

CHECKPOINT



WHAT'S INSIDE

Extra! Extra!

- 2** • Deadlines for VFW school-related contests and awards announced.
- Membership Department offers target list of potential members.
- Access highlights from VFW's 115th National Convention online.

Service Officer Profiled

3 A Vietnam veteran in Pennsylvania waited 10 years to collect compensation for his own service-related ailments. Now, he helps others avoid the pitfalls.

VFW Scout of the Year

4 An Eagle Scout in Georgia mentored deaf students at his high school and received VFW's top award for scouts.

VFW Teachers of the Year

5 Three educators who infuse their lessons with Americanism and patriotism were honored at VFW's national convention. Here are their stories.

WWII Vets Active at Posts

6 This list recognizes those still serving VFW and their communities at the grassroots level.

West Virginia's Youth Camp Reopens

7 After a year's hiatus, the Department of West Virginia hosted 87 young campers at a new location in the Mountain State.

Hunter Safety in Wisconsin

8 Here's how a Post in Wisconsin promotes gun safety leading into hunting season.

A Mutually Beneficial Partnership

Virginia Students Donate \$600 to *Unmet Needs*

OVER THE COURSE OF THE PAST YEAR, members of Post 8644 in Bridgewater, Va., and their Ladies Auxiliary made 32 young friends. What the members did not know at the start of the relationship a year ago is that the youngsters—all first- and fifth-grade elementary school students—would make a donation to VFW's Unmet Needs program.

In May, Ottobine Elementary School students presented the Post with a \$600 check earmarked to help veterans. The donation was the result of the students' economic endeavors throughout the school year.

First, the students—led by teachers Dawn Flora and Ann Komara—made patriotic windsocks to sell. Later, they crafted bracelets and sold those, as well.

According to Debbie Weekley with the Ladies Auxiliary, school officials invited Post members on Veterans Day to come and be recognized during a special ceremony. Each vet was presented a windsock.

In turn, the Post color guard posted the colors and conducted a flag etiquette ceremony for the students.

"The Auxiliary presented the students with pencils and flags," Weekley said. "This relationship, this partnership, is one of the best we have ever had."

Weekley, whose husband, Buddy, is the current VFW Department of Virginia commander, says there was a lot of "intermingling" throughout the year to find out what the vets could do to help the students and vice versa.

The students started a care package program for troops overseas. So the Ladies Auxiliary offered its expertise on preferred items and helped fill out the shipping paperwork.

In March, the students mailed eight care packages and two large boxes of potato chips. It cost \$15.85 to mail each box.

The two teachers had received a joint \$1,000 grant that was used to pay for the shipping, as well as supplies for additional patriotic projects.

Weekley said that on the day students mailed the packages, a few VFW members helped with transportation. One of the parents owns a limousine service, so the little deliverers headed to the post office in style.

The year-long partnership between VFW and the school culminated in May when the kids and members together laid student-made wreaths on the graves of veterans buried at Mount Crawford Cemetery.



TOP: Bonnie Snook, left, with Post 8644 Ladies Auxiliary in Bridgewater, Va., helps students and teachers last March at Ottobine Elementary School box up care package items for troops. ABOVE: Students paid \$15.85 to mail overseas each of the 10 packages. ABOVE LEFT: Students were chauffeured to the Dayton, Va., post office in style, compliments of a limousine service. LEFT: Kendal Simmons, then a first-grader at Ottobine, hands her package to Sharon May at the post office with help from fifth-grade teacher Ann Komara.

"It's an honor for us to have the children do this," Buddy told the *Daily News-Record* at the time. "Obviously, they're taught what Americanism is, and they know what the sacrifices were that the veterans have made for this country."

Indeed, Ottobine Elementary School Principal Laura Evy said that being in a rural area, the children are somewhat sheltered, which is why teachers strive to teach about service.

"It's not that we want to expose them to the ultimate reality of warfare," Evy told the *News-Record*, "but the idea that people serve and give the ultimate sacrifice."

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PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE DAILY NEWS-RECORD

EXTRA! EXTRA!

NOTIFY SCHOOLS OF VFW DEADLINES

While the school year has just begun, it's not too early to visit 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, 2014
- Patriot's Pen: Nov. 1, 2014
- National Citizenship Education Teacher Award: Nov. 1, 2014
- Scout of the Year: March 1, 2015

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



BOOST MEMBERSHIP WITH LISTS

VFW's Membership Department can assist Posts in recruiting new members. Lists can be provided to you to work from to obtain potential members. Call Matt Nute in the Membership Department at 1-888-JOIN-VFW (1-888-564-6839) for more information.

CONVENTION HIGHLIGHTS ON YOUTUBE

Did you miss the 2014 VFW National Convention? Watch video highlights from St. Louis, Mo., online at www.YouTube.com/VFWVIDS.

