



Convention Highlights

Monday, Aug. 2, 2021
Business Session

VFW Chief Opens Business-Only Convention

Calling it “nothing short of amazing,” Commander-in-Chief Hal Roesch II highlighted during today’s Business Session the many successes VFW achieved during the COVID-19 pandemic. “We are back,” the chief said to thunderous applause. “Words simply cannot express how glad I am to be here with all of you right here and online.” Last year was the first time in VFW’s history that the organization did not hold an in-person gathering for a National Convention. Roesch and his national officers received a rousing welcome when they took the stage as AC/DC’s “We Salute You” – the battle anthem for Persian Gulf War vets – reverberated throughout the hall.

Roesch noted that during the past year VFW and Auxiliary members continued serving others. He recognized Post, District and Department commanders for leading the organization in the midst of a pandemic. “You did an unbelievable job, and we thank you,” Roesch said. He touted the joint VFW Foundation and National Headquarters Post Pandemic Relief grant program, which provided \$1 million to struggling VFW Posts. “We knew that we had Posts that wouldn’t make it without assistance,” Roesch said. “We didn’t turn down one request.” The Chief said VFW Post and Auxiliary members created face coverings, provided safety equipment, sent meals to school children, hosted blood drives, started food banks and opened facilities for COVID-19 vaccination sites. “When others hunkered down to wait it out, you rolled up your sleeves and answered the call,” he said. “You proved that VFW Posts are the pillars of communities.”

Roesch applauded the efforts of VFW and Auxiliary members for their dedication to the Buddy Poppy program. When COVID forced the shutdown of Poppy production sites, volunteers stepped in to assemble nearly 10 million Poppies. He also lauded VFW employees at National Headquarters and in the Washington Office. “They displayed great strength to make sure services continued uninterrupted,” he said. “They successfully navigated uncharted territory.” Roesch said the past year resulted in many “virtual” firsts, including an election of officers, National Council of Administration meetings, VFW’s Legislative Conference and the VOD Parade of Winners.

Chief Roesch said that VFW’s accredited service officers never faltered even with the lack of face-to-face opportunities. They proved once again, he said, that they are the “best in the business,” recovering \$9.7 billion in VA disability compensation last year alone. A giant QR code was displayed on the screens in the hall regarding the *Cost of War Act* to let lawmakers know where VFW stands. Roesch encouraged those in attendance to scan the code, which enabled the user to instantly contact his or her lawmaker. Roesch concluded by thanking his leadership team, his wife, Beth, and expressing his pride in VFW. “We proved once again that no one does more for veterans,” Roesch said. “I can honestly tell you that in my 30 years of being a member of the VFW, I have never been more proud to serve alongside you and say, ‘We are the VFW.’”

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Virtual Guest Speakers

President Joe Biden virtually addressed delegates via a 10-minute video presentation, thanking VFW for its “unwavering dedication” in its support for veterans and communities across the country. “It’s a sacred obligation,” Biden said. “It’s as simple as that.” He said that during his presidential term he will ensure that the VA provides all veterans with timely access to “world-class healthcare” and the all the benefits that go with that. The President noted issues of concern for his Administration include the effects of toxic exposure from burn pits, TBI, PTSD and other mental health challenges. To that end, Biden plans to increase the VA budget to include funding for such things as housing for homeless vets, and programs to help end suicide among the nation’s veteran population. “We need to let them know it’s okay to ask for help,” he said. Biden highlighted the *American Rescue Plan (P.L. 117-2)*, which offers veterans better access to quality health care and protections against COVID-19, as well as providing needed economic relief. “Veterans needs are a priority,” Biden said. “We keep fighting to get veterans everything they need.”

Director of Humana’s Veteran Channel Ed Sandrick noted that VFW and Humana together have distributed 1.5 million meals over the past three years through the Uniting to Combat Hunger campaign. The Marine Corps veteran and VFW life member said this year’s goal is 1 million meals. Sandrick shared a video highlighting Humana’s Bold Goal, which addresses social and health-related needs of its members and communities.

Jeff DiLullo, senior vice president and head of operations for North America Philips Healthcare, thanked VFW for its efforts in Project Atlas, which enables veterans to conduct virtual appointments with VA care teams and specialists. Noting that Philips is leading the way globally in telehealth operations, DiLullo said veterans deserve services that are available, relevant and personal. “Veterans have the right to health and access no matter where they live,” the former Army infantry officer said.

Speakers and Awards

VFW National Home for Children’s Buddy Poppy Child, 7-year-old Aurora, spoke to attendees before collecting donations for the National Home. Aurora lives in the North Carolina house on the National Home campus with her parents and three siblings. Her dad is an Army captain serving as a military police officer. Sissy Borel, past national VFW Auxiliary president and current president of the board of trustees, encouraged members to visit the VFW National Home in Eaton Rapids, Mich., to see it in person. “It is you who owns that home,” she said. “It’s an ownership that we should take pride in.” VFW National Home for Children Executive Director Fred Puffenberger thanked members for their commitment to the home throughout the past 96 years. He noted that all VFW National Home events are “back on track” this year. Puffenberger added the home’s Board of Trustees is looking for candidates for District 6 for the 2022-2028 election cycle. Puffenberger said that the National Home is launching a new website which will allow people to apply for residency online. “We can expect to reach people we have never been able to reach before,” he said. “It’s only through you that we can do what we do.”

Joe Davis received the *VFW Distinguished Service Medal and Citation*, for his 15 years of dedicated service to the VFW as director of Communications and Public Affairs, retiring in 2019. Davis, a Gulf War and Somalia vet, is a life member of VFW Post 3391 in America Samoa.

“Top Tier” Departments from each conference were announced: Montana from the Western Conference, Indiana from the Big 10 Conference, Delaware from Eastern Conference and Arkansas from the Southern Conference.

The Conference Membership Trophy, which recognizes the VFW conference with the highest percentage of membership, was presented to the Southern Conference for the second year in a row.

Several Posts were inducted into the Legacy Society: Post 8541 in San Antonio, Texas, for having 100 Legacy Life members and Post 10454 in Grapevine, Texas, for attaining 50 Legacy Life members. The following six Posts all tallied 25 Legacy Life members: Post 2667 in Newnan, Ga.; Post 3522 in Charles Town, W. Va.; Post 7692 in Appleton, Wis.; Post 8790 in Houston; Post 8862 in Vicenza, Italy; and Post 12101 in Henderson, Nev. The Legacy Society includes Posts with at least 25 Legacy Life members on its roster.

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2021 Triple Crown winners received awards for reaching All-American status at the Post, District and Department levels.

Membership honors were presented to 2019-2020 All-American commanders (33 Posts, 56 Districts and 251 Posts) and 2020-2021 All-American commanders (22 Departments, 188 Districts and 996 Posts).

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