

CHECKPOINT



WHAT'S INSIDE

Extra! Extra!

- 2** • Cut your hair on Veterans Day.
- National convention highlights on YouTube.
- Deadlines for school-related awards approaching.

Post Service Officer Profiled

3 A Gulf War vet in Minnesota describes his service work as his way of saying "thanks."

November is Veterans in the Classroom Month

4 Learn how a Post in Wisconsin enhances students' history lessons with accounts of life in a war zone.

National Teachers of the Year

5 Representing Illinois, Montana and Florida, VFW's top teachers for 2013 explain their passion for America and patriotism.

Students and Veterans Work Together

6 School kids in Korea honor Iraq and Afghanistan KIAs while Post members in New Jersey offer first-hand war experiences.

Voice of Democracy Winners Wed

7 Two VOD contestants who met during the 2008 national competition decide to spend their lives together.

WWII Vets Active at Posts

8 Recognizing those still serving VFW and their communities at the grassroots level.

Gains Five New Members

Oklahoma Post Hosts First Major Iraq War Veterans Reunion

WHEN THE 2ND BN., 18th Field Artillery returned from their 2003 deployment to Kuwait and Iraq, many figured they would never see each other again.

"We scattered to the four winds," said Tommy Davern, who belonged to the Ft. Sill, Okla.-based unit and later moved back to the Chicago area.

And like many others, Davern found joining Facebook helped him reconnect with old friends, so he created a page for his former unit to "cobble together contact information."

One thing led to another, and soon the group's plans to get together for the 10th anniversary of the unit's deployment became the first major reunion for Iraq War veterans.

Davern, the junior vice commander at Post 9801 in Markham, Ill., made contact with Post 5263 in Lawton, Okla., where Ft. Sill is located, convenient for those who stayed close to the Army facility.

"My Post wrote a check for the hall rental fee, and we raised money for the reunion by selling t-shirts," Davern said. "I wanted to make sure no one paid to eat or drink—it was all free to those attending."

Some 100 members of the battalion attended—one member making the trek from Saipan. Another member of the group happened into Post 5263 while

Davern and his coordinating team were holding a planning meeting the day before the event.

"It was like a snowball rolling down a hill," Davern said. He began the effort with just his battery, but the word spread and soon members from Alpha, Bravo, Charlie and Headquarters Batteries had RSVP'd. Mark Therrien, former first sergeant of Bravo Btry., and former Captain Takeshi Walker helped tremendously in the planning.

"Some of those guys you figure you'll never see again," Davern said. "It's a really weird sensation but obviously very cool. It was the honor of my post-military life to have played a role in planning and organizing this event."

Hosting the reunion at the VFW Post was beneficial for both groups. Members

of Post 5263 were more than willing to help Davern facilitate the reunion, providing a projector. Donald Fenter, commander of the Oklahoma Post, was on hand to help with any logistics the group of Iraq War vets might have.

And by exposing a group of eligible vets to VFW, Davern said that the Post gained five or six new members from the reunion.

"It's important to keep the Posts open because we're going to have this emerging generation of veterans who need them," Davern said.

Additionally, the members of 2/18 contributed to the Lawton community by donating leftover food to a local battered women's shelter and by raising some \$400 in one night for tornado disaster relief for Moore, Okla.

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PHOTOS COURTESY TOMMY DAVERN



EXTRA! EXTRA!

FOOTBALL PLAYER ISSUES CHALLENGE

VFW's annual United for Veterans initiative, which aims to bring awareness to VFW programs and services, is getting a nudge from Troy Polamalu, strong safety for the Pittsburgh Steelers. Known for his long curly hair, Polamalu has agreed to cut off his mane on Veterans Day. He also is encouraging fans to commit to a haircut on Veterans Day, donate to Team Troy or start a new fundraising page as part of "The VFW Mane Event."

"I understand the issues that veterans and their families face while serving our country, and I am honored to join the Veterans of Foreign Wars Mane Event, encouraging the nation to unite for veterans for a second year," Polamalu said. "By cutting my hair on Veterans Day, I am showing my commitment to the men and women who served our country ... the real heroes."

The campaign got a jumpstart in July at VFW's National convention in Louisville, Ky., where Jerry Newberry Newberry, VFW's assistant adjutant general, had his hair cropped off on stage. Some \$16,662 was raised on site as a result of his haircut and more than \$16,000 was additionally pledged.

To learn more about The VFW Mane Event, visit www.vfwmaneevent.org.

CONVENTION HIGHLIGHTS ON YOUTUBE

Did you miss the 2013 VFW National Convention? Watch video highlights from Louisville, Ky., online at www.YouTube.com/VFWVIDS.

NOTIFY SCHOOLS OF VFW DEADLINES

While the school year has just begun, it's not too early to hit the classrooms to talk about relevant VFW programs. Here are the deadlines you need to know to pass on to your local schools:

- Voice of Democracy **Nov. 1, 2013**
- Patriot's Pen **Nov. 1, 2013**
- National Citizenship Education Teacher Award **Nov. 1, 2013**
- Scout of the Year **March 1, 2014**

For more information on VFW programs, visit www.vfw.org, then click on the "Community" tab at the top and then "Programs."

USE YOUR VFW MEDICARE OPTIONS

To help cover health care costs that aren't covered by Medicare Part A and Part B, VFW offers Medicare Supplement and Medicare Advantage plans. There are many plans available, but with these VFW-sponsored plans you get solid coverage with national insurance companies.

Additionally, these include benefits such as a choice of plans depending on your individual health care needs, affordable group rates and personalized guidance to help you understand your specific plan and manage your health care budget. To request an application for the VFW-sponsored Medicare plans visit the Medicare Insurance page at www.vfwinsurance.com.



