



2024 ANNUAL REPORT

VFW
VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS.

Members of VFW Post 7392 gather at the campgrounds outside of their Post building in Oak Harbor, Wash., on July 1. The campgrounds are five acres, and they accommodate many veterans each year who want a place to camp or stay.

Photo by Lauren Goldman/VFW





Members of the VFW Post 7175 in Millington, Tenn., gather April 2 prior to their monthly meeting at their Post home.
Photo by Lauren Goldman/VFW

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Photo by Chris Mullins

VFW Continues Advocacy for Veterans and Their Families in its 125th Year of Service

Now in its 125th year, VFW continues to be the No. 1 advocate for veterans, troops and their families around the world. As VFW’s Commander-in-Chief, I am humbled to lead each of our incredible members to work on behalf of veterans and their families in any way possible. During my tenure as Chief, I continue to serve under the motto “Follow Me.”

The VFW Day of Service is the finest example of our great organization working to benefit others. Launched in 2022, the VFW Day of Service kicked off on the first Saturday in May. It is a month-long endeavor dedicated to serving communities around the world.

This year, the #DayofService hashtag was used more than 3 million times across several social media and news outlets. More than 500 Posts engaged on the Day of Service. These acts of service surely spread the good news about the VFW.

VFW’s Day of Service was developed from the successful #StillStarving campaign, which kicked off in 2020. Using the hashtag #StillServing, veterans share their stories of continued service on social media. I am excited to proclaim that more than 3 million people have engaged in this dynamic campaign. I encourage all veterans everywhere to share their stories of how they are #StillServing.

VFW’s community work extends to the importance of promoting education. Through its Voice of Democracy audio-essay competition, the VFW awarded \$1.4 million in scholarships in 2023-24. Another \$865,000 was awarded to middle-school participants in the Patriot’s Pen writing competition.

VFW’s generosity also extends through the VFW’s “Sport Clips Help A Hero Scholarship” program. Now in its 11th year, VFW has awarded more than \$12 million to 2,729 veterans and service members wanting to further their education. I am incredibly proud of this program and VFW’s partnership with Sport Clips.

Another program in which I take pride is VFW’s *Unmet Needs* program. Since it first began in 2004, *Unmet Needs* has distributed more than \$13 million to more than 11,600 military and veterans families. This program provides up to \$2,500 to veterans, active-duty service members and their families during times of financial hardship. It is

humbling to think about the number of lives we touch through this program.

On Capitol Hill, VFW’s Washington Office staff plays a critical role in issues of great importance to veterans. The National Legislative department advocates daily to improve care and benefits for the community. The staff works to accomplish VFW’s priority goals, which are established annually. In 2024, VFW continued the fight for the passage of the *TAP Promotion Act*. This would ensure all service members have direct, essential access to VA-accredited service officers during the Transition Assistance Program (TAPS) classes. The *Not Just a Number Act* is another vital piece of legislation for which the VFW continues its fight. This bill would require VA to look at how veterans are using their benefits. Such evaluations could likely point to correlations between VA benefits and suicide outcomes.

VFW’s National Veterans Service (NVS) office also is in our nation’s capital. The tireless work of our folks at NVS is the essence of why VFW was founded 125 years ago. With a robust team of more than 2,000 exemplary VA-accredited service officers, NVS recovered more than \$14 billion last year for more than 590,000 veterans. That is billion with a “B.”

Additionally, VFW has 23 service officers at Pre-Discharge offices on military installations ready to offer assistance to those active-duty troops ready to be discharged. The incredible part about the work of VFW’s NVS team is that it is provided free of charge. Unlike some law firms that claim to be “veterans advocates,” and then turn around and charge exorbitant fees, our service officers are highly knowledgeable in this field and ready to go to work for FREE for veterans.

As we continue to work towards the good of veterans over the next 125 years, VFW will continue to lead the way in advocating for veterans in their communities. From our work in the schools offering scholarship opportunities to America’s youth, to our outstanding work on Capitol Hill, VFW is known and will forever be known as the greatest veterans organization worldwide.

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WE ARE THE VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS



Clockwise from left, Bill Castonguay and his wife, Kara; VFW Post 7272 Commander Kevin Calnan; Post 7272 member and yoga instructor Dave Dunbar; Elle Taran; Macy Castonguay and Mallory Castonguay, gather after a yoga class in January 2024 at VFW Post 7272. Dunbar says that after classes, many of the participants stay at the Post to socialize before leaving.
Photo courtesy of VFW Post 7272.

OF THE UNITED STATES

OUR CORE VALUES:

- Always put the interests of the members first.
- Promote patriotism.
- Honor military service.
- Ensure the care of veterans and their families.
- Serve our communities.
- Promote a positive image of the VFW.
- Respect the diversity of veteran opinions.
- Treat donors as partners in our cause.

VFW BY THE NUMBERS

MORE THAN

1.4 MILLION: Number of VFW and Auxiliary members

5,646: Number of VFW Posts worldwide

Six major wars and nearly **40** military actions since 1945 represented by VFW members.

VFW TAKES PRIDE IN ITS COMMITMENT TO VETERANS AND TODAY'S MILITARY. OUR PROGRAMS ENSURE NO ONE IS FORGOTTEN.

You have most likely heard of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. The initials "VFW" are emblazoned on many of our 5,646 Posts worldwide. We are the nation's oldest major veterans' group, and we have been a part of the country's social fabric for 125 years.

We are an organization of nearly 1 million veterans who have served overseas in war zones or areas demanding arduous duty, from mountains and deserts to jungles and swamps.

