

GOPHER OVERSEA'R

Volume 80, NO. 2

Official Publication of the Veterans of Foreign Wars - Department of Minnesota Celebrating 105 Years 1921-2026

June 2026 - September 2026

Fall Conference September 18-20, 2026

By Cheryl Burton, Department Office Manager

The 2026 Annual Fall Conference will be held at Willmar Convention Center, Willmar, MN from September 18-20, 2026.

This fall, join fellow VFW and Auxiliary members at the Willmar Convention Center for an exciting opportunity to learn, connect, and grow. Explore many of the VFW's outstanding programs, share ideas with members from across the state, and enjoy the camaraderie found in the welcoming hospitality rooms. The Fall Conference is known as the most educational event of the year and offers something valuable for every member. Don't miss this opportunity to strengthen your knowledge, expand your network, and celebrate all that makes the VFW great.

Officers Training (OTI) will be held on Saturday, September 19th from 8:00 am to 3:00 pm. The entire OTI class schedule takes place in one room with everyone attending

the same sessions. No more missed information due to overlapping classes. Everyone gets the same content at the same time. Same goes for the Auxiliary. The Auxiliary Training (ATS) goes from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm.

REGISTRATION

Registration for the Fall Conference will begin on Friday from Noon to 4 pm and Saturday from 7:00 am to Noon in the WCC Atrium. Reminder, there is NO preregistration. For OTI Registration, pay at the door \$10/person to receive a Flash drive with both Commander and Quartermaster materials. Everybody is welcome, OTI is not just for Commanders and Quartermasters. Don't forget to pick up your "Casual Banquet Event" tickets at the registration table, no assigned seating for this Fall Conference except a reserved table on the floor for the State Commander

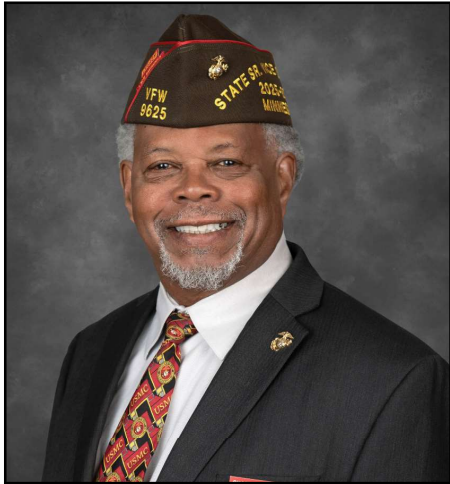
and for those posts who purchase tables.

Schools of Instruction and Seminars

VFW and Auxiliary members can look forward to exciting and informative sessions that showcase the many outstanding programs of our organization. Through engaging schools of instruction and seminars, attendees will gain valuable knowledge, fresh ideas, and practical skills to bring back to their Posts and Auxiliaries. Be sure to attend the Membership sessions, as several program updates and changes will be introduced.

All Commanders, Presidents, Quartermasters, Treasurers, Chairmen, and Members are strongly encouraged to attend as many of these sessions as possible. Your participation is vital to the success of

Fall Conf. - Cont. on Page 7



**2026-2027
State Commander
Charles Hawkins Sr.**

Member of
VFW Post 9625
Coon Rapids, MN

Comrades, Sisters and Brothers.

I would like to thank you all for your confidence and trust in me for this opportunity to lead our great organization.

The Veterans of Foreign War has become a home and life for me! I live at Post 9652 Coon Rapids, MN. I have lived there for 35 years. I was mentored by the old guard members and auxiliary members. I listened to their advice. They allowed me to make choices of my own. Today we have and need young members to mentor. We must allow them to make

Legislative Rep. Goes to Washington

By Barry Henriksen, Department National & State Legislative Chairperson



Barry Henriksen, Dept. National Legislative Chair meets with Representative Brad Finstad, MN 1st Congressional District, to discuss the Take Care of America's Veterans Act (HR9237)

On Wednesday, July 8th the VFW National Legislative Team put out an urgent request for leadership from across the country to come to Washington DC to rally in opposition of HR9237 the Take Care of Americas Veterans Act. Less than a week later I was in Washington DC meeting with the Minnesota Congressional Delegation to urge them to vote no on the legislation.

While the VFW supports many of the programs in the bill, including the Major Richard Star Act, we oppose the funding mechanism. Section 108 of the bill would reduce benefits for future disability claims. We cannot support helping one group

Veterans Act - Cont. on Page 6



Barry Henriksen, Dept. National Legislative Chair and Representative Betty McCollum, MN 4th Congressional District, discussing the Take Care of America's Veterans Act (HR9237)



State VFW Commander Charles Hawkins Sr. and VFW Nat'l Home 2026 Poppy Girl Noelani

COMMANDER - Cont. on Page 6

Department of Minnesota, VFW
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Saint Paul, MN 55155

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Save The Date!!

Fall Conference
September 18-20, 2026
Willmar Conference Center
Willmar, MN

Big Ten Conference
October 15-17, 2026
Kalamazoo, MI

Midwinter Conference
January 22-24, 2027
Marriott Northwest
Brooklyn Park, MN

VFW State Hockey Tournaments
Boys Bantam AA, A and Girls U15A
January 29-31, 2027
Moorhead, MN

Upcoming VFW Events

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

Top News

MN Officers Receive All-American Honors

CONGRATULATIONS!

2025-2026 All-American District Commanders: 2nd Dist. Cheryl Burton
3rd Dist. Merle Rabenberg
4th Dist. Sean Gustafson
6th Dist. Donald Lohse
7th Dist. Dennis Maddox

2025-2026 All-American Post Commander honorees from Minnesota:

- Jerry Ludwig, Redwood Falls Post 2553, a Top 15 Post in its Division
- Dr. James Tuorila, St. Cloud Granite Post 428
- Rick Godfrey, Crystal Post 494
- Mark Gelhar, Hastings Post 1210
- Gary Carlberg, White Bear Lake Post 1782
- Billy Luetkahans, Chaska Post 1791
- Tony Johnson, Zumbro Falls Post 1802
- Duane Frank, Redwood Falls Post 2553
- Robert Newman, Wilmont Post 2603
- Tim Kent, Isanti Post 2735
- Jarrold McReynolds, Brooklyn Park Post 3915
- David David, Pine City Post 4258
- Patrick Zenk, Northfield Post 4393
- Bobby Johnson, Cannon Falls Post 4452
- David Fladhammer, Montgomery Post 5340
- Erik Monson, Elk River-Rogers Post 5518
- Robert Gunderson, Burnsville Post 5833
- Jake Roach, Prior Lake Post 6208
- Jason Hanson, Sauk Rapids Post 6992
- Mark Schutta, Roseville Post 7555
- Cathy Osterbauer, Monticello Post 8731
- Cottage Grove Post 8752
- Melissa Medberry, Randall Post 9073
- Dana Thompson, Winsted Post 9232
- James Chambers, Rosemount Post 9433
- Nathan Morgan, Coon Rapids Post 9625

The Veterans of Foreign Wars All-American Program acknowledges exceptional leadership in helping their level achieve growth in membership and outstanding work in key VFW scholarship programs.

All-American Criteria

All-American District Criteria All Districts that have met the following criteria as of June 30, 2027 will be named as All-American Districts:	
- Must exceed prior year’s membership based on June 30, 2026 totals (100% +1). - Must finish in the top 20 Districts in their division based on membership percentage as of June 30, 2027. - Must make a restricted donation, minimum of \$100, to National in support of DPAA. - Must have a District election report submitted and be in good standing. - Must meet the following Program Participation Criteria by January 31, 2027:	- Voice of Democracy - minimum of one entry advanced to Department judging - Patriot’s Pen - minimum of one entry advanced to Department judging - National Citizenship Education Teachers Award - one entry advanced to Department judging. - Entries must be submitted via Programs Dashboard by January 31, 2027.
All-American District Awards All Districts that meet the listed criteria will receive an All-American District Streamer, an All-American District Commander Citation, recognition in the VFW magazine.	
In addition, the top ten Districts in each membership division will receive: - All-American District Cmdr’s Cap - All-American District Cmdr’s Badge - All-American District Cmdr’s Lapel Pin These awards for the top 10 District	Commanders will be presented on stage at the 128th National Convention. The top <i>two</i> District commanders in each division will receive a \$1,000 award to recognize their leadership. Commanders must attend the 128th National Convention in order to receive this award.
All-American Post Criteria All Posts who have met the following criteria as of June 30, 2027 will be named as All-American Posts:	
- Must meet the Divisional Membership Quota. - At least 80% retention of prior year Annual members. - Must have a Post election report submitted and be in good standing. - Must meet the following Program Participation Criteria by Jan. 31, 2027: - Voice of Democracy - minimum of one entry advanced to District judging. - Patriot’s Pen - minimum of one entry advanced to District judging. - National Citizenship Education Teachers Award - must advance a teacher to Dist. - National Veterans Service Programs - must donate \$125 via Programs Dashboard link. - Must make a restricted donation, minimum \$75, to National in support of DPAA.	- Must meet the following Community Service Requirements: - Participation in the VFW Day of Service event held during the month of May and registered at vfwdayofservice.org no later than June 1. This event may be counted for a Post’s quarterly community service activity. - A Post must submit a community service report quarterly to their department for submission to the All-American Dashboard. The quarters are July-Sept., Oct.-Dec., Jan-Mar, and Apr.-June. - A Post must show an increase in total Community Service of at least 5% from the previous year. - Must purchase a minimum of 500 Buddy Poppies.
All-American Post Awards All Posts that meet the listed criteria will receive: An All-American Post Streamer, a Post Home Citation, and will be recognized in the VFW magazine. In addition, the top 20 Posts in each membership division will receive:	
- All-American Post Cmdr’s Citation - All-American Post Cmdr’s Cap - All-American Post Cmdr’s Badge. - All-American Post Cmdr’s lapel pin. These awards for the top 20 Posts will be presented on stage at the 128th National Convention. Department Quartermasters will be directed to collect and distribute awards for All-American Posts not in attendance.	The top five Post Commanders in each division will receive a \$1,000 award to recognize their leadership. Commanders must attend the 128th VFW National Convention in order to receive this award.

Minnesota VFW Office Locations

Department Headquarters:

Barry Henriksen, Adjutant/QM
B5 Veterans Service Building
20 West 12th Street
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
1 Federal Drive
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
1 Veterans Drive- Room 4G- 109E
Phone: (612) 725-4448

GOPHER OVERSEAS'R

Department of Minnesota, VFW, Editor
Rice Street Station, P.O. Box 17146, Saint Paul, MN 55117
Phone:(651)291-1757 - Fax:(651)291-2753
Email: Oversear@vfwmn.us - Webpage: www.vfwmn.org

Publications Committee:
Charles Hawkins, Sr. Commander; Mary Thompson. Sr. Vice Cmdr.
Todd Roberts, Jr. Vice Cmdr.; Jarrod McReynolds, Judge Advocate,
Ken Schroepfer, editor

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Upcoming deadlines are July 15, November 15, and March 15

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

Please Note the below address change: (Please Print)

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State and Zip: _____

Post Number: _____

2026-2027 Department Officers

Senior Vice Commander

Mary Thompson.



Thank you for the confidence you've placed in me. I am truly honored, and I promise to give this job everything I've got.

If you've talked with me for more than five minutes, you've probably figured out that I believe our greatest strength isn't our buildings, our programs, or even our numbers. It's our people. It's the member who quietly fixes things around the Post and never asks for recognition. It's the Quartermaster who somehow keeps everything running. It's Auxiliary members working side by side with our VFW members doing whatever needs to be done. It's the veteran who shows up because another veteran needed a friend that day. Those are the people who make

the VFW what it is. My job this year is pretty simple: support our Department Commander, support our Districts, support our Posts, and help wherever I can. If I visit your Post this year, I'm coming because I want to get to know you. I want to hear what's working, what's challenging you, and what we can do at the Department level to better support your Post. Every community is different, every Post has its own personality, and everyone has something to teach the rest of us. One thing I hope we never lose sight of is why we're here. We all answered the call to serve once. The VFW gives us the chance to keep answering that

Sr. Vice Cmdr. - Cont. on Page 6

Junior Vice Commander

Todd Roberts



Greetings, to my fellow Comrades and Auxiliary,

I am very excited and humbled to be writing to you as your Department Jr. Vice Commander and look forward to working with all of you this year.