DEC. 31 DEADLINE FOR TAX-FREE DONATION

The IRA Charitable Rollover is set to expire on Dec. 31 of this year. Making a gift to VFW directly from your IRA may count against your unsatisfied required minimum distribution without generating a taxable income and allows you to witness the benefits of your generosity.

To find out more, visit www.vfw.org/plannedgiving, e-mail plannedgiving@vfw.org or call (816) 968-1119.



Leadership Perspectives

John Hamilton, Adjutant General

Assign a Student-Vet Liaison at Your Department

During our latest national convention in Louisville this summer, we invited the executive director of the Student Veterans of America to speak. Michael Dakduk, a VFW member-at-large in Washington, D.C., provided us with an update on the VFW-SVA partnership.

We officially joined forces with SVA last January when we signed a Memorandum of Understanding. Dakduk, a Marine veteran of both the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, said at the convention that SVA has added some 5,000 members and more than 100 chapters since then.

The agreement also included a new program, **1 Student Veteran**, where student vets can seek assistance with their education or other VA benefits by e-mailing 1studentveteran@vfw.org.

VFW's National Veterans Service staff members acknowledge receipt of each inquiry within 24 hours during the workweek and either intervene with VA on behalf of the student veteran or recommend other courses of action.

Another aspect of our partnership will include "student-veteran liaisons"

representing every VFW Department. These liaisons will build relationships between SVA chapters and VFW Posts. VFW's Director of Programs Dan Parker reports that about half of our Departments have selected a liaison.

At the convention, we presented Dakduk with a \$5,000 contribution to help SVA establish a state-by-state university "status tracker." It will enable student vets to search colleges online and learn things like which states offer in-state tuition. In addition, VFW's Director of Student Veteran Outreach and former commander-in-chief Jim Nier will again attend SVA's national convention in January.

This is a mutually beneficial partnership for both groups. We've got 114 years of experience as the nation's premier veterans group, while SVA—a group of some 26,000 members at more than 850 college chapters in all 50 states and two foreign countries—brings energy, smarts and enthusiasm. We look forward to our continued partnership with SVA for years to come.



Bob Greene, Quartermaster General

VFW Store Offers No-Wait Ordering

Our members asked for specialty apparel that can be ordered without waiting, and we listened. VFW Store is now proud to stock selected decorated items that are ready to ship whenever you need them. We offer:

- T-shirts
- polos
- Kamp shirts
- oxfords with the Cross of Malta
- mini-hounds tooth button-down shirts with the VFW Logo
- ¾ sleeve Ladies Auxiliary shirts
- uniform shirts
- ragland T-shirts
- long-sleeve T-shirts
- hoodies
- zippered jackets.

Some of these items even come in tall sizes. To check out our inventory, visit www.vfwstore.org or watch for the new 2013-2014 catalog coming in the mail.

You can still choose your own shirt, color and emblem. VFW Store continues to offer a variety of shirts and jackets with a huge array of styles, sizes, colors and pocket and embroidery options. While these items take a little longer—up to six weeks for delivery—you are sure to get exactly what you want.

VFW Store also provides custom shirts, jackets or caps in bulk quantity, which is ideal for Post, District or Department events, anniversaries, sports sponsorship or fundraisers.

Our staff is happy to assist you in selecting the right product, as well as with designing a logo, and we offer very competitive pricing. We also have expanded our line of made in the USA merchandise. To get a free, no-obligation quote, call Kim Winston at 816-968-1181 or e-mail her at kwinston@vfw.org.

Please note that **only** the VFW Store and licensed vendors are authorized to use the logo. And remember, not only does a portion of your purchase go back to your Department, but when you purchase from the VFW Store you support VFW programs that help veterans, military service members and their families.

CHECKPOINT

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NO ONE DOES MORE FOR VETERANS.

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Minnesota Service Officer Determined to 'Change Lives' through Claims Work

SERVICE IS AN UNDERAPPRECIATED ENDEAVOR in today's world, according to Todd County, Minn., service officer Pete Berscheid. For that, he believes the best way to say "thanks" is giving back.

"I think that we all need to be a part of some kind of service within our capabilities," said Berscheid, a 1991 Persian Gulf War veteran. "I knew being a service officer is something I could do well."

Located some 100 miles northwest of Minneapolis in Long Prairie, the Todd County Veterans Service Office helps more than 2,000 veterans a year. Berscheid, along with his two employees, work 40 hours a week to get the job done.

Although Berscheid is sure to credit the hard work of VA employees, he deeply sympathizes with veterans who are struggling to push their claims through.

Today, the most common claim he deals with is hearing loss.

"The instruments of war make a tremendous amount of noise," said Berscheid, a member at Post 1140 in Long Prairie. "It seems like all of our vets have hearing damage."

In addition to helping veterans obtain benefits from tinnitus claims, the service officer has had other victories.

In early 2012, Berscheid met with a Korean War veteran more than three dozen times. He had a service pension that kept him above the poverty line, but Berscheid was determined to get him more assistance.

After several meetings, the vet opened up to the service officer. He said more than 80% of his company died after the enemy demolished a dam as they crossed a river. The memory was something he rarely shared.

With that, Berscheid collected enough information to make sure his PTSD claim was passed through in a timely manner. As a result, the veteran received more monetarily than he ever thought possible.

"We benefited him economically, and also helped him on other levels," the service officer said about the vet sharing his painful memories. "It was a really good win."