What you might not know about is our continuing commitment to our country and community. Our mission extends to troops serving overseas

today and their families waiting back home.

Our Mission: To foster camaraderie among U.S. veterans of overseas conflicts. To serve our veterans, the military and our communities. To advocate on behalf of all veterans.

Our Vision: Ensure that veterans are respected for their service, always receive their earned entitlements and are recognized for the sacrifices they and their loved ones have made on behalf of this great country.

VFW MEMBERS CARE PASSIONATELY ABOUT SERVING THEIR FELLOW CITIZENS. JUST AS WE PLEDGED DURING OUR TIME IN UNIFORM, WE AGAIN VOW TO SUSTAIN A LIFELONG COMMITMENT TO THE NATION AND OUR COMMUNITIES.

A VENERABLE ORGANIZATION

VFW traces its origins to 1899 when 13 Spanish-American War veterans convened in Columbus, Ohio. By 1914, this group had merged with two other Spanish-American/Philippine War veterans' organizations to become known collectively as the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

VFW's supreme governing body is its National Convention. Each July, thousands of VFW members vote as registered delegates, determining policy by adopting resolutions and making important business decisions.

VFW's National Headquarters is in Kansas City, Mo., where the organization's administration and programs-related efforts are coordinated. Legislative-oriented activities are developed and implemented in VFW's Washington Office in the nation's capital

VFW-AFFILIATED ORGANIZATIONS

Joining VFW to accomplish its mission are the VFW Auxiliary, the VFW Foundation, the VFW National Home and the Military Order of the Cootie, which is composed of VFW members dedicated to assisting hospitalized veterans.

NONPROFIT STATUS

VFW is a tax-exempt organization under section 501(c)(19) and the VFW Foundation is exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Contributions to both organizations are deductible under section 170(c).



NATIONAL VETERANS SERVICE 2024

**MORE THAN
\$14.6 BILLION**
TOTAL RECOVERED IN 2024

VETERANS **HELPING** VETERANS

Located in the nation's capital, VFW's National Veterans (NVS) has served veterans, military members and families for over a century. NVS was built on the principle of helping these groups acquire their earned VA benefits.

Last year, VFW's National Veterans Service helped more than 593,000 veterans receive more than \$14.6 billion of VA disability benefits, including back pay. VFW's network of VA-accredited service officers has been helping veterans receive their earned pay.

VFW's NVS Director Michael Figlioli said that VFW is committed to a lifetime of advocacy for all veterans.

"Our representatives are representing a client from the moment they file a disability claim, through a review of the VA's decision," Figlioli said. "VFW also files any appeals necessary for the veteran or family member to receive the maximum benefit allowed."

Figlioli said VFW Accredited Service Officers' work on disability claims does not end with VA disability claims. Service officers must be knowledgeable on topics such as GI Bill and VA health care, home loans and other VA benefits and services.

VFW is especially proud to provide service on 23 military installations to offer assistance to those active-duty troops preparing to discharge. VFW's Benefits Delivery at Discharge (BDD) representatives have been available for more than 20 years providing free service. In addition to its legislative support of the TAP Promotion Act (see p. 13), VFW continues to champion to formally integrate its BDD service into the military's Transition Assistance Program, or TAP.

"It does not matter if you are a member of the VFW or not — we are here to help," Figlioli said. "VFW will never charge a fee for assisting a veteran, their spouse or family member in filing a claim."

VFW Life member Jeffrey Cowell of St. Paul, Minn., is among the 2,162 exemplary VA-accredited service officers within the VFW's network. As a VFW



From left, Director of the Waupaca County (Wis.) Veterans Service Office Jesse Cuff, a member of the VFW Department of Wisconsin, and Joshua Kampert, life member of VFW Post 11346 in Waupaca, Wis., pose last October at the Iola (Wis.) Veterans Memorial. Cuff has helped Kampert with filing disability claims and said his main job as a service officer is connecting veterans with their earned benefits.
Photo by Holly Neuman

Department of Minnesota Service Officer since 2018, Cowell has seen an average of about 35 veterans a week.

With the signing of the *Honoring Our Pact Act* on Aug. 10, 2022, Cowell's caseload shifted from musculoskeletal claims to exposure-related claims, often varying in respiratory issues such as rhinitis, asthma and sinusitis. These conditions can range from post-9/11 veterans exposed to burn pits to Vietnam War veterans dealing with Agent Orange.

Cowell says his work impacts veterans from all walks of life and enriches his life with a purpose.

"I am grateful for the opportunity to assist veterans and their loved ones, and it gives me a chance to serve people," said Cowell, who first earned his VFW eligibility in 2003 during a European deployment with the Minnesota Army National Guard in support of *Operations Iraqi* and *Enduring Freedom*. "However, the most rewarding part is seeing the tangible changes VA benefits can be: helping spouses file their survivor's benefits in a difficult time, helping unhoused veterans achieve stability, and providing relief through medical care. This is truly the most fulfilling job I have had."



HOW SERVICE OFFICERS HELP:

- Providing a lifetime of advocacy from the time a veteran files an initial claim, to helping survivors understand their benefits.
- Explaining benefits and helping veterans navigate the often bureaucratic maze of procedures and paperwork.
- Guiding and supporting veterans through months or even years of claims processing.
- Helping veterans prepare necessary documents and evidence, monitoring cases and information claimants of recent development.
- Assisting veterans who can't personally get to VA regional offices.