I know you hear this all the time, but now is the time to start on membership. We must keep pushing to make sure we reach as many of our eligible veterans as possible.

Membership is the lifeblood of our organization, and every conversation matters. Whether it is reaching out to a veteran in your community, following up with a former member, or simply sharing what the VFW continues to do for veterans and their families, each

effort helps strengthen our Posts, our Districts, and our Department. If we start early, stay consistent, and work together, I know we can build the momentum needed for a successful year.

I am asking each Post, District, and member to make membership a priority starting today. Do not wait for someone else to make the first call, send the first message, or invite the next eligible veteran to join us. Set a goal, make a plan, and take action now. Together, we can grow our organization, strengthen our voice, and ensure that every veteran who has earned a place among us knows they are welcome in the VFW.

I will be attending many District

Jr. Vice Cmdr. - Cont. on Page 6

Adjutant/ Quartermaster

Barry Henriksen



I'm looking forward to seeing a full room at the Fall Conference Officers Training Institute (OTI) in Willmar September 18-20. This is our second year of doing OTI at the Fall Conference. We had a lot of positive feedback from last year. Once again, we will do it all together. No need to pick where you should be. In the morning we will do one-hour sessions on leadership and membership first thing in the morning. That will be followed by Quartermaster/Adjutant/Dashboard for hour two. Inspections and Commanders Project round up

the morning. In the afternoon we will do 15-minute segments on all our key programs. VOD/Patriots Pen/Community Service/Poppies/Legislative/Safety/Scouting/Teacher. For \$10 you get all the training and a flash drive with all the information! It will help you have a successful year in whatever role you occupy at your post of district.

Please register for the Fall Conference as soon as you can. Get your hotel room and your banquet

ADJ/QM - Cont. on Page 6

Judge Advocate

Jarrold McReynolds



I would like to sincerely thank the members of the Department of Minnesota VFW for the confidence and trust you have placed in me by electing me as your Department Judge Advocate. It is a privilege and an honor to serve this great organization, and I am grateful for the opportunity to give back to the VFW that has given so much to me.

As I begin this new role, my commitment is simple: I want to be a resource for every Post, every District, the Council of Administration, our Department officers and staff, and

every member who has questions or needs assistance. The Office of Judge Advocate is about more than bylaws and policies—it is about helping our organization operate effectively, consistently, and in a way that allows us to better serve Veterans, their families, and our communities.

Whether you have questions about bylaws, procedures, governance, or simply need another perspective on an issue facing your Post or District, I encourage you to reach out. If I don't

JUDGE - Cont. on Page 12

2026-2027 Minnesota VFW Council of Administration

2026-2027 MN VFW Auxiliary Council of Administration

Officer	Home City	Home Post
Commander Charles Hawkins Sr.	Coon Rapids	Post #9625
Sr. Vice Commander Mary Thompson	Aurora	Post #8144
Jr. Vice Commander Todd Roberts	Monticello	Post #8731
Quartermaster Barry Henriksen	White Bear Lake	Post #1782
Adjutant Barry Henriksen	White Bear Lake	Post #1782
Judge Advocate Jarrold McReynolds	Brooklyn Park	Post #3915
Surgeon Dr. James Tuorila	St. Cloud	Post #428
Chaplain Scott Hansen	Brooklyn Park	Post #3915
Chief of Staff Dale Hooegeveen	Carver	Post #1791
Member at Large Barry Henriksen	White Bear Lake	Post #1782
Chief Inspector David Staehlin	Cottage Grove	Post #8752
Past Commander Ed Keogh	Montgomery	Post #5340
Officer of the Day Donald Heuer	Litchfield	Post #9433
Nat'l Council Mbr. Dale Hooegeveen	Carver	Post #1791
MOC Grand Cmdr. Martin Adams	Minnetonka	Post #425
1st District Cmdr. Troy Helget	Racine	Post #8980
2nd District Cmdr. David Thompson	Prior Lake	Post #6208
3rd District Cmdr. Jerry Ludwig	Redwood Falls	Post #2553
4th District Cmdr. Gary Carlberg	White Bear Lake	Post #1782
5th District Cmdr. Lee Christopherson	Osakis	Post #7902
6th District Cmdr. Jason Oxley	Sartell	Post #6992
7th District Cmdr. Kyle Morton	Anoka	Post #9625
8th District Cmdr. Charles Cossette	Makinen	Post #8144
9th District Cmdr. Curtis Anderson	Bemidji	Post #1260

Officer	Home City	Home Aux
President Jean Keogh	Montgomery	Aux #5340
Sr. Vice President Tammy Shell	Lake City	Aux #8729
Jr. Vice President Ron Vaughn	Monticello	Aux #8731
Secretary/Treasurer Laurie Dale	St. Paul	Aux #141
Chaplain Deb Courts-Brown	White Bear Lake	Aux #1782
Conductor Nanci Bohmer	Circle Pines	Aux #246
Guard Jen Ray Sapienza	Minneapolis	Aux #246
Chief of Staff Karen England	Lake City	Aux #8729
1st District President Kris Kohn	Spring Valley	Aux #4114
2nd District President Theresa Hooegeveen	Chaska	Aux #1791
3rd District President Carolyn Penning	Wilmont	Aux #2603
4th District President Deb Courts-Brown	White Bear Lake	Aux #1782
5th District President Cindi Nelson	Alexandria	Aux #936
6th District President Pam Vaughn	Monticello	Aux #8731
7th District President Dana Slimmer	Spring Lake Park	Aux #6587
8th District President Cindy Slater	Cloquet	Aux #3979
9th District President Brianna Smith	Thief River Falls	Aux #2793
Nat'l District Council Sonia Tatge	Kenyon	Aux #141
Past Department Presidents on Council:		
PDP Sonia Tatge	Kenyon	Aux #141
PDP Dave Scofield	Litchfield	Aux #2818
PDP Karen England	Lake City	Aux #8729
PDP Julie Stoehr	Cook	Aux #1757

Minnesota Auxiliary News

STATE PRESIDENT VFW Auxiliary



Jean Keogh

Member of
VFW Post 5340 Auxiliary
Montgomery, MN



Welcome to the new VFW Auxiliary year. I am very honored to be your Department President.

Special thanks to all Auxiliaries and Districts for your part in our Department Auxiliary ending the 2025-2026 membership year at 99.93% paid. You went above and beyond to recruit and retain members of this great Veterans service organization. Together, you signed 218 new life members, 9 life rejoins, 90 new annuals, and 8 annual rejoins. Unfortunately, 553 members were deceased. Our prior total was 16,706 and we closed the Auxiliary year with 16,141 current members and 16,494 paid members.

Now, we are in the new membership year. Please start early to reach our 2026-2027 goal of 101% by June 30, 2027. Time flies, do not delay. Carry an application and/or the QR code with you everywhere – as you travel, shop, vacation, visit relatives and friends. Ask every person you encounter first, if they are a veteran, and then if they are eligible for the Auxiliary. Do not just give them an application and hope they sign up. Follow up in a few days and

offer assistance. Be ready to recruit not only for the Auxiliary, but for the VFW and the Riders too. By working together to grow our numbers we are "Partners in Success"

Remember that it is highly encouraged all Auxiliaries have representation at District meetings. Districts are the link between Auxiliaries and the Department. They are the place to keep current on information regarding National, State, and District programs and projects, events, and legislative issues. An bonus for attending is the new friendships you will make and the comradery you will enjoy.

All Auxiliaries MUST complete at least one project, activity, or donation that benefits veterans between now and April 30. Please be sure to send me a quick email or text about your event.

I look forward to a great year together and to meeting you and your Post as I travel around the state. If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions, please contact me at jkeogh234@gmail.com or call/text 952.334.2172.

National District Council

By Sonia Tatge, Member Area E

During the next few days, I will be preparing to attend the National VFW/Auxiliary National Convention in Reno, Nevada. Looking at the schedule, all members attending will be very busy. Besides the election of new National Auxiliary officers, a patriotic rally, luncheons to honor 45+ members and Council of Administration members, the COA meets the day after convention on Thursday, July 30, 2026, for our business meeting.

Some of the agenda items include investment reports for the 3rd Quarter, Reading of the Minutes from the last meeting in February, and other Official Communications. We also look forward to visits from the VFW Officers who will speak to us about their goals and programs for the new year.

Of course, the Council does focus on the Budget for the 2025-2026 Fiscal Year and the Proposed

Budget for the 2026-2027 Fiscal Year. Expenses for Convention, National Headquarters, Insurance, Salaries for National Officers, Program Award costs, and budget for the 2027 Convention in Milwaukee.

Another focus is to approve any Standing Rules that have been recommended for change. By looking at the investments for the last quarter we will be able to see the changes--gains and losses. National Home has a proposal for the Council to hear and finally, we will be discussing the Legacy Life VFW Auxiliary Program. Your comments will be shared with the Council.

This is just part of the work ahead for the Council of Administration at the National Convention in Reno, Nevada. Following the Convention, I will share the highlights and share many of the decisions made that could affect all of our Auxiliaries.

Treasurer/Secretary Chair

By Laurie Dale, Treasurer/Secretary MN VFW Auxiliary

Hello to all.

It is not necessary to send a copy of your bond to the Department Office if you are bonding through the National Organization. If you want to use an outside company is it necessary for you to send a copy of the proposed policy to the Department Office so that it can be reviewed and approved. Bonds purchased from a source other than National require Council approval. Bonds must be purchased in the amount of 1.25 times the amount of your auxiliary assets. You can read more about Bonds in Section 814.E of the VFW Auxiliary National Bylaws (yes, it's under Trustees).

Bonds must be purchased no later than August 31, 2026.

990N e-postcards are due by November 15. A copy of your acceptance is needed in the Department VFW Auxiliary HQ Office. If your auxiliary files a tax return, you do not need to do the 990N, but we need a copy of your return on file in place of the 990N. **YOU DO NOT HAVE TO PAY ANYTHING TO FILE THE 990N ONLINE!** If you are trying to complete the 990N e-postcard online and someone is trying to charge you a fee to do it.... you are on the wrong website! Please let us help you if you need it.

The Department of MN VFW General Orders are always available on the MN VFW Auxiliary website. You can go to www.vfvauxmn.org in the Login Section go to Members

Only. The first time you login you will use your Member ID Number and then your last name as your password, you can then change the password to anything you wish. PLEASE do not confuse the MN VFW Auxiliary website with the National VFW Auxiliary website/MALTA. Minnesota specific information is not available on MALTA and your passwords are not interchangeable unless you change them to align.

Auxiliary Treasurers should be processing dues reminders on MALTA now and getting those out to the Annual Unpaid Members. Once those dues come in, please process them yourself on MALTA as this is the quickest and safest way to assure that all dues are processed. We cannot guarantee items mailed into our office will be received in a timely manner. If your Treasurer is tracking our progress of processing dues on MALTA, they can process them on MALTA right from the comfort of their own home or office. Do it yourself and save the check writing and the wait for the mail.

Our Department Office is open Monday – Thursday from 8 AM – 4 PM. Call us at 651-291-1759 or email us at treasurer@vfwamn.org or secretary@vfwamn.org we ask that you not use our personal emails or personal phone numbers or Facebook/Facebook Messenger to reach us for auxiliary business.

MN Auxiliary Office Hours

Monday - Thursday 8am - 4pm

Phone: (651) 291-1759

email: treasurer@vfwamn.org or secretary@vfwamn.org

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

Staff will not be used for Auxiliary business.

OFFICERS DUES

Must be paid by December 31

Claims and Service Office Report

By Jon Gohn, Claims Director

VFW Defends Tradition of Political Satire

July 2, 2026

WASHINGTON – The Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) today reaffirmed its opposition to Section 108 of the proposed Take Care of America's Veterans Act and defended its longstanding tradition of using political satire to advocate for veterans.