SHARING INHERITANCE IS COMMONPLACE

According to a study done by the Stelter Company, 72% of adults surveyed who expect to or have already received an inheritance feel it's reasonable for their family member to designate 5%-10% percent to charity. For more information, contact the VFW Planned Giving Office at (816) 968-1119 or e-mail plannedgiving@vfw.org.

PROCESSING SERVICES ASSIST POSTS

As the exclusive provider of credit card processing services to VFW, Empower Processing offers services to VFW Posts and members.

VFW Posts commonly use Empower's payment solutions for hall rentals and membership payments, as well as canteen, food and beverage sales.

For more information, please go to www.vfw.org, Member Benefits, Financial Services. Or you may contact the VFW Member Benefits Department at 1-800-821-2606, option 1.

SHOPPING AT VFW STORE MAKES SENSE

Check out all the new products available at the VFW Store. If you haven't received your 2014-15 catalog in the mail yet, call us at 1-800-821-2606, and we will send you one for free. If you would prefer, shop online at www.vfwstore.org.

Don't forget, when you purchase through the VFW Store, you support veterans, military service members and their families.



Leadership Perspectives

John Hamilton, Adjutant General

Why Did Eight Vote "No"?

VFW was pleased when the House and Senate approved *H.R. 3230—the Veterans Access to Care through Choice, Accountability and Transparency Act of 2014*. The bill offers real change for a VA health care system that is fundamentally broken.



It passed easily with a vote of 420-5 in the House and 91-3 in the Senate. But what struck me in the immediate aftermath was, "How could any lawmaker vote 'no' on this needed piece of legislation?"

The five "no" votes in the House came from Rep. Eric A. Crawford (R-Ark.), Rep. Walter B. Jones (R-N.C.), Rep. Jack Kingston (R-Ga.), Rep. Mark Stanford (R-S.C.) and Rep. Steve Stockman (R-Texas).

In the Senate, the naysayers were Sen. Tom Coburn (R-Okla.), Sen. Bob Corker (R-Tenn.) and Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-Ala.).

One of the main components of *H.R. 3230* is accountability—holding senior VA executives more responsible for the quality of care they deliver to their patients. In the same way, VFW and its supporters will hold these eight lawmakers accountable for their stance on this issue.

All eight supported sending troops off to fight in Iraq and Afghanistan, in essence asking these young men and women to put their lives on the line to protect their own. Some of those troops never did come home, but for those who did, there are elements of this bill, such as help for the many who suffer from traumatic brain injuries, that give them much needed help.

These young vets, as well as the other 8.4 million patients in VA's health care system, deserve the best access, doctors, nurses and facilities that we can give them. But eight congressmen and senators who could have done that chose to turn their backs.

As VFW Commander-in-Chief John Stroud said, it is "as reprehensible as it is disgusting." VFW and its supporters won't forget.

Bob Greene, Quartermaster General

Get on Board with Direct Deposit

VFW is working hard to reach its goal of having 100% of all Posts using ACH/EFT deposits. If you aren't familiar with this, Automated Clearing House (ACH) or Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) allows VFW to send funds electronically to bank accounts without the processing and clerical expense of paper transactions or checks.

Many of you are currently experiencing the benefit of ACH/EFT deposit for your membership dues money or other payments made by National Headquarters. You receive your money the day after the transmission is sent to the bank by VFW.

However, we still have a significant number of Posts that only receive payments by a paper check.

If you are wondering why you should sign up for ACH/EFT services, here is why: ACH deposit is the safest, most-reliable and fastest method of payment available.

No longer do you have to wait for a check to appear in the mail. No longer do you have to worry about your check being stolen or misplaced. Furthermore, ACH deposits save VFW money.



It costs approximately 14 cents to process an ACH transaction, but it costs about 60 cents to make and mail payments by check. This does not even include all the cost savings in clerical and processing time by our staff.

Forty-six cents savings per transaction might not seem like a lot, but consider that VFW sends out more than 70,000 cash payments per year. Using ACH is a win-win situation.

Posts and members benefit from the speed and convenience, and the national organization benefits from the cost savings and assurance that the funds were received and deposited by the appropriate payee.

Are you interested in signing up for automated deposit services? If you currently are receiving your payments from National Headquarters by a paper check in the mail, simply call VFW's accounting department at (816) 968-1188, and the appropriate form will be sent to you. You also can sign up to receive an e-mail notification any time National Headquarters transmits a payment to you through the ACH/EFT process. You will be glad you did.

CHECKPOINT

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VFW
VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS

NO ONE DOES MORE FOR VETERANS.

VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS

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Pennsylvania Service Officer Stresses Patience While Pursuing Claims

WHEN VFW POST 6393 SENIOR SERVICE OFFICER Mike DeBonis sits down with a veteran, both parties can expect to see results. In his two years with the Yardley, Pa., Post, DeBonis has secured an impressive 100% successful completion rate of claims submitted.

DeBonis, 70, knows about filing VA claims. After serving in the Army with the 18th Military Police Brigade in 1968-69 in Nah Trang, Vietnam, DeBonis needed help for cancer of the larynx, Type 2 diabetes, PTSD and neuropathy of the feet.