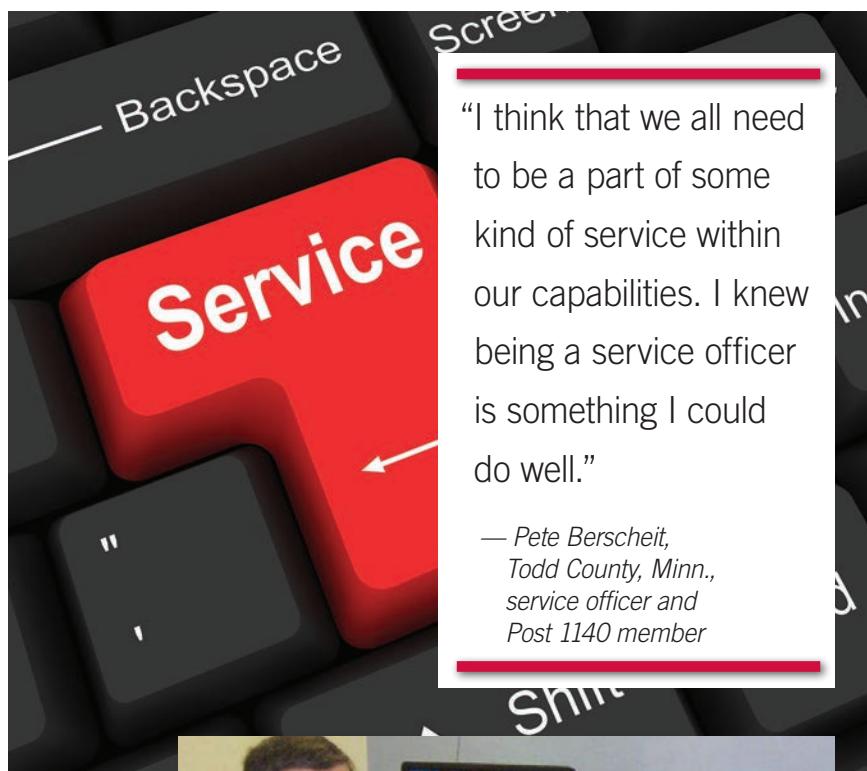
Berscheid first heard his calling to help veterans in 2004 when he retired from the Army after 20 years of service. That December, he became Todd County's service officer. A year later, he applied to do the same for his VFW Post 1140.

"Even when Pete is not at work he is working," said Tina Riedel, the Todd County Veterans Services administrative assistant. "He does everything from receiving phone calls at home to chatting with veterans while at the gas station, grocery store, church or VFW. He is an outstanding service officer."

Berscheid will modestly admit that his favorite part of the job is changing peoples' lives. His secret is to keep the method simple:

"When a person walks into my office, I just think, 'how can I help them?'" Berscheid said. "Always remember that each journey is an individual one; treat each situation that way."

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"I think that we all need to be a part of some kind of service within our capabilities. I knew being a service officer is something I could do well."

— Pete Berscheid,
Todd County, Minn.,
service officer and
Post 1140 member



PHOTOS COURTESY PETE BERSCHEID

Pete Berscheid, VFW service officer for Post 1140, talks with a veteran on Aug. 9, 2013, at his office in Todd County, Minn.

Berscheid in October 1999 in Aschaffenburg, Germany, while serving with the 4th Bn., 66th Armor Regt. He served 20 years in the Army before his retirement.



WANTED
Outstanding Service Officers

We would like to read about the hard work your Post and Department service officers are doing. If you would like to see them receive some much-deserved recognition, send us a brief note explaining why.

Please send information to:
Checkpoint
Attn: Outstanding Service Officers
406 W. 34th Street
Kansas City, MO 64111
or call (816) 968-1171
or e-mail tdyhouse@vfw.org

NATIONAL VETERANS SERVICE

Do you need help filing a claim?

VFW's National Veteran's Services has a VFW Department service officer locator on its website. To find a service officer near you, just follow these easy steps:

1. Visit www.vfw.org/nvs.
2. Select "ASSISTANCE" from the menu.
3. Select "NATIONAL VETERANS SERVICE" from the pull-down menu.
4. Locate the "FIND A SERVICE OFFICER" box on the right-hand side of the screen.
5. Select your state and hit "GO".

FIND A SERVICE OFFICER

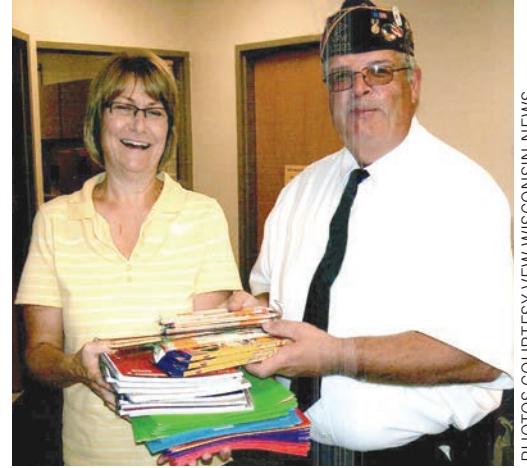
State

Wisconsin Post Donates School Supplies for Cash-Strapped Families

A SCHOOL DISTRICT IN WISCONSIN is benefitting from the hard work and generosity of a VFW Post in the central part of the state. Post 10231 in Necedah, Wis., held a warm clothing drive for the Necedah Area School District in September 2012, collecting some four extra-large U-Haul moving boxes full of coats, sweaters, boots, hats and gloves. The Post also made a donation of school supplies, such as notebooks and pencils.

According to Post Commander Darrell Santana, the area has a high unemployment rate, often making it difficult for families to afford the costs associated with sending kids to school. The Post's donation provided needy students with adequate school supplies and warm clothes for the winter months.

Ken Murphy, a trustee at Post 10231, and his wife, Sharon, organized and executed the donation. Santana and Post Quartermaster Ken Hornburg presented the donations to the school in September 2012. **E-mail:** kgibson@vfw.org



PHOTOS COURTESY VFW WISCONSIN NEWS

(Left) Tabitha Murphy, an elementary school secretary in the Necedah (Wis.) school district, accepts a bag of winter clothes from Post 10231 Quartermaster Ken Hornberg. (Right) Post Commander Darrell Santana presents school supplies to Pam Darnell, an elementary school district administrative assistant. The Post held supply drives last year to benefit area school children in need.