From left to right, VFW Dept. of Oregon Service Officer (SO) David Lowe, VFW Dept. of Georgia SO Belinda Boldoe, VFW National Veterans Service Director Michael Figlioli, VFW Dept. of Michigan SO Sidney Love and VFW Dept. of Massachusetts Assistant SO Michael Raymond attend a VFW SO training conference on Sept. 9, 2023, in Annapolis, Md. *Photo by Lauren Goldman/VFW*

Cowell, who himself was medically separated in 2007 and awarded 20 percent for his disabilities, understands the importance of seeking help from a knowledgeable source like those of VFW service officers.

“It was not until I got the job as a VFW claim’s examiner in September 2017 that I pursued any new claims or increases of my own,” Cowell said. “Assigning the VFW as your representatives ensures competent representation from step 1 all the way to the BVA. VFW’s training is top-notch. No one should file their claims on their own, and no one should have to pay for their rightfully earned benefits.”

Belinda Boldoe, an Army veteran, is another example of VFW’s outstanding service officers. An appeals officer who assists veterans at the Georgia Department of Veterans Service, Boldoe also is the service officer with the Department of Georgia.

Boldoe said it is her goal to explain the process of filing a VA disability claim to everyone she helps. She added that she assists with about 25 VA disability claims per month.

“We’ve been seeing a lot more claims due to the passage of the *PACT Act*,” Boldoe said. “Most of the claims are respiratory related from veterans of the Persian Gulf

War through the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. We also get many claims from Vietnam War veterans who have hypertension related to Agent Orange exposure.”

Boldoe recalled when she tried to file a disability claim with VA, that she had no one to help her through the process.

“There was no guidance, and I messed up my claim,” Boldoe said. “When I saw the posting for the job I have right now, I knew that’s what I had to do. I was able to learn the process for myself, and I’m helping guide others, so they don’t make the same mistakes I made filing a claim.”

UNITING TO **COMBAT HUNGER**



Volunteers in July at the 125th National Convention in Louisville, Ky., pack seeds during a *Uniting to Combat Hunger* event aimed at helping those affected by food insecurity. VFW and Humana's partnership has supplied more than 5.6 million meals for families across the country.
Photo by Bob Knudsen

Since 2018, VFW has teamed with Humana to establish the *Uniting to Combat Hunger* campaign. It remains a staple in fighting not only hunger, but also food insecurity across the country. VFW is proud to add a veteran homelessness component to the campaign.

VFW's partnership with Humana has garnered more than 5.6 million meals for families in the United States. VFW and Humana also are alarmed at the number of active-duty troops and veterans who suffer from food insecurity. This is the reason why VFW and Humana wanted to give healthy meals to needy Americans as a part of *Uniting to Combat Hunger*.

Volunteers at the 125th VFW National Convention in Louisville, Ky., participated in a seed-packing event that helped families affected by food insecurity. Those seeds were sent across the country to distributors that provide healthy and fresh produce to those in need.

VFW Foundation Director of Donor Relations Richard Freiburghouse said that the *Uniting to Combat Hunger* campaign exhibits VFW's commitment to serving veterans and their communities, as well as addresses one of the most pressing issues facing many veterans.

"The core goals of the *Uniting to Combat Hunger* program are to alleviate food insecurity in communities around the country and engage with VFW members participating in meaningful service projects," Freiburghouse said. "By leveraging our networks and resources, VFW Posts can make a significant impact, often involving veterans and their families in these efforts."

According to Feeding America, 1-in-9 working-age veterans are food insecure. The organization also claims that about 24 percent of active-duty service members were food insecure in 2023 and about 1.2 million low-income veterans use the government's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

As of 2023, 13.5 percent of U.S. households are considered food insecure, according to the Department of Agriculture. There are also 14 million children who are food insecure.

For more information about the *Uniting to Combat Hunger* initiative, visit www.vfw.org/UTCH.

FOOD INSECURITY BY THE NUMBERS **5.6 million:** The number of meals that have been provided by VFW and Humana's *Uniting to Combat Hunger* initiative. **14 million:** The number of food insecure children in the country. **1.2 million:** The number of low-income veterans who use SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program). **1-in-4:** The approximate number of active-duty service members who experience food insecurity. **1-in-9:** About the amount of food insecure working-age veterans.



VFW and VFW Auxiliary members attend a hearing of the Senate and House VA committees on March 6, 2024, on Capitol Hill. The centerpiece of the hearing was a speech by then-VFW Commander-in-Chief Duane Sarmiento in which he outlined VFW priorities that the organization wants Congress and VA to fulfill. *Photo by Bub Knudsen*

A LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM FOR VETERANS



Backed by throngs of VFW members, then-VFW Commander-in-Chief Duane Sarmiento testifies before a joint hearing of the House and Senate VA committees in March 2024, in Washington, D.C. Photo by Bob Knudsen

VFW has played an integral part in almost every piece of veterans' legislation signed into law for more than 125 years.

VFW advocates daily at the nation's capital to improve care and benefits for the military community. The more than 1.3 million VFW and Auxiliary members' influence helps the organization achieve its legislative goals.

The VFW's National Legislative Service (NLS) monitors all legislation affecting active-duty service members, veterans and their families. The NLS team regularly testifies at congressional committee hearings and directly works alongside Congress and the president's administration to accomplish VFW's priority goals and fight back against bad proposals that would eliminate or cause harm to veterans' earned benefits.

Every year since 1949, Congress has provided VFW with the opportunity for the organization's leaders and activists to speak with lawmakers and staff of their respective states.