"For more than 125 years, the VFW has been a fearless advocate for veterans, speaking plainly when elected officials propose policies that threaten the benefits generations of service members have earned through sacrifice," said VFW National Commander Carol Whitmore. "Our opposition to Section 108 reflects that longstanding commitment. Veterans' benefits are not funding sources or bargaining chips for Congress while they scrounge to score political points."

While the VFW supports many of the bill's underlying goals, it strongly opposes Section 108 because it would reduce future veterans' disability compensation to pay for other veterans' programs. Disability compensation is not a government spending program to be trimmed when convenient. It is earned compensation for injuries and illnesses incurred through military service. Veterans should never be asked to finance new initiatives with benefits they earned through their sacrifice.

The VFW also opposes using projected reductions in Title 38 disability compensation to finance separate Title 10 military retirement obligations. The organization continues to support passage of a clean and complete Major Richard Star Act, but believes Congress should fulfill that obligation without reducing earned disability benefits for current or future veterans.

Since its introduction in the fall of 2025, the firing squad illustration has become a recognizable symbol of the VFW's ongoing Honor The Contract campaign. It is political satire that depicts bureaucrats and their pundits figuratively taking aim at veterans by proposing cuts to their earned disability benefits in order to save money or fund other initiatives. Despite House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Chairman Mike Bost's unprecedented and unacceptable accusations in a recent statement, the image is not a depiction of violence. It is a symbolic representation of the consequences veterans face when Congress targets the benefits they earned through their service. It is also protected First Amendment speech. Political cartoons, symbolism, satire and hyperbole have been part of American public discourse since the founding of our Nation. They remain among the most recognized forms of protected political expression because they communicate ideas through symbolism rather than literal depiction. Americans are free to disagree with the VFW's message, but disagreement with protected political expression does not transform satire into violence. Even Chairman Bost at one

time agreed with this premise:

"Free speech is foundational to democracy and the American way of life. That's why service members and veterans have fought and died for it for 245 years," said Bost on October 13, 2021, during opening remarks of a committee hearing on violent extremism. "Free speech must be protected. I will oppose any effort to restrict it. It is every veteran's right to have an opinion – even one I find radical."

The political illustration is also rooted in the VFW's own history. The use of satirical political cartoons was commonplace in early 20th century magazines, and the VFW regularly published works of illustrators' satire to convey the unjust ways America's veterans were being treated by the government. The current artwork is a modern interpretation of illustrations published in the VFW's Foreign Service magazine in 1933 and again in VFW magazine in 1956. Sadly, what veterans were experiencing decades ago is the same thing occurring today, which is why the illustration in question remains so relevant.

The VFW has consistently used this imagery in official advocacy before Congress and in public communications. The illustration appeared prominently in the organization's October 2025 response to a series of Washington Post articles that characterized veterans' disability benefits as loopholes to exploit. VFW Washington Office Executive Director Ryan Gallucci presented the historic and modern illustrations during his testimony before the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs last October. Whitmore, along with VFW members in attendance, wore buttons displaying the illustration during her testimony before a Joint Congressional Veterans' Affairs committee this past March.

"The VFW has never apologized for forcefully defending veterans and we are not about to start now," said Whitmore. "Political cartoons have long been part of American public discourse because they communicate difficult truths in memorable ways. When bureaucrats take aim at veterans' earned disability benefits, we will continue to use every tool available to ensure veterans' voices are heard."

The VFW urges Congress to remove Section 108 from the Take Care of America's Veterans Act, preserve the integrity of the disability rating system and pass veterans' priorities without reducing earned disability compensation. America's obligation to disabled veterans is not negotiable and should never be treated as a source of savings to pay for other legislation.

The VFW remains committed to working with lawmakers who seek to improve care and benefits for veterans. However, the organization will continue to oppose any proposal that weakens the commitments America has made to those who answered the nation's call.

Tell Congress to Vote NO on Reducing Future Benefits

June 15, 2026

The Take Care of America's Veterans Act (TACAVA) (HR9237, S.4744) is advancing through Congress, and now is the time to make your voice heard.

The VFW proudly supports many of its provisions, including the Major Richard Star Act, strengthening mental health protections for veterans, and expanding support for surviving families. These are important priorities that deserve the support of Congress.

What we cannot accept is asking one generation of veterans to pay for another.

The Take Care of America's Veterans Act would offset the cost of these important provisions by reducing future veterans' disability compensation for tinnitus and sleep apnea through changes to VA's Schedule for Rating Disabilities. While current disability ratings would be protected, future veterans with service-connected disabilities could receive less compensation than they otherwise would have under current law.

America's obligation to those who serve is a debt owed by our nation,

it is not a debt that should be paid by other veterans. The cost of caring for veterans should be paid through the federal government, not by reducing the earned disability compensation of future generations who answered the call to serve, including many who are serving in harm's way right now.

This week, VFW leadership, VFW staff, VFW National Legislative Committee members, VFW members, and advocates from across the country are meeting with members of Congress and their staffers on Capitol Hill to urge them to reject these disability compensation offsets. You can strengthen those efforts by making your voice heard today.

Take Action Now! Contact your congressional representatives and urge them to VOTE NO on the Take Care of America's Veterans Act.

Veterans kept their promise to America. Congress must keep its promise to veterans.

To contact your elected officials, go to www.vfw.org, login, scroll down to "How To Get Involved" and click on "Contact your Elected Officials."

VFW Encouraged As TCAVA Vote Postponed

June 16, 2026

VFW National Commander Carol Whitmore and staff respond to today's event.

WASHINGTON – We stopped Congress from taking a dangerous step today. No matter how people try to spin it, Congress shouldn't open Pandora's Box on arbitrarily reducing disability ratings. It's never been done before. We're not about to let it start.

I know there are provisions in this bill that everyone wants to get done. Major Richard Star Act needs to pass. But it needs to pass CLEAN. And it certainly cannot be passed by taking away from future veterans!!!

TCAVA Vote Response For survivors, who wanted this to be the path to fix your injustices, the fight is not over! But again, fixing these problems cannot come at the expense of those currently in harm's way.

To our troops serving overseas right now. We heard you LOUD AND CLEAR! You told the VFW to keep fighting for YOU. I hope you can see that we are fighting and will continue to stand up for our war fighters.

To the members of the VFW: Thank you. You showed up when it mattered most. The VFW was threatened and coerced to try to support a dangerous policy that would harm our community. YOU said NO!

YOU sent more than 60,000 messages to Congress in just a couple weeks; YOU met with your legislators face-to-face; and most importantly: YOU came to Washington, D.C., on a moment's notice – from more than 30 states!!! To tell Congress DO NOT CUT FUTURE BENEFITS!

There have been a lot of distractions in our work to protect veterans' benefits. VFW was accused of "inciting violence" over our Honor the Contract imagery. A

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

We'll Help with YOUR Veteran Benefits

Message From Your National Council Member

By Dale Hoogeveen,
National Council Member

What a year! Congratulations to Past Department Commander Keogh for an outstanding year that saw six of our districts and 31 of our posts achieve All-American status. Congratulations to those commanders and every comrade who contributed to the mission! Just as quickly as one year ends, the next begins under the leadership of Department Commander Charles Hawkins, Sr. The requirements for the All-American program have changed for 2026-27 – don't let that be a deterrent to continuing to demonstrate why the Department of Minnesota has earned a reputation for excellence. And by the time you're reading this, the 127th National Convention will have concluded with the election of a new Commander in Chief. I look forward to the successes our posts, districts, and department will enjoy in the year ahead!

We continue to struggle to pass the Major Richard Star Act. The latest roadblock was thrown by House Veteran' Affairs Committee Chairman Mike Bost (R-Illinois) and Congressman Jack Bergman (R-Michigan) with the introduction of The Take Care of America's Veterans Act (TACAVA), a bill that will reduce future veterans' disability compensation for tinnitus and sleep apnea. Current disability ratings would be protected but the VFW also works to protect the interests of our active and reserve forces, many of whom would become the bill-payers for other provisions of TACAVA. We cannot allow that to happen. If you have not signed up for the Action Corps Alert, I implore you to do so and to respond when requested. Advocacy is one of our most important missions – to protect the earned benefits for our veteran community, to ensure future veterans are adequately compensated for the harm suffered while in service to our nation and to ensure currently serving forces are trained, equipped and cared for.

As a result of the VFW's opposition to TACAVA, Representative Bost asked VA Secretary Doug Collins to review whether our conduct is consistent with our accreditation to represent veterans' claims. Feels like a not very transparent attempt to convince the VFW to capitulate to his legislation. Contact your elected officials to let them know this is unacceptable!

I am embarking on the fourth and final year of my term as National Council Member. It has been a rewarding and humbling experience serving with the motivated and dedicated leaders of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. I encourage anyone interested in this opportunity to compete for election.

Sr. Vice Cmdr. - Cont. from Page 3

call in a different way. Every veteran we help, every community event we support, every young person we mentor, and every voice we raise on behalf of veterans is a reminder that service doesn't have an expiration date.

Thank you for what you do every single day. Thank you for giving your time, your talents, and your heart to this organization. I am proud to serve beside you, and I'm looking forward to seeing you somewhere down the road.

Until then, keep taking care of each other.

Jr. Vice Cmdr. - Cont. from Page 3

and Post meetings, if you are looking for any ideas or advice for recruiting or retaining, please ask so we can discuss many items I have found to work well.

Thank you for everything you do for our veterans, our communities, and the VFW. I am confident that with dedication, teamwork, and a renewed focus on membership, we will have a strong and successful year. I look forward to working alongside each of you as we continue to serve, support, and strengthen our great organization.

ADJ/QM - Cont. from Page 3

ticket. And then bring the information from the Fall Conference back to your post.

During the leadership/membership training on Saturday morning we will recognize every All-American Post and District. We had 31 posts and 6 districts achieve All American. One post, Redwood County Post 2553 was first place in their division and was recognized at the National Convention in Reno. Make sure you congratulate them at the Fall Conference. We will present All-American certificates, and streamers that we receive from National at the Fall Conference. You will be able to purchase your All-American caps from the VFW store in August. You call National and give them your membership number so that they can make sure you qualify.

Our Conference/Convention advertising program was very successful. We are asking every post and district that sponsored our events with an ad to renew your ad. Details are in the General Orders. We did not raise the price. If your post did not do an ad, I encourage you to do one this year. It helps us keep prices down on OTI, and banquet tickets. It also helps with banquet tickets for the students and their families at Midwinter. And with your ad you can tell everyone the great things that your post is doing.

With the new year we start over again with community service on the Dashboard. Please enter your community service every month. We did a much better job this past year, but we are still under reporting. If you need help, call or email me at the office.

Let's get the year off to a great start! See you in Willmar at the Fall Conference.

COMMANDER - Cont. from Page 1

changes as needed. It can't be "well that's how we have always done it." Those days have come and gone. Let them Lead us to the next level!

I have mentioned the need for young members. We were all young once. We did things differently than our parents. We went to different events, had different interests and led different lives. In order to find younger members, perhaps we need to sit and talk with younger people and find out where their interests lie and where they go for enjoyment. Once we discover that, then we need to break out of our mold and escape our everyday habits. Go and visit younger people in their environment. Here we will find the younger veteran. Speak with them on their turf and in their terms. Once we find our commonality, we can more easily understand what they want and need from the VFW. At this point we can inform them what the VFW has to offer. How it can help them in their civilian life thru the camaraderie of fellow veterans.

Many of our posts and districts

Veterans Act - Cont. from Page 1

of veterans by taking benefits from another group.

VFW's advocacy on Capitol Hill July 14-16 mattered. After two days of 100 VFW and Auxiliary members from across the country visiting every Representative and Senators office, the legislation was pulled before the vote. This now gives the House and Senate the opportunity to write a better bill. One that does not take care of one set of veterans on the back of others. Congress should pass clean legislation without an offset.