November is 'Veterans in the Classroom Month'

In early fall, many Posts focus their attention on local schools. Appropriately, November is VFW's "Veterans in the Classroom Month," which also kicks off VFW's annual essay contests for students to earn cash awards.

Posts can get started by contacting schools at the beginning of the fall semester. Tell teachers your Post members can provide "living history presentations" to their classes. A veteran's perspective of what it was like to actually serve in a war zone is something students simply cannot get by reading textbooks.

November also is the time Posts submit their *Voice of Democracy* and *Patriot's Pen* essays to qualify for the grand prizes: a \$30,000 college scholarship for the winning *Voice of Democracy* entry and a \$10,000 U.S. savings bond for the top middle-school essay.

And don't forget to nominate hard-working teachers for VFW's National Citizenship Education Teachers Awards. The top elementary-, middle- and high-school teachers will each receive \$1,000, as will their schools.

VFW members can obtain more information about these programs at www.vfw.org. Simply click on the "Community" tab and then "Programs" in the drop-down menu.



'He Really Fired the Kids Up'

Wisconsin Post Makes a 'Big Deal' of School Visits

EVERY NOVEMBER, VFW PROMOTES Veterans in the Classroom month, encouraging VFW members to visit with area students. The program promotes patriotism and informs students about the meaning of Veterans Day.

"We make a pretty big deal about it here," says Joe Roffers, commander at Post 2113 in De Pere, Wis. "People really enjoy seeing veterans come out and do what we do."

The Post is active in the community, particularly with the schools. Members help with opening ceremonies at local high school football games, but they also make a point to visit individual classrooms to teach flag etiquette and military history.

"It's pretty important because kids are going to school and learning under teachers who may not be teaching them the history of past wars," said Roffers, 1991 Persian Gulf War veteran. "They don't learn what [veterans] went through to protect our freedom."

Last fall, WWII veteran Lester Krug, a member at Post 2113, spoke to a class of fourth graders at St. Joseph Grade School in De Pere. Linda Gerlach, who teaches at the school, has worked often with the Post by assisting in fundraising events and providing Christmas cards for veterans.

"The students were totally engrossed in what he had to share about his experience," Gerlach said.

Krug served as a Marine in the Pacific theater during WWII and shared some of his wartime experiences with the students. He also discussed his participation in the Honor Flight program, which takes WWII, Korean and Vietnam war vets to Washington, D.C., for one day to visit national monuments. At the end of the long day, veterans receive letters from their loved ones and neighbors thanking them.

After listening to Krug speak about his experiences, students from Mrs. Gerlach's class plan to send letters this year to area veterans participating in the program.

"He really fired the kids up before writing letters to our veterans," Gerlach said. "They were so happy to be able to recognize and thank a veteran for their service and our freedom."

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PHOTO COURTESY WISCONSIN VFW NEWS

Students at St. Joseph Grade School in De Pere, Wis., listen intently as Post 2113 member Lester Krug shares his stories about WWII. Post members visit area schools every November as part of VFW's *Veterans in the Classroom Month*.

VFW Awards Top Three Patriotic Educators

FOR 14 YEARS VFW HAS HONORED THREE OUTSTANDING EDUCATORS for their exceptional commitment to teach Americanism and patriotism.

Posts in every Department submitted nominees. More than 1,439 teachers earned about \$254,000 in VFW awards in 2012-13. National winners are selected in three categories: elementary school (K-5), middle school (6-8) and high school (9-12).

“Honoring America’s teachers has been a tradition for nearly 100 years,” said Dan Parker, VFW’s director of Programs. “Next to parents, they hold the key to raising young civic-minded patriots who will perpetuate the values that have made this nation great.”

The awards were presented during VFW’s National Convention in July in Louisville, Ky. The winning teachers received \$1,000 for personal professional development, and another \$1,000 went to their schools. Here is a look at the winners.



PHOTOS COURTESY ROBERT KNUDSEN



Teacher Makes ‘Lasting Impact’ on Students

Last year, at Columbus Elementary School in Edwardsville, Ill., **Matt Maddox** spearheaded a project with his fifth-grade students to team up with Illinois State Sen. William Haine to create Iraq and Afghanistan War Remembrance Day in Illinois on Oct. 7. Illinois Gov. Pat Quinn approved on Aug. 2, 2013, that Oct. 7 is now a commemorative school holiday in that state.

His students later raised \$800 to send two local WWII veterans on an Honor Flight to see the WWII Memorial in Washington, D.C.

Nominated by Post 1299 in Edwardsville, Ill., Maddox is in the Illinois National Guard, currently in officer candidate school in nearby Springfield, Ill.

“Matt is an outstanding teacher who brings the real world into his classroom,” wrote Ed Hightower, superintendent of the Edwardsville School District in a recommendation letter. “He makes a lasting impact on every child who is fortunate enough to have him as his or her teacher.”

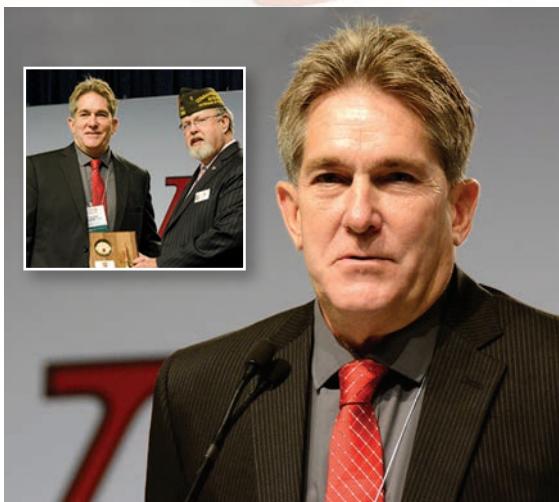
Maddox regularly invites veterans to speak to his students and also had each one write to Pearl Harbor survivors.