One of VFW's top priorities made loud and clear on Capitol Hill and beyond, is our fight against predatory unaccredited companies, or "claim sharks," that target veterans' earned VA benefits. While the federal solution to this atrocity has stalled, the VFW has turned its attention to the state level. To date, VFW advocates have succeeded in outlawing the practice of claim sharks in at least six states, with more on the horizon in 2025. For this, we could not be prouder.

Through 2024, VFW has advocated for many veteran-related bills, including the *TAP Promotion Act*, which was part of the 2025 National Defense Authorization Act. VFW highly recommended its passage, which would ensure all service members have direct access to VA-accredited service officers during



Rep. Andre Carson (D-Ind.), center-back, poses for a photo with VFW and VFW Auxiliary Members of the VFW Department of Indiana in early March in Washington, D.C.
 VFW Department of Indiana Photo

Transition Assistance Program (TAP) classes. It also will allow representatives of veterans service organizations, such as VFW, to meet with troops leaving the military.

The *Foreign Medical Program Modernization Act, H.R. 9177*, is another top priority for the VFW. American veterans who support American interests abroad do not get timely access to care, which poses a national security risk. VFW is the only organization talking about this vital issue and we will continue advocate on behalf of our veterans overseas.

Another VFW-supported bill, the *Not Just a Number Act*, would require VA to examine how veterans are using benefits. The evaluation could point to correlations between VA benefits and suicide outcomes. The *Not Just a Number Act* also would require VA to analyze which VA benefits and programs have the greatest impact on preventing veterans suicide.

The VFW-supported *Not Just a Number Act* was

legislation that was part of the *Elizabeth Dole Home Care Act*. It gives additional support to caregivers and expands access to home and community-based care programs for older veterans and would:

- Expand access to a non-VA provider that would furnish all-inclusive care to elderly veterans living in the community.
- Update electronic capabilities to assist veterans and caregivers using long-term health care and support services.
- Start a pilot program that would address homemaker and health aide services to veterans.
- Give reports and conduct studies on programs that provide medical and health services to elderly veterans in their homes and communities.

Alongside VFW's legislative efforts are student veterans. The VFW-Student Veterans of America (SVA) Legislative Fellowship is a semester-long program involving researching, coordinating and reporting on

behalf of one of four veterans' policy areas, including:

- Student veterans success during and after their education
- Veteran's health care and benefits
- Transitioning from military to civilian life
- Challenges service members and military families face every day

Since 2013, members of VFW and SVA have had the opportunity to make their voices heard on Capitol Hill. The fellows of VFW-SVA are given the opportunity to meet lawmakers and administrators responsible for implementing veterans' policy.

VFW's collaboration with Student Veterans of America (SVA) provides students a semester-long academic experience involving research, action, reporting and advocating for policies affecting military members, veterans and their families. This year, the legislative fellows pushed lawmakers to pass the *Not Just a Number Act*.

One of those students who participated in this year's program was Jamie Springston, a member of VFW Post 1064 in Huntington, W. Va. Springston, a Navy veteran and former Fleet Marine Force corpsman, graduated in 2024 with a bachelor's degree in social work from Marshall University in Huntington, W.Va.

"It was great working with everyone at VFW's Washington Office," Springston said. "I was motivated by the passion and care that every individual put into our advocacy efforts and that was a big part of making our work a success."

VFW also advocates for veterans, military members and their families through the Action Corps, a grassroots-level newsletter that gives more than 400,000 VFW members, veterans and supporters a chance to stay informed on issues facing the military community. Newsletter subscribers stand ready to email, write, call or visit our nation's lawmakers to make VFW's voice heard on Capitol Hill.

EMERGING LEADERS



With fellow Post 7392 VFW and Auxiliary members, Post Commander Julie Doran, second from left, hangs out at the Post located in the community of Oak Harbor on Whidbey Island, Wash. Doran is the first female commander at the Post and said the VFW is like “family.”
Photo by Lauren Goldman

As more and more of the latest generation of veterans join the elite ranks of the VFW, the leadership torch is passed.

VFW Post 7392 in Oak Harbor on the northern end of Whidbey Island, Wash., is no exception. The Post is home to more than 1,000 veterans, of which 870 are Life members.

Leading the way is Post Commander Julie Doran, who has been a VFW member since 2005, and is the first female commander of the Post. Doran and her family were drawn

to the Post after finding themselves nearly homeless.

“As a mother of four, we were on the verge of being homeless,” said Doran, a Navy veteran. “We owned a large trailer, so I asked around, and a veteran from Post 7392 told me about the campgrounds at the Post.”

Doran, who still lives at the campgrounds with her family, which includes her husband, a Navy veteran and Auxiliary member himself, has since become camp host, helping veterans like herself find a place to stay as they transition from the military or navigate hardships.

“It’s my way to pay it forward,” said Doran, who alongside her husband, also serves as caretaker of the campgrounds, which includes a veterans memorial garden, showers and a V-dome picnic area.

“When I first got to Post 7392, I realized how active and amazing these people were. I had not seen what a real VFW Post was until I came over to this Post. I used to think it was just a hangout for older veterans. But they opened my eyes, and I saw all the work they were doing in the community.”

Doran said she finds her role as commander to be rewarding. When she thinks of the VFW, she said she thinks of the word “family,” because no matter what anyone is going through, fellow members are always there to help.

