Keogh, State Senior Vice Commander

It has been a very busy year so far but very enjoyable. Besides being the State Senior Vice Commander I am also the chairperson for Community Service and Membership.

At the Department Fall Conference I challenged the whole Council to sign up at least one new member or reinstate a member (Reinstate is someone who has not paid dues for two years or more). I want to extend this challenge to all Post Commanders as well. Commanders and Quartermasters, if you want a list of "unpaid or relocated members" in your area, request a list from Quartermaster/Adjutant Barry Henriksen ([adjutant@vfwmn.us](mailto:adjutant@vfwmn.us)).

Once you receive your list, Google *US Phone Book* to verify that the member is still in your area, their age, and address. Give them a call and advised them all about what the VFW does in your community, Schools, what your Post does for your Veterans and Active Military and a Also advise them that the VFW is the strongest Veterans Organization advocating for Veterans and Active Military in Washington D. C.

You can find all the Membership and Community Service information on the Department website [www.vfwmn.org](http://www.vfwmn.org).

If you have not visited the Dept. website, you will need to enter a login which is your membership number, your password is your last name (all lower case). Once logged in select "members only" and then click on "post resources". Here you will find several drop-down items. Select Community Service for all the information you will need to enter community service. Select "membership". Here you will find everything you need for membership along with the "All State Program".

Please continue to submit community service reports on the "Dashboard". Your Post must submit a report every quarter. Again, refer to the Dept. website for more information.

If you have any questions regarding membership of community service, please contact me. Ed Keogh [ekeoghvr24@gmail.com](mailto:ekeoghvr24@gmail.com) or call or text 952-334-2128.

## Junior Vice Commander

By Charles Hawkins, Sr., State Junior Vice Commander

Hello, Comrades, Sisters, and Brothers,

Since our last Gopher Oversea'r writing, the line officers of your Department of Minnesota have been very busy. Traveling has taken us to Indianapolis, Indiana, and Kansas City, Missouri, for training. It's very encouraging to meet and break bread with other Veterans of Foreign Wars members from different States and countries.

Membership is going very well, so keep your foot on the gas. It's been said that if you don't have an application with you or close at hand, you might have missed that potential member. As we go to our district meetings and see old friends, we get to hear how your District is doing with your programs, Community service, and your district activities. Remember no one knows what you are doing unless you put it down on paper so that it can go on your report. And if you have an auxiliary,

it is a joint report and it's the post commander's responsibility to get this done!

There has been a change: post members can now sign up auxiliary members and vice versa and remember to put your membership number on the application. If you don't have an auxiliary, try to get one started, This begins at your Department Auxiliary.

There have been a few posts that have consolidated with other posts, which makes it more robust in membership and revitalization. Start a round table discussion to find out what you can do to get your post back on track.

We will soon have our Midwinter Conference running from, Friday-Sunday, January 10-12, 2025, at the Marriott NW, 7025 Northland Dr., Brooklyn Park, MN. I hope to see you all there!

If you have any questions of me or any line officer don't hesitate to call!

## Adjutant/Quartermaster

By Barry Henriksen, State Adjutant/Quartermaster

I hope to see all of you at the Midwinter Conference January 10-12 at the Marriott Northwest in Brooklyn Park. The highlight once again will be the Voice of Democracy Banquet on Saturday night. Please order your tickets early! Also, book your rooms while they last.

On the Saturday of Midwinter, we will have several interesting seminars. At 10:15am VOD/Patriots Pen Chair Dewey Hermanson will explain the new "Scholars App" that will be used to accept and grade entries in the future. This will give you a big leg up on next year. I will also give out information on how you can conduct and submit entries for the 4th annual "VFW Day of Service". The Day of Service is also required for All American this year. All State will be extremely competitive this year. Remember that only the top 20 post commanders and quartermasters can achieve All State status. Last year we had less than 20 that applied. Part of this is due to last year the standard was 102% membership. This year we went back to 100%. As of November 1st, we already have 29 posts at 100%

or better. By the April 30 deadline I would expect that there will be well over 50 posts that will qualify. To make All State you will need to not only be at 100% or better in membership, but you will also need to accumulate as many points as possible. The 20 posts with the most points will be All State. Refer to the All-State program to see how to maximize your points. The further over 100% in membership you go, the more points you receive. Participating in programs and attending District and State events also gets you more points. The Commander whose post receives the most points will receive the additional honor of being recognized as the Captain of the All-State team!

Please submit your quarterly audits on a timely basis. Make sure that they are accurate and that it reconciles. Audits are how your post and the Department know that you are safeguarding the assets that you have been entrusted with.

Thanks for all that everyone of you do! Please email me at [adjutant@vfwmn.us](mailto:adjutant@vfwmn.us) anytime with questions, or call at 651 291-1757.

## Judge Advocate

By Mary Thompson, State Judge Advocate

I am honored to be the State Judge Advocate for the Department of Minnesota VFW. I thank everyone for their support as I continue on this journey. Traveling the state and meeting new comrades, some only new to myself, has been a rewarding experience.

I recently visited the VFW National Home in Eaton Rapids, Michigan. This was a truly impactful experience, seeing the work being done there to help our veterans and families has inspired within me a deeper commitment to our mission. Providing veterans and their families with the support they need to get started on a successful path is essential. Whether it's through housing assistance, educational programs, or community resources, every bit of help can make a world of difference.

Our organization exists to support veterans and their families, and this requires a unified effort. Collaboration between Posts and their Auxiliaries is essential for strengthening our mission and fostering a sense of community. We

must all reflect on whether we're fulfilling the purpose for which the VFW was founded 125 years ago. This reflection can lead to meaningful change and help us recommit to our core values. By assessing our contributions and encouraging dialogue among members, we can enhance our impact and reinforce our mission of helping veterans and their families. It's a powerful call to action!!

As we enter the holiday season, I extend my warmest wishes for a blessed Thanksgiving, a Merry Christmas, and a Happy & Healthy New Year, and joy in any other holidays you celebrate. I will be thinking of my comrades and their families and hoping for happiness and safety during this special time. If you are feeling down or in need of any support, please reach out to your family, friends, or fellow veterans. We must look out for one another, especially during challenging times. I am here for you. Let's continue to support each other and strengthen our bonds.

## Merry Christmas from the Staff of the Gopher Oversea'r



## Chaplain

By Scott Hanson, State Chaplain

My door is always open, my phone always on.

If you have any prayer requests, are in need of spiritual guidance, or have any other chaplain requests, feel free to contact me at [chaplainmnvfw@gmail.com](mailto:chaplainmnvfw@gmail.com).

If you are struggling and need immediate assistance, contact the

Veterans Crisis Line by dialing 988 and then press "1" or text 838255.

In closing, I'll leave you with my favorite inspirational scripture; "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." (Joshua 1:9)

# Minnesota Auxiliary News



**STATE PRESIDENT  
VFW Auxiliary**

**Karen England**

Member of  
VFW Post 8729 Auxiliary  
Lake City, MN



"Preserving and Extending Veterans Rights, Advocating a Strong National Defense, Promoting Patriotism and Serving Local Communities" - Veterans of Foreign Wars Founding Principles

I am blessed for the opportunity to serve as the Auxiliary President for the State of Minnesota this year! This year, I have made it a priority to visit all of the hospitals and homes around the State. So far it has been wonderful to see our amazing facilities, meet the staff, and (more importantly) visit with our beloved veterans!

I started in Bemidji in August and had a quiet Sunday tour in one of the three new facilities in Minnesota. They are working on staffing and recreation and adding benches along their walking path.

Next in September, I visited the Fergus Falls Home and the Fargo VA Hospital. The Fargo facility serves veterans in Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota. A highlight in Fargo was sitting with a dozen veterans for coffee and cookies and enjoy good-spirited rivalry about their branches of service. They also do "goat yoga". Yes, that is no typo. Ask about it.

Then I visited Montevideo, which is a state-of-the-art facility. They have an impressive memorial wall with the names of deceased residents, and the feeling is one of serenity with incredible natural surroundings.

I visited the Minneapolis

Hospital, Fisher House, and the Minneapolis Veterans Home. Prosthetics is the first in the nation creating artificial limbs for women, which caters to female veterans and are more feminine.

The Fisher House is like a combined hotel and bed and breakfast for family members whose veteran is in the hospital or home. A veteran's wife I visited with complimented the staff and appreciated that she had a shuttle to and from the hospital to visit her husband.

I visited St. Cloud and Luverne in October. St. Cloud is huge, and Luverne is a smaller facility which has been there for 30 years. Currently they are phasing down to only one veteran per room with a shared bathroom in between, which gives them twice the space and more privacy.

Please donate generously to the Veterans Hospitals and Homes that we support in Minnesota! Send checks to the VFW Auxiliary: Veterans Service Building, 20 West 12th Street, Floor 3, St. Paul, MN 55155 and note "VAHCS Facilities" in the memo line.

Caring for and supporting our veterans is what this is all about.

**Always and In All Ways!**

## National District Council

By Frankie Bill, Member Area E

Comrades and Members, the National organization published the latest 2024 VFW Auxiliary facts and figures highlighting some of the amazing and ongoing work done by our members on behalf of Veterans, their families, and surrounding communities across the nation. In particular, six (6) of the 11 National Programs reported the following statistics:

### Americanism

**9.07M** Number of American Flags and POW/MIA flags distributed and/or presented by Auxiliaries

**9,396** Certificates given to businesses and citizens for flying the American Flag

**2,614** Number of Auxiliaries that promoted, participated in, recognized any patriotic day and/or branch of service birthdays

### Veterans & Family Support

**262,738** Approximate number of veterans, service members and/or their families assisted

**\$4.83M** Total monetary donations and/or value of donations and goods/services provided to veterans, service members and/or their families

**4,137** Number of Auxiliaries that provided direct aid to veterans, service members and/or their families

### Hospital

**\$1.67M** Total spent on all Hospital Program-related items and projects

**194,177** Hours volunteered in VA and non-VA medical facilities

**10,742** Auxiliary members who volunteered within the Hospital Program

### Scholarships

**\$2.29M** Total amount of scholarships awarded

### Available Scholarships

Continuing Education **AGES 21+**  
Young American Creative Patriotic Art Contest & 3-Dimensional Patriotic Art Contest **GRADES 9-12**

VFW Voice of Democracy Audio Essay Contest **GRADES 9-12**

VFW Patriot's Pen Essay Contest **GRADES 6-8**

### Legislative

**208,124** Contacts made by members to legislators regarding veterans' issues.

### Youth Activities

**144,818** Youth Auxiliaries worked with

**3,677** Youth groups Auxiliaries worked with

**7,920** Youth recognized for their patriotism

Big thanks go to our Minnesota membership for contributing to these impactful initiatives. There is more to do to further advocate for our American heroes and those who continue to serve the greatest nation.

During this holiday season, we take a moment to express our deepest gratitude to the brave men and women who have served our country. Minnesota is home to countless veterans who have sacrificed so much to protect our freedoms.

Here are a few ways we can all show up and continue to support them, their families, and communities:

**Volunteer:** Many organizations like the VA Homes, Fisher Houses, and Hospitals hosting veterans rely on volunteers to assist with various tasks, from administrative work to event planning. Check in with your local Veterans facilities or community centers for ways you can help them and give back.

**Donate:** Consider donating to Veteran charities providing essential services; such as housing, healthcare, and job training. Contact non-profits like the Minnesota Assistance Council for Veterans (MACV), the Minnesota Veterans for Veterans (MNV4V) Trust Fund, or the Minnesota Disabled American Veterans on ways to contribute, to name a few.

