

2024-2025

April 2025

Volume 50

"Leading with Honor: Debbie McElhannon Serves as Louisiana's Second Female State Commander"



*"Continuing the Mission to Serve and Support
Veterans Across the State"*



CELEBRATING THE LEGACY

This year the VFW enters its 125th year of service to America's veterans. We are honoring the impacts and achievements that will continue to positively impact the lives of all future generations of veterans, forever. We are Celebrating the Legacy.



vfw125.org



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Louisiana Welcomes VFW & VFW Auxiliary National Representatives to the 94th State Convention



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Past National CIC
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Auxiliary Conductress
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Celebrating Service, Strength, and a Historic Milestone

In a historic moment for Louisiana, Debbie McElhannon was elected



as the State Commander for the 2024-2025 term, becoming only the second female to hold this position. The official installation of McElhannon and the 2024-2025 Council of Administration took place on June 30, 2024, during the Joint Installation Ceremony.

The event marked a significant milestone in the VFW Department of Louisiana's history, celebrating leadership that continues to break barriers and set new precedents.

Her election serves as an inspiration to many, highlighting the vital role of women in leadership positions within veteran service organizations and paving the way for future generations.



Standing Strong in the Storm: VFW Louisiana Disaster Relief

Submitted by State Quartermaster, Elvin Bass

In the midst of disaster, it isn't just the storm that tests us—it's how we respond, our resilience, and our refusal to give up on one another. Our Department knows all too well the feeling of despair during any disaster. That is why when disaster strikes, whether flood, fire, or a hurricane, we are reminded once again of the strength of our VFW family.

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A MESSAGE FROM THE STATE COMMANDER



What a wonderful year we have had so far. I have completely enjoyed traveling the state and meeting so many veterans. The best part of meeting veterans is listening to their stories. The comradery that we share in our organization is outstanding which makes our conferences fun. At the same time, we continue to serve by fighting to ensure veterans receive what they have earned.

Many stories are told at funerals. The Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Department of Louisiana has lost many members this year. We must honor our comrades for they were willing to fight for and possibly pay the ultimate sacrifice for our freedom. Our freedom was bought by the blood of our fallen comrades and those veterans who fought alongside them. They have paved the path for our future generations. Without the veterans who are willing to fight for our country, we would not have freedom. Some of these funerals are for veterans who lost their lives overseas and were Missing in Action (MIA). The remains have been recovered sometimes 80 or more years later and identified by DNA. We must continue to bring our fallen comrades home. You can help by passing the word that any family who has a loved one still MIA, can help identify the remains by providing DNA samples and other artifacts or personal items, like letters from the missing family member.

Every March we go to Washington D.C. to speak with our representatives about important issues for our veterans. We had 27 people go to the Washington Conference this year. We went to all our Louisiana representatives' offices and later met with some of them and their legislative assistants or Defense Fellow to discuss the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) priorities we want passed or enforced for veterans. I always say that it took Congress a stroke of a pen to enforce health care and legislation for veterans and it is only a stroke of a pen that can take it away. We must continue to build our membership and go in large numbers to speak to our representative to ensure veterans continue to get what they earned.

Another great thing about the Washington D.C. trip is that the Voice of Democracy (VOD) winners are announced during this trip. Ms. Ella Wilson and I had the privilege of escorting the Louisiana VOD winner, Ms. Ashlyn Rogers, down the red carpet for the parade of winners. Our VOD winner received a \$2000 scholarship for her essay. Afterwards, we enjoyed a dinner out with the VOD winner's family. VOD is one of the programs that the VFW offers students each year. Americanism, Patriot's Pen, and VOD are very important programs that help reach today's students. We must help teach patriotism to our youth before it is too late. I am happy to see so many posts going into the schools and talking to our students, reading books and teaching them flag etiquette. Many of you have shared photos of members working with students. Keep up the good work!

We had a lot of fun at our conferences and the State Commander's testimonial. I really enjoyed spending time with all of you. The attendance was mixed with all ages. Some of the key items I have stressed this year are communication and mentorship, Generations continuing to serve together. We need all our veterans, those who have been in the VFW for years so they can mentor and teach the traditions to the members who are just starting. We need new members to help carry on our legacy. Together we work as a team to help veterans.

We also help veterans by checking on our buddies and neighbors. Don't be afraid to ask the tough questions like are you planning to hurt yourself. We need to check on each other's mental health. Invite comrades to a fun event at your post, go out to lunch or have coffee and share stories. Comradery and helping veterans are our main purpose. You are important and you are needed. You have a purpose in being here and can help fight for what our veterans earned.

Thank you for what you do. I appreciate your hard work and dedication to serving and helping veterans. Generations must continue to serve together.

Debbie McElhannon
State Commander

LEADERSHIP, DEDICATION, AND SERVICE TO OUR VETERANS

2024-2025 VFW Department of Louisiana Council of Administration



Debbie McElhannon
State Commander



James Prestenback
Sr. Vice Commander



Sharee Arends
Jr. Vice Commander



Elvin Ray Bass
State Quarteraster



Carl Karnish
State Adjutant



Larry Koons
State Surgeon



Aaron Lawrence
State Judge Advocate



David Fields
State Chaplain



Max Arends III
Chief of Staff



Phil Gallet
State Inspector



Ron Delaney
Jr. Past Commander



Lance Ellis
Dist 2 Commander



Murdock Gilmore
Dist 3 Commander



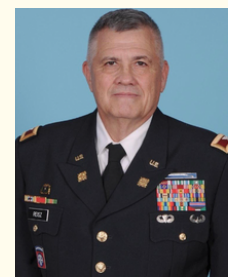
Don Reber
Dist 4 Commander



Ernest Mitchell
Dist 5 Commander



Dennis Hart
Dist 7 Commander



Robert Reisz
Dist 8 Commander



Terry Sauls
Dist 9 Commander



James Rabalais
Dist 10 Commander



Phil Lawrence
Dist 11 Commander



Walt Korb
Dist 12 Commander

On behalf of the Department, we extend our sincere gratitude to each member of the Council of Administration, along with all District and Post Officers, for their outstanding service this year.