“One of the biggest challenges I have discovered as Post commander is that I do not have the answer for everything,” Doran said. “I have seen some challenges. You run across so many personalities and that can be incredibly challenging. I learned that I do not have to have the answer right away and to always counsel as I have been taught. I must keep emotions out of the situation and keep it professional. I lost my son four years ago to cancer. He was a sergeant in the Army National Guard. So, as you can imagine, that is a challenge, but I am blessed to be sure I am there for the grieving loved ones now, as they were there for me.”

Doran said when a new member comes to the Post, she is sure there is always someone there to greet them! She said it is important to get a feel for the person who walks in and find out if they need assistance at all.

“I have run into several active-duty members and their families who are getting ready to discharge and are just not ready to be separated in all ways. This is how we, as VFW members, can help. It is important that the new member feels welcome and appreciated as they are often eager to volunteer and help veterans and their families.”

HELPING WHEN FAMILIES NEED IT MOST



“I wish I could visit those who made the assistance possible to give you a hug and big thanks.”

VFW's *Unmet Needs* program provides active-duty service members/Guard/Reserves and their families with a hand up during times of financial stress. *Unmet Needs* grants can pay for a variety of expenses including mortgage/rent payments, childcare, utility bills and groceries, among others. *Bigstock Photo*

Patrick Byrne, 40, lives in Greensboro, North Carolina, with his wife, Jennifer, and their three children, Patrick, Finnegan and Amelia. In college, he joined the ROTC before serving in the Army for nine years.

Patrick was stationed in Georgia, North Carolina and Alaska and completed deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan. Now, years later, he manages several health conditions related to his service.

“Similar to many who deployed to the Middle East, I have a variety of chronic respiratory issues,” he said. “Also, my last airborne jump was by far the worst. I landed hard enough to sustain a concussion. Today, I act as an advocate for fellow service members to find the best care.”

Recently, Patrick was laid off from his job, and it was taking longer than he'd hoped to find something else.

“I researched ways I could get help as time kept passing and finances grew tighter and tighter,” he said.

Patrick found the VFW's *Unmet Needs* program and applied. He said the application process was straightforward, and the support was deeply appreciated. But, like many veterans, Patrick found it difficult to ask for help.

“It was humbling,” he said. “I didn't want much, just something.”

Patrick used the aid to cover a payment on the car he uses to get to interviews and meetings in his job search. He encourages people to donate to the VFW and other veteran-focused nonprofits because he knows the difference their generosity makes.

“I am extremely thankful,” Patrick said. “I wish I could visit those who made the assistance possible to give you a hug and big thanks.”

UNMET NEEDS BY THE NUMBERS More than \$13.1 million: The amount of financial grants awarded to military families since 2004 to help cover basic needs in times of financial hardship. 11,607: Number of servicemembers/veterans and their families who received assistance through *Unmet Needs* since 2004.

VETERAN RECEIVES **HELP A HERO SCHOLARSHIP**



Victoria Tillett, right, is pictured while serving in the Ohio Army National Guard. Tillett has been awarded VFW's "Sport Clips Help A Hero Scholarship" multiple times and says she is "deeply grateful" for the opportunity to pursue higher educational goals in nursing.
Photo courtesy of Victoria Tillett

Victoria Tillett served in the Ohio Army National Guard between October 2016 and October 2022, spending most of her time with the 1st Battalion, 145th Armored Regiment.

In support of *Operation Spartan Shield*, Tillett deployed with the 30th Infantry Division. Tillett primarily served as a culinary specialist. However, since she became a registered EMT before deployment, she also occasionally worked alongside medics while overseas.

Currently, Tillett is working on a Bachelor of Science degree in nursing at Chamberlain University in Ohio. After graduation, she plans to work in emergency medicine.

"I am also interested in community health nursing through medical mission trips, clinics, and possibly emergency response roles with organizations like FEMA," she said. "In the future, I plan to pursue a master's in nursing education and later a nurse practitioner degree."

Remarkably, Tillett has received the VFW's "*Sport Clips Help A Hero Scholarship*" for several semesters in a row, since she first learned about it through *Scholarships.com*.

She highly recommends that her peers apply as well, stressing how the scholarship has helped to take pressure off every aspect of her life.

"The "*Help A Hero Scholarship*" has been a tremendous support in my journey," Tillett said.

"It has not only eased the financial burden of tuition but also allowed me to maintain a balance between my academic, professional and personal responsibilities. I am deeply grateful for the assistance it has provided and encourage others to take advantage of this valuable resource."

As VFW's official haircutter, Sport Clips began working with VFW in 2005 to raise funds for a former program called *Operation Uplink*. In 2013, Sport Clips became the primary supporter of the "*Help A Hero Scholarship*" program. The VFW's "*Sport Clips Help A Hero Scholarship*" has awarded more than \$12 million to more than 2,700 veterans and service members wanting to further their education.

"The Help A Hero Scholarship has been a tremendous support in my journey. I am deeply grateful for the assistance it has provided and encourage others to take advantage of this valuable resource."

HELP A HERO BY THE NUMBERS VFW's "*Sport Clips Help A Hero Scholarship*" program has awarded 2,729 scholarships worth more than \$12 million since 2013. Visit <https://www.vfw.org/Scholarship> for more information.

SUPPORTING TROOPS AND THEIR FAMILIES



Soldiers of the Army National Guard's 112th Infantry Regiment in the Horn of Africa show off new baseball equipment sent to them by VFW Post 470 in Erie, Pa. Currently, troops in the Horn of Africa are requesting several items for care packages, including baseball gloves, baseballs, raman noodles, and hot sauce. *Photo courtesy of 112th Infantry Regiment*

A VFW Post in the Rust Belt continues to provide much-needed care packages to troops deployed to the Horn of Africa.