**Connect:** Reach out to a veteran in your life and simply say "thank you." A small gesture can make a big difference; especially during the holiday season. Whether sending a holiday card or posting a holiday message via social media, you have the power to lift their spirits and let them know they matter.

May this holiday season bring each of you peace, joy, and gratitude.

## Treasurer/Secretary Chair

By Laurie Dale

Greetings everyone

To remain a member in good standing and to be in compliance with the National Bylaws, Section 807: Term of Office - the dues of all officers must be paid by December 31. If an officer's dues are not paid before midnight that day, they will be removed from office by the Department President.

### IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT AUXILIARY CHECKS:

Your Auxiliary check should have the Auxiliary Number on them and there SHOULD NOT be any person's name on the checks. If you have checks without the Auxiliary Number or that may have a person's name on them, you need to get new checks.

The VFW Auxiliary has eleven (11) programs to participate in. An Auxiliary IS NOT required to participate in all of them. National would rather have your VFW Auxiliary do one (1) or two (2) programs very well than all of them halfheartedly. There is NO REQUIREMENT to be 100% in participation or reporting on ANY

level.

National still requests two (2) dollars per member for the Cancer Grant Program to keep it viable. This is NOT a requirement; an auxiliary can give as it wishes. You can process this donation in MALTA or send to our office for processing. If sending it to our office, please make check payable to MNVFW AUX.

The MALTA Bookkeeping Application is available for use. You will find the link on your MALTA Dashboard - all the way to the right-hand side of the shortcuts at the top of your DUTIES page.

Auxiliaries are NOT REQUIRED to use this application; it was developed to make the Treasurer's job easier. The system developed specifically for the VFW Auxiliary is like QuickBooks and is quite user friendly. It will make reporting easier each month and will assist in giving your Trustees some of the information they need for their quarterly audits. There is a USER GUIDE available in MALTA. This application is only available to the Treasurer.

**Happy Thanksgiving and Merry Christmas to all.**

## MN Auxiliary Office Hours

Monday - Thursday 8am - 4pm

Phone: (651) 291-1759

email: [treasurer@vfwamn.org](mailto:treasurer@vfwamn.org) or [secretary@vfwamn.org](mailto:secretary@vfwamn.org)

Personal emails, phone numbers, messaging systems/apps of our Office

Staff will not be used for Auxiliary business.

# Claims and Service Office Report

By Jon Gohn, Claims Director

## VFW Claims Office Fiscal Year Wrap Up

As the fiscal year wrapped up, your Minnesota VFW Claims Office proved to be a continued elite force for our entire state and VFW National Organization. Our service officers went above and beyond yet again. This past year we were able to procure an amazing number of benefits for our veterans and dependents in the State of Minnesota. Overall, we were able to help obtain an astounding total accumulation of \$659,386,478.00 in benefits for those who are most deserving.

Although our numbers are very impressive, the most important part of our jobs is to provide the best customer service that we can. We know that the hard work we accomplish is the most satisfying aspect for us in knowing that we are improving the quality of life for those we assist. I often hear compliments about how knowledgeable, understanding,

persistent and caring our staff treats our clients. Many times we are able to accomplish favorable decisions for veterans who have fought and struggled for years to obtain their benefits without favorable actions. Once our office became involved and provided the best advice their claims were approved by the Veterans Administration.

I am extremely proud of our claims office and the vigilant work they do to care for those who stepped up in service and defense of our Great Nation. We truly have an outstanding office and continue to stand ready to assist those we can.

If you have any questions about your VA benefits, do not hesitate to contact us. Whether it's existing benefits or potential benefits, we are here to help you. Our staff can be reached at [VFW.VBASPL@VA.GOV](mailto:VFW.VBASPL@VA.GOV).

## VA Amends Character of Discharge Barriers - More Are Eligible for Benefits

October 1, 2024

**VA BENEFITS** — VA is implementing a new regulation regarding character of discharge determinations, allowing more former service members to become eligible for VA benefits, regardless of their military discharge. Generally, to receive VA benefits and services, a former service member's character of discharge must be under other than dishonorable conditions (e.g., honorable, under honorable conditions, or general). However, while VA cannot change the discharge status provided by the Department of Defense, VA is required to make a determination on eligibility for VA benefits for all individuals who receive a dishonorable discharge.

### Understanding VA benefits and Character of Discharge

When VA receives a claim from a former service member, it reviews their character of discharge to determine if they meet basic requirements to be eligible for VA benefits. Any discharge under honorable conditions satisfies the character of discharge requirement for basic eligibility; however, certain types of discharges—and certain circumstances—may prevent an individual from receiving benefits. These claims require an additional review to determine eligibility for benefits.

### What are the new changes?

The new regulation expands access to care and benefits for certain former service members by:

Eliminating the regulatory bar for "homosexual acts involving aggravating circumstances or other factors affecting the performance of duty";

Defining the circumstances under which the willful and persistent misconduct bar will apply;

Creating "compelling circumstances exceptions" for the statutory bar of absent without leave (AWOL) of 180 days or more, and regulatory bars of moral turpitude and willful and persistent misconduct.

These changes make the character of discharge process more objective, and lead to more consistent adjudication of claims. These modifications are the first of its kind

in over four decades and will increase the number of former service members found eligible for certain VA benefits based on determinations of honorable service for VA purposes.

### What do these changes mean for me?

This VA character of discharge determination does not change the Armed Forces' characterization of service and has no effect on the former service member's military discharge status. VA's determination is for VA benefits and services eligibility purposes only.

VA claims processors are now processing character of discharge determinations with a more objective review. If you believe your discharge falls under any of the updated criteria, or a compelling circumstance may affect your discharge, we encourage you to apply for VA care and benefits today.

VA also invites all former service members who previously received a negative character of discharge determination from VA to submit a VA Form 21-0995, Decision Review Request: Supplemental Claim. Once received, claims processors will reevaluate the claimant's record using the new guidance.

VA encourages former service members who received an unfavorable discharge to apply for VA care and benefits today.

You can submit a claim to a VA regional office near you or work with a trained professional, like a VA accredited representative or VSO, to get help filing a claim for disability compensation. Other options include calling 1-800-827-1000 Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. EST or by fax using 844-531-7818.

Remember, VA will never charge you for assistance filing for benefits. To protect yourself from fraudulent claims, you have the right to verify anyone's credentials before filing a claim or providing personal information.

For more about applying for benefits and character of discharge determinations, please visit the character of Discharge webpage.

## Service Dogs May Reduce PTSD Symptoms

October 17, 2024

A June study funded by the National Institutes of Health found that service dogs may reduce symptoms of PTSD, as well as anxiety and depression. Researchers claim the study is the largest-ever national study about service dogs relating to veterans with PTSD.

The results of the research were published by the Journal of the American Medical Association and titled, "Service Dogs for Veterans and Military Members with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder." The study consisted of 156 veterans diagnosed with PTSD and was conducted between August 2017 and December 2019.

Participants, all being post-9/11 veterans, were recruited from a nonprofit service dog organization called K9s For Warriors, and then were divided into two groups: 81 veterans who received a service dog and 75 veterans who remained on a waiting list. After three months, the group of veterans with service dogs showed improvements with: PTSD symptoms, depression, anxiety, and psychosocial functioning, such as social isolation.

### MENTAL HEALTH IMPROVED

According to the study, veterans with service dogs had a two-thirds (66 percent) less chance of a PTSD

diagnosis when compared to veterans without a service dog.

"Findings of this trial suggest that trained psychiatric service dogs may be an effective complement to usual care for military service-related PTSD," researchers noted in the study. They added that more research is needed to learn the long-term benefits of how service dogs may improve mental health.

### VFW SUPPORTS SERVICE DOGS

VFW National Legislative Service Director Patrick Murray said that VFW has and will continue to support further research and programs that he said can "empower" veterans by making them more independent. Murray also added that service dogs can assist some veterans with several physical and auditory disabilities.

"Service dogs provide veterans with more than companionship — service dogs offer emotional support and can enhance the quality of life for many veterans," Murray said. "VFW will continue to support legislation that helps ensure veterans have access to service dogs."

This article is featured in the 2024 October issue of VFW magazine, and was written by Dave Spiva, associate editor for VFW magazine.

### Veterans Claim Service

Bishop Henry Whipple Federal Bldg.  
1 Federal Drive, Room G900, Saint Paul, MN 55111  
Phone: (612) 970-5669 FAX: (612) 970-5404

email: [vfw.vbaspl@va.gov](mailto:vfw.vbaspl@va.gov)

*We'll Help with YOUR Veteran Benefits*

## Message From Your National Council Member

By Dale Hoogeveen,  
National Council Member

Our national convention, held in Louisville, Kentucky, brought into focus the need to elect delegates to our district, state, and national conventions who will attend the events and be available to cast the votes your post and our department are entitled to. According to Adjutant General Dan West, a roll call vote was conducted on a proposed amendment to the Bylaws for the first time in over twenty years. The proposed amendment would have changed the requirement to remove an elected National officer or appointed salaried officer from a two-thirds vote of the National Council of Administration to a majority vote. As you review our bylaws and manual of procedure you will note that two-thirds votes required for various issues at the post, district, department and national levels are reserved for significant, impactful changes that should only be made after serious, thoughtful consideration. There was adequate concern about this proposed amendment by enough delegates to require a roll call vote – why does your registration matter? I was registered for the National Convention as a member of the National Council of Administration and I was also registered as a delegate from my post, 1791 in Chaska. When I arrived at the convention to confirm my registration, I was asked how I wanted to register. Because I was the only member of my post attending the convention, I elected to register as a post delegate. That gave me the authority to cast the delegate votes Post 1791 was entitled to, five, instead of the one vote I would have been entitled to if I had registered as a National Council member. In this case, the proposed amendment was overwhelmingly defeated but it was quite interesting to watch the department commanders polling their delegates and standing at the microphone to report their results.

When you attend your post meeting in April to elect officers and delegates, please elect delegates who will actually attend your district and department conventions to represent your post's interests. It is certainly feasible for a similar situation to present itself for a roll call vote and every vote could determine the outcome.

Your Department Officers and I attended the Big 10 Conference in Indianapolis, Indiana from October 18-20 where we were joined by Commander in Chief Al Lipphardt, Sr Vice Commander in Chief Carol Whitmore, Jr Vice Commander in Chief Tim Peters and Adjutant General Dan West. A wonderful surprise greeted us Saturday evening

### Anniversary - Cont. from Page 1

official name on August 21, 2015, when membership opened to eligible male spouses and family members.

On January 23, 1925, the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Auxiliary in Minnesota was established. The Department Charter was granted by National President Effie King and National Secretary Margaret Armstrong with fifteen auxiliaries.

Florence Lufkin Hiland served as our first Minnesota Auxiliary President from January 1925 to June 1926. Her first encampment (which is what it was called back then) was in Mankato, and the Department of Minnesota had a total of twenty-seven auxiliaries at that time. A highlight about this event was the first appearance of an auxiliary drill team, which was comprised of seventeen ladies from Minneapolis and St. Paul. The uniform was a white dress with a blue shoulder cape fastened to the dress with gold buttons. This later became the

model for the Minnesota Auxiliary uniform, and was instrumental in the movement for a National Auxiliary uniform.

The second encampment in Minnesota was held in Winona, and at that time, six new auxiliaries had been added, bringing the total to 33. The sessions included reports of the officers and a series of meetings during which the Auxiliary ritualistic floor work was performed by the hosting auxiliary members.