Thank you for leading with honor, purpose, and pride!

VFW NATIONAL REPRESENTATIVE TO THE 94TH STATE CONVENTION



Brian Duffy *Past National CIC*



Brian Duffy was elected Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars on July 27, 2016, at the VFW's 117th National Convention in Charlotte, North Carolina.

In July 2017, he was appointed Adjutant General of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, a position he held until his retirement in 2018.

Brian served in the U.S. Air Force as a jet engine mechanic on F-4 Phantom fighter aircraft, and later as a flight engineer aboard C-141 Starlifter transport aircraft.

During his service, he deployed in support of several campaigns to include Grenada, Panama, and Operations Desert Shield/Storm in Southwest Asia. His military decorations include the Air Medal, Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, Southwest Asia Service Medal, and the Kuwait Liberation Medal.

Upon his return from Grenada in 1983, he joined VFW Post 6590 in Cookstown, New Jersey. He later transferred his membership to VFW Post 120 in Garden City Park, New York, then to VFW Post 1170 in Middletown, Kentucky, in 1989.

Following his Air Force service, he was employed by several airlines as a flight engineer instructor. He moved to "The Bluegrass State" of Kentucky in 1988 after joining United Parcel Service (UPS) Airlines as a flight engineer instructor. Rising through the ranks, he would retire in 2014 as assistant chief pilot with UPS, having flown worldwide as an instructor/check captain on Boeing 757 and 767 aircraft.

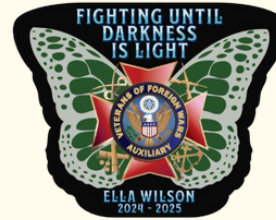
Brian was elected as Commander of the VFW Department of Kentucky in 2006. He achieved All-American status at Post, District and Department levels. His Honor Flight activities were recognized by the Kentucky Aviation Hall of Fame, the Kentucky Derby Festival as the 2009 "Thunderator," and was a recipient of the 2011 (Louisville) WLKY "Bell Award" for community volunteerism. In 2012, Brian was the recipient of President Obama's Volunteer Service Award after being nominated by UPS to recognize his numerous volunteer activities.

He is a Gold Legacy Life member of the VFW and is a member of the National Home for Children, Military Order of the Cootie, American Legion and AMVETS. Brian holds his Associate and his Bachelor of Science Degree in Aeronautics (Cum Laude) from Embry Riddle Aeronautical University.

He and his wife, Jean, who served three terms as Auxiliary President to VFW Post 1170, reside in Fort Myers, Florida, and have two adult children, Tara and Andrew.



A MESSAGE FROM THE STATE PRESIDENT



Hello everyone! Hope you are doing well. Before I get started, I would like to personally thank the Department of Louisiana VFW for the honor of having an article in the Combat Veteran. I truly appreciate this.

I became a member of this great organization in October of 2009. I have served as Chairman of different programs and offices on different levels from the local auxiliary to the Department. My greatest honor has been the office of Department VFW Auxiliary President. There have been some ups and downs this year including deaths of some of our mentors on both sides of the house, but there have also been good times. When I first became a member of the VFW Auxiliary in #4759 in Starks, La., I honestly wasn't sure what I could do to make a difference in a Veteran's life, an active servicemember or my community. It wasn't until one of our service members returned home from duty that I realized that I wanted to have a voice for. This Veteran was suffering and even though there were VFW Veterans visiting with him and his family, being there side by side with him, nothing was helping. It was at this point I realized "there is not enough being done." I remember sitting down to write a letter to President Trump asking for more help for our veterans. I'm not saying I had anything to do with this, but President Trump signed the Veteran's Act. I guess that is why Legislative is so important to me. When I was voted in as Department Guard I thought, "I'll be able to be a little louder voice for those suffering with psychological issues. None of our Comrades, VFW or not, should feel like they are here alone.

Before we know it, our year will be over. It truly has been an honor to serve with our Department Commander, Debbie McElhannon and her team and the deepest honor to serve as Department President to the greatest and best members! Louisiana, thank you for this moment.

Ella Wilson
State President

"Fighting Until Darkness is Light"

VFW AUXILIARY NATIONAL REPRESENTATIVE TO THE 94TH STATE CONVENTION



Sandra Uzell
National Conductress



Sandra Uzell National Conductor 2024-2025 Sandra Uzell, of Moreland Hills, Ohio, was elected to the office of National Conductor of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) of the United States Auxiliary at its 111th National Convention in Louisville, KY. She is now in the fourth of five offices leading to the National Presidency, which she is expected to hold in 2028-2029.

She is a Life Member of Al Santos Lyndhurst Auxiliary 7536 in Lyndhurst, Ohio, which is named after her father. She joined on the eligibility of her husband, Clayton, a Vietnam Veteran, who served in the U.S. Navy from 1962 to 1965. She has served the organization in many capacities including, Auxiliary, County, District and Department President. On the National level she has served as National Council Member Area D, National Color Bearer, Big Ten Conference Chairman for Americanism/Patriotic Instructor and Scholarship Programs, National Sponsorship Committee Chairman and National Appeals & Grievances and Ritual Review Committee Member.

Sandra holds a bachelor's degree in nursing and was a registered nurse. In addition, she holds a hot air balloon pilot license, is a professionally trained clown, balloon decorator and floral designer. She is a life member of the VFW National Home and Military Order of the Cootie Auxiliary (MOCA) #92.

Her family includes three daughters, three sons, nine grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. In her spare time, she enjoys Broadway musicals, Candy Crush, Sudoku and spending time with her family.