"It took me 10 years to get my own benefits," DeBonis said. "I've been through the mill. I understand the system."

In 2010, DeBonis, formerly a restaurant owner, decided to retire. That same year, he joined VFW. Within another two years, he decided to become a service officer. He says he took on the job "to serve those veterans who cannot or do not know how to file a VA claim."

His office in Yardley, which includes fellow service officers Rick Sowden, Joe Keller and Russ Davidson (also the Post commander), handles approximately 100 cases per year. DeBonis said the workload most commonly consists of claims for PTSD, ischemic heart disease and hearing loss.

The most rewarding part of DeBonis' job, he says, is "seeing the results of my efforts helping veterans to receive their compensation." Some of his biggest victories include securing an award of \$75,000 for a WWII vet exposed to radiation during nuclear testing and using the Nehmer Court Orders to award \$85,000 to the widow of a vet who died of a condition related to herbicide exposure.

Aside from his work on claims, DeBonis has reached out to the Yardley community and surrounding areas to help veterans in other ways. He has rallied members of his Post to help drive vets to appointments and, according to Davidson, has "built an efficient and effective network" between elected officials, local VA facilities, churches and public institutions to better serve vets.

He also is highly active with those who suffer from PTSD. He leads a monthly PTSD breakfast group and participates in an additional group at Victor J. Saracini VA Outpatient Clinic in nearby Horsham, Pa.



PHOTO COURTESY OF MIKE DEBONIS

VFW Post 6393 Senior Service Officer Mike DeBonis discusses a claim with a veteran in July at his office in Yardley, Pa. DeBonis' own claims experiences helps other vets avoid missteps during the process.

"Mike DeBonis has been instrumental and highly influential in furthering a VFW mission: 'To honor the dead by serving the living,'" Davidson said.

One trait DeBonis credits his success with is patience. He suggests that any young or new service officers remember to have plenty of it, reminding that it "can take a year or two to go through a claim."

When he's not helping individuals, DeBonis is a "go-to leader" for Post 6393 as a whole, Davidson says. In addition to being a regular contributor to monthly meetings, he helps out with such events as the Post's St. Patrick's Day, Memorial Day and Veterans Day festivities, as well as the annual Post picnic.

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"It took me 10 years to get my own benefits. I've been through the mill. I understand the system."

— Mike DeBonis, Post 6393 Senior Service Officer

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 Veterans Service 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

GO >>

Montana Home-Schooler Places First in Essay Competition



ALEXIS CANEN, AN EIGHTH-GRADE student in Glendive, Mont., took home the top prize in VFW's 2014 Patriot's Pen national essay competition in March.

The home-schooler wrote her 300-400 word essay as an assignment. The 2014 essay topic was "What Patriotism Means to Me," and Canen focused on how anyone can define patriotism, no matter how old they are.

"So how does a 13-year-old like me be a patriot?" Canen wrote. "When I see the American flag, I put my hand over my heart and think about all the great things our country has accomplished and that all the great leaders of our country were once my age."

"So remember, patriotism is the freedom to express your beliefs and to act on those beliefs. Pursue your God-given talents to better our country—no matter what age you are."

Her work was sponsored by Post 1125 in Glendive. Canen says she was surprised by how well she did.

"I had sort of forgotten about submitting it," she said. "It's an honor."

Winning first place nationally means a lot to Canen. On top of a \$5,000 award, she visited Washington, D.C., for the first time and had the chance to tour the national monuments with other Department winners.

"I met a lot of neat people along the way," Canen said.



Alexis Canen shows her horse, Blessing, at a recent rodeo. The Montana eighth-grader won the 2014 Patriot's Pen essay contest, encouraging others to show their patriotism in everything that they do. PHOTOS COURTESY CANEN FAMILY

She says she would like to see more people encourage students to enter.

"Most people haven't heard of Patriot's Pen, but it's a really good opportunity," Canen said.

The deadline for the 2015 Patriot's Pen essay contest is Nov. 1. Students in grades 6-8 are eligible to enter. They can be enrolled in a public, private or parochial school, or participate in a home-school program. The essay topic for 2015 is "Why I Appreciate America's Veterans."

For more information about Patriot's Pen, visit <http://www.vfw.org/PatriotsPen/>.

E-mail: kgibson@vfw.org

Georgia Eagle Scout Mentors Deaf Students

EVERY YEAR, VFW POSTS ACROSS THE NATION sponsor outstanding Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and venture crew members in their communities. This award recognizes scouts nationally for their demonstration of exemplary citizenship in school, scouting and community.

Nominated by Post 5448 in Griffin, Ga., Eagle Scout Evan Mercer claimed the top VFW scouting scholarship—an award of \$5,000.

"This award allows me to focus more on my studies and less on cost," wrote Mercer, who plans to study biochemistry and neuroscience at Vanderbilt beginning this fall. "I am grateful for that."