Over the next several months Minnesota's US Representatives and Senators will be back in their districts and the state. Both Doc Tuorila and I have attended events in the past month where Congressional members have been. Doc Tuorila

achieved the goal of 101% in membership. Let's use that as the starting off point for the rest of the posts in the coming year. At district meetings, feature those posts that achieved the 101%. Ask them to tell others how they reached that goal. Let them mentor other the posts in their district. We can all reach 101% if we work together.

Enough about membership. Where do I come from and what do I stand for?

I'm a retired Marine with 20 years of active-duty service, 1 year, 11 months and 22 days in Vietnam. I was with the 1st Marine Division, I Corps up on the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) and other places. We all know how long we were down range!

During my time in the Marine Corps, I was a Squad Leader, Platoon Sergeant, Drill Instructor, and at times worked with 2nd Lieutenants, a Hand-to-Hand Combat Instructor and a Weapons Instructor.

More importantly, I am a family man. Proud of my family; wife, children and grandchildren.

went to Mankato to speak with Rep Brad Finstad in the 1st Congressional District. VA Secretary Collins was also at the event. I went to Richfield Post 5555 where Representative Omar was having a "Coffee with Veterans". Both Doc and I stressed the VFW's position in opposition of HR 9237.

You can help by attending events where your Congressional Representative is present. Know the VFW's legislative priorities. They are on the National VFW website. And, let me know if there is an event. Doc Tuorila or I will try to attend.

Doc Tuorila and I will be back in Washington DC in September to meet with our Representatives and Senators. We will give an update on where things stand at the Fall Conference in Willmar.

Convention Committee Report

By Scott Bill and the Convention Committee Team

Dear Comrades and Auxiliary Members, mark your calendars for these upcoming events:

- 2026 Fall Conference
September 18-20, 2026
Willmar, MN
Hotel Info, Banquet Tickets and tentative schedule are available on page 7 of this newspaper and at: vfwmn.org under "news".
- 2027 Midwinter Conference
January 22-24, 2027
Marriott Northwest
Brooklyn Park, MN
- 2027 State Convention
June 17-20, 2027
Crowne Plaza
Plymouth, MN
- 2027 Fall Conference
September 17-20, 2027
Doubletree Hilton
St. Louis Park, MN
- 2028 Midwinter Conference
January 14-16, 2028
Marriott Northwest
Brooklyn Park, MN
- 2028 State Convention
June 22-25, 2028
St. Cloud Convention Center
- 2028 Fall Conference
September 15-17, 2028
Doubletree Hilton
Owatonna, MN
- VFW Big 10 Conference
October 17-19, 2030
Hilton, MSP Airport

We are making progress on new conference locations across the state.

Thank you to those who have given us some ideas for new places. We continue to send out RFPs in the hopes these new locations can accommodate our needs

2026 Fall Conference - September 18-20, 2026



VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS - DEPARTMENT OF MINNESOTA



VFW FALL CONFERENCE

September 18-20, 2026

Willmar Conference Center, 240 23rd Street SE
Willmar, MN

FRIDAY, September 18, 2026

9:00am - 10:00am	Pre-Conference Committee Meeting	Boardroom
10:30am - 11:30am	Internal Affairs Committee	Boardroom
11:30am - 1:00pm	LUNCH	
12:00pm - 4:00pm	VFW Registration	WCC Atrium
12:00pm - 4:00pm	Auxiliary Registration	WCC Atrium
8:00am - 3:00pm	PROGRAM Exhibits/Poppy Contest	Galleries 5-6
11:45am - 12:45pm	VFW Aux. Hospital Mtg (Closed meeting)	Boardroom
1:00pm - 2:30pm	Finance Committee	Boardroom
2:30pm - 4:00pm	Gambling Meeting	Gallery 7
3:00pm - 4:30pm	MN VFW Charitable Association	Boardroom
6:00pm - 8:30pm	VFW Council of Administration	Gallery 7
6:00pm - 9:30pm	AUX Council of Administration	Galleries 1-4

** After meetings Hospitality Rooms (3) Poolside

SATURDAY, September 19, 2026

7:00am - Noon	VFW Registration	WCC Atrium
8:00am - 1:00pm	AUX Registration	FWCC Atrium
8:00am - 3:00pm	VFW OTI Sessions	Gallery 7
9:00am - 3:00pm	Auxiliary OTI Sessions	Galleries 1-4
8:00am - 3:00pm	Program Exhibits/Poppy Contest	Galleries 5-6
11:45am - 1:00pm	LUNCH	
4:30 - 5:30pm	Catholic Mass at Church of St. Mary, 713 12 St. SW, Willmar, MN	
	Non-Denominational Services	Gallery 2
6:00pm - 6:45pm	General Reception	Atrium
7:00pm - 9:30pm	Banquet	Galleries 5-7
	Doors open at 6:45pm	
	Hospitality Rooms Closed during Banquet	

VFW OTI Sessions - SATURDAY, September 19 in Detail

8:00am - 8:50am	Commander's Leadership Session taught by Cmdr. Charles Hawkins Sr. & Adj/QM Barry Henriksen	Gallery 7
9:00am - 9:50am	Adjutant/Quartermaster Session taught by Adj/QM Barry Henriksen	Gallery 7
10:00am - 10:50am	Inspections Session taught by David Staehlin Learn the changes on Post Inspections	Gallery 7
11:00am - 11:45am	Commander's Project/Claims Office by Dan Meyer & Jon Gohn	Gallery 7
11:45am - 1:00pm	Lunch	
1:00pm - 2:00pm	Let's Talk Programs - VOD/PP by Cheryl Burton - Legislative by Barry Henriksen - Community Service by Dennis Maddox - Buddy Poppy by Charlie Cossette	Gallery 7
2:10pm - 3:00pm	Let's Talk Programs (cont'd) - Safety by Duane Frank - Scouting by Chris Trebelhorn - Teacher of the Year by Kyle Morton - Youth Activities by Scott Wiechmann, Dennis Bushy & Barry Henriksen	Boardroom

SUNDAY, September 20, 2026

8:00am - 9:30am	VFW Council of Administration	Gallery 7
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Fall Conf. - Cont. from Page 1

our VFW and Auxiliary programs in the year ahead. We also encourage every Post and Auxiliary member to send at least one representative who can bring back and share what they've learned with those unable to attend.

A full schedule of seminars and instructional sessions can be found in the Department and Auxiliary General Orders or on the VFW Department website: www.vfwmn.org/New/FallConference, and will also be accessible via a QR code at the event.

Committee Displays and Exhibits

The Display and Exhibit Area will be open from 8:00 am to 3:00 pm on Friday, September 18th and 8:00 am to 3:00 pm and on Saturday, September 19th in Galleries 5 & 6. All members will have ample opportunity to visit these displays and exhibits to pick up samples of all the available program information. Some of the VFW and Auxiliary Programs will be exhibited here as well as four of our Veterans Homes and other related programs and vendors. All Post Commanders and Quartermasters wishing to have a chance at ALL-STATE honors should locate the Membership Display Area and sign in on the sheets provided at the entrance.

Fall Conference Casual Banquet Event

This year's Annual Fall Conference Buffet Dinner promises to be a casual, enjoyable evening filled with good food and great company. State Commander Charles Hawkins Sr. and State President Jean Keogh invite all VFW and Auxiliary members to come, unwind, and enjoy time with friends and fellow

members.

Seating will not be assigned, allowing everyone to choose where they'd like to sit. Tables will be set for eight people, with reserved seating only for honored guests' there is space for everyone! The dinner is open to all VFW and Auxiliary members. Tables will be reserved for Posts who purchase tickets in groups of eight. For full details, including the menu and how to order tickets, please refer to the order form printed in this issue of The Gopher Oversea'r or visit us online at www.vfwmn.org/News/FallConference. We look forward to seeing you there for an evening of food, fellowship, and fun!

Sunday Council Meeting

We invite you to stay and attend the Council of Administration meeting on Sunday morning. This important session will conclude the business of the 2026 Fall Conference and include the bidding process for Youth Activities Programs. The VFW Council meeting will begin promptly at 8:00 am Your participation is encouraged as we wrap up key discussions and decisions for the year ahead.

Ads for Program Books

Ads for our Program Book are under new management. The Department is inviting Posts and Vendors to renew their Fall Conference Program Book advertisements for another year and update their ads as needed. Advertising rates are \$900 for a full-page ad, \$200 for a half-page ad, and \$100 for a quarter-page ad. Deadline to submit advertisements is August 14, 2026, at 4:00 pm Please send high-quality artwork in JPEG, PNG, TIFF, or PDF format to officemanager@vfwmn.us.

Fall Conference Casual Banquet Event
Saturday, September 19th, 2026
Tickets \$50/person (No Refunds)
Reception 6:00pm Dinner 7:00pm

Deadline: Tuesday, September 4, 2026
Menu: Unknown to date.

Banquet/Dinner Tables seat 8 people
Attire: Casual attire except for the Head Table (Suits and Tie)

No assigned seating except for the State Commander's Honored Guest Table; Posts who purchase complete tables. (Tickets will be at the Registration Table in the WCC Atrium)

HOUSING RESERVATIONS

***** BOOK EARLY *****

September 18-20, 2026

DEADLINE August 17, 2026

Reserve online at vfwmn.org/news/FallConference and then click on hotel links
Seminars are held in the Willmar Conference Center.

Best Western Plus 2100 US Hwy 12, Willmar	Holiday Inn Express 230 23rd Street SE, Willmar	Country Inn/Suites 201 28th Ave SE, Willmar
Call Direct: 1-320-235-6060 Say "VFW Fall Conference" Rate: \$139.99/night + Tax	Call Direct: 1-320-231-2601 Say "VFW Fall Conference" Rate: \$149.99/night + Tax Suites: \$169.99/night + Tax	Call Direct: 1-320-214-0300 Say "VFW Fall Conference" Rate: \$169.99/night + Tax
Check-in: 3pm / Out 11am	Check-in: 3pm / Out 11am	Check-in: 3pm / Out 11am
Arrival Date: _____ Departure Date: _____	Arrival Date: _____ Departure Date: _____	Arrival Date: _____ Departure Date: _____
____ Standard King Bed ____ Two Double Beds	____ Standard King Bed ____ Two Double Beds ____ Suite	____ Standard King Bed ____ Two Double Beds
Handicap ? _____ Near Elevator ? _____ Other ? _____	Handicap ? _____ Near Elevator ? _____ Other ? _____	Handicap ? _____ Near Elevator ? _____ Other ? _____

Mail & Make checks payable to:

Dept. of MN - VFW
PO Box 17146
St. Paul, MN 55117

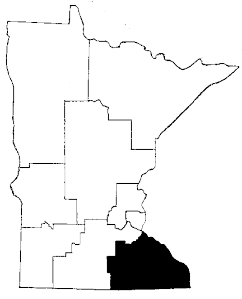
Please Reserve _____ Tickets at \$50/person Fall Conference Casual Dinner.

Name: _____

Phone: _____ Post/Auxiliary # _____ District # _____

Email: _____

News from YOUR District Commanders and Presidents!



**Troy Helget, Commander
First District**

Greetings from the 1st District. Thank you goes out to all members of the District who have put their trust in me to lead them for a second year. It was with the hard work of each member and post that made us an All-American District. Thank you .A special congratulations to Posts 1802, 4393 and 4452 for being All-American Posts.

We made the membership goal last year and we can do it again this year. Remember, potential new members are out there. We just have to ask them to join.

Our first District meeting of the year will be on August 1, 9:30am at the Spring Valley Post 4114.

Don't forget to get your reservations made for the Fall Conference, January 18-20 at the Willmar Conference Center. The Annual OTI Training sessions run all day Saturday. Post Officers need to be there to receive the most current information.

See you at the Fall Conference!



**Theresa Hooegeven, Auxiliary
President Second District**

Greetings from Second District, Thank you for putting your trust in me to serve our outstanding organization.