FUTURE LEADERS, STRONG VOICES:

The Department of Louisiana proudly recognizes the exceptional students who participated in this year's Patriot's Pen and Voice of Democracy competition. Students from all over the State of Louisiana competed in the essays for their grade levels.

Voice of Democracy: A Platform for Young Leaders

The Voice of Democracy program provides high school students with the unique opportunity to express themselves in regards to a democratic and patriotic-themed recorded essay. This year's theme, "What Are the Greatest Attributes of Our Democracy?", challenged students to reflect on

the strengths of our democratic system and the principles that uphold American freedoms. Through their words, these young leaders demonstrated remarkable insight, passion, and dedication to the ideals of liberty and service.

Patriot's Pen: Encouraging Young Writers

The Patriot's Pen essay contest encourages young students in grades 6th-8th to examine America's History, along with their own experiences in modern American society, by drafting an essay, expressing their views based on the theme for the year.

This year's theme, "How Are You Inspired by America?", encouraged students to reflect on the principles that shape our great nation and inspire their own journeys as future leaders. Louisiana students delivered impressive essays filled with insight, passion, and patriotism.

PROGRAM TOTALS FOR THE 2024-2025 YEAR:

VOICE OF DEMOCRACY

Participating Students- 2,120
Total Monetary Awards- \$10,090.00
Total Amount Expended- \$6,863.00

PATRIOT'S PEN

Participating Students- 2,267
Total Monetary Awards- \$6,430.00
Total Amount Expended- \$6,270.00

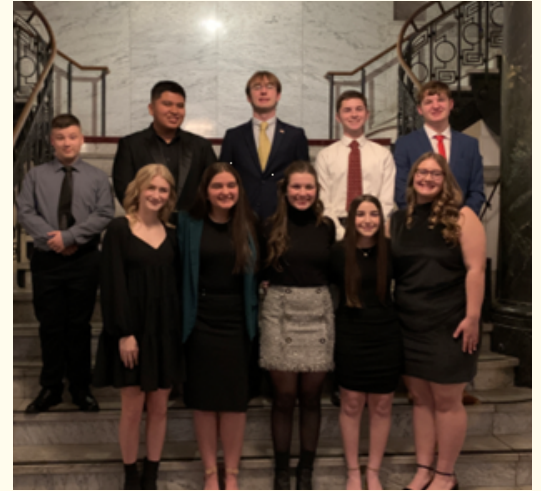


THE IMPACT OF VOD & PATRIOT'S PEN

Both essay competitions saw an impressive number of entries, with students representing VFW Posts throughout the state. After rigorous judging at local, district, and state levels, the 2024 Louisiana Patriot's Pen and Voice of Democracy Winners were announced during the 2025 Mid Winter Conference in January.

Future Leaders Speak Out: Louisiana Announces Voice of Democracy Award Winners"

- **First Place:** Ashlyn Rogers, sponsored by Post 3750 in Luling, delivered a moving speech that earned her a scholarship prize and the honor of representing Louisiana at the VFW National Voice of Democracy competition in Washington, D.C.
- **Second Place:** Lincoln Trumps sponsored by Post 9822
- **Third Place:** Omar Benites sponsored by Post 5951
- **Fourth Place:** Ava Russell sponsored by Post 3693
- **Fifth Place:** Haven Wilhite sponsored by Post 1809
- **Sixth Place:** Anna Bourque sponsored by Post 9903
- **Honorable Mention:** The following students received Honorable Mention at the Department level, in no specific order: Ethan Hammons sponsored by Post 12182, Grady Reeves sponsored by Post 2203, Ryleigh Vutera sponsored by Post 3652, and Ryan Lemoine sponsored by Post 3139



Honoring the Voices of Patriotism: Louisiana Announces Patriot's Pen Winners

- **First Place:** Caleb Barron, sponsored by VFW Post 5153 in Arnaudville, demonstrated extraordinary writing and a compelling perspective on American inspiration.
- **Second Place:** Phoenix Lemoine sponsored by Post 3267
- **Third Place:** Breanna Baye sponsored by Post 3652



First Place Department Patriot's Pen recipient pictured with family as well as the District 7 Commander (Dennis Hart), State Commander (Debbie McElhannon), State President (Ella Wilson), Post 5153 Commander (Larry Thomas).

The VFW Department of Louisiana extends its heartfelt congratulations to all participants. Their hard work, dedication, and commitment to expressing their patriotic voices inspire not only their peers but also veterans and community members statewide. For more information on both programs and how students can participate visit <https://vfw.org/community/youth-and-education/youth-scholarships>.

PATRIOTISM IN ACTION: 2024-2025

AMERICANISM WINNERS

The Department of Louisiana is proud to recognize the outstanding elementary school students who participated in this year's Americanism competition. This annual statewide contest encourages coloring, drawing, or an essay, for school aged children in grades K-5th.

Louisiana's Top Winners

During the Mid Winter Conference Joint Opening Ceremonies on January 24, 2025, the following awards were presented to the sponsoring Post of each student:

CATEGORY 1: THIS CATEGORY IS OPEN TO ALL KINDERGARTEN STUDENTS. EACH STUDENT COLORED A PICTURE OF THE AMERICAN FLAG.

1st Place Samara Payyalla VFW Post 9822

2nd Place Aurora Castillo VFW Post 8720

3rd Place Katie Grey Talton VFW Post 1809

CATEGORY 2: THIS CATEGORY IS OPEN TO ALL STUDENTS IN 1ST & 2ND GRADE. EACH STUDENT SUBMITTED A DRAWING OF THE AMERICAN FLAG.

1st Place Addison Pasache VFW Post 3665

2nd Place Reed Parker VFW Post 3106

3rd Place Madeline Perrin VFW Post 8720

CATEGORY 3: THIS CATEGORY IS OPEN TO ALL STUDENTS IN 3RD & 4TH GRADE. EACH STUDENT SUBMITTED A DRAWING OF A HISTORICAL EVENT.