“It was a great thing to see a proactive teacher get his students involved in learning about history from the men who lived through Pearl Harbor,” wrote Rick Miller, son of Pearl Harbor survivor, Clarence Miller. “The Pearl Harbor Survivors will be gone soon, and it is up to our generation and teachers like Matt to keep honoring the Greatest Generation and the sacrifices that they made.”

Next up for Maddox is trying to get a street in Edwardsville named for Army Ranger Ryan Garbs, who was killed in Afghanistan.

“I believe that the type of instruction offered in Mr. Maddox’s class is what all parents would want their 11-year-old children to experience,” wrote Vincent Schlueter, principal at Columbus.

ARIZONA MEMORIAL PHOTO: ANDREW ZARIVNY / SHUTTERSTOCK.COM
COLLAGE PHOTOS: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM



‘The Troops Will Never Forget’

Nominated by Post 1634 in Billings, Mont., **Hunter Jones** teaches history to eighth-grade students at Will James Junior High. He is the school’s soldier support coordinator for troop support activities. To date, students have mailed some 11,000 letters and more than 5,000 care packages.

“It’s been a long war, and Hunter has never wavered,” fellow teacher Patrick Kenney wrote. “In fact, he has stepped up his efforts even more over the years. His program of support for our troops is incredible, the troops will never forget and neither will his students.”

Walking into Jones’ classroom is like stepping into a museum. There are U.S. flags that have been presented to him after being flown at overseas bases. Photographs, unit patches and thank-you letters are all on display.

Jones also started a Veterans Day Assembly several years ago. Complete with students singing patriotic tunes, the event sometimes ends with a Black Hawk helicopter landing on the school’s football field. Veterans in attendance are recognized each year, as well.

“Hunter’s students leave knowing that freedom is not free, and it’s about the cost that America has paid in the number of lives lost to protect our ideals,” wrote Mark Kramlich, a teacher at Jones’ school.



Students Re-enact History While Learning

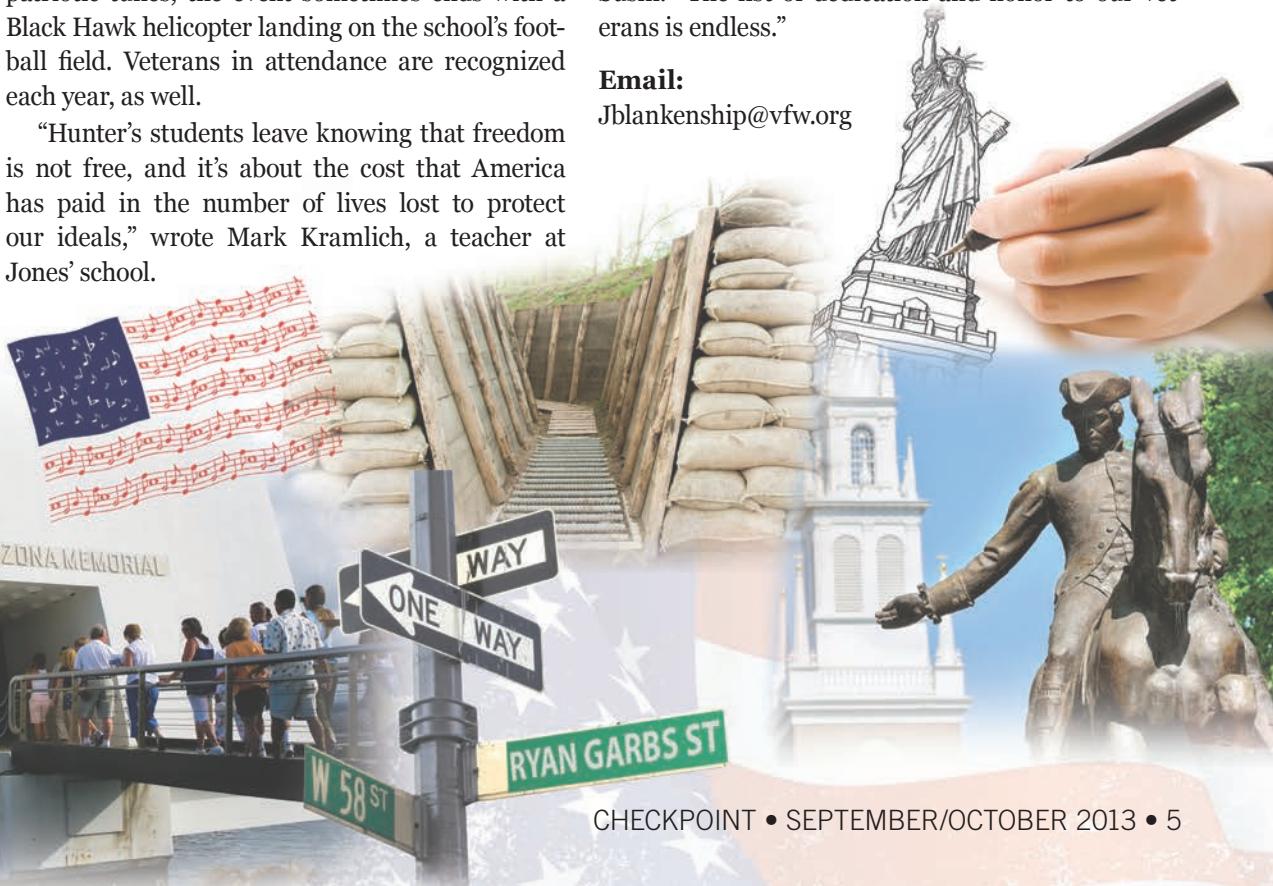
Ninth-grade history teacher **Matthew Susin** took teaching to a new level when he built a WWI trench battlefield for his students to re-enact the Battle of Belleau Wood. Nominated by Post 4643 in Satellite Beach, Fla., Susin teaches at Eau Gallie High School.