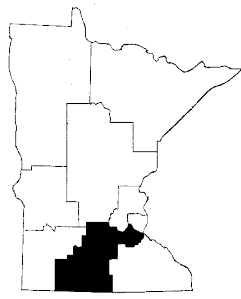
As an all volunteer organization, your ideas and participation shape our future. Please do not hesitate to contact me with your thoughts, concerns, and suggestions. Let us work as one team, supporting each other to grow our Auxiliary.

The planning for our year has began with a joint District VFW/Aux leadership meeting.

Commander Dave Thompson and I are excited to announce that our joint project will be the Twin Cities Honor Flight. We will have a presentation from them at our first district meeting on August 15 in Hastings. There are 400 veterans waiting to take this flight, let's get them to Washington DC.

I encourage every Auxiliary to send at least one member to every District meeting and report back to their Auxiliary. Let's strive for 100% participation.

Membership is vital. Without it, we don't succeed. I encourage everyone to go out and recruit one member this year. Imagine what that



**Dave Thompson, Commander
Second District**

I would like to say how humble I am to have been elected as Commander of the 2nd District. We have a proud and honored history of great Commanders, and I am proud to be apart of this lineage. I hope I don't let you down.

With that said, I would be remiss if I didn't thank Cheryl Burton, our past Commander, for the fantastic job she did last year. I truly appreciate her guidance and commitment to every Post in the District throughout the last year. I know that our job is to serve our Veteran, and that we are not in this for the rewards, but being recognized as an All-American District Commander and having seven All-American Posts is a direct result of her outstanding leadership. Congratulations to Cheryl and all seven Posts on achieving this great honor. Those Posts are: 1210,1791,5340,5833,6208,9232, and 9433.

As we start our new year, we will be stressing the importance of renewing our annual members, reaching out to those members who have slipped and trying to rebuild that relationship and trust with our Veterans and most importantly recruiting new members.

Our Auxiliary President Theresa Hooegeven and I are proud to announce that Honor Flights Twin Cities as our joint project this year. We hope that you will be as excited as we are about having a chance to raise funds for this great organization whose goal of showing our nation's Veterans the appreciation and honor they deserve.

See you all at our next District Meeting August 15 in Hastings.



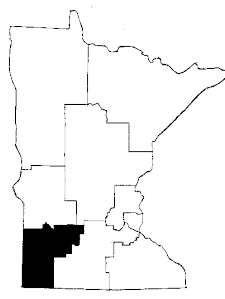
**Deb Courts-Brown, Auxiliary
President Fourth District**

Greetings from District 4!

This is my second year as president, and I am honored to have been re-elected. The auxiliaries in our District reported some wonderful achievements on their year-end reports. It will be interesting to see what the auxiliaries have planned for this year.

Our first District meeting will be August 22 in Mendota at 9:00 am where we will have schools of instruction from our program chairpersons.

My president's project this year will be Fisher House. It is located near the Mpls. VA Hospital where



**Jerry Ludwig, Commander
Third District**

Greetings from the Thundering Third.

Thanks to the members of 3rd District for selecting me to the 2-year District Comdr.. position..Our District's goal is to keep the State Membership Standard, "Big Red" right where it is. The 3rd District is looking for continued All-American status for the District and have more Posts be rated as such. We'll approach the Dashboard the same as eating an elephant, one bite at a time. Membership will continue to be a priority. Posts will be encouraged to try the "I know a guy " who served in (Afghanistan, Korea, Somalia.... etc.). Even if they can't make post meetings, new members will be welcome to the roster. There are a lot of National Guard 34th Division Red Bulls in our communities that have reached the state in life that they'll be able to be active members in Posts. We're hoping to corral them up.

There will be two Commander's Projects this year. The one-year project is to have a Reflection Bench at the MN State Veterans Cemetery subject to State's design. Approximate cost is \$5000.00. The year two project will be to have plaques commemorating closed or consolidated posts in the towns where they were chartered. Cost will be dependent on funds raised or available. District 3 Posts will be encouraged to increase funding to the Auxiliary in their support of the Luverne Veterans Home.

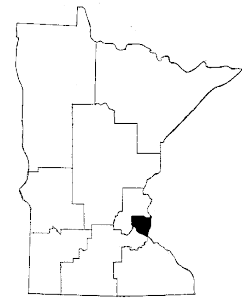
Next District meeting will be in Redwood Falls on September 12th 10:00 AM. Attendees will be welcome to stay for Redwood County Post #2553 All-American Celebration to include food, beverages and door prize drawings.

it offers housing, food, and support to families who have a hospitalized veteran at the Hospital.

I was excited and proud to see the number of awards our auxiliaries and the District received at the State Convention. Our Illustrating America entry from Auxiliary 6690, submitted by Matthew Heider, was sent on to National!

August 6-9 White Bear Township will be hosting The Wall That Heals. This is a ¾ replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall in Washington, D.C. This will be the only location in Minnesota this year.

I am looking forward to working with our auxiliaries and Auxiliary President Jean Keogh the rest of the this year.



**Gary Carlberg, Commander
Fourth District**

It is my honor to have been elected as the 4th District Commander. We salute Sean Gustafson for the great work he did for veterans as the previous commander. We are fortunate to have so many VFW leaders, to include four past Department Commanders, who attend our meetings and tactfully provide sage advice to Junior leaders like me.

The 4th District did well at the Department of MN VFW Convention in June. We had three posts achieve the lofty goal of All State and All-American Posts: 7214,1782 and 7555. Post 1782 won the award for being the Most Outstanding Community Service post in Minnesota for the second year in a row! Post 1350 won the award for best Social Media, congratulations to them.

We hosted a very successful Woman's Veterans Day ceremony on June 12th by the beautiful Women's Veteran memorial in Blaine. Following the ceremony about 30 had dinner and some good comradery time at the Blaine VFW Post 6316. We plan to repeat this success next year, making this available to more veterans in the Twin Cities and beyond.

The 4th District is heavily involved in "The Wall That Heals", a ¾ scale traveling Vietnam Wall that will be open 6 - 9 August. We hope to see you at this event in White Bear Township.



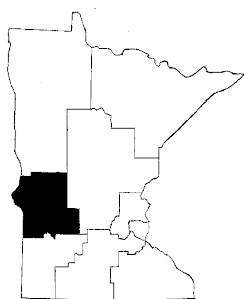
**Cindi Nelson, Auxiliary
President Fifth District**

Hello from District 5 Auxiliary.

We have started the New Year off running. Many of our Auxiliary's were busy during our Country's Birthday this year. I was able to attend one of the parades up in West Union and saw Osakis VFW Post and Auxiliary having fun and working together not only on the color guard but on their float.

We started something new in District 5 which is a monthly newsletter to all presidents in District 5. In it, you can announce what you have coming up so the other Auxiliary's can attend some of these fabulous events.

Auxiliary 936 worked together with the Veterans Memorial Honor Guard and the Veterans Honor Flight at the Community Wood Fire Grill



**Lee Christopherson, Commander
Fifth District**

Greetings from the 5th!

First off, I would like to thank everyone for electing me as you District Commander again.

Again, this year I have the pleasure to work with my wonderful sidekick in crime and district partner, the amazing District Auxiliary President Cindi Nelson. Over the past years she has done great things for veterans and veterans families. I could not ask for a more powerful and dedicated district partner. Thank You Cindi.

I have attended several conventions and conferences in the past years and have noticed a great decline in attendance to these events. Conferences are where the commanders and their officers get the information needed to run the Posts according to the By-laws and Procedures set forth by National VFW. The greatest thing is that these events tend to become a great time socializing with our fellow veterans.

To my Post Commanders in the 5th, please attend Fall Conference. This is where you will get information at OTI that will help you in your post in the upcoming year.

I would like to thank the 7 posts in my District for reaching 100-101% this past year. It was a hard recruiting year but we will never stop recruiting into this fine organization.

This coming year I have a feeling that the stars will align and the membership will grow and the 5th will be an "All American" District.

Our next District meeting is scheduled September 27th at Madison VFW Post 1656 at 2 PM. I highly encourage the members of the 5th District to be at the meeting especially Post Commanders.

As always there is an open invite for any other members from other districts that would like to attend, we will greet you with open arms.

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

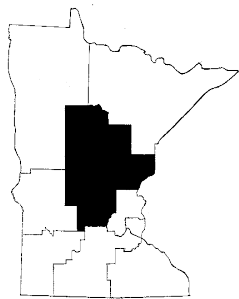
DIST. 2 Aux. - Cont. from Page 8

could do to our membership numbers.

If your Auxiliary is currently not holding a joint meeting with your VFW, please get with your commander and plan at least one this year. I will brag on my own Auxiliary, Chaska 1791, we participate greatly with our VFW Post.

Before every meeting, we have a joint meal, followed by a joint meeting. Communication is key.

"Serving those, who served us"



**Jason Oxley, Commander
Sixth District**

Greetings from the "Fighting" 6th!

First off, I want to thank everyone for electing me as your District Commander. I'm looking forward to working with all 33 Posts, District Officers, Department and the District Auxiliary this year.

The district achieved 101.16% membership, and Comrade Don Lohse kept his word. He shaved his beard off at the Department Convention. We had 25 posts achieve 100% or above membership and had many posts that just missed 100% by just a few members. Outstanding job everyone on recruiting and retention. Let's keep up the great work this year.

Congratulations to St. Cloud Post 428, Pine City Post 4258, Sauk Rapids Post 6992, Monticello Post 8731 and Randall Post 9073 for being All-American posts. I want to give a huge thank you to all the posts and members in the "FIGHTING" 6th District which enabled the 6th to be an All-American District. Congratulations to the Post Commanders and Quartermasters that earned their All-State Team hat.

On a sad note, Post Commander David Paulson of Roberts-Glad Post 1727 Aitkin, passed away. Thoughts and prayers are with David's family, friends and the post.

We have another busy year ahead of us. Stay motivated and please read the General Orders monthly to stay up to date on the latest and greatest and program due dates. I encourage everyone to visit www.vfwmn.org for even more information pertaining to Commanders, Quartermasters, Trustees, membership, VFW Programs and more. To log in all you need is your membership number and last name.

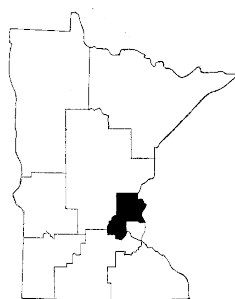
Our first District Meeting will be at 1:00pm on 8 August 2026, at Sauk Rapids Post 6992. The rest of our District Meetings are as follows, 10 October Randall Post 9037, 12 December St. Cloud Post 428 and 8 May 2027 Monticello Post 8731.

In closing, I'm looking forward to this year and seeing all of you at our District Meetings, Fall Conference 18-20 September, and other VFW functions.



**Dana Slimmer, Auxiliary
President Seventh District**

Hello! My name is Dana Slimmer, and I am the new District 7 Auxiliary President. I have been a member since 1992, when my mother, Dorothy, talked me into joining so I could take her to Midwinter. I joined under my father Donald, who served



**Kyle Morton, Commander
Seventh District**

Greetings from the 7th District.

Let me first start off by Congratulating outgoing District 7 Commander Dennis "Maddog" Maddox for achieving All-American District Commander. This was a team effort by all of the Posts in the District. Commander Maddox has continually proven to be an outstanding leader for the District and the Department of Minnesota.

I would also like to Congratulate the following Post who also achieved All-American: Crystal Post 494, Rum River Isanti Post 2735, Palmer Lake Post 3915, Elk River-Rogers Post 5518 and Coon Rapids Post 9625. I look forward to continuing the good work our District has been doing by achieving at least 101% in membership once again and growing Post participation in our programs.

Additionally, I would like to announce that District President, Dana Sinner and myself are teaming up for this year's District Commanders' Project - Haven for Heros. Donations will be earmarked for female vets and their needs. Haven for Heroes' mission is to provide a place of safety and refuge for veterans who may need assistance. They hold our veterans, who have selflessly served our country, in the highest regard. It is understood that there will be wounds of war and unwanted outcomes of serving, both visible and invisible. Their intention is to partner with each veteran to help alleviate and mend those wounds. Their goal is rebuilding and rejuvenating the whole person to live the life they desire and so richly deserve.