As of the date of this writing, Minnesota has approximately 17,300 members, representing 115 auxiliaries, and I am honored to serve as the Auxiliary President! Our officers are leading this organization into our monumental 100th year. The VFW Auxiliary will continue to work our 12 national programs and assist the VFW to pass or block legislation that impacts veterans and their families and advocates for veterans' rights, support the VFW efforts to end veteran homelessness and reduce

the number of suicides, provide nearly a million volunteer hours in the VA medical system, conduct patriotic programs with thousands of students, and offer thousands of dollars annually in scholarships for our state's youth. Our Auxiliary is here to serve the VFW and we are working hard to add members to our ranks and keep our members active and engaged in serving our veterans.

Not only is the VFW Auxiliary's 100th anniversary a time to celebrate the last century of fantastic accomplishments, but to look ahead to the next 100 years by engaging new and existing veterans and their families to carry on our work. We will continue to support our veterans and our VFW Posts.

If you or anyone you know is in need of support, please reach out and let your Auxiliary know. We are here to support you Always & In All Ways!

**Thank you for your service!**



Coon Rapids Post 9625 donated \$25,000 to the Magnus Veterans Foundation in Dayton MN. It assists Minnesota veterans in recreation, physical and mental health and has a current membership of 900 veterans.

**pictured (l to r) Rich Lien, Gambling Mgr.; Nathan Morgan, Post Cmdr.; Ben Riechers, Post Adj.; Jeremy Evers and Bob Jaskowiak Magnus Foundation Directors; and Randy Tesdahl, VSO Coordinator**

at the banquet when country singing star John Rich appeared, thanking all for their service and singing some patriotic songs. If you enjoy blended whiskey, try his Redneck Riviera American blended whiskey and take satisfaction in knowing a portion of the proceeds from those sales are donated to the VFW.

Congratulations to Patty Thron from the Second District for her election to Conference Auxiliary Guard – the first step on the path to Conference President! Congratulations to Past State Commander Curt Hermanson for his election to Conference Vice-Chair – we look forward to October 2025 when we'll have the opportunity to elect him to Conference Chairman. Comrades and members of the auxiliary, we have an outstanding Department!

I encourage all members to review the legislative priorities of the Veterans of Foreign Wars as we prepare to attend the Washington Conference in the spring of 2025. I thank you for all you do to support our efforts to advocate for veterans, their families and our currently serving forces!

## Save the Date Veterans Day on the Hill

April, 2025  
Nat'l Guard Armory,  
600 Cedar St, St. Paul, MN

10:00am - Doors open  
11:30am - Lunch  
1:00pm - March to Rally

ALL Veterans Welcome

Watch for more information in the next issue of the Gopher Oversea'r and your VFW General Orders.

## Convention Committee Report

By Scott Bill and the Convention Committee Team

Good day comrades and auxiliary members.

It is that time of year again to start booking your hotel rooms for our Midwinter Conference. You can find all the details on the [vfwmn.org](http://vfwmn.org) website (rooms, banquet, tentative schedule etc.).

Midwinter is all about the kids so please make an effort to come and join us for a fun weekend as MN selects its VOD and Patriots Pen winners.

The convention team would like to thank Palmer Lake VFW Post 3915 and it's Auxiliary for offering to host a free child care room, so you can enjoy the Midwinter Diner. They will provide games and crafts, along with snacks and a pizza dinner.

Please go to this location to reserve your child's spot: <https://vfw3915.org/di/vfw/v2/default.asp?pid=149231>

Remember you can use your

credit card to buy your banquet tickets if you so choose. Again, visit the Department website. If you use the CC option, use the "donate button" for now, just list your name, Post and quantity. Any questions you can call VFWHQ and speak to our QM.

Cheryl and I are continuing to seek out RFPs to new conference and convention locations as well as revisiting locations from the past. Please send in ideas for locations-keep in mind they need to have enough hotel and meeting spaces at reasonable prices for our gatherings. If your Post and Auxiliary are interested in hosting, please reach out to VFW HQ.

The summer convention, will be held in St. Cloud, hosted by the Granite Post 04-08 June 2025.

On behalf of the entire Convention Committee, we appreciate your attendance at these gatherings.

# Midwinter Conference - January 10-12, 2025



VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS - DEPARTMENT OF MINNESOTA



## VFW MIDWINTER CONFERENCE

January 10-12, 2025

Marriott NW, 7025 Northland Dr.

Brooklyn Park, MN 55428

Tentative (11-14-24)

### FRIDAY, January 10

6:30 - 10:30am	Breakfast Buffet in the Wadsworth Restaurant (\$20/person)	
8:30 - 9:30am	Pre-Con Meeting	Arbor Lakes
10:00 - 11:00am	VFW Internal Affairs Committee	Lake Michigan
NOON - 4:00pm	<u>Registration and Banquet Tickets</u>	Northland Foyer
1:00 - 2:00pm	VFW Finance Committee	Lake Michigan
2:00 - 5:00pm	<b>VFW Claims Open Office Hours</b>	Arbor Lakes
2:00 - 3:00pm	VFW Charitable Association	Lake Huron
2:30 - 3:30pm	Auxiliary Hospital Repts & Deps Meeting (Invitation Only)	Lake Michigan
3:00 - 4:30pm	Gambling Seminar	Elm Creek
3:00 - 6:00pm	Displays and Vendors	Hallway in front of MN Ballroom Lobby
6:00 - 8:00pm	VFW Council of Administration	Minnesota Ballroom
6:00 - 9:00pm	Auxiliary Council of Administration	Northland Ballroom

### SATURDAY, January 11

7:00 - 11:00am	Breakfast Buffet in the Wadsworth Restaurant (\$20/person)	
7:00 - 9:00am	Register Poppy Displays	Hallway from Hotel Lobby to Northland Foyer Area
8:00 - 10:00am	<b>VFW Committee Meetings</b> VFW Bylaws Committee Legislative Committee VFW Riders	Lake Michigan Lake Huron Lake Erie
8:00 - 1:00pm	<u>Registration and Banquet Tickets</u>	Northland Foyer
8:00 - 3:00pm	Displays and Vendors	Hallway in front of MN Ballroom Lobby
9:30 - 2:30pm	Auxiliary Meeting	Northland Ballroom
10:15 - 11:15am	<b>Scholars App Class:</b> VOD/PP Introduction for 2025-26, VOD/PP Chair Dewey Hermanson will explain the expectations for VOD/PP in 2025-26 (receiving, judging & submitting) using the "Scholars App." <b>Annual VFW Day of Service,</b> ADJ/QM Barry Henriksen will explain what is required to conduct and organize the VFW Day of Service. A requirement for All American	Hennepin Salon 2 & 3
11:30 - 1:00pm	Lunch Break	
1:00 - 2:00pm	<b>Suicide Awareness &amp; Prevention</b> Presenter: Eric Wittenberg, MSW from Mpls. VA in Mental Health. The VA S.A.V.E program is designed to help build confidence in identifying signs of suicide and talking with a veteran, family or friends about suicide. JOINT Seminar	Northland Ballroom
2:00 - 3:00pm	Women Veterans Meeting w/Jennifer Warren	Hennepin Salon 3
2:00 - 3:30pm	District VOD Winners Party	Hennepin Salon 1
2:30 - 4:00pm	Buddy Poppy Chairmen Meeting	Minnesota Ballroom
4:00 - 5:00pm	Catholic Service	Lake Michigan
4:00 - 5:00pm	Non-Denominational Church Service	Lake Huron
5:30 - 10:00pm	Daycare/babysitting during banquet	Lake Huron
5:30 - 6:30pm	District VOD Winners Reception	Arbor Lakes
5:30 - 6:45pm	Banquet Reception (Cash Bar)	Atrium
6:30pm	Line up for the Procession	
6:45pm	Banquet Doors Open	
7:00 - 9:30pm	Grand Banquet Procession begins	Grand Ballroom

### SUNDAY, January 12

7:00 - 11:00am	Breakfast in the Wadsworth Restaurant (\$20/person)	
8:00 - 10:00am	VFW Council of Administration	Minnesota Ballroom

## HOUSING RESERVATIONS

VFW Midwinter Conference 2025

Friday, Jan. 10 -- Sunday, Jan. 12

Marriott NW

7025 Northland Dr. N., Brooklyn Park, MN

For Reservations call 1-877-303-1681

Room Block: **2025 Annual Midwinter Conference**  
You MUST say "2025 Annual Midwinter Conference" or the reservation desk will tell you that there are no rooms

Room Rate: \$129/night + tax  
(Standard King OR Two Double Beds)

Check in: 4pm Check out: 11am

**DEADLINE -- December 16, 2024**

Reserve online at [vfwmn.org](http://vfwmn.org), click on "NEWS", then "Midwinterconference"

## Midwinter - Cont. from Page 1

Service. This event is required for All American consideration.

After lunch there will be a joint seminar, **Suicide Awareness & Prevention** presented by Eric Wittenberg, MSW, from the Mpls. VA in Mental Health. The VA S.A.V.E. program is designed to help build confidence in identifying signs of suicide and talking with your Veteran, family or friends about suicide.

While we have many special things going on at the Midwinter Conference, we still need to be diligent in conducting the business of our organization. There will be various committee and program meetings throughout the weekend.

Friday will bring the MN VFW Charitable Association meeting, Gambling Seminar, Auxiliary meeting and more. The day will end with both VFW and Auxiliary Council Meetings. During the meetings the Councils will conduct program, financial and other official business. Attendees will get a good feel for what takes place in overseeing the Minnesota Veterans of Foreign Wars and its Auxiliary. The VFW Council of Administration will reconvene Sunday at 8:00 am to conclude their official business.

On Saturday morning, the VFW By-Laws and Legislative Committees as well the VFW Riders will meet. Again, they are open to all to attend.

The Marriott has the space where we can spread out and expand our activities and displays. We strive to provide various displays and vendors that will be of interest to everyone in attendance. Everything from Vets Homes to the Buddy Poppy Contest.

Midwinter brings the opportunity to use the undistributed Buddy Poppies for the contest. Posts and Auxiliaries create displays that fall into one of three different categories:

1) Memorial, 2) Promotional, 3) Decorative. The first and second place winners in the three main categories are eligible to compete at the VFW National Convention in July.

The highlight of the Midwinter Conference is always Saturday's Grand Banquet. During the Banquet we will receive greetings from the VFW and Auxiliary National Representatives Dale Hoogveen and Janey Feher. Thank you to every 2025 Award Sponsor in donating towards this event.

The awards are the favorite part of the evening. We honor our three State Teacher of the Year winners, categories K-5, 6-8, and 9-12 grades. We continue the evening by listening to the Patriot's Pen (6-8 grade) winner's speech "My Voice in America's Democracy". The winner will compete at the National level competition for a \$5,000 top award. Lastly, the announcement of the nine District Voice of Democracy winners. The first-place winner will give their speech on this year's essay theme "Is America Today Our Forefathers' Vision?" The State Voice of Democracy winner will be presented with a lovely trophy and a check for \$2,000. They earn a free trip to Washington D.C. and compete for a \$35,000 scholarship.

If you attended in the past, then you know all the information, activities and social opportunities that await you. So, invite fellow members and plan to attend the Department of Minnesota's Annual Midwinter Conference.

## 2025 Annual Midwinter Conference

Saturday, January 11th, 2025

Tickets \$60/person (No Refunds)

Reception 5:30pm Dinner 7:00pm

**Deadline: Wednesday December 23, 2024**

Menu: Herb roasted chicken w/wild mushroom ragout, mashed potatoes, green beans, mixed green seasonal salad, choice of two deserts - flourless chocolate cake or lemon raspberry cheesecake w/berries.