VFW Post 470 in Erie, Pa., has gathered enough items to fill 52 large postal service boxes. VFW Post 470 Commander Robert Depew said the most requested items for troops deployed to the Horn of Africa include puzzles, sunscreen, baby wipes, hot sauce, raman noodles, Halloween candy, and flavor packets for water, such as Gatorade or Powerade. Baseballs and baseball gloves also are highly requested.

Depew said earlier this year, he received an email from the VFW Department of Pennsylvania requesting care packages for Pennsylvanian units. Depew noticed one of the units was the Army National Guard's 112th Infantry Regiment, based near Erie in Cambridge Springs and Lewiston.

Depew also said that troops from the regiment are thankful for the care packages.

"We are making sure that they are not forgotten," said Depew, who served as an Army Military Police Officer in 1972-1982 at South Korea's Camp Humphreys. "It's nice to know people are thinking about you, especially when you are overseas in the military."

"It's nice to know people are thinking about you, especially when you are overseas in the military."

DISASTER RELIEF

Since the VFW's inception 125 years ago, its members' pursuance to help communities ravaged by natural disasters remains undeterred. VFW members from across the country annually carry out missions to combat the harsh aftermath of floods, wildfires, typhoons or hurricanes that have ravaged communities.

This year was no exception. In October, members sprang into action to assist communities impacted by *Hurricane Helene*. From delivering supplies and clearing debris to organizing drop-off and pick-up points, VFW members were on the ground providing support where it was needed.

In Chandler, Okla., VFW Post 1719 members delivered donated supplies to VFW Post 5202 in Waynesville, N.C., which was a hub for receiving donations.

Also in Waynesville, VFW members worked to clear downed trees and debris and repair a fence for a veteran.

San Antonio-based Grunt Style sent shirts to the VFW in North Carolina to distribute to those who lost everything.

Members of VFW Post 2252 in Kalispell, Mont., presented a \$15,000 check to VFW Post 6908 in Mountain City, Tenn. The funds were earmarked to assist with recovery efforts for residents affected by *Hurricane Helene*.

Learn more about VFW's relief efforts at <https://www.vfw.org/relief>.



VFW Quartermaster General Marc Garduno helps lead disaster relief efforts in October 2024 at VFW Post 5202 in Waynesville, N.C. Garduno was one of many VFW members from around the country who volunteered to help victims of *Hurricane Helene*. VFW photo



VFW Post 5202 and Auxiliary members clear out a tree in October 2024 in Waynesville, N.C. VFW Post 5202 photo



Supplies for *Hurricane Helene* victims are shown at VFW Post 1142 in North Wilkesboro, N.C. in October 2024. Photo by Brittany Dymond/VFW



EDUCATING AMERICA'S YOUTH



Then-VFW Commander-in-Chief Duane Sarmiento (right) and then-VFW Auxiliary National President Carla Martinez (left) present *Patriot's Pen* first-place winner Bryant Day with his \$5,000 award in March in Washington, D.C. Photo by Bob Knudsen



Then-VFW Commander-in-Chief Duane Sarmiento (right) and then-VFW Auxiliary National President Carla Martinez (left) present *Voice of Democracy* first-place winner Sophia Lin with her \$35,000 award during the Parade of Winners in March in Washington, D.C. Photo by Bob Knudsen

VOICE OF DEMOCRACY

Each year, VFW provides high school students in the United States and certain areas overseas with an opportunity to voice their ideas through a democratic-themed essay.

Through this premiere scholarship program, *Voice of Democracy*, VFW presented Sophia Lin with its first-place \$35,000 *T.C. Selman Memorial Scholarship* during the Parade of Winners in March 2024 in the nation's capital.

Sponsored by VFW Post 3513 and its Auxiliary in Scottsdale, Ariz., Lin's essay on "What Are the Greatest Attributes of Our Society?" paid tribute to her parents, who moved to the U.S. as a young couple with the hopes of becoming citizens. She wrote: "I asked my mother why she kept persevering in hopes of one day becoming an American citizen. She said, 'because to be a citizen is to be a part of democracy.'"

Lin, then a junior at BASIS Scottsdale, also used her essay to highlight a 100-year-old World War II woman veteran named Dolly. The high schooler had previously interviewed Dolly through the Veterans Heritage Project.

"She described an era when democracy was threatened, and young Americans like her rallied to preserve it," Lin wrote. "Dolly underscored that democracy is not just about casting votes; it's about fighting, both physically and literally, for a set of ideals that make life worth living — freedom, justice and the pursuit of happiness."

The *Voice of Democracy* contest drew nearly 40,000 students from grades nine through 12 for the 2023-24 year.

PATRIOT'S PEN

Bryant Day garnered top honors in VFW's 2023-24 *Patriot's Pen* youth essay contest. His essay on the theme, "How Are You Inspired by America?" earned Day the \$5,000 *North End Post 144, Paul A. Spera Past Commander-in-Chief Award*.

Then an eighth-grade student from Ashland, Ohio, Day was one of more than 110,000 students in grades six through eight to compete in the contest. He was sponsored by VFW Post 9943 and its Auxiliary in Mansfield, Ohio.

The first-place recipients from each Department in the *Patriot's Pen* contest shared

"To be a citizen is to be part of a democracy."

the \$54,500 in awards, distributed accordingly to each based on placement.