1st Place Ivy Duke VFW Post 1736

2nd Place Kalyel Monsibais VFW Post 3665

3rd Place Olivia Lemaire VFW Post 9822

CATEGORY 4: THIS CATEGORY IS OPEN TO ALL STUDENTS IN 5TH GRADE. EACH STUDENT SUBMITTED AN ESSAY BASED ON THE TITLE "HOW I HONOR VETERANS"

1st Place Kreid Johnson VFW Post 4224

2nd Place Grant Ochello VFW Post 5735

3rd Place Jillian Elizabeth Hebert VFW Post 1982

Post Awards

Most Participating Schools

Post 1736 Post 1962

Post 1809 Post 2130

Most Participating Students

Post 3619

2644 Students

PROGRAM TOTALS FOR THE 2024-2025 YEAR:

Participating Students- 14,690

Total Amount Expended- \$6,623.00

CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

The Department of Louisiana is honored to recognize the dedicated educators who have been selected as the 2024-2025 VFW Teacher of the Year winners. This outstanding award celebrates teachers who instill patriotism, civic responsibility, and an appreciation for America's history in their students.

Each year, the VFW acknowledges outstanding teachers at the elementary, middle, and high school levels who go above and beyond in promoting good citizenship and fostering a deep respect for our nation's core values. These educators play a vital role in shaping the leaders of tomorrow.

Honoring Those Who Inspire

After careful evaluation of nominations submitted by VFW Posts across the state, we are proud to announce the 2024-2025 Louisiana VFW Teacher of the Year honorees:

Elementary School: Theresa Landry, a Librarian working with students in Pre K through 5th grade at Lake Elementary School in St. Amant, LA, received the First Place Award in the Elementary category. Theresa was sponsored by Post 3693 in Gonzales, LA.

Middle School: Adam Exnicios, a 7th grade teacher at JB Martin Middle School in Paradis, LA, received the First Place Award in the Junior High category. Adam was sponsored by Post 3750 in Luling, LA where he is also a Life Member.

High School: Steven Griffith, a teacher at Starks High School in Starks, LA received the First Place award in the High School category. Steven was sponsored by Post 4759 in Starks, LA.

Each of these winners will advance to compete at the national level, where they will have the opportunity to be recognized alongside the best educators from across the country.

The VFW Department of Louisiana extends its heartfelt congratulations to these exceptional educators. Their passion for teaching and commitment to fostering patriotism among students serve as an inspiration to both their peers and their communities. For more information about the VFW Teacher of the Year program and how to nominate an outstanding educator, visit www.vfw.org/TeacheroftheYear or contact your local VFW Post.

LOUISIANA VFW ADVOCATES FOR

The 2025 Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Washington Conference, was held from March 2-6, 2025, in Washington, D.C. This conference brought together VFW leaders and delegates from across the nation, including representatives from Louisiana. This annual event serves as a platform for VFW members to advocate for veterans' issues directly with lawmakers and to participate in key organizational activities.



Louisiana's Active Participation

VFW members of the Louisiana Department were well represented at this year's conference. Louisiana delegates, led by State Commander Debbie McElhannon, met with congressional members to discuss pressing issues Louisiana veterans encounter. Their lobbying was focused on ensuring the special needs of Louisiana veterans are heard and addressed at the national level.

Key Highlights of the Conference

Commander-in-Chief's Testimony: VFW National Commander Al Lipphardt presented the organization's legislative priorities before a special joint hearing of the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees.

Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen Awards:

The national winners of these prestigious Scholarship contests were announced. Tri Vu from Manchester, New Hampshire, won the first place in the Voice of Democracy competition with a \$35,000 scholarship, while Evelyn Newbigging is from Indian Land, South Carolina, won the Patriot's Pen award, receiving a \$5,000 scholarship. Our very own First Place VOD student, Ashlyn Rogers, received the \$2,000



Department of Kentucky Brian Duffy and Marion Watson scholarship for her outstanding essay.

VFW Congressional Award: Representative Derrick Van Orden was honored with the 2025 VFW Congressional Award for his significant legislative contributions on behalf of veterans and service members.

VETERANS AT LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE



The commitment shown by Louisiana's VFW and Auxiliary members at the national conference reflects their strong dedication to the protection of veterans' rights and benefits. Their effort makes certain that the voices of Louisiana's veterans are heard and considered at the national, state, and local levels of government.



A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO OUR LEGISLATIVE CHAIRMAN, MATTHEW WEST!

The VFW Department of Louisiana would like to extend our appreciation to our Legislative Chairman, Matthew West, for his dedication and advocacy on behalf of Louisiana veterans, as well as his leadership in coordinating Louisiana's participation at the 2025 Legislative Conference. He helped to ensure that the issues of Louisiana veterans were conveyed effectively to lawmakers.

Thank you, Matthew, for your leadership, dedication, and outstanding service to the VFW Department of Louisiana and all veterans.