Mercer's commitment to improving his community is undeniable. In 2010, when he was a high school sophomore, Mercer, who was born deaf, established a mentoring group for deaf elementary school students called the Mercer Maniacs, helping them with common social struggles that accompany hearing loss, and encouraging them to overcome barriers and focus on their goals. The group expanded in 2013 to include junior-high-aged students. And though Mercer is leaving behind the Mercer Maniacs for college, he says he has already found other groups in Nashville to work with.

"Evan is a terrific role model for the students as they have witnessed his motivation to succeed in the spirit of perseverance," said Aspen Johnson, a special education teacher in Mercer's school district and who helps Mercer oversee the program.

The project that Mercer completed as part of his Eagle Scout award was an outdoor classroom he built for Due West Elementary in Marietta, Ga. Mercer hoped to provide an outdoor space for students to learn about the environment.

"I feel deeply honored that VFW, with its legacy of honor and service, chose me to represent them," Mercer said. "Knowing that veterans, who have lived their lives with courage, determination and a great love of country, selected me for this honor humbles me. I want to make sure that my actions, now and in the future, always justify their faith in me. Being the VFW Scout of the Year is an award that I will treasure for the rest of my life."

In addition to his extensive community service, Mercer graduated valedictorian of his 500-person class at Harrison High School in Marietta.

E-mail: kgibson@vfw.org

Right: Evan Mercer (left) works with another Scout to build an outdoor classroom for a local elementary school.

Below: Mercer poses with members of the Mercer Maniacs, a mentoring program he started in 2010.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF EVAN MERCER



VFW Recognizes Top Educators for Patriotism in the Classroom

VFW's annual Smart/Maher National Citizenship Education Teacher of the Year program honors the nation's top elementary, middle and high school teachers for displaying commitment to Americanism and patriotism.

VFW presented this year's awards during its 115th National Convention in St. Louis, Mo. The winning teachers received \$1,000 for personal professional development, and another \$1,000 went to their schools.

Nominations for the 2014-15 awards must be submitted to a local VFW Post by Nov. 1, 2014.



Shirley Harmon Helton

**Fairlawn Elementary Magnet School
Ft. Pierce, Fla.
Post 8058 (Ft. Pierce, Fla.)**

Shirley Harmon Helton incorporates as much patriotism as she can into her fifth-grade lessons. Activities such as raising money to make care packages for troops and using Skype to talk with deployed soldiers are some of her endeavors.

"Mrs. Helton's classroom is a place where history, civic pride, patriotism and democratic values are abundant," said colleague Nell Moyers.

Students Skype with soldiers in Afghanistan and at Ft. Knox, Ky. In the last five years, Helton's fifth grade students have sent 110 care packages and letters to deployed troops.

"The younger soldiers and I will be forever grateful for the multiple care packages, encouraging letters, e-mails and, when lucky enough, the occasional video chats on Skype," writes Capt. Lucy Bowen with Headquarters Co., 3rd BCT, 101st Abn. Div. "[Helton's] efforts of generosity have shown us the kindness and pride of the American people and will not be forgotten."



Jeff Gephart

**Holloman Middle School
Holloman AFB, N.M.
Post 7686 (Alamogordo, N.M.)**

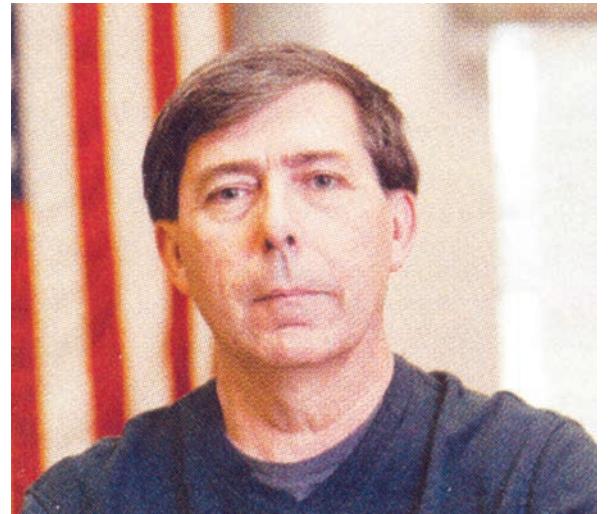
This seventh- and eighth-grade history teacher partners with the Holloman Air Force Base community to sponsor programs and educate students about the military, history and society. He also organizes the local Veterans Day parade and a Veterans Day program, at which his students present research projects about various wars throughout history.

Gephart has been recognized as New Mexico History Day Teacher of the Year, and his contributions led to Holloman being named a National Blue Ribbon School in 2011.

"I am more proud of all of the achievements my students have earned throughout the years than any personal honors I have ever been awarded," Gephart said.

Ever modest, Gephart touts his students achievements above his own. He has sponsored several students as they won national accolades at the annual National History Day competition.