To make this event a success this year we need your support! Please consider donating. More information can be obtained at www.Haven4HerosMN.org or 763-600-6142, Ellen Ward.

in the Army in WWII and Korea. I have held several chairmanships for the district and the department over the years. I started up the chairs in 6th district. A job change and a move to the Twin Cities had me transfer to Kraus Hartig Post 6587 in Spring Lake Park. Now, almost 30 years later, I am finally finishing that run up the chairs in 7th District. I hope I will do the district proud!

We have already had our first meeting (always the hardest when you haven't held a gavel in a few years). Thanks to all those who have stepped up to fill the chairmanships. I am looking forward to a fun and busy year of meetings, activities, and making my official visits this fall.

Our next meeting will be at my post home, Kraus Hartig Post 6587, on September 12.

DISTRICT MEETINGS

First District

Dec. 5 Zumbrota #5727 @ 9:30 AM

Second District

Jan. 16 Chaska #1791 @ 1:00 PM

Third District

Sept. 12 Redwood County #2553 @ 10:00 AM

Fourth District

Aug. 22 Mendota #6690 @ 9:00 AM

Fifth District

Sept. 27 Madison #1656 @ 10:00AM

Sixth District

Oct.10 Randall #9037 @ 12:30 PM

Seventh District

Sept. 12 Sp. Lk. Park #6587 @ 11:00 AM

Eighth District

Oct. TBD #TBD @ 9:00 AM

Ninth District

Aug. 29 NY Mills #3289 @ 1:00 PM

MOC

Sept. 12 Brooklyn Pk. #3915 @ 10:00AM



**Pam Vaughn, Auxiliary
President Sixth District**

I am honored to serve as the 2026-2027 District 6 Auxiliary President.

I have proudly been a Life Member of VFW Auxiliary Post #8731 since 2016. I became eligible through my stepson, Sean Vaughn, who honorably served two tours in Iraq with the Army National Guard. My grandfather served during World War II, several uncles served in the Army, and my cousins continued our family's tradition of service in the National Guard.

During my years in the Auxiliary, I have had the privilege of serving as Auxiliary President of Post #8731 for five years. I remain active in the VFW Riders and the Cootie Auxiliary.

The friendships, opportunities to serve, and shared dedication to veterans and their families have been among the greatest blessings of my life.

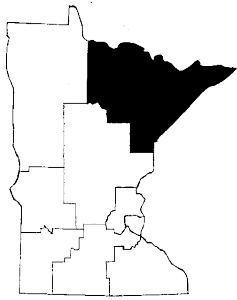
**"Keep Our Auxiliaries Humming...
with Membership of the Next
Generation."**

The hummingbird represents hope, resilience, joy, and perseverance. Just as it brings energy wherever it goes, every new member brings enthusiasm and ideas that help our Auxiliaries flourish. Investing in the next generation ensures our mission continues.

My President's Project is the Veterans Resource & Enrichment Center in St. Cloud. VREC provides vital resources to veterans and their families and recognizes the service and sacrifices of women veterans.

I look forward to visiting each Auxiliary, celebrating your accomplishments, encouraging membership growth.

Together, we can inspire future generations, preserve our traditions, and keep our Auxiliaries humming!



**Charles Cossette, Commander
Eighth District**

Comrades and Auxiliary Brothers and Sisters of the 8th District,

The true strength of this district is our perseverance, resilience and never leaving our fellow veterans or their families behind.

We stand side by side to keep the mighty 8th district strong and active; it has been great to see all the activity and support to our communities from each of our posts throughout the district. I am very proud of you all and am proud to be your commander.

We bring and show our strength by being present at parades and ceremonies supporting our local towns and lifting up our fellow veterans and their families, telling them that we are here, we are proud, and even if you are not a member you are not alone.

By being out in the community, we are showing them that we are not just a bar with a flag out front, we are a lifeline. We know what it is like to be knocked down by life, by injury, or by loss. Yet we are still standing, I believe that our mission now is to make sure no veteran fights their battles alone. Whether it's helping a young service member return from a modern deployment, visiting a buddy who is struggling, or honoring those who never made it back, together we will continue to honor and serve them.

Together we are a fortress of fellowship where a brother or sister can walk in after fighting the invisible wars of PTSD, physical pain, or the quiet ache of isolation, and be told that they are welcome and not alone.

The most important truth of our service is we did not do it for the glory, we did not do it for applause, we did it for the person standing to our left and right. Though people have changed over the years, that sense of service is still within us.

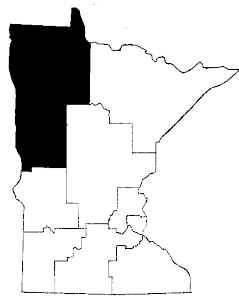
So, I want to sincerely say thank you for your service and sacrifices you have made to help keep our district strong.

I hope to see you at the district and department meetings; your support and presence is greatly appreciated.

Veterans Crisis Line



**DIAL 988 then
PRESS 1**



**Curtis Anderson, Commander
Ninth District**

Aloha, 9th District!

I first and foremost need to let you know how grateful I am in all that our Posts were able to achieve last year. Congratulations to Post 612, 1260, 1676 and 8663 for earning the title of All American Post! It takes a lot of work on both the Post and Auxiliary side to achieve All American. If other Posts have questions those four Posts are good places to reach out to for any helpful hints/assistance as we go into this next year.

Secondly, thank you for your confidence in me, and allowing me to be your 9th District Commander again this year. 9 is most definitely fine! I cannot thank our Posts and Auxiliaries enough in the 9th District for all your support last year with our programs and membership! As we begin our new membership year, I encourage each one of us to reach out and engage first with our annual members to renew and then our fellow veterans in the community to join. Membership is vital! This summer has proved it so far, as both the Department and National have been very busy advocating on your behalf. Also, for those members who reached out to their elected representatives to inform them of how you felt about HR9237, that advocacy is very much appreciated. We can never let up in our advocacy for our fellow veterans. But to do that, we also need to ensure we increase our membership numbers as that gives the clout that our elected representatives listen to. So reach out and invite a veteran to your next event/meeting!

I am looking forward to being able to work alongside our new 9th District Auxiliary President, Bri Smith. Our Auxiliary continues to be a vital partner as we engage in our communities, supporting veterans, currently serving and their families.

If you didn't know, your voice is needed at our meetings! If you can attend one of our three upcoming meetings (Aug. 29th, New York Mills, Dec. 5th, Pelican Rapids, or March 20th in Thief River Falls), please come out. Each of you has some amazing talents. Please think about using them in the District and consider a committee or other District position you may want to dip your toe into. There is a ton of support in the 9th for anyone who would like to stretch their bonds outside of just your Post. If you have questions, don't hesitate to reach out to myself or one of the other district officers.

Looking ahead, our Department Fall Conference is just around the corner. I strongly encourage all Post officers to attend—especially the OTI training sessions. OTI offers valuable tools and insights, and the conference is a great chance to learn from other Posts across the state.



**Brianna Smith, Auxiliary
President Ninth District**

Thank you for your confidence in me and for giving me the honor of serving as your 9th District President this year. I really appreciate the opportunity and can not wait to work with 9th District Commander Curt Anderson.

For those who may not know me, I also work as a preschool paraprofessional and I'm a proud mom of four amazing kids, ages 15, 13, 12, and 7. Between family and school, life stays pretty busy, but it reminds me every day how important it is to support each other and serve our communities.

I also want to give a big thank you to our Posts and Auxiliaries for all the support you've shown. Your dedication to our programs, our veterans, and our mission is what makes the 9th District something we can all be proud of, I can't wait to see how this coming year goes.

As we start a new membership year, I encourage all of us to make

membership a priority. By reaching out to our annual members and helping them renew helps a major way. Then take some time to connect with veterans in your communities and invite them to join our VFW family. Membership isn't just a number—it's our voice and our strength.

We can never stop advocating for our fellow veterans. The bigger and stronger our membership is, the more influence we have when talking with elected officials and community leaders. Our membership gives a voice to the issues that matter most to veterans.

I hope to see many of you at our district meetings on Aug. 29 in New York Mills, Dec. 5 in Pelican Rapids, or March 20 in Thief River Falls. These meetings are a great chance to connect, share ideas, and keep building our strength together.

So I challenge each of you to reach out, invite a veteran to your next meeting or event, and share what the VFW means to you, your why. Together, we can keep growing our membership, strengthen our voice, and make a lasting difference for the veterans we proudly serve.



**Kris Kohn, Auxiliary
President First District**

The First District would like to welcome everyone to the 2026-2027 program year.

This year, we will be continuing to focus our District meetings on education and support. Education in the form of our amazing program chairman sharing valuable information on the VFW Auxiliary's established program to fulfill the mission of our organization and information during our "Share with the Pack" sessions on topics such as Secretary and Treasurer tips, understanding delegates, audits and more.

Another message that I will be sharing with our District Auxiliaries is about inclusion and welcoming. As District President, I want every member in our District to know that all you need to bring to any meeting is yourself and good intentions. It doesn't matter to me if you are wearing VFW Auxiliary clothes, if you don't know the Bylaws by heart, if you aren't sure of all the protocols, if you aren't sure you will say the "right" thing, or if you don't know if you agree with everyone in the room.

We all come to this organization with our own "why", our own history, our own beliefs. That is actually part of will continue to make our organization BETTER.

When we come with differences of opinion, share them in respectful ways, and assume the best in everyone else, we can have the conversations that bring new ideas, new ways of doing things, and a new, brighter future for our organization and those we serve.

All I am asking is that you COME, you participate, and you do so with the love of veterans, their



**Cindi Slater, Auxiliary
President Eighth District**

Hello and welcome to all of those enjoying the Overseas.

My name is Cindy Slater and I am the newly elected President of Minnesota District 8. At this time, there are several items that all of the auxiliaries are currently involved in. First, is organizing for the 2026-2027 year by reviewing Standing Rules, budgets, and expenditures, and any other protocol that needs to be addressed. Secondly, each Auxiliary is focusing on membership, pushing for lifetime enrollment. Third, having all chairpersons in place, programs will be getting full attention. Lastly, fund raising to have the financial means to support all our programs.

With the 4th of July having passed, I am certain that there were Auxiliaries that participated in parades and community events. What a patriotic support of our Veterans. Please remember all of those in our Veterans hospitals, which is Silver Bay for District 8, and volunteer whenever possible. Watch over with extreme care our Veterans suffering from PTSD. Let's help prevent Veteran suicide. It is my wish that all Auxiliaries participate in these matters.

families, and our communities in mind. I also ask that, when someone says something that isn't perfect, or that you don't agree with, you bring the assumption that everyone else has good intentions in what they say or believe as well.

Our Districts and organization can only thrive when we choose to see the best in ourselves and others, that is the message and the belief I hope to instill in District 1 this year.