He created Rho Kappa Historical Honors Society at the school, in which students volunteer at local military and civilian museums. Inspired by his late grandfather who was a WWII vet, Susin invites WWII vets to speak to all 10th-grade students.

Susin also has students re-enact the first battle of the Revolutionary War. He has a student acting as Paul Revere run down the school hallways yelling, “The British are coming!” His class is the Redcoats and a fellow teacher’s class act as the colonists.

“Through this unique classroom curriculum Matt entices our youth to learn this nation’s history and ensures lasting impressions for the rest of their lives,” fellow teacher Robin Miller wrote in nominating Susin. “The list of dedication and honor to our veterans is endless.”

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'Unusual Request' Spurs Korea Post to Help Honor KIAs

In January 2013, Post 8180 in Yongsan, Korea, was approached with an unusual request. The Seoul American Elementary School asked if its members could provide its students with 200 pedometers.

For the second year, the school was hosting a project titled, *Miles for Heroes*. In front of friends and families, some 190 second graders present the lives of 10 men and women from all services who were KIA in either Iraq or Afghanistan. It is followed by the students walking one mile in honor of the service members' memories.

But this year, the school wanted to measure the steps they walked.

"The school approached me and asked if there was a possibility of [the Post] providing pedometers for the event," said Jason Chudy, a Post member and Iraq and Afghanistan veteran. "I brought it up and received overwhelming support from our comrades to pursue this."

On April 5, 2013, the Post wrote a check for \$200 for 200 pedometers. They were used successfully during the program held on May 22.

"The Post takes immense pride in helping make the *Miles for Heroes* event a success," Chudy said.

"When we can partner with our school to honor our military brothers and sisters who have paid the ultimate sacrifice, we are more than thrilled to do so."



PHOTO BY ALLISON FENIMORE

From left, Post 8180 members Jason Chudy and Richard Krebill present 200 pedometers their Post donated on April 5, 2013, to Seoul American Elementary School for their *Miles for Heroes* program. Receiving them are staff members Samia Mounts, Alex Han and Melinda Lowder.

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'Kids Were So Interested'

New Jersey Post Members Offer Wide Ranging War Experiences

On the early morning of June 4, 2012, members from Post 4715 in Point Pleasant, N.J., visited the local high school.

The seven veterans in attendance took nothing with them except their stories and experiences earned in war. They would spend several hours that day sharing those experiences with high school juniors and seniors.

"A lot of times [veterans] don't want to talk about their experiences—maybe at the Post—but not to strangers," said Vince Castin, the Post commander and a 1958 Lebanon Expeditionary Force veteran. "But kids, kids are different. The combat vets were happy to share."

Point Pleasant Borough High School teacher and Post 4715's Teacher of the Year, Naomi Switzer, coordinated the entire event. Her original intent was to focus entirely on Vietnam War veterans, but according to Castin, she was just as pleased when multiple generations from the Post volunteered to speak.

In addition to Castin, WWII Navy veteran Nick Ceratti was in attendance. Charlie Hagen—a Marine from the Korean War also spoke. Tom Favire, Angelo Frangione, Bill Underwood and Gene Murphy—all Vietnam War veterans—made an appearance at the event as well.

When it came time for the presentation, more than 50 students crowded into the school's art room.

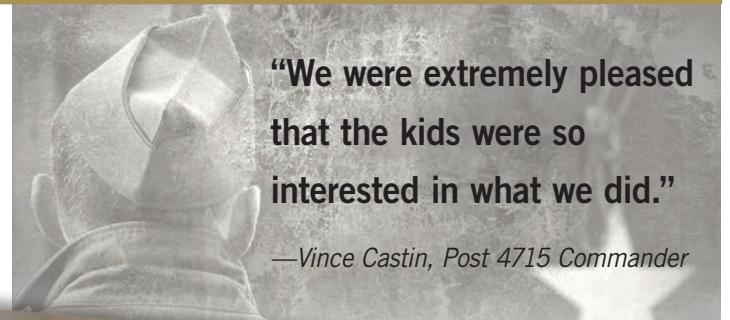
Gene Murphy, a sailor in Vietnam, talked about shelling the mainland. Charlie Hagen discussed what it was like being shot during his time in Korea. But the teenagers asked other compelling questions about post-traumatic stress disorder and race equality issues at the time.

"We were extremely pleased that the kids were so interested in what we did," Castin said. "We were very into [the presentation] as well."

A few weeks after their appearance, the veterans in attendance received more than 30 hand-written letters thanking them for their presentation.

Hurricane Sandy prevented Point Pleasant Borough High School from inviting the veterans back in 2013. But teachers and Post members alike hope to turn it into an annual event starting next year.

"The entire thing was very moving," Castin said. "It was one of the nicest things I've ever been a part of."



"We were extremely pleased that the kids were so interested in what we did."

—Vince Castin, Post 4715 Commander



Post 4715 members Nick Coratti (from left), Gene Murphy, Bill Underwood, Charlie Hagen, Angelo Frangione, high school teacher Naomi Switzer, Vince Castin and Tom Favire at New Jersey's Point Pleasant Borough High School on June 8, 2012.

PHOTO CREDIT THE OCEAN STAR

E-mail: Kdawson@vfw.org



Thank you!



KAISA & TJ

'We Met at an Essay Competition'

VOD Winners Wed

For 66 years, VFW's Voice of Democracy scholarship program has been changing lives by awarding scholarships that allow students to attend colleges or universities they might not otherwise have been able to. Other times, lives are changed by the forming of lifelong friendships.