"His love for the country is infectious," writes Cally Finnegan, mother of one of Gephart's former students, in her nomination letter. "He teaches the students to appreciate the freedoms we have and to take seriously the responsibilities that accompany those freedoms."



Tom Clark

**Lake Central High School
St. John, Ind.
Post 717 (St. John, Ind.)**

In 1986, Clark began a classroom project to encourage his students to take a personal interest in those killed in action from the area. Called "The Star Honor Roll Project," Clark has had students for the past two decades identify, research and immortalize Indiana natives killed while serving overseas.

"Through this experience, [students] gain a greater appreciation of the sacrifices made," writes Gene Kijanowski, Clark's colleague, in his nomination letter.

Clark's family has a long history of military service, including his father, who served in both WWII and Korea. Clark himself joined the Indiana National Guard in 1971 and from 1976-79 served with the 110th Military Police Plt., Special Troops Bn., 7th Corps in Stuttgart, West Germany. In 2006, he earned VFW eligibility when he deployed to Afghanistan with the 219th Area Support Group, part of the Indiana National Guard.

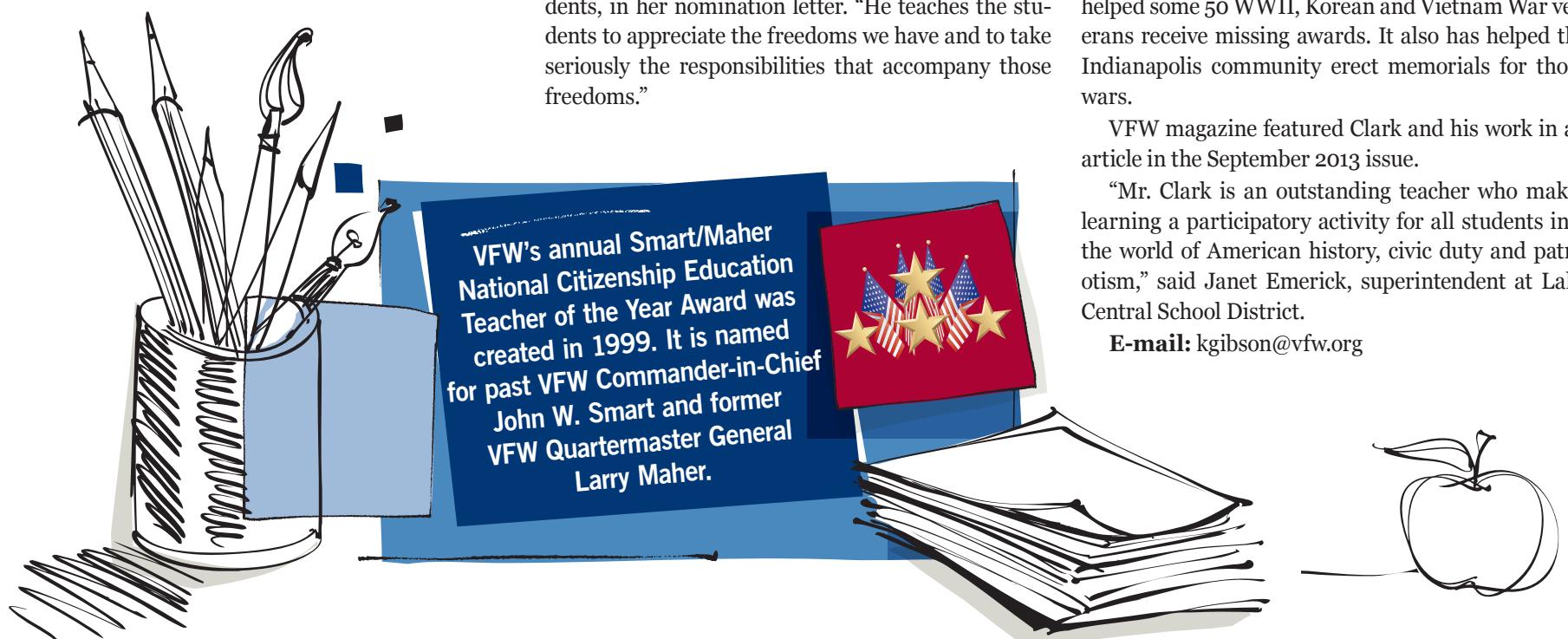
Clark is a member of VFW Post 717 in Dyer, Ind.

The research Clark's students have completed has helped some 50 WWII, Korean and Vietnam War veterans receive missing awards. It also has helped the Indianapolis community erect memorials for those wars.

VFW magazine featured Clark and his work in an article in the September 2013 issue.

"Mr. Clark is an outstanding teacher who makes learning a participatory activity for all students into the world of American history, civic duty and patriotism," said Janet Emerick, superintendent at Lake Central School District.

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VFW's Work Helps Accomplish VA Reform

Here's a brief timeline of how VFW helped usher through legislation that will fundamentally change VA's health care system.