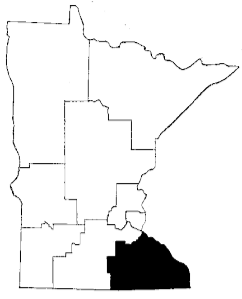
**Tickets will bear a table number and orders will be filled as received. Tickets will be reserved under the name designated on the order form.**

**Assigned seating and tickets will be available at the Registration Desk**

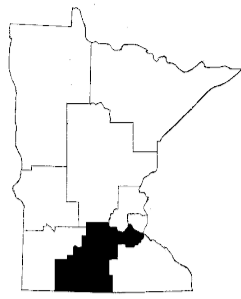
Mail and Make Checks Payable to: **Dept. of MN - VFW**  
**Rice Street Station**  
**PO Box 17146**  
**St. Paul, MN 55117**

Please Reserve \_\_\_\_\_ Tickets at \$60/person Midwinter Conference Banquet Dinner.  
Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Post/Auxiliary # \_\_\_\_\_ District # \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_

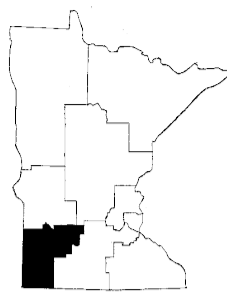
# News from YOUR District Commanders and Presidents!



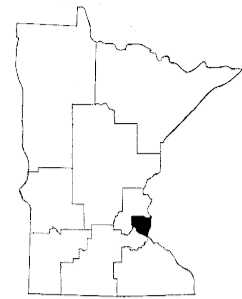
**Lowell Lyman, Commander  
First District**



**Maria Maldonado, Commander  
Second District**



**Merle Rabenberg, Commander  
Third District**



**Sean Gustafson, Commander  
Fourth District**

It is at this time of the year when I think of the many veterans that have given their time and more to serve in order that our country can continue to be a beacon to all of the freedom loving people in the world. You who once wore the uniform of the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Coast Guard and now the Space Force deserve the thanks and gratitude for helping preserve our way of life.

This gratitude is a way of expressing appreciation for the sacrifices and contributions you and your families made not only in uniform but the examples you make as citizens.

As in some cases, this year especially, Veterans Day follows a hard fought election, an exercise in free speech and the ability to self-govern that we the people chose. In the end we always find ways to come back together, our commonalities are greater than fleeting politics. One of the best examples of this are the men and women we salute on Veterans Day.

I acknowledge the fact that we as a nation can never repay a veteran for their service in the same way they have served their nation, but we can pay it forward, serve, volunteer and keep each others backs. We as VFW members know this better than most. We raise great amounts of money and serve untold volunteer hours in an order to continue to serve our veterans and our communities. This makes me proud of all my fellow veterans.



**Kristian Kohn, Auxiliary  
President First District**

The weather is cooler, the leaves are falling, and the days are getting short. Where did the first quarter of this Auxiliary year go? We gained an hour of sleep, yet everyone seems to be tired. For many, this sense of exhaustion has come from the polarization of our country in preparation for the national election. But while many in our country see democrats and republicans, the VFW Auxiliary sees veterans, families, and communities.

I have had the privilege of visiting many of our auxiliaries in District 1 this summer and early fall. What I have seen is our amazing members, doing what they do best...supporting our veterans, veteran families, and

**DIST. 1 AUX. - Cont. on Page 12**

Greetings from the Second District

It is hard to believe that we are halfway through the last quarter of 2024. Since the last publication, we processed three post consolidations: Post 7266 New Auburn with Post 6031 Arlington, Post 295 South Saint Paul with Post 1210 Hastings, and Post 9607 Butterfield with Post 1914 Saint James. Even though post consolidations are a bittersweet process, it is an action that allows us to continue our primary mission to help and support our veterans and communities.

We also experienced the loss of comrades and family members. Amongst them, Past Second District Commander, Leonard Gudmunson. Our thoughts and prayers go out to all our VFW comrades, auxiliary brothers and sisters, and their families.

The Second District posts and auxiliaries have been quite busy hosting and facilitating the many programs and events of the season. Voice of Democracy, Patriots Pen, and Teacher of the Year submissions. Post Inspections are well on their way and will be completed prior to Midwinter Conference. Last but certainly not least, participation in Veterans Day programs and events throughout the district.

I am looking forward to seeing

**DIST. 2 VFW - Cont. on Page 12**



**Becky Selleck, Auxiliary  
President Second District**

Hello from District Two Auxiliaries,

As we head into the Holiday Season, our district has been active in showing appreciation for our veterans. Auxiliaries throughout our area have been visiting local nursing homes and assisted living facilities, bringing seasonal cheer with Halloween treats, Veterans Day cards, and hand-made gifts.

Veterans Day was celebrated across the district with events honoring the service of our veterans, including lunches and presentations to recognize and thank veterans in their community.

We are excited to receive this year's entries for the Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen programs. It's inspiring to see the

**DIST. 2 AUX. - Cont. on Page 12**

Greetings from VFW Third District.

I hope this letter finds you well and have enjoyed the wonderful fall weather. We have enjoyed a very productive season in recruiting new members. Our posts are reporting and new member per post and with some reporting more.

Redwood County VFW Post 2553 hosted a Vietnam Veterans Appreciation Night Saturday Sept. 7th. It was well attended and they gained several new members.

Our posts are gearing up for Veterans Day. All will observe it in form or another. Wilmont VFW post will be having a pot luck on Sunday the 10th.

That's all. See you at Midwinter Conference.



**Diane Rabenberg, Auxiliary  
President Third District**

Greetings from the Third District Auxiliary.

Our October district meeting was well attended and now we have moved on to our fall schedules. Our official visits showed us what a great and caring group of people we have in each of our auxiliaries.

We have had so many wonderful entries for VOD, PP, and the Americanism contests to judge. Our youth are exceptional, as are the teachers who promote our projects in the classroom!

Planning is in full swing for Veterans Day celebrations. We are excited to help celebrate our veterans with potluck dinners, quilts of valor presentations, gifting schools with patriotic books to read and discuss for Veterans Day, and school and community programs!

We wish everyone a joyous Holiday Season and happy New Year.



**Carol Kratz, Auxiliary  
President Fourth District**

I am so happy to report that District 4 is in 1st Place in Membership as of this writing.

I have faith in our auxiliaries to reach out and make personal attempts to remind our unpaid members to continue their membership and offer a discount for those willing to become

**DIST. 4 AUX. - Cont. on Page 9**

Season's Greetings Fighting Fourth!

Hope you all had magnificent Veterans Days and are looking forward to the New Year. I've been to each of your monthly meetings now and can honestly state that the Fourth District is doing fantastic this year. Congratulations to Roseville Post 7555 for already being over 100% on strength. Wow! Mendota, Cottage Grove, and St. Paul Post 1171 are right on your heels. Now is a wonderful time to ask eligible Veterans to join our ranks. Please ask me or one of our Posts that are excelling if you need assistance, ideas, or the like. 2.5 million Vets this year have filed claims with the VA, a 27% increase, thanks to the VFW-supported PACT Act and wonderful CVSOs like we have in Ramsey, Washington, and Dakota Counties, assisted by our own VFW Claims folks Jon, Lynette, Jeffrey, and Zachary.

Changing tone for a second, this time of year can also be really tough on Veterans facing challenges. Please take some time to reach out to all the Vets you know and make sure they are doing OK. Our Posts and Department have some really helpful resources in dealing with Depression, Anxiety, and Financial Insecurity, among others. But you have to ask. A wonderful option for so many of our Vets with Post Traumatic Stress (PTS) are service dogs from Believet, Commander Dave and President Karen's dual project this FY. Please consider having an event and/or making an impactful donation to this

**DIST. 4 VFW - Cont. on Page 12**



**Cindi Nelson, Auxiliary  
President Fifth District**

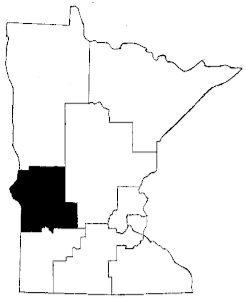
We are off and running in the 5th District.

My first district meeting for the year was in September. I want to thank those who were able to join us in Starbuck. We have been busy doing inspections and plan to be completed by the end of November so that we avoid the yucky roads.

At our District meeting, District Commander Lee Christopherson and I discussed our group project which is the Montevideo Veterans Home. After I visited the home I discovered that they could use a few things: an additional exercise bike because

**DIST. 5 AUX. - Cont. on Page 10**





Lee Christopherson, Commander  
Fifth District

Greetings from the 5th!

First off, I would like to wish everyone a Happy and Blessed Holidays.

We have some trying times this fall in the 5th District with the loss of some of our influential veterans like John Pallow Osakis Post 7902 Chaplain, Robert Friesen Starbuck 4582 Post Commander and several more. They all will be missed, but here is the kicker. In losing members, we must recruit their replacement in the membership.

I would like to acknowledge a few great members in our district. I would like to thank Tyler Smith from Starbuck Post 4582 for stepping up to be our VOD and Patriots Pen chair and Mitch Johnsrud stepping up to Commander after the passing of Robert Friesen. I could go on and on about the great members in my district but truly I believe that the VFW has some great people, and I am honored to be among them.

A lot of the post's in the 5th have been busy doing breakfasts, luncheons, dinners and providing coffee & donuts to the veterans in the community.

Our next district meeting is scheduled for January 19th at Madison Post at 2 PM. I highly encourage the members of the 5th District to be at the meeting especially post commanders. If any other members from other districts would like to attend, we will greet you with open arms. Midwinter Conference is just around the corner. I hope to see all at the conference.

In closing, I am looking forward to seeing all of you at the Various VFW functions. Stay Healthy.

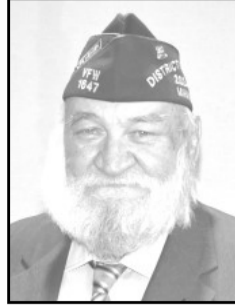
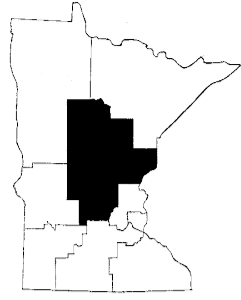
#### DIST. 4 AUX. - Cont. from Page 8

a Life Member. Let's attempt to complete this by December 1st and relax over the Holidays.

Our most recent meeting was held on November 16. We held a few Schools of Instruction. I enjoyed attending the auxiliary meetings while completing our official visits. Each auxiliary shared their traditions and projects including saying the National Home Prayer, hosting cake walks, adopting veterans at veterans homes, donations for the cemetery wreaths, and much, much more.

Great ideas are shared and a lot of business will be completed. We have lots of work yet to do for participation in the programs. We have deadlines to meet and members to tend.

Time to Give Thanks and Wish you peace.



Donald Lohse, Commander  
Sixth District

Greetings from the Commander's desk.

My thanks to all who participated in the October Bike Ride for Charity, raising funds for our Pine City Commander's daughter's medical expenses. The Riders Group from Monticello did a fantastic job, with a silent auction and spaghetti dinner.

Patriots Pen, and Voice of Democracy winners from the post level, have been received at district level. The district winners will be announced at the December district meeting on December 7, at the Granite Post, 428, in St. Cloud.

Post inspections are proceeding very well, anticipated completion by late December, in time for Midwinter Conference.

All post quartermasters are reminded about timely submission of audit reports to Department, along with district dues, Hospital Fund and National Home Fund contributions.

In October, the convoy of antique military vehicles, traveling from Winnipeg, Canada to Louisiana, passed through several of the 6th District posts, with a lunch stop in Randall, Post 9073. My thanks to the Post and Auxiliary members for providing a great meal.



Deb Wieshalla, Auxiliary  
President Sixth District

Greetings from the 6th District!

Here we are entering the busy Holiday Season. As always, our auxiliaries are busy supporting our veterans and working on our auxiliary programs.