State Contest Winners

NATIONAL AWARDS

Best Feature Article The BRONZE Award

"HLWW Honors Those Who Have
Served with Annual
Veterans Day Program"

Published in the Herald Journal,
November 15, 2025
Author - Austen Neaton
Nominated by: Lake Mary Post 9232
Winsted

Community Service Contest

CATEGORY I (250 and Less)

First Place

Eugene H. Truax Post 4393
and Auxiliary, Northfield

Second Place

Novak-Milliren Post 4258
and Auxiliary, Pine City

Third Place

Charles D. Center Post 3289
and Auxiliary, New York Mills

CATEGORY II (251 - 500)

First Place

Keep-Zimmer Post 1782
and Auxiliary, White Bear Lake

Second Place

Bernard Flesche Post 8729
and Auxiliary, Lake City

Third Place

Rum River Post 2735
and Auxiliary, Isanti

CATEGORY III (Over - 501)

First Place

Charles R. Knaeble Post 494
and Auxiliary, Crystal

Second Place

Coon Rapids Post 9625
and Auxiliary, Coon Rapids

Third Place

Lyle Russell Post 1210
and Auxiliary, Hastings

MINNESOTA'S MOST OUTSTANDING COMMUNITY SERVICE POST

Keep-Zimmer Post 1782
and Auxiliary, White Bear Lake

NATIONAL SAFETY AWARDS



Firefighter of the Year

Wilbert Werner
Firefighter, USDA Forest Service
Sponsored by: Redwood County Post 2553
Redwood Falls



Dispatcher of the Year

Amber Percy
911 Dispatcher
Morrison County Sheriff's Office
Sponsored by: Curtis-Olson Post 9073
Randall



Bus Driver of the Year

Jimmy Johnson
McGregor School District
Sponsored by: Larson-Deneen Post 2747
McGregor

CHAPLAIN OF THE YEAR

Chaplain Mike Ackerman
Monticello Post 8731, Monticello
Presented by Scott Hansen, Dept. Chaplain



Law Enforcement of the Year

Luke Gutzwiller & Earl
Conservation Officer, K-9
MN DNR Enforcement
Sponsored by: Redwood County Post 2553
Redwood Falls



Emergency Medical Tech of the Year

Matthew Huber
EMT/Paramedic,
Woodbury Fire Department
Sponsored by: Woodbury Post 9024
Woodbury



Scout of the Year

Kate Winter
Eagle Scout Troop 5424
Sponsored by: Prior Lake Post 6208
Prior Lake

BEST SOCIAL MEDIA SITE

First Place

Mahlum Hanson Post 1647
Website & Facebook, Brainerd
Social Media Mgr.: Mark Persons

Second Place

Arthur O, Haukland Post 1350
Website & Facebook, North St. Paul
Social Media Mgr.: Jim Hannegan

BUDDY POPPY DISPLAY CONTEST

Category 1 - Public Promotion

First Place

Bernard Flesche Post 8729
and Auxiliary, Lake City

Category 2 - Memorial or Inspirational

First Place

Oscar & John Soberg Post 210
and Auxiliary, Lakeville

Category 3 - Artistic or Decorative

First Place

Eugene H. Truax Post 4393
and Auxiliary, Northfield

PHEASANTS FOR HOSPITAL- IZED VETERANS DONATIONS

Hugo Matejcek Post 3723	
Owatonna	\$13,974
Charles McLaughlan Post 906	
Hutchinson	\$ 2,000
Young America Post 1783	
Young America	\$ 500
Glen C. Turner Post 5833	
Burnsville	\$ 300
Arthur Ziegler Post 6031	
Arlington	\$ 300
Guy L. McDermeit Post 6206	
Menahga	\$ 250
Don Heuer of Post 9433 donation	
Litchfield	\$ 700

OUTSTANDING POST YOUTH ACTIVITIES PROGRAM

CATEGORY I (less than 101 members)

First Place

Eugene H. Truax Post 4393
and Auxiliary, Northfield

CATEGORY II (101 to 300 members)

First Place

Kraus-Hartig Post 6587
and Auxiliary, Spring Lake Park

CATEGORY III (over 300 members)

First Place

Lyle Russell Post 1210
and Auxiliary, Hastings

All-State Commanders

Captain of the All-State Commanders: Mark Gelhar, Post 1210



Back row (l to r): Kevin Jones, Nat'l VFW Chief of Staff; Ed Keogh, 2025-2026 State Cmdr.;
James Chambers, Post 9433; Tim Kent, Post 2735; Duane Frank, Post 2553;
Jarrod McReynolds, Post 3915; Jerry Sanborn, Post 1221; Mark Gelhar, Post 1210;
Bob Gunderson, Post 5883; Melissa Medberry, Post 9073; Ted Mavencamp, Post 7664;
Patrick Zenk, Post 4393.

Front row (l to r): David David, Post 4258; John Naastad, Post 1260;
Rick Godfrey, Post 494; Cathy Osterbauer, Post 8731; Eugene Bronson, Post 724;
Gary Carlberg, Post 1782; Mark Schutta, Post 7555
Missing: David Fladhammer, Post 5340; Erik Monson, Post 5518; Jake Roach, Post 6208.

All-State Quartermasters



Back row (l to r): Kevin Jones, Nat'l VFW Chief of Staff; Ed Keogh, 2025-2026 State Cmdr.;
Nicholas Stai, Post 8731; Russell Bentley, Post 1221; Ross Parker, Post 9647;
Bryan Anderson, Post 6992; Bob Cook, Post 1403.

Front row (l to r): Dave Thompson, Post 6208; Jim Richter, Post 494;
Curt Anderson, Post 1260; Robert Daniels, Post 724; Jim Murtaugh, Post 1210.

Missing: Jerry Brletich, Post 9625; Ghislain Devlaminck, Post 9433;
Douglas Fabre, Post 9880; Dave Gailey, Post 9232; Graham Gustafson, Post 9073;
Michael Hunter, Post 4930; Ed Keogh, Post 5340; James Mozey, Post 1720;
Aaron Olson, Post 8663; Gary Provo, Post 5833; Krystal Schmidt, Post 7555.

Simota Receives Vehicle from LaMettry's Collision

2026 is the 16th year that LaMettry's Collision, through their Military Family Vehicle Donation program, has donated a vehicle to a veteran who has demonstrated the need for a reliable vehicle. Together with AAA-The Auto Club and LaMettry's vendor partners, a totaled-out vehicle is restored to like-new condition. This year that vehicle was a 2022 Toyota Corolla Cross.

This year's recipient is Thomas Simota.

He enlist in the Minnesota Army National Guard in 1995 and has served in a wide range of communications, operations and leadership roles in over 30 years. He was deployed in the active Army for Operation Joint Force in Bosnia, Operation Iraqi Freedom in Kuwait and most recently in Task Force Spartan in Kuwait.

Outside of his military service, Thomas has played a critical role within Minnesota's emergency communication services such as: COVID-19 response efforts, 2020 Minneapolis civil unrest, Super Bowl LII and presidential inaugurations.

He currently serves a communications officer in Minnesota's Division of Homeland



Thomas Simota and VFW QM/ADJ Barry Henriksen stand in front of the 2022 Toyota Corolla Cross

Security and Emergency Management.

As a past post commander in the VFW and member of the American Legion, he remains active in his local church and community.

One of the qualifying points is that Thomas continually puts other first while facing personal challenges.

Thomas cited his family's medical issues, transportation setbacks and unexpected home repairs which have led to severe financial strain as reasons for seeking a reliable means of transportation.

This vehicle will help him and his family ease the stress of work, family and continued service.

A New Era for Minnesota Veterans Starting September 12

By Kevin Olson, Director MN Military & Veterans Museum

On September 12, 2026, Minnesota's veteran community will celebrate a historic milestone as the Minnesota Military & Veterans Museum opens its new 40,000-square-foot facility outside the gates of Camp Ripley.

Founded in 1976, the Museum has spent the last fifty years preserving the stories, artifacts, and legacy of Minnesota's military service members and veterans. The new \$30 million museum represents far more than a new building—it reflects a renewed vision for engaging veterans, families, students, and communities across our state.

Designed by nationally recognized museum professionals, the facility will tell the stories of Minnesotans who served in every branch of the Armed Forces and in every era of conflict. Visitors will encounter exhibits representing all 87 counties and learn how military service has shaped Minnesota's history.

Many Minnesotans have already noticed the growing outdoor displays along Highway 371, including a submarine, tanks, artillery pieces, helicopters, and soon, military aircraft. Yet the Museum's mission extends far beyond preserving equipment. The true focus of the Museum is the people behind the artifacts—the Minnesotans who answered the call to serve.

For the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the new Museum offers exciting



opportunities for engagement. We invite VFW posts across Minnesota not only to visit the Museum but also to think creatively about how it can support their missions. Educational programs, commemorative events, community partnerships, youth activities, and veteran outreach initiatives can all be enhanced through collaboration with the Museum.

The Museum's Board of Directors, including District 4 Commander Gary Calberg, remains committed to ensuring that this resource serves veterans and communities throughout Minnesota for generations to come.

As we approach opening day, we encourage VFW members and posts to begin considering how they can partner with the Museum and help share Minnesota's military stories with future generations.

The doors officially open on September 12, 2026. We invite the VFW to help lead the way into this exciting new chapter.

Together, we can ensure that the stories of Minnesota's veterans continue to educate, inspire, and unite our state for decades to come.



Post 5462 Color Guard and Bugler performing Memorial Day ceremonies

Minnesota VFW Riders

By Dan "Forest Gump" Jordan,
President MN State VFW Riders

Thanks to all for the support of the Gordy Kirk ride at state convention.

The National VFW Convention is coming up at end of July and the VFW Riders should have there own 501(c)(3) status at the conclusion.

Each Wednesday evening there is a dinner ride out of Monticello Post 8731.

The Vietnam Healing Wall will be in White Bear Lake on August 4th. I will be serving as Road Captain to escort the wall. All are welcome to ride with us. More information will be sent out as the event gets closer.

The annual Summerfest event at Monticello VFW 8731 will be held August 15th with registration at 9:30am.



More information about the MN VFW Riders can be found at www.vfwmn.org under "about".

DIST. 5 AUX. - Cont. from Page 8

where they make and bake pizzas. Anyone can come and enjoy them while listening to the live music. Together, they were able to make 260 pizzas from 5 to 7 pm. If there is some event planned in your community like this ask if it is something your Auxiliary can volunteer with other Veteran organizations.

District 5 Commander, Lee Christopherson and I will continue our "project" for the year together as a team. For 2026-2027 we will be working with the staff at Eagles Healing Nest. We staffed a VFW information table at their recent golf outing.

I am excited about this because I am also helping with the Department Commander/Presidents project this year (Bravo Zulu House) since it aligns with ours.

Thank those who came to the convention and those who helped out in the hospitality room and brought items. We worked well with District 6 and of course have the best Hospitality room.

In closing I want to share our slogan for the VMHG – Let no veteran be forgotten.

JUDGE - Cont. from Page 3

have the answer immediately, I will work to find it. We are strongest when we share knowledge, communicate openly, and work together toward our common mission.

Over the coming year, I look forward to visiting Posts, attending District meetings, and continuing the conversations that make our organization stronger. Every Post has unique challenges and successes, and I believe we all benefit by learning from one another.

Thank you again for your support, your confidence, and your dedication to the Veterans of Minnesota. I look forward to serving alongside each of you as we continue our shared mission of honoring the dead by helping the living.

Please don't hesitate to contact me whenever I can be of assistance. I am here to serve you.

**THANK YOU
FOR YOUR
SERVICE**

Veterans / Youth Activities

Voice of Democracy and Patriots Pen

Comrades and Auxiliary members, the themes for this year's Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen scholarship programs have been announced. The Theme this year for both programs is "What A Veteran Taught Me About America."

Now is the time to begin promoting two of the VFW's most important youth programs. Every Post is encouraged to use the promotional flyers available through ScholarsApp and personally visit local schools to meet with administrators, teachers, and students. These visits help ensure that students know these programs are active, accessible, and free to enter.

Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen provides young people with an opportunity to express their thoughts on important patriotic themes through audio recordings and written essays. By sharing this year's themes with students and educators, we can encourage participation and inspire the next generation to reflect on the values of citizenship, democracy, and service.

Your outreach can make a difference. Help spread the word and encourage students in your community to share their voices through these outstanding VFW programs.

The Rules and Eligibility as well as the Entry Forms for both Programs can be found on the VFW MN website at www.vfwmn.org/programs.

Students shall submit their Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen entries utilizing the ScholarsApp Platform, an electronic scholarship entry and tracking platform.



2026 - 2027 Voice of Democracy Topic
and
2026 - 2027 Patriot's Pen Topic

"What a Veteran Taught me about America"

Entries are Due at Local VFW Posts by October 31st, 2026



2026 VFW State Baseball Champions

By Scott Weichmann, State Baseball Chairman

The 72nd VFW Junior State Baseball Championships were held July 30 thru August 2 at the St Cloud MAC sport complex..

The tournament started off with a Thursday evening barbecue held by tournament hosting VFW Post 4847. Burgers, fries and soft drinks were provided free to all VFW State Baseball players and their coaches.