VFW National Veterans Service Deputy Director Ryan Gallucci testifies before the Senate VA Committee in Washington, D.C. Gallucci tells lawmakers that VFW members and their families are "outraged" and want VA employees held accountable.

Gallucci offers evidence from "hundreds" of calls fielded at VFW's help line about inadequate care at VA facilities. He tells lawmakers that vets view the VA system as "overburdened, under-resourced and, many times, paranoid."



Former VA Secretary Eric Shinseki resigns. Deputy VA Secretary Sloan Gibson is named acting secretary.



VFW hosts town hall meetings at Post 6506 in Rosedale, Md., and at the Uptown Theater in Kansas City, Mo. Vets are invited to discuss their personal experiences with VA health care and ask VFW service officers questions.

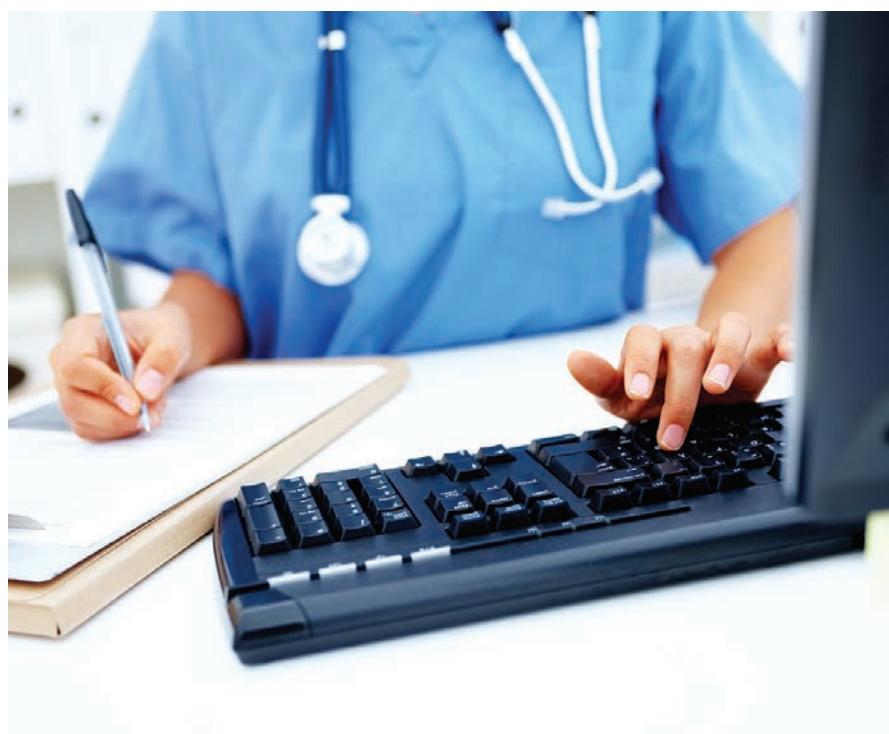
VFW Washington Office staff members attend the Maryland meeting, and employees from VFW's National Headquarters attend the Kansas City meeting.



The White House releases a report that finds a "corrosive culture" at VA that has "seriously" affected morale among employees and has produced "significant and chronic systemic failures that must be addressed" by VA leadership.



VFW's National Legislative Service works with lawmakers, including Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) and Rep. Mike Michaud (D-Maine), to ensure that VFW priorities such as improved care for vets with traumatic brain injuries, consideration for vets living in rural areas and upgraded educational benefits are included in VA reform legislation.



Acting VA Secretary Sloan Gibson attends VFW's National Convention in St. Louis and says VA's problems represent "the most serious crisis in more than a generation." Gibson praises VFW for annually demanding more VA funding and warning that shortfalls could lead to the problems VA is currently experiencing.



Robert McDonald confirmed as eighth VA secretary. Gibson resumes role as deputy secretary.



President Obama signs the bill into law
(Public Law 113-146).

2,045 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 42 WWII veterans who serve VFW Posts in official capacities. Checkpoint has recognized a total of 2,045 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
Harry Aivano	Surgeon	Post 10169, Durham, Conn.
Russell Allen	Trustee	Post 8018, East Greenwich, R.I.
Charles Arrigoni	Commander	Post 10169, Durham, Conn.
Thomas Arrigoni	Chaplain	Post 10169, Durham, Conn.
Joseph Barna	Membership Chrmn.	Post 1055, Ravenna, Ohio
James Blescia	Trustee	Post 3361, Ventnor City, N.J.
Ernest Burl	Trustee	Post 1466, Beekmantown, N.Y.
Ralph Clark	Trustee	Post 2468, Roseburg, Ore.
Edward Cook	Trustee	Post 8018, East Greenwich, R.I.
Jesse Deardorff	Honor Guard	Post 7822, Puxico, Mo.
Dominic Deludos	Commander	Post 6694, Dundalk, Md.
Roger DeMagri	Quartermaster	Post 1073, Malverne, N.Y.