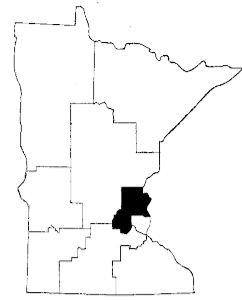
Several auxiliaries have been holding events bringing awareness to veterans and their needs. Great job everyone! I do want to give a big Shout Out to the Curtis Olson Post and Auxiliary 9073 in Randall. They held a 2.2 mile walk to draw attention to Suicide Awareness. They were also hosts to the Jefferson Highway Military Vehicle Convoy. Kim-Valley Watkins Post 5460 also had a stopover from the convoy.

Auxiliaries were able to participate in area school programs as they honored and remembered 911.

Many Auxiliaries held services and programs honoring Prisoners of War, and those Missing in Action. Every one of these were moving and a powerful reminder of those who have not returned to their families yet.

Veterans Day is just a few days away and everyone is getting ready to honor Our Heros.

Our District meetings are always very informative. The chairman have been doing a great job sharing the



Dennis Maddox, Commander  
Seventh District

Greetings from the Mighty 7th.

With some heading south for the winter, that usually leaves more responsibility for those of us that stick around. Thank you to those that fill in while snowbirds are away.

I would like to thank Palmer Lake Post 3915 and Coon Rapids Post 9625 for inviting my better half and I to their membership dinners. The food was great, and the camaraderie was even better. I would also like to thank Sgt. John Rice Post 6316 for the invitation to their Veterans Day dinner. Unfortunately, I couldn't make it as I was out of the state attending Tomb Trek.

Recently the District lost two Posts as there were two consolidations. West Metro Post 7051 merged with Charles R. Knaeble (Crystal) Post 494 and Oak Park Heights (Stillwater) Post 323 merged with Hugo (Minneapolis) Post 7. This brings our District total down to 20 Posts; a far cry from the 55 Posts it once had.

The District Inspectors have been working hard at performing the post inspections. The goal is to have them all completed prior to the end of the year.

As of the time of writing this, the annual District 7 Veterans Day event at the Minneapolis Veterans Home is scheduled to take place on November 11, 2024, at 2:00 pm. The scheduled Master of Ceremonies is Past District 7 Commander, Ken Schroepfer. Hopefully, there will be a good turnout to support the veterans at the home.

Our next District meeting will be on Saturday, December 7, 10:00 am at the Coon Rapids Post 9625. I'm looking forward to the announcement of the District VOD, Patriot's Pen and Teacher of the Year winners. Afterwards, we will have our holiday luncheon.

The Midwinter Conference is just around the corner, January 10-12, 2025. Be sure to reserve your rooms and order your banquet tickets. This will be a great banquet and where the announcements for Voice of Democracy, Patriot's Pen and Teachers of the Year awards will take place. Hopefully all the banquet tickets will be sold.

Finally, I hope everyone had a Happy Thanksgiving. I would like to wish all of you and your families a Very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

information about all the programs and upcoming events and deadlines.

We started the year with our August meeting in Randall with Department President Karen England being our special guest. October saw us up in Jenkins for our annual

#### DISTRICT MEETINGS

- First District**  
Feb 1 Rochester #1215 @ 9:00 AM
- Second District**  
Jan. 18 Chaska #1791 @ 1 PM
- Third District**  
Jan. 4 Redwood Falls #2553 @ 10 AM
- Fourth District**  
Jan. 18 N St. Paul #1350 @ 9 AM
- Fifth District**  
Jan. 19 Madison #1656 @ 2 PM
- Sixth District**  
Feb. 1 Sauk Rapids #6992 @ 11 AM
- Seventh District**  
Feb. 1 Hopkins #425 @ 10 AM
- Eighth District**  
Feb. 1 Gilbert #4456 @ 9 AM
- Ninth District**  
Mar. 15 New York Mills #3289 @ 1 PM
- MOC**  
Feb. 22 Coon Rapids #9625 @ 10 AM



Don't forget to change your address when you head South for the winter.



Peg Snoko, Auxiliary  
President Seventh District

The year is off to a good start. Official visits are underway and things are looking very good.

Veterans day weekend will be busy with programs at the Minneapolis Medical Center and the Veterans Home as well as other community events.

There are membership dinners which have been very well attended. It was wonderful to see so many members and to be able to hand out membership pins for the levels of membership from 5 years up to 60 years.

January will mark the 100th anniversary of the auxiliary and there will be many fun events to attend to mark this momentous occasion.

It is also the 100th birthday of the National Home and they are celebrating all year as well.

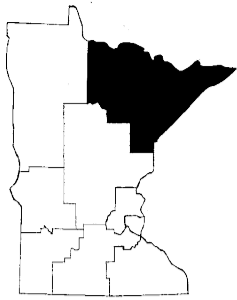
auction fundraiser. Department Chaplain Jean Keogh was our guest.

Upcoming meetings will be:  
**December 7**—428 Granite, St. Cloud; meeting time 1pm-- **COOKIE WALK.**

**February 1**—Sauk Rapids; meeting time 1pm.

**April 26**—Browerville—**LOYALTY DAYS**—Memorial Service at 9am, meetings to begin at completion of service.

I wish each and every one of you a Very Happy Holiday Season.



**Anthony Rechichi, Commander  
Eighth District**

Greetings 8th District Comrades and Auxiliaries.

I'm especially proud of the posts when I drop in to attend their monthly meetings and witness most of their members wearing their VFW covers. I'm also impressed at the great participation these posts are having at their meetings.

The 8th District is working diligently on their inspections. We are half done and will be completely finished before the end of the year. The VOD and Patriots Pen submissions have been received by the district.

Before closing, I want to thank our VFW and Auxiliary members who have served our country and continue to assist veterans and their families.

I am looking forward to seeing everyone at Midwinter Conference.

**God Bless and continue to be safe.**



**Marlaina Hart, Auxiliary  
President Eighth District**

Greetings from Northeastern Minnesota District 8 VFW Auxiliary.

We have been busy serving our veterans around the district. Some auxiliaries had POW/MIA Observances and are gearing up for Veteran's Day to honor our veterans on their day, with dinners and programs at our post homes.

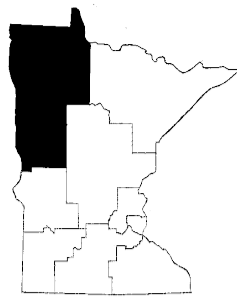
We observed Project Blue Light for our local police officers, first responders and firefighters by serving free meals, or taking sandwiches and treats to their precincts.

One auxiliary and post had a past commander's and president's dinner to honor their past officers. They included the district president and commander in this honor. It was a very nice program and dinner. Dr. Jim Tourila was the guest speaker.

On Veterans Day, another auxiliary is presenting Quilts of Valor to 5 of their post members. All are Vietnam Veterans.

The Grand Rapids Post and Auxiliary is hosting a Silver Star Award Ceremony for Corporal Norris Brenden, who was Killed 5 Feb 1968 in Vietnam. Norris was from the area growing up in Talmoon. His comrades have been on a mission for several years to ensure that he is recognized for his bravery above and beyond the call of duty that ultimately led to his death. District and State Commander's and Presidents are invited to attend on Nov. 20 at 4pm.

Americanism and Scholarships (VOD & PP) entries were due on Oct 31st to local posts and auxiliaries.



**Kelly Booge, Commander  
Ninth District**

Greetings from the northwestern part of the state, home of the VFW 9th District.

The year is flying by very rapidly. That maybe a good thing and then again it maybe not. When we start a new VFW year, we always have such great aspirations of what we can accomplish. Then life happens, and we do not succeed with all of it.

I want to thank everyone who extended prayers and good wishes through cards and phone calls during my medical challenge.

**Thank you so very much!!**

Although we are doing fair on membership, I know that we can do so much better. I challenge each member to talk to people they meet on the street, in the store or wherever, about becoming a member, if eligible. If this was done at least twice a month, we could find the members for our posts. They are out there!! Watch for the baseball caps and the t-shirts.

The challenges from both Department and National are attainable if we work hard. It takes just a bit of effort.

With the Bemidji Veterans Home now open and being filled with those who, on the one hand, are not fortunate enough to live at home, but on the other hand have a beautiful facility with loving caregivers to help them. There are opportunities to volunteer if you have the desire to help out.

The posts in the 9th are working to keep things going on an even keel. I know that many are going to have events for Veterans Day and I thank you for making the effort to improve a veteran's life. If you are blessed enough to be invited into the classroom of our young people not only will you enrich their lives but the blessing bestowed on you for being there can be very enriching. Keep up the good work.

I wish you all a very happy Veterans Day, Thanksgiving and a Very Merry Christmas. Look forward to seeing you all again at the Department of Minnesota Midwinter Conference.

They are now being judged at the local level and one entry for each contest to be sent to District by Nov. 15th.

Thanksgiving and Christmas is coming. We are planning events all around the district for these days. Gifts to veteran's in nursing homes are "in the works." December 13th is the Christmas Party at the Veteran's Home in Silver Bay.

We hope everyone has a wonderful Holidays Season.

### COMMANDER - Cont. from Page 1

holding Veterans Day observances across the State.

I want to extend my deepest gratitude to our Minnesota VFW members and the Auxiliary for their generosity. Through your dedication, the Minnesota VFW and Auxiliary donated over \$7 million last year, combining cash donations with the value of volunteer time. Your commitment makes an enormous impact, reaching veterans, families, and communities across the state. Please continue this great work and remember to report your community service efforts—which includes all donations to outside community groups. Fundraising, expenditures, and volunteer work that benefits our Posts and Post homes doesn't count.

I am also immensely proud of the Minnesota VFW Claims office, whose staff represents over 34,000 Minnesota veterans, their families, and survivors providing free assistance with their VA claims. Thanks to the tireless work of our five accredited claims representatives,

Minnesota veterans received over \$630 million in VA benefits in the past year, ending September 30, 2024. This incredible achievement is a testament to their hard work and dedication.

I am grateful for all our members' efforts to grow and retain membership in the VFW and Auxiliary. Membership is vital to sustaining our mission, and I encourage all members to continue recruiting for both organizations. I also encourage every VFW Post to participate in our programs and strive for the All-State Post Commander and Quartermaster Teams and toward earning the All-American Post award. As Commander-in-Chief Al Lipphardt says "Effort is appreciated; achievement is celebrated."

Finally, as we approach the holiday season, I wish you all a Happy Thanksgiving, a Merry Christmas, and best wishes for any other holiday you may celebrate this time of year.

Thank you for all you do for our veterans and for continuing to support our shared mission.

### DIST. 5 AUX. - Cont. from Page 8

the residents wait in line in the mornings to use it; and a computer that can be put on a cart and used in the residents' room so they are able to face time their loved ones. They don't have anything like this so a couple carts with computers would be great. According to our District 5 Treasurer, Emily, it looks like we will be able to buy at least one computer setup right away.

I put a shout out to all district auxiliaries to see if they could help by donating candy or crafts for the Montevideo Veterans Home for Halloween. The residents play games and hand out candy to the kids. This is special since we all know that in some towns the homes are overlooked because of trick or treat, and parades. I don't know on how

many pounds of candy were donated but I appreciate all of you that were able to help. Lee and I are working on a couple fundraising ideas that include the district. I am excited to announce that the State VFW Bantam A and AA along with the Girls U15A hockey tournaments will be held in Alexandria. The boy's tournament is February 7-9, 2025 and the girls are March 7-9, 2025. If you are free either of those weekends, come on over and watch some great hockey. It is always nice to see VFW members attend this. Working for these great events has already started.

I look forward in seeing many of you at our Midwinter Conference January 10-12, 2025 at the Marriott NW in Brooklyn Park.