To learn more about the *Voice of Democracy* and *Patriot's Pen* youth programs, visit www.vfw.org/YouthScholarships.

SMART/MAHER NATIONAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION TEACHER AWARD

This year's *Smart/Maher National Citizenship Education Teacher Award* winners received rounds of resounding applause from thousands of VFW members and guests at the 125th VFW National Convention in Louisville, Ky.

Introduced by then-VFW Commander-in-Chief Duane Sarmiento, the teachers, representing three categories ranging from elementary to high school, were recognized individually.

The winners included Eugene V. Struzik III for the elementary school category, Monica Galloway for middle school and Edward M. Graf for high school.

Struzik, who served more than 26 years in the Air Force, began teaching fifth grade at Northwest Elementary School in Dodge City, Kan., in 2019 and quickly instilled a sense of appreciation and patriotism amongst his young scholars. He was sponsored by VFW Post 1714 in Dodge City.

Galloway, an Army veteran, was sponsored by VFW Post 9376 in Clinton, Md. She is a sixth-grade math teacher at Eisenhower Middle School in Laurel, Md., and strives to connect veterans with today's youth.

Graf, a social studies teacher at Somerset County Vocational & Technical High School in Bridgewater, N.J., was sponsored by VFW Post 7858 in Bernardsville, N.J. He established "Proud to be an American Day" at his school.



Then-VFW Commander-in-Chief Duane Sarmiento, left, presents Monica Galloway, a sixth-grade math teacher at Dwight D. Eisenhower Middle School in Laurel, Md., with the *Smart/Maher National Citizenship Education Teacher Award* during the VFW's 125th National Convention in July in Louisville, Ky. Galloway was honored for her remarkable ability to connect the military and veterans' communities with today's youth. *Photo by Bob Knudsen*



Then-VFW Commander-in-Chief Duane Sarmiento, left, presents Eugene Struzik, a fifth-grade teacher at Northwest Elementary School in Dodge City, Kan., with the *Smart/Maher National Citizenship Education Teacher Award* at VFW's National Convention in July in Louisville, Ky. Struzik established Project Mail Call: Honoring Our Veterans, which allows his students to write letters to veterans embarking on Kansas Honor Flights. *Photo by Bob Knudsen*

EDUCATION BY THE NUMBERS \$1.4 Million: Amount of awards presented at all levels of VFW during the 2022-23 *Voice of Democracy* competition. **\$865,000:** Amount of awards presented at all levels of VFW during the 2022-23 *Patriot's Pen* competition. **68,439:** Number of *Patriot's Pen* student participants in 2022-23. **26,431:** Number of *Voice of Democracy* student participants in 2022-23. **70:** Number of teachers who have been honored since 1999.



Army veteran Edward Graf, a social studies teacher at Somerset County Vocational & Technical High School in Bridgewater, N.J., gives an acceptance speech after receiving the VFW's *Smart/Maher National Citizenship Education Teacher Award* on July 30 in Louisville, Ky. Graf was chosen for the passion and energy he has in support of service members, veterans, and Gold Star families. *Photo by Bob Knudsen*

#STILLSERVING



Members of VFW Post 4934 in McComb, Miss., gather at the Day of Service event in May 2024. Post 4934 members participated in a blood drive. *VFW Post 4934 photo*

“Even though we’ve hung up our uniforms, we remain dedicated to our community. It feels great to give back.”

VFW held the third annual Day of Service, an event that was held by Posts across the country, through May 2024. The initiative aimed to recruit veterans, military members and local advocates to participate in events that make meaningful impacts in their communities.

#DayofService was used more than 3 million times across several social media and news outlets, which engaged more than 500 Posts around the world to participate in the 2024 Day of Service.

Examples of community service events include:

- Drives for food, personal hygiene products and diapers
- Home repair
- Highway clean up
- Street, park, cemetery or vacant lot clean up
- Health fairs
- Houseless to home support
- Playground rehab
- Accessibility initiatives

VFW Post 2260 in Oconomowoc, Wis., hosted a “Fill the Humvee” food drive. Garrett Collins, a member of the Post, said being part of the 2024 Day of Service was a rewarding way for veterans to continue their commitment to service.

“I enjoy serving,” Garrett said. “Even though we’ve hung up our uniforms, we remain dedicated to our community. It feels great to give back.”

Among other notable VFW Day of Service events, VFW Post 8273 in Frisco, Texas, showcased its “Wall that Heals,” which is a traveling replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Members of VFW Post 4934 in McComb, Miss., participated in a blood drive. Also, VFW Post 3396 in Sparks, Nev., collaborated with local organizations to beautify a local high school.

“You can’t truly understand someone’s life unless you’ve walked in their shoes,” said Post 5408 Commander Dwayne Kilbourne, whose Post in Acworth, Ga., organized a drive-thru food donation event. “Our goal today was to bring a smile to someone’s face — you never know how that might uplift them tomorrow.”

To see more about VFW’s 2024 Day of Service, visit todaysvfw.org/vfw-day-of-service-2024-photos.

REMEMBERING OUR **FALLEN**



“It truly tells a story about the soldier and his family.”

VFW Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief Carol Whitmore congratulates sculptor Sabin Howard on *A Soldier's Journey*, the memorial centerpiece to the World War I Memorial, on Sept. 14 at Pershing Park in Washington, D.C.

Photo courtesy of Rob Couture

VFW's third objective of purposes as listed in its Congressional Charter is to perpetuate the memory and history of our dead.