Name	Position	Post/Location
Thomas Dougherty	Chaplain	Post 3361, Ventnor City, N.J.
Pat Guidice	Sr. Vice Cmdr.	Post 1073, Malverne, N.Y.
John Guiheen	Trustee	Post 1073, Malverne, N.Y.
George Hosker	Judge Advocate	Post 1073, Malverne, N.Y.
Gerald Iadeluca	Surgeon	Post 8018, East Greenwich, R.I.
Vito Ilardi	Trustee	Post 1073, Malverne, N.Y.
Louis Jaccino	Commander	Post 1073, Malverne, N.Y.
Lee James	Judge Advocate	Post 5246, Federalsburg, Md.
Donald Johnson	Chaplain	Post 8018, East Greenwich, R.I.
Steve Kirtyan	Jr. Vice Cmdr.	Post 1073, Malverne, N.Y.
Robert Kitto	Bugler	Post 10262, Plover, Wis.
James "Al" Kitts	Judge Advocate	Post 3632, Tempe, Ariz.
August Lanzotti	Adjutant	Post 1073, Malverne, N.Y.
John Long	Trustee	Post 10169, Durham, Conn.
Edward M. Maier	Trustee	Post 4947, Bloomingburg, N.Y.
John Marcinkiewicz	Surgeon	Post 1073, Malverne, N.Y.
Robert Maynes	Trustee	Post 8317, Benton, Pa.
Glenn McCandless	Chaplain	Post 4000, Meridian, Idaho
Joseph Natoli	Service Officer	Post 1073, Malverne, N.Y.
Ray Pack	Judge Advocate	Post 4000, Meridian, Idaho
John Portrey	Sr. Vice Cmdr.	Post 4000, Meridian, Idaho
John Roach	Honor Guard	Post 7822, Puxico, Mo.
Oscar Rogers	Trustee	Post 4000, Meridian, Idaho
Joseph Romboli	Sr. Vice Cmdr.	Post 10169, Durham, Conn.
Erlon Rose	Surgeon	Post 3335, Jay, Maine
Bernard Schmitt	Sr. Vice Cmdr.	Post 4624, Hubbell, Mich.
Dick Skarnes	Quartermaster	Post 12122, Kailua Kona, Hawaii
William Swift	Jr. Vice Cmdr.	Post 8018, East Greenwich, R.I.
Roland Therrien	Trustee	Post 3335, Jay, Maine
Elmer Wilson	Honor Guard	Post 7822, Puxico, Mo.

West Virginia's Revamped Youth Camp Hosts 87 Kids

FOR 55 YEARS, VFW'S DEPARTMENT OF WEST VIRGINIA and Posts throughout the state have funded and organized a camp for youths ages 11-14. After a yearlong hiatus in 2013, the revamped camp returned with a devoted staff, a new location and more than 80 eager campers.

The youth camp, though sponsored by the Department, is funded entirely by donations, both from members and other local companies and groups. Campers attend free of charge and can take part in such activities as swimming, paddleboats, archery, simulated rifle training, a rock wall, crafts and a geology course. Self-defense and survival courses also are offered.

Camp Director Joe Norris and other VFW members, all of whom are volunteers, work year-round preparing for the annual weeklong event. It took place this year from July 27 through August 2 at Camp Dawson, a National Guard base in northern West Virginia.

Throughout the week, campers also learned about patriotism, history and got a crash course in the military lifestyle, marching to and from all activities and sleeping in the barracks. A different event each evening focused largely on such topics, from a talk by guest speaker Woody Williams, the only living West Virginia recipient of the Medal of Honor, to taking part in a flag retirement ceremony.

An Army vet who served as an infantryman with the 101st Airborne Division from May 1970 – May 1971 in Vietnam, Norris has been with VFW (Post 9097, Hurricane, W.Va.) for about 15 years and has worked with the youth camp for eight. This year was his fifth as director, and he also serves as the geology instructor, holding a master's degree in that field.

Norris continues his involvement with the camp because he believes "it's something truly worthwhile. I believe in the camp and what is has done for the kids."

Helping him manage the 87 kids who participated this year were Assistant Directors Kevin Light and Wanda Hurley, and more than 20 counselors, nearly all VFW or Auxiliary members.

Light is a Navy veteran who earned his VFW eligibility with receipt of the Navy Expeditionary Medal for service in the Indian Ocean Contingency Operation/Iran Hostage Crisis (1979-81). He joined in 2005 (Post 4768, Allen Creek, W.Va.) and is in his fourth year with the camp.

Hurley, affiliated with Post 5578 Auxiliary (Madison, W.Va.) and the Sr. Vice President for the Ladies Auxiliary with the Department of West Virginia, joined the Auxiliary in 2005, as well, and also is in her fourth year with the camp.

Light and Hurley were both incredibly impressed with the facilities and support offered at Camp Dawson, as was the rest of the youth camp team. "We've not received better support for facilities," Light said. "They [the staff at Camp Dawson] are bending over backward to help us."