In closing I want to wish all of the veterans a blessed Veterans Day.

**Thank you for your service.**



**Shirley Quist, Auxiliary  
President Ninth District**

Greetings from the Mighty 9th District VFW Auxiliary.

We are well into our program year. Members are visiting the schools providing information and guidance on the VFW Scholarship, Americanism and Youth Programs. Veterans Day programs will be held across the district. Veterans Service Offices can be contacted for dates, times and locations. Local VOD and Patriots Pen winners will be honored and they will show case their essays to the community.

At this time of year, efforts turn to those who will not be with loved ones over the holidays by providing care packages and cards to active-duty troops. In the Bemidji Veterans Home, residents will be able to select gifts donated and wrapped for their family.

The District Commander's and

President's Project this year is to install benches and chairs along the walking trail that surrounds the Bemidji Veterans Home. Any donations are greatly appreciated.

Our auxiliaries are in need of members to help carry on our mission to serve our veterans, their families and the community. I ask you to strongly encourage your family members to join the VFW Auxiliary to help America's heroes. We are a voice for veterans, locally and on Capitol Hill. We work to pass or block legislation impacting veterans, mail care packages, visit veterans in care facilities, offer youth scholarships and educate youth about the American Flag, sponsor youth organizations and school programs, and deliver meals to shut-ins. These are just a few of the ways the auxiliary works to support veterans. Membership information can be found at [VFWAuxiliary.org](http://VFWAuxiliary.org).

It is a pleasure to Serve those who Serve, Always and in All Ways.

## Post Activities Around the State

### Quilts of Valor Presented at Westbrook Post 5098

By Dennis Phelps, Commander Post 5098

When Brian and Kerry Cassens returned to their childhood home in Westbrook, MN after spending the previous forty years in Arizona and Iowa, Kerry continued to pursue her love for crafting, particularly quilting, at a whole new level. She sought information and joined a group some forty miles away who made and distributed quilts to older veterans in the area. Soon another individual joined her in finishing quilts locally.

As time went on, Kerry, who had joined VFW Auxiliary for Post 5098 in Westbrook, arranged to

begin awarding Quilts of Valor to local veterans, particularly the oldest members of both the local VFW and Legion posts.

In the past five months, Kerry has arranged for quilts to be presented to 97-year-old Daryl Eichner, Army veteran of both WWII and Korea; and to 92-year-old Leo Vortherms, Army veteran of Korea.

Plans are to periodically award quilts to our oldest veterans in recognition of their service. Both Eichner and Vortherms have remained active members of the VFW/Legion posts in Westbrook.

### Kraus-Hartig Post 6587 Helps Distribute Food

Members of Kraus-Hartig Post 6587 have been donating their time to a local food distribution program, Manna Market.

It distributes over 350,000 pounds of donated surplus food each month. Members of Post 6587 help unload trucks, sort donated food, bag/box the food and then help place these items in the vehicles of over 9000 families.

All donated foods come from area grocery stores, restaurants and farms. The food is typically from a wide variety of fresh, high-quality products or those foods approaching

their "best by" date but are still perfectly safe and nutritious.

Post 6587 has made this weekly commitment to the Manna Market distribution program for the benefit of their community.

Post Commander Bob Wiltse made a point of stating that this effort gets food into the hands and mouths of those who need it the most while keeping it out of landfills. He encourages other posts to check with their local food shelves and food distribution services and volunteer their time to help out.



(l to r) Aux members Dolly Phelps, Kerry Cassen, veteran Darrel "Ike" Eichner, Aux President Pat Thiner, Pam Steen, Sharon Trent



(l to r) Post Member Scott Sweno, Sr. Vice Cmdr. Richard Herring, Jr. Vice Cmdr. Mike Morris and Post Member Jim Woodard (back right)

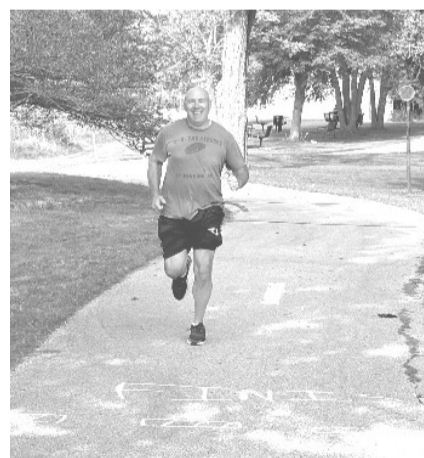
### Gold Star Family Day Fun Run at Post 1287

By Fred Orłowski, Veterans Service Officer Post 1287

In honor of Gold Star Family Day on September 29th, 2024, the Winona Neville Lien VFW Post 1287 held a fundraiser 5k run with proceeds going to the Gold Star Family Weekend, Inc. The Gold Star Family Weekend annually holds a weekend event at Camp Ripley in August to support, honor, and share memories of their lost loved ones.

This was an inaugural event for the Winona VFW Post and with tremendous community support. As a result, Post 1287 was able to donate \$7000 to Gold Star Family Weekend. While runner turnout was lower than expected, the event was a remarkable success. The run took participants on a scenic run/walk around a portion of Lake Winona. The finish line was appropriately located adjacent to Winona's Veterans Memorial Park. Mary Johnson attended our event and traveled from Savage, MN. Mary is a Gold Star Mother and Board President for Gold Star Family Weekend.

The Winona 5k Committee wants to thank the volunteers that consisted of community members, Post



Post 1287 member Matt Biesanz completes the 5k run

members including the Post's Honor Guard, Winona area Girl Scouts, and the Winona Fire Department. Their participation made this event something that Post 1287 can be proud of and plans to continue in the future. The 2nd annual 5k and newly added one mile walk is tentatively scheduled for September 27th, 2025. Please mark your calendars and consider participating in this amazing event next year.

### Redwood County Post 2553 Receives Donation

By Jerome Ludwig, Commander Post 2553

Redwood County Veteran of Foreign Wars Post #2553 recently received a generous donation from VFW member and Korean War Veteran Jim Ross. One half of Ross's donation is dedicated to the VFW Post 2553's "Veterans Emergency Fund". This fund can assist local veterans in dire need of food, clothing, shelter, emergency travel, etc., usually within 8 hours of request.

Ross dedicated the remaining half to the VFW Post's Youth activities. The VFW Post uses funds to promote and award participants in the Voice of Democracy and Patriots Pen programs. Funds are used to assist local youth hockey, baseball, shooting sports, summer recreation, Cub Scouts and Prom. Monies raised by and donated to the Redwood County VFW Post are audited annually to insure the best and wisest use of funds toward the goals of the local VFW.

Requests for funds for veterans in need should be directed to the Redwood County Veterans Service office at 637-4034. Funding requests for youth or other activities should be sent to Redwood County VFW Post

#2553, PO Box 23, Redwood Falls, MN 56283



(l to r) Post 2553 member Jim Rodd and Post 253 Quartermaster Roger

**THANK YOU  
FOR YOUR  
SERVICE**

# Commander's/President's Project

By Sean Gustafson, Project Coordinator

Each one of us has faced veteran suicide, some from a distance, many up close. Commander Dave and President Karen's Joint Project this year is making great strides towards reducing veteran suicide and getting vets off VA-prescribed opioids, which come with so many additional challenges.

Sam Daly and the team at Believet Canine Service Partners ([www.believet.org](http://www.believet.org)) are making headway every day, taking dogs (many of them rescues), training them intensely for 12-18 months, then giving them totally free of charge to our veterans with Post Traumatic Stress (PTS). But the need is endless and resources are tight. It costs at least \$30k to fully train a dog. They need funding for this and to take care of the vets while they are training with the dogs. They also need fosters of all kinds and help raising awareness.

We are almost halfway through the year. Please consider making a generous donation to the Commanders/President's Project, mailing them to "MN VFW Charitable Association, PO Box 17146, St. Paul, MN 55117." Donations can be made via Venmo or PayPal using links at the MN VFW webpage (please specify Commanders/President's Project). Auxiliaries and their



members are kindly asked to send their donations directly to the Department Office, Attn: Laurie Dale.

Please consider hosting an event of any kind this year to raise funds and awareness for Believet. Contact me at 612-751-9918 or [sean.gustafson@gmail.com](mailto:sean.gustafson@gmail.com), Deb Courts-Brown at 651-964-5748 or [dcourtsb@comcast.net](mailto:dcourtsb@comcast.net), or Tim Haugen at [timhaugen74@gmail.com](mailto:timhaugen74@gmail.com) with questions or to invite us. There will be a presentation of checks to Believet on Friday evening, January 10, of Midwinter Conference, during the Council of Administration, if you would like to put your donation directly in the hands of Mr. Daly and his incredible organization.

# Nat'l Legislative Report

By Nathan Morgan, National Legislative Chairperson

The House of Representatives will vote Monday, November 18th on H.R. 8371, Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act. It would provide enhancements to critical health care services for veterans and caregivers who need help now and cannot wait any longer. It has bipartisan support in the Senate but is not supported by Democrats in the House. This must change! Contrary to certain opposing voices, this IS a good piece of bipartisan-negotiated legislation that had input from numerous organizations representing veterans, caregivers, and survivors from around the country.

It's essential that veterans' issues remain a priority for lawmakers, especially with the transition in Congressional leadership. With Congresswoman Kelly Morrison now representing District 3, it's crucial to connect with her early to advocate for VFW Legislative Priorities and ensure veterans' voices continue to be heard. Even if priorities remain largely unchanged from the previous Congress, advocacy is vital, particularly as leadership shifts and new members join.

Senator Jon Tester loss in Montana the Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman, to Tim Sheehy, a Navy veteran, signals a shift in the Senate, especially with the upcoming changes in the Veterans Affairs Committee leadership. Staying informed on who will chair

this committee is important as it can greatly influence how veterans' issues are handled moving forward.

While broader issues like immigration, the economy, and election security may dominate the political landscape, veterans' needs must remain a top concern. The absence of specific polling data on veterans' issues from Pew Research underscores the importance of ensuring they are not overlooked. Veterans and their advocates should continue flooding lawmakers' inboxes with messages, calls, and letters to ensure that these issues receive the attention they deserve. Now more than ever, communication with your representatives is critical.

If you haven't signed up for VFW Action Corps use your camera on you phone to scan the code below and sign up.



You can also use the following link to signup.  
<https://www.vfw.org/ActionCorpsSignup>

## DIST 1 AUX. - Cont. from Page 8

one another.

Our Chatfield auxiliary is promoting patriotism in our youth by working with the school library on an entire section dedicated to books that speak of our Country.

In Lake City, I was privileged to witness and returning female soldier present the auxiliary with a flag in gratitude for the many packages and well wishes provided to her and her comrades while deployed.

I was able to work with our Zumbrota auxiliary in their efforts to ensure a thriving future for the members and the important work they do.

I was able to participate in Owatonna for their annual Pheasant dinner fundraiser and see the time, effort, and care that went in to ensuring our veterans received this wonderful meal.

In Brownsville, I watched as a newer President lead her auxiliary towards an even brighter future of service and connection.

I visited in Preston and listened to the work they are doing with the new Veterans Home and its residents. Nowhere did I see tired, divided people, just passionate members dedicated to the cause of the VFW Auxiliary.

We are one auxiliary, one family, one mission.

## DIST 2 VFW - Cont. from Page 8

everyone at Midwinter Conference 10-12 January 2025 in Brooklyn Park, MN. Please make sure to make your lodging and banquet reservations as soon as possible. Our next district meeting will be held on January 18, 2025 at Walter Hecklin VFW Post 1791 in Chaska, MN.

As we approach the Holiday Season, let's continue to support each other, our posts and our communities. Happy Thanksgiving Day, Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah, Happy New Year and Happy any and all customary celebrations with your friends and families.