In 2008, Kaisa Messerly of Minot, N.D., and Timothy "TJ" Cody of Celina, Tenn., were no exception. Each had won the VOD competition in their respective states and headed to Washington, D.C., for the annual site-seeing tour and announcement of the \$30,000 T.C. Selman scholarship winner.

On the second day of the trip, after it was announced that TJ was the second-place national winner, the pair got acquainted while touring Arlington National Cemetery. After that, they became "bus seat buddies" for the remainder of the trip.

"There were a lot of political discussions among all the winners," Kaisa said. "We discovered that politically we were similar, as well as our home upbringings and values."

They kept in touch via e-mail and for Kaisa's high school graduation a couple of months later, TJ sent her a Celtic cross necklace. In June, they saw each other at the annual VOD pilgrimage to Freedoms Foundation at Valley Forge.

"This time around, we spent all of our time together," Kaisa recalls. "We definitely liked each other."

Indeed. Over the next few years with Kaisa studying elementary education at Bethel University in St. Paul, Minn., and TJ attending the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, the duo took advantage of technology's offerings. They texted, and used webcams to visit when they weren't on the phone with each other. They only visited in person every few months.

So it came as no surprise to their friends and families on Dec. 27, 2011, when TJ proposed to his fellow VOD essayist on the morning of the Tennessee All Academy Ball.

According to Kaisa, TJ told her he had missed her prom, her volleyball games, her concerts and her college graduation, but he didn't want to miss the rest of her life.

The former VOD winners were married on June 1, 2013, in Baltimore, Md., only six days after TJ graduated from West Point.

They recently moved to Ft. Benning, Ga., where TJ attends the Armor Basic Officer Leadership Course and Kaisa is looking for a teaching job while taking care of their home, which includes two cats and a new puppy.

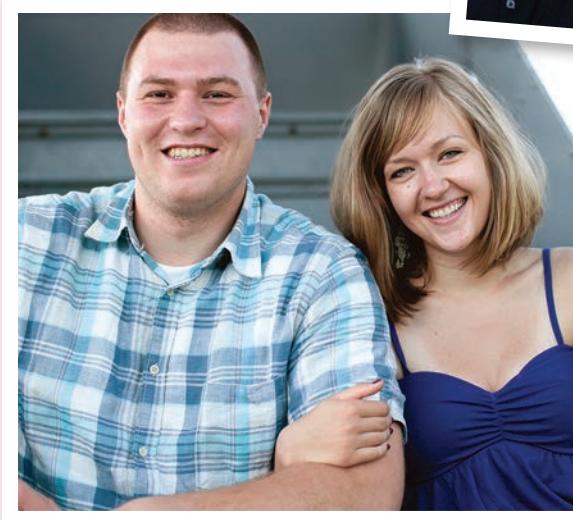
When strangers find out that the two didn't grow up together or attend the same college, they ask, "How did you meet?"

Kaisa and TJ just smile and say, "We met at an essay competition."

E-mail: Jblankenship@vfw.org

TJ and Kaisa in 2008 in Washington, D.C., at the VOD awards ceremony.

PHOTOS COURTESY KAISA AND TJ CODY



The duo in 2012 at Gettysburg, Pa., while having their engagement photos taken.



Kaisa with TJ in 2012 at West Point for his graduation from the U.S. Military Academy.



JUNE 1, 2013



Posts with the Most

VFW POSTS OF 1,000 MEMBERS
OR MORE AS OF AUG. 15, 2013

Rank	Post No.	Location	Members
1	27	Wiesbaden, Germany.....	2,913
2	1114	Evansville, IN.....	2,666
3	1503	Dale City, VA.....	2,533
4	8862	Vicenza, Italy.....	2,054
5	9972	Sierra Vista, AZ.....	2,048
6	392	Virginia Beach, VA.....	1,763
7	6506	Rosedale, MD.....	1,735
8	9342	Ansbach, Germany.....	1,619
9	9785	Eagle River, AK.....	1,617
10	2485	Angeles City, Philippines.....	1,611

11	4372	Odessa, TX.....	1,586
12	628	Sioux Falls, SD.....	1,581
13	63	Boise, ID.....	1,579
14	7686	Alamogordo, NM.....	1,549
15	4647	North Highlands, CA.....	1,518
16	10692	Grafenwoehr, Germany.....	1,483
17	76	San Antonio, TX.....	1,441
18	1146	St Clair Shores, MI.....	1,377
19	6873	Abilene, TX.....	1,374
20	4809	Norfolk, VA.....	1,353
20	7234	Ocean View, DE.....	1,353
22	10047	North Las Vegas, NV.....	1,322
23	972	Terre Haute, IN.....	1,311
24	10097	Fort Myers Beach, FL.....	1,304
25	2503	Omaha, NE.....	1,278
26	3892	Harker Heights, TX.....	1,275
27	1326	Bismarck, ND.....	1,260
28	969	Tacoma, WA.....	1,246
29	4548	Jacksonville, AR.....	1,241
30	3944	Overland-St. Ann, MO.....	1,239
31	2111	Chula Vista, CA.....	1,227
32	1512	Lemon Grove, CA.....	1,211
33	549	Tucson, AZ.....	1,208
34	1273	Rapid City, SD.....	1,189
35	10216	Sonton-Si, Korea.....	1,151
36	1308	Alton, IL.....	1,149
37	1599	Chambersburg, PA.....	1,144
38	788	Cedar Rapids, IA.....	1,118
39	1810	Brentwood, PA.....	1,097
40	7968	Apache Junction, AZ.....	1,090
41	1170	Middletown, KY.....	1,088
42	7564	West Fargo, ND.....	1,084
43	56	Leavenworth, KS.....	1,082
44	10436	Kitzingen, Germany.....	1,075
45	10420	Murrells Inlet, SC.....	1,063
45	9400	Sunnyslope, AZ.....	1,063
45	1152	Kokomo, IN.....	1,063
48	9223	Arlington, CA.....	1,053
49	7175	Millington, TN.....	1,050
50	379	Yakima, WA.....	1,049
50	1296	Bloomington, MN.....	1,049
52	401	Albuquerque, NM.....	1,043
53	3282	Port Orange, FL.....	1,039
54	10209	Spring Hill, FL.....	1,037
55	3160	Norfolk, VA.....	1,030
56	8951	West York, PA.....	1,028
57	8541	San Antonio, TX.....	1,016
58	1079	Elyria, OH.....	1,010
59	5263	Fort Sill, OK.....	1,005