The campers had more varied opinions on what the best part of camp was. Brothers Kemo and Kavanaugh Summers, 11 and 13, respectively, were both attending the program for the first time and hope to return next year.

"I really like the self-defense" course, Kavanaugh said. "It's good to learn if someone is going to try to hurt me."

Dakota Carroll, 14, said all the activities were "really fun. And you get a good workout marching." Dakota returned to the camp for her third time this year and said that she has enjoyed making new friends with each visit.

For the time being, the West Virginia camp is a unique experience. But if Norris has anything to say, that will soon change. In spreading the word about the youth camp, he says he is "hoping to get it going in other states."

Planning for the 2015 camp is already underway, and Norris and his team hope to bring it back to Camp Dawson.

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LEFT TO RIGHT, TOP TO BOTTOM: Campers watch a skit and talent show, where kids and counselors alike took the stage.

Children attending West Virginia's VFW Youth Camp ask questions of the pilot and crew of a HealthNet Aeromedical Services helicopter before being allowed to tour the chopper.

During a survival course, a group of campers work to get a fire started.

Campers complete a test on the final day of a survival course taught by members of the Army's Green Berets.

Deputy Justin Childers of the Preston County (W.Va.) Sheriff's Department shows off his canine partner, Snitch.

Campers spent the week sleeping in the barracks at Camp Dawson, W.Va., with counselors conducting a military inspection of the bunks each day.

Gary McCord, center, explains the rules of an archery contest to the competing campers.



PHOTOS BY HILLARY SHIPMAN

Promoting Gun Safety in Wisconsin

Kyle Drake, a warden with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR), conducts hunter education training for future instructors in April at the town hall in Vernon, Wis. Organized and sponsored by Post 11038 in Rochester, Wis., these free-to-the-public classes produce WDNR hunter safety instructors who can certify hunters for licenses or gun owners for concealed-carry permits in their respective communities.

PHOTO BY TIM AGOUEDEMOS, POST 11038 QUARTERMASTER, COURTESY OF WISCONSIN VFW NEWS



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VFW POSTS OF 1,000 MEMBERS
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Rank	Post No.	Location	Members
1	27	Wiesbaden, Germany.....	2,809
2	1114	Evansville, IN.....	2,653
3	1503	Dale City, VA.....	2,397
4	9972	Sierra Vista, AZ.....	1,954
5	8862	Vicenza, Italy.....	1,799
6	392	Virginia Beach, VA.....	1,699
7	2485	Angeles City, Philippines.....	1,627
8	9785	Eagle River, AK.....	1,619
9	4372	Odessa, TX.....	1,609
10	6506	Rosedale, MD.....	1,524

Rank	No.	Location	Members
11	63	Boise, ID.....	1,503
12	10692	Grafenwoehr, Germany..	1,472
13	4647	North Highlands, CA.....	1,466
14	628	Sioux Falls, SD.....	1,451
15	76	San Antonio, TX.....	1,449
16	9342	Ansbach, Germany.....	1,443
17	6873	Abilene, TX.....	1,439
18	1146	St Clair Shores, MI.....	1,302
19	7234	Ocean View, DE.....	1,282
20	3944	Overland-St. Ann, MO.....	1,262
21	10047	North Las Vegas, NV.....	1,259
22	972	Terre Haute, IN.....	1,250
23	4809	Norfolk, VA.....	1,239
24	10097	Fort Myers Beach, FL.....	1,214
25	8951	West York, PA.....	1,204
26	2503	Omaha, NE.....	1,181
27	549	Tucson, AZ.....	1,174
28	56	Leavenworth, KS.....	1,170
29	2111	Chula Vista, CA.....	1,162
30	1326	Bismarck, ND.....	1,145
31	1273	Rapid City, SD.....	1,117
31	1152	Kokomo, IN.....	1,117
31	7686	Alamogordo, NM.....	1,117
34	1512	Lemon Grove, CA.....	1,115
35	1308	Alton, IL.....	1,112
36	969	Tacoma, WA.....	1,106
37	1599	Chambersburg, PA.....	1,079
38	10216	Songtan-Si, Korea.....	1,073
39	10436	Kitzingen, Germany.....	1,048
39	7968	Apache Junction, AZ.....	1,048
41	7330	Oakville, CT.....	1,037
42	1170	Middletown, KY.....	1,035
43	788	Cedar Rapids, IA.....	1,034
44	4709	Conroe, TX.....	1,020

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VFW Says Farewell to Deploying Troops

VFW National Recruiter David Gyger, left, of Post 6417 in Palmyra, Pa., and Fred Hechler of Post 9639 in Grantville, Pa., help send off members of the Pennsylvania Air National Guard's 201st Red Horse Squadron in March. About 80 members deployed to Afghanistan.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF DAVID SANDMAN, PENNSYLVANIA VFW PUBLIC AFFAIRS DIRECTOR