## DIST 4 VFW - Cont. from Page 8

amazing organization, details can be found elsewhere in this newsletter.

Finally, Buddy Poppy Days are almost upon us. Many of our Posts use this time to get out in the community, help raise Veteran awareness, and grow their membership. Please ask our Poppy Chair, Mike Lindvall, or me if you need assistance. Order more poppies, we now have so many options.

Thank you all for your continuing efforts. Sean 612-751-991 or [sean.gustafson@gmail.com](mailto:sean.gustafson@gmail.com).

## Vets on the Lake

Veterans on the Lake Resort is a not-for-profit resort. Its focus is on providing veterans, the disabled, and the general public, opportunities to be included in outdoor recreational activities and mental respite. The resort is designed to honor those who have contributed to and sacrificed for our nation and to help them heal from the pain and suffering they endure.

Various scholarships are available to qualified MN veterans. Contact Heather Schaller at (218) 365-6900 for more information.

For more information visit us at [www.veteransonthelakeresort.org](http://www.veteransonthelakeresort.org)



## DIST 2 AUX - Cont. from Page 8

patriotism and thoughtfulness of our nation's youth through their heartfelt essays and speeches. These programs continue to foster a valuable connection between younger generations and our veterans, and we're grateful for the impact they have on our community.

Our focus also continues building strong connections and growing our membership, knowing that each new member strengthens our ability to support our veterans. It is important

to remember each community event is an opportunity to make an impression and bring awareness to our mission.

As we prepare for the Christmas Season, many auxiliaries are busy making and sending holiday cards to brighten the spirits of veterans in our care. We look forward to seeing everyone at Mid-Winter Conference.

Wishing you a joyful season filled with family, friends, and meaningful support for our veterans and their families.

**Thank you, and Happy Holidays!**

# Veterans / Youth Activities

## The State of VFW Hockey

### The Tradition Continues

By Jim Hesselgrave, VFW State Hockey Chairman

As we enter our Seventieth (70) year of VFW Sponsored Hockey in Minnesota, we find ourselves at another 'crossroads'.

For about sixty years of the VFW Bantam Hockey Program, we had VFW District Playoffs and a VFW State Bantam Hockey Tournament. Through those years, the VFW Hockey Program went through some growing pains and obviously, some 'twists and turns'. Eventually, the District Playoffs and State Tournament process fell apart and we moved into our current VFW Hockey Program which is a VFW State Invitational A and AA Bantam Tournament. Last year, we added a VFW State U15A (Girls) Tournament, which met with Great success.

So, now let's discuss the 'crossroads' and where the VFW Hockey Program is headed. About ten years ago, we started to notice some of our hockey teams disappearing from our VFW District Playoffs. This eventually led to most of the VFW districts not having playoffs. Some of these districts would maybe send a team to the VFW State Tournament (without a playoff game). Other districts did not send any teams. It took us about five years to notice a trend.... At first we thought it was a lack of bantam teams. But, as we investigated the trend further and started talking to VFW posts and our traditional VFW bantam teams, we discovered it was not a lack of teams, but rather a lack of VFW



sponsors. And, this is logical. Many VFW posts that sponsored VFW hockey teams have since closed their doors or no longer have the funds to sponsor a hockey team.

Now that our VFW Invitational Hockey Program is well established and well run, we are getting more and more Bantam and U15A Teams that want to play in the Tournament. NOW, the 'Crossroads'... We have plenty of teams wanting to play in our VFW Tournament, BUT, we do not have enough VFW sponsors! We have a number of VFW posts that have the resources to sponsor two and three hockey teams. We THANK those posts for their DEDICATION and support! We have a couple of posts and a district that are pulling their resources together just to sponsor one team. We also THANK them for their EFFORTS!

We have not come up with the 'Golden Puck' yet. But, we are continuing to keep the tradition of VFW hockey alive in Minnesota!

## Veterans Fishing Activities

By Jerry Brletich, Veterans & Youth Activities Chairman

There are many opportunities available to veterans for activities such as FREE fishing trips. Various organizations throughout the State have set up events veterans.

This summer I had the opportunity to go to Lake of the Woods and stay at Cypress Lodge for two full days on a charter boat fishing trip with three veterans from the Coon Rapids VFW. Our Captain Jason (Lodge Owner), as well as several other lodges in the area, invited veterans up for a free fishing expedition (boats, lodging and food included). There were about 50 veterans from throughout the State that attended this event. All that the veteran had to do was get there. This event was put on by "Fishing for Life" and was sponsored by various resorts and companies. They are here to support veterans who want to get away and clear their minds.

I recently returned from a Giant Cat Fishing trip sponsored by "Fishing for Life" on the Red River near East Grand Forks. I was able

to bring two Veterans from Coon Rapids VFW and one from Remer. Our party of eleven veterans caught over 160 pounds of River Catfish. Half of them were 10-20 lbs. each.

There are a lot of opportunities out there that are free to veterans who need to get away to relax and enjoy the friendship of other veterans. All you need to do is fill out a short application and be accepted. No experience required.

Camp Ripley puts on a yearly Turkey hunt, summer fishing trip on the Mississippi River and/or Mille Lacs Lake and an October early deer hunt. ([davn.org](http://davn.org)).

Fishing for Life has Pheasant Hunts, Muskie, Walleye and Catfish fishing trips and more. ([fishingforlife.org](http://fishingforlife.org))

DAV has fishing trips in Ontario and on Lake Winnibigoshish and Rainey Lake just to name a few. ([davn.org](http://davn.org))

Warriors & Walleyes also have trips. ([warriorandwalleyes.org](http://warriorandwalleyes.org))

## VETERANS UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

Visit [www.vfwmn.org](http://www.vfwmn.org) for Updates

**Archery**  
2025  
Open for Bids

**Bean Bag**  
2025  
Open for Bids

**Bowling**  
2025  
Open for Bids

**Cribbage**  
2025  
Open for Bids

**Fishing**  
2025 & 2026  
Open for Bids

**Golf**  
2025  
Coon Rapids #9625

**Horseshoes**  
2025  
Open for Bids

**Pistol**  
2025  
Hosted by Sauk Rapids #6992

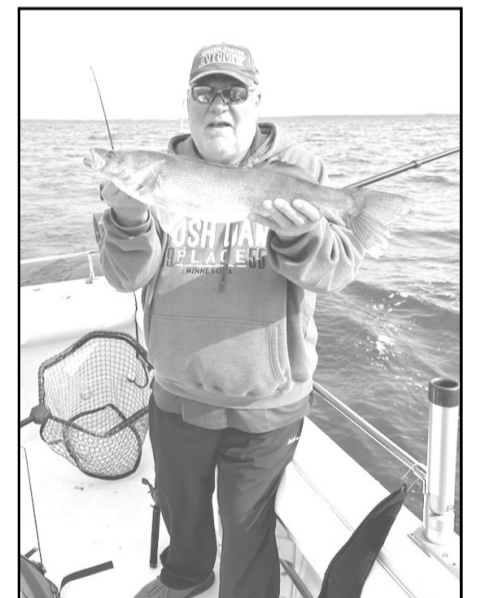
**Trap Shooting**  
2025  
Hosted by Rosemount #9433

## YOUTH UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

Visit [www.vfwmn.org](http://www.vfwmn.org) for Updates

**Baseball**  
August 2025  
Hosted by Austin #1216

**Hockey**  
Boys February 7-9, 2025  
Hosted by Alexandria #936  
Girls U15A March 7-9, 2025  
Hosted by Alexandria #936



There are many things available for veterans to help us get away from the everyday grind and commune with nature.

Contact one of these organizations or contact your local County Veterans Service Officer (CVSO).

# MN VFW Loses Dedicated Veteran

Leonard "Len" R. Gudmunson passed away unexpectedly on October 5, 2024. He was born in Yankton, South Dakota on June 9, 1946.

He served in the Army for three years during which he spent one tour in Vietnam as a member of the 1st Cavalry Division. Len was active in the VFW, Cooties and Pointman Ministries.

At various times, Len was the gambling manager and held officer positions within Fred Babcock Post 5555. He then went through all of the officer positions within District 7 culminating as the District Commander in 2012. His next step was that of State Chaplain.

After he and his wife moved from Minneapolis to Hastings, he joined Hasting Post 1210. He held numerous positions there including Post Commander. Finally, he went through the officer positions of District 2 and was installed as the District 2 Commander in 2023.

In his spare time with the VFW, he served as the Department and



Gopher Overseas photographer.

Lastly, his involvement with the Cooties resulted in Len becoming a Cootie Grand Commander and then a Cootie Trustee.

On a personal note, Len met, married and loved his wife Kay for 53 years before she passed away. Their legacy lives on in their three children and eight grandchildren.

**Farewell. Until we meet again.**

## Cootie Korner

By Todd "Tiny" Roberts  
Commander of the Grand of MN



To my fellow Comrades and Auxiliary,

It is already November and getting close to Midwinter Conference. I hope to see many Cooties in attendance sporting their Cootie Gear.

We have a busy winter coming. I will be attending Cootie Christmas at the VFW National Home in December. I hope to see many from Minnesota in attendance.

Our Grand Commander and President's Project is in full swing.

We are raising money to help get bingo machines in the new Veterans Homes. We have three new homes, and these systems are not cheap, please consider a donation to help us help our Veterans. Also, please see if your VFW Post would be interested in helping. We have our venison raffle tickets going again. The drawing will be held at the Midwinter Conference. Be sure to get your tickets because this does help with defray costs associated with making sure our veterans get to enjoy a venison meal every year. We also have Venison Pins for sale. Look up your local Cooties to make that purchase. Pup Tent 62 is planning to purchase Christmas gifts for all veterans that live at our homes here in Minnesota. They are looking for help funding this program. Any donations can be sent to Jim Dalziel at 12138 305th Ave Princeton, MN 55371 or if you need a 501(c)(3), please send a check to VFW Department Charitable Association and ask the money to be donated to this project.

Any money left over from Christmas will in turn be used for Valentines Day.

Cooties, keep working our fertile hunting grounds as membership should never stop. Keep the hospital reports coming, and



## Minnesota VFW Riders

By Chad Engen, President VFW Riders Post 8731



On Oct 19th, the VFW Riders Post 8731 Monticello, MN conducted the Regina David Benefit Ride riding from St. Cloud to Pine City VFW Post 4258. It was held to raise money for a veteran and his family. David David's daughter Regina was diagnosed with DiGeorge Syndrome and had two life-saving operations over the summer of 2024. It took months of planning and the dedicated work of several individuals to organize the ride. On the day of the ride, the VFW Riders, Combat Veterans Motorcycle Association, American Infidels Motorcycle Club, and American Legion Riders all rode together as a unit for Regina.

The VFW Riders left Sauk Rapids VFW Post 6992 at 9am and arrived seven hours later at the Pine City American Legion Post 51. The group made four stops along the way where they sold t-shirts, raffle tickets and held 50/50 drawings to raise money.

After the ride Legion Post 51

sponsored a spaghetti feed and a silent auction. By the end of the night, \$15,660 had been raised to help the family pay for medical expenses.

This was truly a community event involving all of the various riders clubs as well as the Pine City Beyond the Yellow Ribbon organization to help a veteran and his family when they needed it the most.



## What the Heck is a Cootie?

By Todd Roberts, Cmdr of the Grand of MN

The Military Order of the Cootie is the Honor Degree of the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

We were founded in September, 1920 with all the Veterans coming home from WWI. The largest veterans organization at that time was the VFW. It was missing one important element at that time: a way to take care of our veterans who were injured and had to spend time in the Old Soldiers & Sailors Homes. The Spanish American War Veterans had the "Imperial Order of the Dragons". The VFW needed to come up with one to assist in the work with hospitalized veterans and keep them smiling.