94TH ANNUAL STATE CONVENTION



Louisiana

June 26-29, 2025
Randolph River Center
707 2nd St., Alexandria, LA 71301



Louisiana

Thursday, June 26th

Pre-Registration 4:30pm - 5:30pm

Friday, June 27th

Registration 8:30am - 11:30am
PSC & PSP Presentation 8:30am - 9:00am
Health Fair 9:00am - 12:00pm
Lunch 12:00pm - 1:15pm
Registration 12:30pm - 3:00pm
1st Business Session 1:15pm - 3:30pm
Training- Trustee Reports 6:30pm - 4:30pm
Training- Suicide Prevention 4:00pm - 5:00pm
Bylaws Committee Mtg 4:00pm - 5:30pm
Auxiliary Bingo 4:00pm - 5:30pm
2025-26 Leadership Mtg 5:00pm
Auxiliary Fundraiser 6:00pm

Saturday, June 28th

Registration 8:30am - 11:30am
Officer Line Up 8:45am
Joint Opening & Memorial 9:00am - 11:15am
Ceremony
Lunch 12:00pm - 1:15pm
PSC Lunch 12:00pm - 1:15pm
Registration 12:30pm - 3:00pm
2nd Business Session 1:15pm - 3:30pm
Budget Meeting 3:50pm
Rehersal for Sunday 4:30pm - 5:00pm
VFW/Aux Awards Banquet 6:30pm

Sunday, June 29th

Registration 8:00am - 9:00am
Final Business Session 9:00am - 11:00am
Nominations & Elections
Joint Installation Ceremony 11:15am
Reception for 2025-26 State Cmdr. *To Follow*

Thursday, June 26th

Registration 3:00pm - 5:00pm
Staff, Budget, Audit Meetings 4:00pm - 4:30pm
District Presidents Meeting 4:30pm - 5:30pm
(Presidents & Line Officers Only)
Floor Practice, including Line Officers 7:00pm

Friday, June 27th

Registration & Sweets Booth 8:00am - 4:00pm
PSC & PSP Presentation 8:30am - 9:00am
9:00am - 11:15am
Lunch 11:30 am - 1:00pm
Council of Administration Meeting 1:15pm - 2:15pm
Auxiliary 1st Business Session & Award Presentations 2:15pm - 4:30pm
4:30pm
NVMS Prize BINGO 6:00pm
Fundraiser Dinner, Theme: "Luau"

Saturday, June 28th

Registration & Sweets Booth 8:00am - 4:00pm
VFW & Auxiliary Officer Line-up 8:45am
Joint Opening & Memorial Services 9:00am - 11:15am
Auxiliary 2nd Business Session 11:30am - 1:00pm
Lunch 12:00pm - 1:00pm
Past Department Presidents Luncheon 1:15pm - 1:45pm
Auxiliary Memorial Service 1:45pm - 3:45pm
Auxiliary 3rd Business Session,
Open Nominations
Awards Banquet 6:30pm

Sunday, June 29th

Auxiliary Final Nominations & Election 8:30 am-11:00 am
Joint Installation 11:15 am
Reception for Incoming State 1:00 pm
Commander & State President

2024-2025 ALL STATE TEAM

Reminder that All State Entry Forms are due May 5, 2025. All entry forms can be mailed to the Department Headquarters or emailed to lastatevfw@yahoo.com

Visit the Department's webpage www.vfwdeptla.org under Programs - All State Team for list of requirements.

BANQUET TICKETS

Banquet Tickets are \$40.00 per person

[Click here to purchase Banquet Tickets online](#)



or visit www.vfwdeptla.org - News - State Convention for more information

MEET THE CANDIDATES

As the VFW Department of Louisiana approaches its 94th Annual State Convention, scheduled for June 26-29, 2025, in Alexandria, LA, members are preparing to elect new leadership to guide the organization in its mission to support veterans and their families.

State Commander:

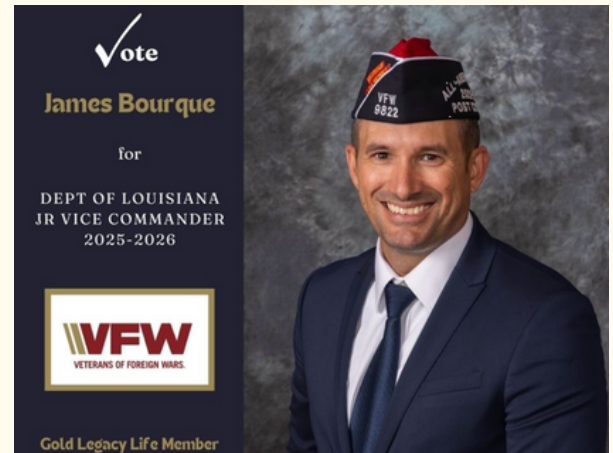
James Prestenback: Currently serving as State Senior Vice Commander, James seeks to advance to the role of State Commander, bringing years of dedicated service and leadership experience within the VFW.

State Senior Vice Commander:

Sharee Arends: The current State Junior Vice Commander, Sharee aims to step into the Senior Vice Commander position, continuing her commitment to veteran advocacy and organizational growth.

State Junior Vice Commander:

James Bourque: A member of Post 9822, previously served as the 2023-2024 District 4 Commander as well as Post 9822 Commander is running for the position of State Junior Vice Commander.



State Quartermaster:

Elvin R. Bass: As the incumbent State Quartermaster, Elvin seeks re-election to continue managing the financial responsibilities of the department with transparency and efficiency.

State Surgeon:

Joseph Dufrene: A member of Post 6640, previously served as District 2 Commander is running for State Surgeon.



MEMBERSHIP & RECRUITING

Membership is the foundation of the VFW's mission, ensuring that veterans have a strong and supportive community to turn to. Achieving 100% membership before the end of the calendar reflects the dedication of Post leadership and members in engaging new and returning veterans in the VFW's mission of advocacy, service, and camaraderie.