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1,758 Recognized to Date

World War II Veterans Leading VFW Posts from Coast to Coast

THE CHECKPOINT STAFF EXTENDS A HEARTY "THANK YOU" to all our World War II Post leaders, members and veterans. And we want to recognize those who still devote time and energy to VFW causes.

Listed below are 50 WWII veterans who serve VFW Posts in official capacities. Checkpoint has recognized a total of 1,758 such Post leaders since the March/April 2009 issue. We will continue to feature this section in subsequent issues until every WWII Post leader whose name is submitted is recognized.

If you would like to recognize a WWII veteran who currently serves your Post, please send us his or her name, official Post position and your Post's location. Send information to:

Checkpoint, Attn: WWII Leaders
406 W. 34th Street, Kansas City, MO 64111
E-mail: tdyhouse@vfw.org



Name	Position	Post/Location	Name	Position	Post/Location
Howard Adams, Sr.	Commander	Post 194, Salisbury, Md.	Dale Lamphear	Quartermaster	Post 3177, Laurel, Mont.
John Austin	Funeral Team	Post 7069, Clarks Summit, Pa.	Clayton Langlois	Judge Advocate	Post 1767, Winooski, Vt.
William "Bud" Beecham	Honor Guard	Post 7069, Clarks Summit, Pa.	Gordon Manchester	Trustee	Post 2747, McGregor, Minn.
Charles "Sid" Bergh	Jr. Vice Cmdr.	Post 2801, Villa Park, Ill.	Earl McMahon	Quartermaster	Post 2838, Darien, Ill.
William Busier	Surgeon	Post 1767, Winooski, Vt.	John McMahon	Trustee	Post 10675, Whitefield, N.H.
Mariano Castillo	Surgeon	Post 12008, Hatch, N.M.	Benny Moore	Chaplain	Post 7316, Yanceyville, N.C.
Ted Cordua	Judge Advocate	Post 6787, Carlsborg, Wash.	Wallace Morden	Quartermaster	Post 7485, Milwaukee, Wis.
Paul Demciak	Surgeon	Post 5207, Daleville, Pa.	Garland Roach	Chaplain	Post 3123, Grant City, Mo.
John Dyer-Hurdon	Youth Activity Dir.	Post 4659, Disco, Mich.	Rene Rouselle	Trustee	Post 1767, Winooski, Vt.
Floyd "Pete" Elliott	Chaplain	Post 1411, Cumberland, Md.	Angelo Rubino	Trustee	Post 2838, Darien, Ill.
Philip Foss	Honor Guard Bugler	Post 4659, Disco, Mich.	Robert W. Schaeffer	Officer of the Day	Post 12099, Allentown, Pa.
Hjalmer Fredrickson	Jr. Vice Cmdr.	Post 2747, McGregor, Minn.	Stanley Sexton	Quartermaster	Post 2857, Kankakee, Ill.
William Goodwin	Chaplain	Post 2287, DeKalb, Ill.	Herman A. Stramm	Jr. Vice Cmdr.	Post 445, Charleston, S.C.
Al Gregory	Quartermaster	Post 10732, Berlin, Conn.	John Surprenant	Jr. Vice Cmdr.	Post 2857, Kankakee, Ill.
George Guritz	Sr. Vice Cmdr.	Post 2532, Paw Paw, Mich.	Peter Tordanato	Chaplain	Post 10732, Berlin, Conn.
Ralph E. Hackey	Trustee	Post 12008, Hatch, N.M.	Walter W. Toth	Trustee	Post 12099, Allentown, Pa.
Richard Hampsten	Trustee	Post 2606, Grayville, Ill.	Albert Treat	Adjutant	Post 2532, Paw Paw, Mich.
Robert Hart	Trustee	Post 12039, Victorville, Calif.	James Verheyen	Service Officer	Post 2257, Galesburg, Ill.
Don Henderson	Service Officer	Post 4659, Disco, Mich.	Norrel White	Sr. Vice Cmdr.	Post 2645, Southfield, Mich.
Jack Hooper	Adjutant	Post 2747, McGregor, Minn.	Kenneth C. Williams	Commander	Post 3177, Laurel, Mont.
Floyd Hovland	Chaplain	Post 7557, Ada, Minn.	Alfred Willis	Chaplain	Post 6787, Carlsborg, Wash.
Delbert Jackson	Trustee	Post 3123, Grant City, Mo.	Fred Willman	Chaplain	Post 77, Holiday Island, Ark.
Melvin Johnson	Honor Guard	Post 2747, McGregor, Minn.	William H. Woolard	Commander	Post 4092, St. Simons Island, Ga.
Willie Johnson	Officer of the Day	Post 12124, Meridian, Miss.	James Wright	Quartermaster	Post 77, Holiday Island, Ark.
Henry Knowles	Quartermaster	Post 3982, Santa Clara, Calif.	Joseph R. Zeller	Commander	Post 12099, Allentown, Pa.