The Cooties were born. One thing veterans always remember is the worse part of their deployment or combat. The Lice, also known as cooties, were horrible in the trenches during WWI. So, we became the Cootie. You can find a Cootie bug on our uniform collar to identify us.

We are the Honor Degree of the VFW, meaning our only purpose is to serve those veterans in VA Hospitals and Veterans Homes and their families. We don't have social clubs. A hospital ward or a nursing home are our true homes.

The Cooties came up with the idea to start the VFW National Home for the War Widows and families.

This is a now a place where veterans can go to with their family and their children and feel safe.

Our purpose is simple. We take care of any veteran and their family that needs help. We regularly visit the VA Hospitals and Veterans Homes in each state. Sometimes, it is as simple as being there to listen or to help with some tasks. We love our bingo games. It's a great way to meet our fellow veterans.

In the Grand of MN, we go above and beyond. We have eight Veterans Homes in the State of MN along with two VA Hospitals. That totals over 1,000 veterans. Each year, the Grand of MN provides a Venison Dinner to all of vets that are residents along with Valentine's candy hearts.

Our name and our organization goes back to WWI. It definitely is a little corny but it's all about service to those who have served. We believe that every veteran needs to be remembered.

We believe that "Keep them Smiling in Beds of White" and "Cooties are Closer than a Brother" are not just sayings but a commitment that we all made when we joined our Nation's Armed Forces.

Please make a donation to our Christmas Gifts program and help us help those who could use some Holiday Cheer.

# Timely Tidbits

## Never Enough White Powder

by Ken Schroeffer, editor Gopher Oversea'r



Karl Lepping, July 7, 1931, spent the first 6 years of his young life in Dortmund, Germany. In 1937, the family relocated to North Minneapolis where he grew up and graduated from Patrick Henry High School.

He attended the Univ. of MN and enrolled in the Army ROTC program. Upon graduation, in 1953 Karl enlisted in the Army and was sent to Ft. Riley, Kansas. As a young 2nd Lieutenant, he was sent to Seoul, Korea and assigned to the 3584th Light Truck Company which was a part of the X Army Corps. He became a convoy commander of up to 24, Army 6x6 trucks hauling troops and munitions from the Seoul Depot to various locations in Korea.

When he completed his term of service, Karl returned to Robbinsdale, MN. He used his GI bill to get a flight license for small aircraft and then float planes.

He raised two sons while working in the family business as a food broker to local grocery stores. It was in 1956, that Karl became a certified ski instructor. He landed a job as a chemical dependency counselor at St. Mary's Hospital in Minneapolis for a while. But the calling was there to run his own business. Using knowledge he learned in the family business, Karl decided to be a broker

of raw nuts to local businesses.

In 1973, now on his own, Karl needed to satisfy that craving for fresh, white powder snow. He packed up and headed to Colorado where he spent the next fifty years teaching skiing full time at the Copper Mountain and Keystone Mountain Ski Resorts.

For the past 25 years, Karl has been teaching skiing part time at the Sunrise Park Resort in Colorado.

Karl's advice, "I've been teaching for about 65 years, and there's nothing better to me than turning someone into a damn good skier, whether they're new at it or a little older and have some experience. Skiing, and teaching people to ski, keeps me young. It keeps my body in motion."

When he's not skiing, he will walk, bike, golf sometimes and just stay active in general.

At 93 years young, Karl has no time to sit around.



## ★★ WANTED ★★

### Photos, captions and articles honoring our Senior Veterans

The Gopher Oversea'r will include articles honoring the contributions of our Senior Veterans (90+) in their service to our country.

The editor and staff of the Gopher Oversea'r are extremely pleased to publish any information as provided by a VFW post, friend or family member.

Send pictures, captions and stories to the VFW Office, Rice Street Station, PO Box 17146, St. Paul, MN 55117, attn. Oversea'r Editor or by email to [Oversear@vfwmn.us](mailto:Oversear@vfwmn.us)

Photos will be returned upon request.

## Birthday Wishes Going OUT

by Ron Steigers, Commander Post 3979

The members of Cloquet VFW Hebert-Kennedy Post 3979, recently celebrated Carl Schenk's 90th birthday with fellowship, food, friends and a dance.

Carl was born on August 20, 1934, in Rice Lake, Wisconsin. He is the second oldest of five children, four boys and girl. Carl and his wife have four children, two boys and two girls.

His military career includes an enlistment in the US Army between 1954 and 1956, and a later enlistment in the US Air Force between 1957 and 1975. He has had several postings including an assignment to Germany during the Army Occupation of Germany. This entitled him to his VFW membership.

Carl originally was a member of Post 137 from 1972 to 2012. He transferred to Post 3979 in 2016 at the request of and sponsorship of Mrs. Lill Lavoy. In 2016, he was elected in 2016 as post Junior Vice-Commander and holds that position to this day. He received appointments by the VFW National Commander as the National Deputy Chief of Staff



in 2019 and just recently has been appointed as the National Aide-De-Camp for 2024-2025.

Carl spends a lot of his time assisting the veterans that live at the Silver Bay Veterans Home. He spends his free time organizing the weekly senior dances here at Post 3979. He insists that all the dances end with the singing of "God Bless America" and one song from a country music style hymnal. Carl volunteers with many other post activities as well. They are just too numerous to list them all.

## Randall Post 9073 Hosts MVPA Convoy

by Melissa Medbery, Commander Post 9073

On Friday, October 4, Curtis-Olson Post 9073 in Randall hosted a lunch for the Military Vehicle Preservation Association (MVPA) convoy as it conducted its eighth transcontinental convoy Oct. 1-31. The convoy retraced the historic 1918 Jefferson Highway route from the Canada-Minnesota border to New Orleans, Louisiana. The 30 day, 2500 mile long convoy was made up of 35 restored military vehicles.

The MVPA exists to promote, preserve, restore, share, and enjoy historic military transport with other enthusiasts and the general public.

Post 9073 provided a free meal of brats, burgers, salads, cowboy beans and dessert to all the members in the convoy. The event was open to the surrounding communities, and

we had a great turn out! The convoy was able to drive past the elementary school in Randall, where the children stood outside holding American flags and waving.




**Veterans  
Crisis Line**  
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Bruce Olson, a former Marine, carries the Certified Military Advisor designation, providing dedicated support for both military and non-military members and their families.



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# Notice to All MN VFW Members

If you enjoy having access to all things VFW especially the National VFW magazine, then you MUST have a current email address on file. This can be your own email address or that of a trusted family member.

For the years 2024 and 2025, the VFW Magazine will be printed and mailed for the months of January, April, August and October. The remaining months will only be available digitally. Notices/reminders will be sent out from the VFW by email informing you when digital editions are available. Starting

in 2026, the VFW Magazine will be 100% digital editions.

If you are a member of a VFW post, your post quartermaster can go to [www.vfw.org](http://www.vfw.org), log in, go to OMS and add or update your email address.

If you are an At-Large member of the MN VFW, contact State Quartermaster Barry Henriksen at [quartermaster@vfwmn.us](mailto:quartermaster@vfwmn.us) or by phone at 651-291-1757.

If you have any questions regarding this article, they may be directed to MN VFW Staff at 651-291-1757.

## Poppy Days 2025



Order Now!! There is still time to place your post's poppy order for 2025.

Poppy days are:  
**May 16-17, 2025**



**Veterans Linkage Line™**  
 your link to experts

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### AD rates for the Oversea'r

The Gopher Oversea'r is the only way to reach 100% of this Departments membership. It is the official newspaper of the Department of Minnesota Veterans of Foreign Wars. We publish our paper three times a year to nearly thirty thousand Veterans in Minnesota. Our paper is four columns wide and fifteen inches deep/tall. Please see rate chart below:

	Column Width	Column Depth/Height in Inches				
		one	two	three	four	five
1 column	2 1/4 "	\$40	\$80	\$120	\$160	\$200
2 column	4 3/4 "	\$80	\$160	\$240	\$320	\$400
3 column	7 1/2 "	\$120	\$240	\$360	\$480	\$600
4 column	10"	\$160	\$320	\$480	\$640	\$800

#### How To Provide Us With Your Ad

The Gopher Oversea'r is published electronically on our computers in-house. Our editor imports your electronic file directly into the newspaper. We prefer you to send all ads in TIFF or PDF format.

All necessary font and graphic files relating to the ad must be included with your file. Image resolution needs to be no less than 300 dots per inch (dpi). PDF files, please embed complete fonts (not subsets) and graphics. Please do not enable any password protection or security block when creating a PDF. Convert all RGB or CMYK color to a Grayscale format unless otherwise agreed on.


All ads must be "Camera Ready". If they are not you will be charged an additional forty dollars.

\*\*Before you send us any money be sure to talk to the Editor and make sure space is available and your Ad meets the requirements above\*\*

The Deadlines for Ads in this years Papers are:

March 15, 2025\* July 15, 2025\* November 15, 2025\*

\*All dates are subject to change



**MINNESOTA VFW CHARITABLE ASSOCIATION**

Please send more information about the MN VFW Charitable Association, its purpose and Programs.

Please accept my Tax Deductible Donation of: \$10 \$25 \$50 \$100 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Would you like to be an ANNUAL Donor? \_\_\_\_\_ (Yes or No)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

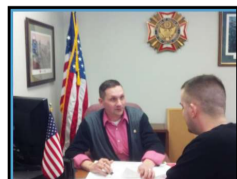
Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Earmark for one of the following: \_\_\_\_\_ General Un-designated

\_\_\_\_\_ VFW Outdoor Fund \_\_\_\_\_ Veterans Service \_\_\_\_\_ VFW Programs

The Veterans of Foreign Wars has been 'fighting' for Veterans since 1899. We have worked endlessly to gain the Benefits and Entitlements that Our Veterans deserve. The members of the VFW have placed their 'bodies and minds' between the enemies of this Great Nation to preserve the American way and the FREEDOM of not only the United States, but other nations as well.

With that said, the MN VFW Charitable Association is asking that you remember this Sacrifice through your Gift Giving and Donations.



There are a number of ways that you can Preserve the Memory and the Sacrifices of our Veterans for now and the future:

Using the form attached, Donate to the VFW Charitable Association.

\* Establish a monthly or annual deduction to the MN VFW Charitable Association from your checking account or credit card.

## The MNVFW Charitable Association Raffle Calendar is Now Available



This Calendar features photos of various National Monuments and Memorials Honoring the different branches of our Military

They sell for only \$20 each and your Post or Auxiliary will receive \$5 back for each Calendar sold...

Order your Calendars now- Email: [mnvfwcharitable@gmail.com](mailto:mnvfwcharitable@gmail.com) or Call 651-291-1757

To purchase a copy for yourself, contact your nearest VFW Post

- \* Designate your Donation to a Charitable Trust in the name of the MN VFW Charitable Association.
- \* Establish a Charitable Gift Annuity to the MN VFW Charitable Association.
- \* Simply make a donation to the MN VFW Charitable Association.
- \* Donate to the VFW Outdoor Fund.
- \* Donate through the MN VFW Charitable Association Annual Raffle Calendar.

We certainly Appreciate the Consideration

of the MN VFW Charitable Association in your Gift Giving Plans. Your Donation will ensure the future of the Programs of the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

For more information, please contact the Treasurer of the MN VFW Charitable Association at 651-291-1757 or email us at [mnvfwcharitable@gmail.com](mailto:mnvfwcharitable@gmail.com).

Letters and Donations can be sent to: MN VFW Charitable Association, Rice Street Station, PO Box 17146, St. Paul, MN 55117