Recognizing Excellence: 2024-2025 Hall of Fame Honors

The Department of Louisiana proudly recognizes the outstanding dedication and commitment of the VFW Posts that reach 100% membership before December 31st, 2024. Through hard work, persistence, and unwavering support for veterans and their families, these Posts have earned a place in the 2024-2025 VFW Hall of Fame:

Post 1982 - New Iberia	Post 5442 - Farmerville
Post 2885 - Minden	Post 5951 - Bossier City
Post 3665 - Raceland	Post 7017 - Denham Springs
Post 3693 - Gonzales	Post 8678 - Port Barre
Post 3793 - Kaplan	Post 8852 - Alexandria
Post 4158 - Abbeville	Post 9608 - Chauvin
Post 4201 - Franklin	Post 9822 - Lafayette
Post 4215 - Breaux Bridge	Post 12065 - New Iberia
Post 4224 - Baker	Post 12182 - Patterson
Post 5187 - Zwolle	Post 12203 - Kinder

VFW Louisiana Honors Top Membership Recruiters for Outstanding Dedication

The following members have recruited 10+ New/Reinstated members so far this year:

Don Reber (Post 9822)	113
Paul Stone (Post 5951)	78
Robert Reisz (Post 4224)	62
Max Arends III (Post 5951)	59
Vance Sutton (Post 7017)	27
Chris LeGuin (Post 1809)	24
Joey Cernich (Post 3693)	15
Gabriela Swanson (Post 8973)	13
James Bourque (Post 9822)	12
James Minchew (Post 3665)	10
Jonathon Hudson (Post 3106)	10
Randy Campbell (Post 4588)	10
Shane Fowler (Post 3619)	10

Celebrating Excellence: 101%+ Membership Achievement!

The following Posts have reached 101%+ Membership for the year as of April 8, 2025:

Post 4224- Baker	Post 4201- Franklin
Post 9822- Lafayette	Post 12065- New Iberia
Post 2885- Minden	Post 3785- Addis
Post 12203- Kinder	Post 3665- Raceland
Post 7017- Denham Springs	Post 9210- Youngsville
Post 5187- Zwolle	Post 9903- Church Point
Post 1809- Monroe	Post 8852- Alexandria
Post 3693- Gonzales	Post 5442- Farmerville
Post 4215- Breaux Bridge	Post 1982- New Iberia
Post 5951 - Bossier City	Post 5735- Slidell
Post 8678- Port Barre	Post 3802- DeQuincy
Post 7643- Simmesport	Post 3155- Winnsboro
Post 3793- Kaplan	Post 12182- Patterson
Post 4158- Abbeville	Post 8973- New Orleans

STANDING STRONG IN THE STORM: VFW LOUISIANA DISASTER RELIEF

Continued from Page 1

This year, Louisiana extended its support to fellow departments who were facing extraordinary hardships. From the wildfires in California to the hurricane-battered communities of North Carolina, Tennessee, and Florida, our department extended vital donations to aid fellow veterans in the rebuilding and recovery process. These efforts speak not just of monetary aid—but of the enduring spirit of camaraderie that defines the VFW.

Our Department's Disaster Relief Program would not succeed without the unwavering support of our Posts. This year, we are honored to recognize the extraordinary act of the members of VFW Post 5735 of Slidell, LA, whose generous contribution of \$10,000 to our Department Disaster Relief has been greatly impactful. Their commitment, along with the commitment of so many other Posts within our Department, makes it possible for us to have the resources and capabilities ready to respond immediately and effectively when disaster occurs—near or far.

Donations received from VFW Louisiana Posts:

Post 5187	\$5,000	Post 3665	\$250
Post 5442	\$1,250	Post 5951	\$1,058
District 12	\$500	Post 4752	\$100
Post 3375	\$250	Post 4752	\$340.95
Post 7017	\$200	Post 3750	\$550
Post 3803	\$200	Post 7017	\$200
Post 7017	\$200	Post 3766	\$200
Post 7017	\$200	Post 5735	\$10,000
Post 3375	\$500		

Disaster Relief distributed to VFW Louisiana Members:

\$2,625.00

Donations made on behalf of the Department of Louisiana:

VFW Dept. of New Mexico	\$1,000
VFW Dept. of North Carolina	\$6,000
VFW Dept. of Tennessee	\$4,000
VFW Dept. of Florida	\$3,000
VFW Dept. of California	\$2,500

**These are not just numbers on paper
—these are meals on tables,
necessities during hard times, and
hope restored to fellow Veterans in
need. Every donated dollar confirms
our mission: No one left behind.**

To all the members and all the Posts that have volunteered, contributed, or stepped forward—thank you. You are the reason our department remains a source of strength in the storm.

OPERATION DAILY BATTLE

A Mission to Save Veteran Lives



Operation Daily Battle is a dedicated initiative aimed at supporting veterans by providing essential resources, community engagement, and advocacy efforts. The idea was conceived by Ed Horton, Founder and Department Chairman of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Riders Group (VFWRG) of Louisiana, and built with the assistance of Tom Anderson of Texas, Billy Stone of Oklahoma, and Shawn Wenninger of Arkansas, with the mission of reducing the tragic number of 22 veterans a day lost to suicide. Organized by the VFWRG chapters of Louisiana, Texas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas, the event focuses on raising awareness about the challenges veterans face, including mental health struggles,

homelessness, and transitioning to civilian life. Through a combination of fundraising, outreach programs, and public events, Operation Daily Battle seeks to ensure that those who have served their country receive the recognition and assistance they deserve.

The event brings together veterans, supporters, and community members for activities such as charity motorcycle rides, educational workshops, and suicide prevention training. A key feature of the event is the incorporation of the Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR) training, an evidence-based program designed to help individuals recognize the warning signs of suicide, provide support, and guide those in crisis toward professional help. By equipping participants with these life-saving skills, Operation Daily Battle fosters a proactive approach to mental health awareness within the veteran community. Additionally, networking opportunities, discussions on veterans' rights, and collaborations with local businesses and nonprofits further strengthen the support network for veterans across the region.

Beyond a single event, Operation Daily Battle represents an ongoing commitment to veteran advocacy. Funds raised will contribute to veteran assistance programs and continued mental health initiatives. The inclusion of QPR training highlights the event's dedication to addressing the urgent issue of veteran suicide, ensuring that those who have served receive not only honor and gratitude but also tangible support for their well-being. Through continued efforts and community involvement, Operation Daily Battle stands as a beacon of hope, reminding veterans that they are never alone in their battles.