To honor this mission, VFW Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief Carol Whitmore attended the unveiling of 'A Soldier's Journey,' a 58-foot bronze sculpture at the National World War I Memorial on Sept. 14 at Pershing Park in Washington, D.C.

Whitmore joined fellow VFW delegates and prominent persons in a crowd that amassed hundreds honoring the sacrifice of 116,500 American soldiers killed during WWI, as well as several hundred thousand more who fought to preserve freedom.

Among those in attendance was former VFW national Quartermaster General Debra Anderson, a member of the World War I Centennial Commission since 2016. Whitmore interviewed Anderson to understand what the VFW did to help create this bronze memorial.

“The World War 1 Centennial Commission was formed in 2013 because there was no World War 1 memorial in Washington, D.C., and Congress decided to do something about that,” Anderson said. “So the Commission came together, represented 1,315 people, representative of both political parties and then a representative from the VFW and one from the American Legion.”

In good faith, the VFW and American Legion each donated more than \$300,000 toward the National World War I Memorial.

Anderson outlined the memorial, which includes an urban park, a bronze 58-foot statue wall created by sculptor Sabin Howard, and a fountain. According to Anderson, each part serves as a peaceful place to contemplate the cost of war.

“What we're doing with this unveiling is to illuminate, to light up the brand new statue that just got completed, cast in bronze, and is here to tell the soldier's journey,” Anderson said.

Whitmore agreed with Anderson's sentiment, thanking her for her commitment to the memorial.

“And it truly tells a story about the soldier and his family,” she said. “So thank you for your hard work on this, and thank you to the World War I Commission for this.”

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The VFW Foundation wishes to express its gratitude to some of its most magnanimous donors. Such generosity helped fund numerous VFW programs and initiatives from Sept. 1, 2023 through Aug. 31, 2024.

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Randy Graf
Peggy Granberry

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Charles L. Grantham
Guy Gravel
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Julia Guggenheim
Marilyn Hahn
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David Hamm
Charles E. Hancock
Lynne E. Hanse
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Eugene Eppolito
Darrell J. Healy
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Helen Heisler
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Alfred C. Henry
Margaret Hensley
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Mary Taylor
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Karen Wright
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Florence Yankosky
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Fred Yeany
Zhou Yong
Ronald Youngdahl
Ronald F. Zarwell
Sonia Zeringue
Mattias Zhbinskiy
Robert Zupan
Richard Zurek



Financial Statements

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AUGUST 31, 2024

ASSETS

Cash and cash equivalents	\$8,830,765
Investments	237,888,830
Receivables	2,573,534
Inventory	3,500,512
Property and equipment, net	6,722,011
Pension and postretirement asset	5,861,025
Prepaid expenses	3,155,133
Total assets	<u>\$268,531,810</u>

LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS

Accounts payable and accrued liabilities	\$11,271,481
Life member dues for future distribution — state and posts	83,762,003
Deferred revenue	36,045,758
Total liabilities	<u>131,079,242</u>
Net assets	
Without donor restrictions	129,675,663
With donor restrictions	7,776,905
Total net assets	<u>137,452,568</u>
Total liabilities and net assets	<u>\$268,531,810</u>

Statement of Activities and Changes in Net Assets Year Ended August 31, 2024

SUPPORT AND REVENUE

Contributions and gifts	\$71,920,628
Investment return, net	20,586,510
Membership dues	6,993,405
Supply, Buddy Poppy and other sales	7,157,092
Advertising revenue	2,552,764
Other revenue	3,500,522
Total support and revenue	<u>112,710,921</u>

EXPENSES

Program Services:	
Veterans service activities	27,996,285
Fraternal and member service activities	19,691,688
Community service and public awareness	11,167,358
Total program services	<u>58,855,331</u>
Supporting Services:	
Fundraising activities	35,257,096
Management and general activities	3,344,229
Membership development activities	1,223,451
Total support services	<u>39,824,776</u>
Total expenses	<u>98,680,107</u>
Change in net assets before pension-related changes other than pension service costs	14,030,814
Pension-related changes other than pension service costs	<u>2,932,751</u>
Change in net assets	16,963,565
Net assets, Beginning of period	<u>120,489,003</u>
Net assets, End of period	<u>\$137,452,568</u>



Financial Statements

Statement of Financial Position August 31, 2024

ASSETS

Cash and cash equivalents	\$4,280,388
Investments	18,787,143
Receivables	51,566
Furniture, fixtures, and equipment	5,458
Prepaid expenses	<u>12,781</u>
Total assets	<u><u>\$23,137,336</u></u>

LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS

Accounts payable and accrued liabilities	\$328,394
Net assets	
Without donor restrictions	17,302,801
With donor restrictions	<u>5,506,141</u>
Total net assets	<u>22,808,942</u>
Total liabilities and net assets	<u><u>\$23,137,336</u></u>

Statement of Activities and Changes in Net Assets Year Ended August 31, 2024

SUPPORT AND REVENUE

Cash contributions and gifts	\$6,388,016
Investment return, net	<u>2,526,105</u>
Total support and revenue	<u>8,914,121</u>

EXPENSES

Program Services:	
Veterans service activities	2,789,324
Community service and public awareness	855,383
Supporting Services:	
Fundraising activities	544,199
Management and general	<u>454,459</u>
Total expenses	<u>4,643,365</u>
Change in net assets	4,270,756
Net assets, Beginning of period	<u>18,538,186</u>
Net assets, End of period	<u><u>\$22,808,942</u></u>



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