This year's Champions Cold Springs 15s, sponsored by VFW Post 6915, were undefeated going 4-0. They defeated Cold Springs 16s 4-3 on Sunday.

Teams from the 1st, 2nd, 6th, 7th and 8th District representing 62 teams and 56 VFW Post competed in VFW Baseball this season.

Congratulations go out to the eight teams competed in this years four-day tournament. Thank you to each post that sponsored a team in the Tournament.

In a new first, this year the championship games were live streamed to the two VA Medical Centers and eight Veterans Homes in the state.

Thank you to Denny Kunkel the

tournament director and the grounds crew at the MAC for the great job keeping the games on schedule.

It was a great season for the program this year.

If your Post or District isn't competing in the program and would like to compete next season. Contact VFW Dept Baseball Chairman at the Fall Conference youth activities meeting.

Here are the final standings and sponsoring posts:

1st	Cold Springs 15s	Post 6915
2nd	Cold Springs 16s	Post 6915
3rd	Elk River	Post 5518
4th	Andover	Post 6316

5th thru 8th place not in any order

Winona	Post 1287
Rochester	Post 1215
New Prague	Post 5145
Grand Rapids	Post 1720

We look forward to providing another great VFW State Baseball Tournament next year.

YOUTH UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

Visit www.vfwmn.org for Updates

Baseball

2026-2027

Hosted by St. Cloud #4847

(2 year obligation)

Hockey

Boys A and AA, 2027

Hosted by Dilworth #1223

Girls U15A, 2027
Hosted by Dilworth #1223

Post 2766 Donates to Fergus Falls Vets Home



The Fergus Falls Veterans Home is very grateful for the incredible support of their community.

DAV Chapter 25 made their 2nd installment of its more than \$31,000 pledge to support the Wi-Fi and Cable TV Fund.

Wilkin County VFW Post 2766 donated \$20,000 toward the purchase of a new transport van, helping residents get where they need to go safely and comfortably.

Post 2553 Wins National Membership Award

Redwood County VFW Post #2553 has won Division 8, National Commander- in -Chief Carol Whitmore's 4th quarter Membership Challenge. Post # 2553 scored more than double the score of the next nearest VFW Post nationally. This included picking up 13 new Life Members. Post #2553 led all posts in Minnesota with a 40% year-to-year increase in membership.

Congratulations to Duane Frank, Jerry Ludwig, Preston Dean, Roger Hassebrook and Roger Zollner for winning National Recruiting Awards.

This is the second year in a row that Post #2553 has led the 400+ VFW Posts in Division 8 for 4th Qtr. Recruiting.



On behalf of Post 2553 Commander Duane Frank, Post Adj/QM Jerry Ludwig accepts the All-American Post Commander award from VFW CIC Carol Whitmore.



2026 VFW State Baseball Champions
Cold Spring 15s sponsored by VFW Post 6915.
Pictured on left State Cmdr. Charles Hawkins and
2nd from right 7th District Cmdr. Kyle Morton

Commander's/President's Project 2026-2027

By Dan Meyer, Project Coordinator

Commander, I would like to thank you for this appointment. What a great opportunity to help out our veterans especially our female veterans that are struggling with addiction.

This year the Commander and President chose the Bravo Zulu House, www.bravozuluhouse.org. They have built the first all-veterans, men's treatment facility specializing in co-occurring PTSD, partnering with Mayo Clinic.

They are now embarking on the next step - a treatment facility for our women veterans with PTSD.

An estimated 6000 women veterans enter drug and alcohol treatment centers every month, 79-90% will have PTSD. Women veterans suffer PTSD at twice the

rate of their male counterparts and are twice as likely to die by suicide as non-veteran women.

Bravo Zulu House has launched a \$2 Million Capitol Campaign to create a safe harbor where women veterans can heal among their sisterhood.

The MN VFW and Auxiliary is stepping up to help raise funds for this facility to be built in Mankato. It will be state of the art fully ADA compliant with private rooms and bathrooms and have commons areas that promote camaraderie, community and healing.

We thank you for your support in this great project because everyone knows that the best way to help a veteran is to put them with other veterans that know the struggle.



On Tuesday, May 19, Wabasha-Kellogg seniors participated in their Senior Service Project in partnership with VFW 4086. Students assisted with laying flags on veteran graves at St.

Felix and Riverview Cemeteries in honor of Memorial Day. This was a great opportunity for Post 4086 and the senior class to honor those who served our country.

Cootie Korner

By Martin Adams

Commander of the Grand of MN

Greetings fellow Cooties and all members of the VFW!

For more than a century, the Military Order of the Cootie (MOC) has served as the official honorary organization of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), combining camaraderie, military humor, and community service to support veterans and their families.

Since joining the VFW in 1923, the Cooties have played a vital role in fundraising for the VFW National Home for Children, contributing millions of dollars toward facilities and programs that benefit the children of veterans, including sponsoring the MOC/MOCA house.

During World War II, the MOC expanded its mission by launching its hospital service program, "Keep 'em Smiling in Beds of White," bringing

comfort, entertainment, and companionship to hospitalized veterans.

Today, members continue to volunteer thousands of hours each year in the Minnesota State Veterans homes, VA medical facilities, and their communities, proudly wearing their distinctive red hats while honoring those who have served and striving to bring hope, laughter, and support to veterans and their families.

If you are not a Cootie, please find our table at the Fall Conference and learn how to join the Cooties.

Lastly, if you are going to be joining us at Tomb Trek at Arlington National Cemetery, 6-8 November, make sure to get your hotel reservations ASAP. Reservation info is available on the Supreme website (lotcs.org) under events.

Posts in Parades

Curtis-Olson Post 9073
Color Guard and Auxiliary
Randall 4th of July Parade



Olaf B. Damm Post 1216
Color Guard
Austin 4th of July Parade



North Branch Post 6424
Float
North Branch Midsummer Parade



Forest Lake Post 4210
Float
Forest Lake 4th of July Parade
(l to r) Nate Morgan,
7th District Jr. Vice Cmdr.;
Bill Prinsen, Post Cmdr.;
Jean Keogh, Dept. Aux. Pres.;
Lisa Woods Post Aux. Pres.;
Ed Keogh, Past Dept. Cmdr.

A Life Dedicated to Helping Others

By Ken Schroeffer, Editor

When Joseph "Joe" Schirmers was thirteen years old, he made a promise that he would spend the rest of his life helping others.

Joe was born in 1928 and left abandoned at the St. Cloud hospital. Three months later he was adopted by the Schirmers family from Avon, MN. It was a very typical rural farm family where young Joe learned all about farm chores when he wasn't going to school. At the young age of nine, his adopted father died.

With only eight years of elementary school under his belt, he ran away from home to work for the Brix family on their farm. Schooling was the last thing on his mind.

When Joe turned 18 years old, he got a full time job paying good money with the Great Northern Railroad. Being the young guy, he ended up climbing phone poles and stringing wire. Once at near the top of a 69-foot pole, he lost his grip and slid all of the way to the ground. This wasn't the last time that this happened! In fact, this happened several more times over the next seven years while working with the railroad. Yes, it would affect his knees.

It was near the end of WWII when Joe received his draft notice. He reported for his physical, was loaded on a train and began his training. Suddenly, a call came from Washington. The war was over and everyone was discharged and sent home.

The Korean War broke out and Joe got re-drafted in January, 1951. He and a group of young soldiers were shipped by train to Fort Riley, Kansas. They all spent the night at the train depot. That afternoon, when the Army officials came to pick up the soldiers, his name wasn't on the list. As instructed, he stayed at the depot. The next morning, they came back for him. After a couple of other mix ups, Joe finally arrived at his unit in Incheon, Korea.

Because of his railroad experience laying telephone wire, Joe was assigned to the Signal Corps. While going up a mountain in the back of a truck, he fell out and was hospitalized. He returned to Korea and worked in the kitchens. Then off to Japan for a 6-week mess steward school. Joe was then sent back to Korea and put in charge of ordering food and making sure that the officers mess halls worked efficiently.

A couple of months later, he was sent to Camp McCoy, Wisconsin and discharged on October 16, 1952.

Once home, he went back to work on the Brix family farm before getting married in 1954.

Back in 1951, Joe had met this young girl named Esther in a dance hall and was smitten. He exclaimed "Someday you're gonna be mine." That day came on June 30, 1954.

Together, they raised 5 boys and



2 girls.

Now, just married, Joe needed to find stable employment. He went back to work for the Great Northern starting as a floor sweeper, then an electrician's helper and retiring as a crane operator in the car shop with the now Burlington Northern. He retired at the age of 61 because of his knees.

Joe joined the VFW soon after he was discharged from the Army. He met and became close friends with Al Loehr when they both worked for BN Railroad. Al held many positions within the VFW including; Commissioner of Veterans Affairs under two Presidents, past State Commander, past District and Post Commander, a member of the National Legislative Committee and mayor of St. Cloud. Joe was always there supporting his friend.

During Joe's tenure with the VFW he served as State Chaplain (16 years), State Surgeon (19 years), State Officer of the Day (10 years), Nat'l Asst Sgt. at Arms (56 years), and District Officer of the Day (75 years).

It was thru his work with the VFW that he had the opportunity to meet former presidents John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson, Gerald R. Ford, Ronald Reagan and both George H. and George W. Bush. "I escorted three of four of them and shook hands with the rest of 'em" Joe said.

In the 70+ years since Joe left the military, he has donated close to 60,000 hours in volunteer time to the St. Cloud VA Hospital. His wife Esther has donated close to 10,000 hours. They have made a great team thru their 72 years of marriage.

Besides being a member of the VFW, Joe is a member of the Korean War Veterans Association, the American Legion, AMVETS, VFW Cooties, Disabled American Veterans Charity, Catholic Aid Association board of directors and other community organizations.

Friday nights finds Joe selling fish fry tickets at Post 4847 just outside the Loehr-Schirmers Room. Meanwhile, Esther is cleaning tables.

Joe and Esther start their day off with a visit to St. Clare's Catholic Church in Sauk Rapids, MN. Joe still has a valid drivers license at age 98.

★ ★ 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

Photos will be returned upon request.

Flag Day at Bemidji Veterans Home

In honor of Flag Day (June 14), the Minnesota Veterans Homes - Bemidji proudly hosted Harold Baggenstoss Bemidji VFW Post 1260 annual Flag Retirement Ceremony.

More than 50 people, including residents, family members, staff, volunteers, scouts and members of the VFW and Auxiliary, gathered to respectfully retire more than 25

American flags. The ceremony included a prayer from Chaplain Philip Houser, an honor salute from the VFW Honor Guard and a special tribute from residents, who each presented a flag and shared a salute as part of the program.

Thank you to all who participated in this meaningful observance honoring our nation's flag and the values it represents.



Veteran’s Day - November 11



Minnesota VFW members, consider getting a VFW license plate the next time you have to renew your vehicle’s license plate. To qualify, you must be a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and, at the time of application, must submit a copy of your membership card.

VETERANS ON THE LAKE RESORT

Thank You for Your Service!

Serving the recreational needs of disabled and able-bodied Veterans, Active-Duty Military, Family and Friends, as well as the general public.

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www.veteransonthelakeresort.org
Email: veteransonthelakeresort@gmail.com
Phone: 218-365-6900 Address: 161 Fernberg Rd, Ely, MN 55731

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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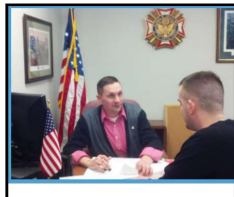
Phone: _____ Email: _____

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:

- * 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.

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

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.

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 then 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

The MN VFW Charitable Association

2027 Raffle Calendar is Now Available

This year’s calendar features photos of the VA Hospitals and Minnesota Veterans Homes that provide health care to veterans located throughout Minnesota.

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

Posts can order their 2027 Calendars now Email: info@mnvfwca.org or Call the VFW Office at 612-291-1757

Individual purchases can be made a from participating VFW Post.