Visit operationdailybattle.org for
more information

MILITARY ORDER OF THE COOTIES



Often when we see something new, different, or unknown we ask questions of other people. For me, when I attended my first state convention, as a member of 1736, I saw the blue and white VFW covers and was asking PSC Landry Saucier why their hats were different than most of the others. When I became a member of the Military Order of the Cootie, I once again had questions about why they do things backwards and what's the deal with those bugs on the backs of your Shirts/Jackets? To this I got told that Cooties like to have more fun and break up the formality that all too often consumes our Meetings.

When I first served as a Pup Tent Seam Squirrel, followed by a first and then a second term as the State Grand Commander, I learned to appreciate this change of pace. I even appreciated getting fined for some infraction, knowing those fines went to support the VFW National Home. In all these positions, like the multitude of others I've served in, I never did it to earn an award or a hat, but rather to do as much as possible for the veterans I assisted. And while I may have earned All-State, All-American, or the Cooties' All-Star awards, it has always been about doing a better or more complete job than I could before. This year has been no exception, and it looks like the Grand of Louisiana is on track to earn All-Star status for the third year in a row. This means we continue to grow, contribute time and money to hospital work, and support the VFW National Home in Michigan.

While we are on a good path, we can't stop striving for improvement. Unfortunately, individuals pass on, move away, or stop being active. Therefore, we must continue to fill the ranks and grow. The Cooties, much like the VFW, do such important work. However, due to the smaller number of members and units, we must take on a larger role to accomplish the same amount. While we may be adding a new unit in the months to come, we always have room for growth. That's where you can help—join as a new member or help form another unit so the net we cast to reach veterans gets even larger. So, the next time you see a VFW member with a funny bug on their shirt, just touch it—but don't be surprised if they ask for a dollar for touching their bug. Make a contribution on your behalf—heck, they might even recommend you to become a new member.

Thank you for all you do for veterans
David B. Fields
Louisiana Grand Commander 2024-25



VFW POSTS IN ACTION ACROSS LOUISIANA

Across the great state of Louisiana, our VFW Posts work tirelessly to serve veterans, support their communities, and uphold the values of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. From hosting events to honoring those who served, here are some highlights of what our dedicated Posts have been doing recently.

VFW Post 9822 – Bingo & King Cake for Veterans

Post 9822 brought joy to the residents of Jennings Veterans Home by hosting a bingo event and serving king cake, ensuring our local veterans felt appreciated and celebrated. The event fostered camaraderie and provided a fun-filled afternoon for those who have given so much to our country.



VFW Post 4158 & Auxiliary – Membership Booth at Troops and Tusks Event

In February, Post 4158 and its Auxiliary set up a membership booth at the Troops and Tusks event, engaging with local veterans, service members, and families to promote the benefits of VFW membership and veteran advocacy programs.



VFW Posts 2885, 4588, & 5951 – Supporting Minden St. Jude Cook-Off

Coming together for a great cause, Posts 2885, 4588, and 5951 joined forces to support the Minden St. Jude Cook-Off, an event raising funds for childhood cancer research. Their participation showcased the VFW's dedication to community involvement and charitable efforts.



VFW Post 3785 – Supporting Port Allen Mardi Gras Parade

March was full of festive spirit as Post 3785 participated in the Port Allen Mardi Gras Parade, bringing joy to the local community while proudly representing Louisiana's VFW.



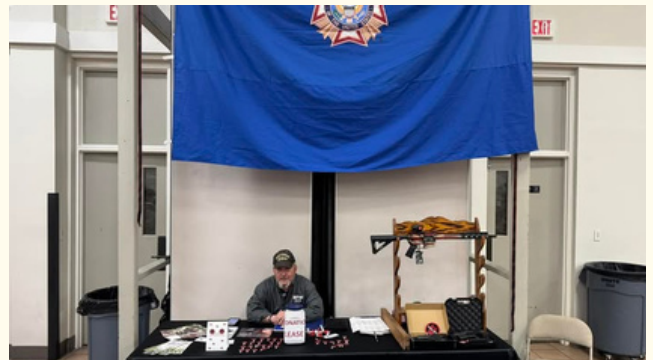
VFW Post 6720 & Auxiliary – Deployment Bags for National Guard

Post 6720 and its Auxiliary worked together to prepare deployment bags for a Louisiana Army National Guard unit deploying overseas. Their efforts ensured that over 13,000 troops received essential items and morale-boosting care packages.



VFW Post 1809 – Membership & Buddy Poppy Fundraiser at Gun Show

Post 1809 combined outreach and fundraising by setting up a membership booth and Buddy Poppy fundraiser at the Kerry Murphy Gun Show, raising awareness and collecting donations to support veteran assistance programs.



VFW Post 3750 - Supporting Local Schools

Post 3750 participated in the crawfish cook off in support of the Pat Pitre Scholarship fundraiser at Hahnville High School.



VFW Post 3693 & Auxiliary – Chili Cook-Off Benefiting Books for Boots

Post 3693 and its Auxiliary hosted a successful chili cook-off, with all proceeds donated to Books for Boots, a nonprofit organization that provides new and gently used books, movies, music cd's, puzzles, and craft items to all members of our military - from injured recruits at basic training to veterans.



VFW Post 7017 – Buddy Poppy Campaign

Post 7017 hosted a Buddy Poppy drive at the their local Bass Pro Store.

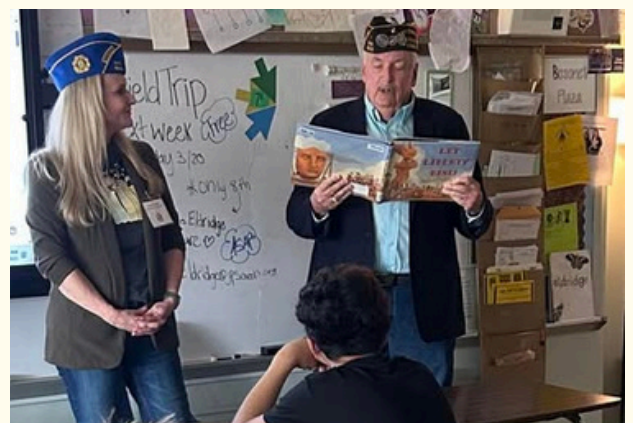


VFW Post 3106 – Membership Booth at Louisiana Moonshine Festival

Post 3106 took advantage of the Louisiana Moonshine Festival to connect with veterans and the public by setting up a membership booth, sharing the benefits of joining the VFW, and providing information on available veteran support services.

VFW Post 6640 & Auxiliary – Read Across America Participation

Post 6640 and its Auxiliary participated in Read Across America at Bissonet Plaza Elementary, reading to students and promoting literacy while emphasizing the importance of honoring veterans.



VFW Post 9854- Honoring WWII Veterans on Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day

Post 9854 honored two distinguished WWII Veterans with a heartfelt tribute recognizing their service and sacrifice. During the ceremony, each Veteran was presented with a special citation and commemorative pin as a token of gratitude for their role in defending our Nationa.



VFW Post 1736- Inspire Young Minds at YWCA

Post 1736 Commander, Rodney Barnett, and Auxiliary President, Ann Barnett, took the time to visit the YWCA After School Center, where shared a special story with the students.



VFW Post 6640 – Honoring Unaccounted Veterans

In a solemn act of respect, Post 6640 attended the funeral services for unaccounted veterans, ensuring they received the honor and recognition they deserved for their service to our nation.

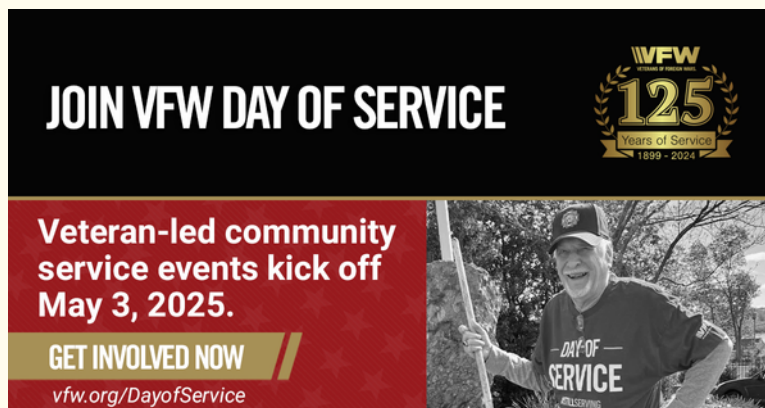


The Department would like to extend its deepest Thanks to the dedicated VFW and Auxiliary members of Posts across Louisiana. Your dedication and committment towards the betterment of veterans,community building, and acts of service are most inspiring.

From organizing events to supporting fellow veterans and their families, please know that your efforts do not go unnoticed.

If you are interested in getting involved, volunteering, or learning about the great work being done by VFW posts in Louisiana, we encourage you to reach out to your local post.

Remember Every Act of Service Makes a Difference!



Launched in October 2020, VFW's #StillServing highlights how America's combat veterans continue to serve in their local communities after transitioning from the military. What started as a campaign became a movement as veterans across the country stepped up to share stories of how they are still serving.

HAS YOUR POST SIGNED UP FOR VFW DAY OF SERVICE?

[Click here to sign up today!](#)

BUDDY POPPY PROGRAM

As of March 26, 2025 the Post in our Department have purchased a combined total of **64,000** Buddy Poppies!



COMMUNITY SERVICE

As of March 26, 2025, the Posts in our Department have volunteered an impressive **364,925** hours in community service, donating a total of **\$5,516,763**. This brings the overall monetary impact to **\$17,717,001**. What an incredible achievement for our Department!

Thank you to all of our members who help make a difference in communities throughout our great state!

126TH NATIONAL CONVENTION

August 9-13, 2025
Columbus, OH

Louisiana Assigned Hotel: Hilton

[Click here book your hotel reservation today!](#)

[Click here for more information](#)

VFW SOUTHERN CONFERENCE

November 7-9, 2025
Conroe, Texas

Margaritaville - Lake Conroe Resort
600 Margaritaville Parkway
Montgomery, Texas 77356

[Click here book your hotel reservation today!](#)

LOUISIANA VFW & AUXILIARY ENJOY A FLURRY OF FUN ON SNOW DAY

Louisiana doesn't often find itself under a blanket of snow, but on January 21, 2025, that's exactly what happened — and our VFW and Auxiliary members across the state made the most of this rare winter treat!

Members across our state stepped outside to experience the quiet beauty and excitement that only snow can bring. Bundled up in scarves and gloves (and maybe a few mismatched layers pulled from the back of the closet), our veterans and their families laughed, played, and posed for photos that captured the magic of the moment. It wasn't just about the snow — it was about togetherness, joy, and making memories in a way that Louisiana rarely gets the chance to.

We're proud to share photos in this edition of the Combat Veteran that show our VFW and Auxiliary members embracing the spirit of community and fun — even when the weather surprised us.



To everyone who shared photos, stories, and laughter on this snowy day: thank you for reminding us that no matter the forecast, our Louisiana VFW family knows how to make the most of every moment.



FOLLOW US & STAY CONNECTED



➡ Official Facebook Page

Stay up to date with news, events, and announcements.

facebook.com/VFWLouisiana

➡ Private Members Group

For Department updates, collaboration, and member-exclusive info.

facebook.com/groups/696401173887489

Note: Access to the group is limited to verified members. Please request to join and answer the verification questions.

➡ Department's Wepage

For more detailed information on Programs and News/Events

vfwdeptla.org

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vfw125.org

WE ARE
CELEBRATING
THE
LEGACY



VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS.

