



Jim Brown, New Department Commander

NEW LEADERSHIP TAKES THE HELM OF THE VFW DEPARTMENT OF PENNSYLVANIA

NEW TEAM READY TO LEAD, SERVE AND STRENGTHEN THE VFW ACROSS THE COMMONWEALTH

By Cynthia Lewis, Dept. of PA VFW

A Team Focused on the Future

The VFW remains one of the nation's leading organizations dedicated to serving veterans, and Pennsylvania's Department continues to play an important role in that mission.

The year ahead will bring a renewed emphasis on **membership, Post development, community involvement, veteran services and advocacy.** The goal is not simply to increase numbers, but to ensure that every member understands the importance of belonging to an organization that continues to fight for veterans and their families.

Strong Posts are the foundation of a strong Department. The new leadership team will encourage Posts to become more active in their communities, reach out to veterans who may not yet be members and demonstrate through their actions that the VFW continues to have an important role in the lives of today's veterans.

Leadership Is a Team Effort

The new Department officers recognize that no Commander — regardless of position — can accomplish the VFW's mission alone.

Success will depend upon the dedication of Post Commanders, District Commanders, Department chairmen, volunteers, Auxiliary members and, most importantly, the membership.

Every member has a role to play.

Whether it is helping another veteran obtain earned benefits, participating in a community event, visiting a veteran in need, contacting

legislators, recruiting a new member or simply welcoming someone into a Post, these individual efforts combine to make a tremendous difference.

The new leadership team is asking members throughout Pennsylvania to continue working together and to remember why the VFW exists in the first place.

Veterans are the mission.

Moving Forward Together

As the new officers begin their terms, they do so with appreciation for those who have served before them and with a commitment to build upon the foundation already established.

The coming year will require teamwork, communication and a willingness to embrace new ideas while remaining true to the traditions and principles that have guided the VFW for generations.

The Department of Pennsylvania enters this new year with an opportunity to strengthen its Posts, engage its membership and reach more veterans who need the services and fellowship the VFW provides.

The challenge now belongs to all of us.

It is time to roll up our sleeves, work together and continue the mission.

One Department. One VFW. One Mission — serving veterans and their families.

The new leadership team welcomes the opportunity to serve and looks forward to working with every Post, District and member across Pennsylvania as we move forward together.

PITTSBURGH, PA — The Veterans of Foreign Wars Department of Pennsylvania gathered in June for its annual Department Convention, bringing together VFW members from across the Commonwealth for a weekend of fellowship, recognition, organizational business and, most importantly, the election and installation of a new leadership team.

The convention provided an opportunity to reflect on the accomplishments of the past year while looking ahead to the challenges and opportunities facing the VFW and Pennsylvania's veterans.

As the new leadership team assumes its responsibilities, the message is clear: **the mission remains the priority — serving veterans, supporting their families, strengthening our Posts and ensuring that the voice of veterans continues to be heard.**

The newly elected officers understand that leadership in the VFW is not about a title. It is about responsibility, accountability and service.

The new Department leadership team will work together to support VFW Posts and Districts throughout Pennsylvania while encouraging greater participation, stronger membership and increased visibility in communities across the Commonwealth.

A MESSAGE FROM THE VFW DEPARTMENT OF PENNSYLVANIA COMMANDER



Jim Brown
State Commander

I wish to continue to thank the VFW PA Membership for putting your trust in me to represent all of you as your VFW PA State Commander for the 2026-2027 fiscal year. Congratulations to the other VFW PA elected: Sr. Vice: Glenn Owen, Jr.; Vice: Jessica King; Quartermaster: John Getz; Surgeon: Jesse Olson; Judge Advocate: Frank McGovern; and Chaplain: Dave Brady. Thank you to Immediate Past State Commander (IPSC) Bill Roland for your Guidance and Mentorship. I look forward to learning, growing, and pushing the Dept. of PA forward with all of you, my appointed Chairs, and the entire Membership of the VFW Dept. of PA!

Since being elected your VFW Dept. of PA Commander on June 20, 2026, I have pushed the Leadership Team hard. They have taken the challenges head on, and are focused on the overall success of the VFW. We have all hit the road running. We started the beginning of July with extremely successful Membership Drives, a very impactful Flying Squadron, followed by spinning straight into the Dept. Leadership Team, conducting 9 PTI Trainings over two weekends, spanning the entire state of PA. We finished the month of July in Reno at the VFW National Convention, learning, making sure our VFW PA voices are heard, and electing the VFW National Leadership.

Congratulations to VFW National Commander in Chief (CIC) Cory Geisler, Sr. Vice CIC Glenn Umberger Jr., (our very own from PA), Jr. Vice CIC Bobby Lovergne Jr., Adjutant General Dan West, Quartermaster General Marc Garduno, and Surgeon General Bill Roland (our very own from PA).

I believe that Leadership comes from those that are willing to get their boots dirty in the trenches. I know we have these Leaders in place. Let us get our boots dirty with you! This will ensure we get the work done that is required by the Veterans of Foreign Wars Posts/Districts/Department/National levels, and create success in everything we set forth to accomplish.

My Brothers and Sisters, I urge you to join me in this collaboration. We must grow our Membership to assist in our efforts to succeed. I need you all to make your Post successful, and adding Members increases the path towards success.

IGNITE your Fire and Passion to make your Post successful.

UNITE as one to make the VFW as a whole successful.

Let us all use that Fire and Passion as one Unit, to ensure we as a Veterans of Foreign Wars Department of Pennsylvania PUSH FORWARD FOR CONTINUED SUCCESS!!!



2 PENNSYLVANIA VETERANS BECOME VFW NATIONAL LEADERS: SR. VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF AND NATIONAL SURGEON GENERAL



Glenn R. Umberger Jr.
Senior Vice Commander-In-Chief

THANK YOU, TEAM PENNSYLVANIA!

Last year I quoted Henry Ford, who once said, “Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress, working together is success.”

The beginning was August 13th, 2025, at the VFW National Convention in Columbus, Ohio, where you elected me as Junior Vice Commander-In-Chief. Together, on July 29th, 2026, in Reno, Nevada, you elected me as Senior Vice Commander-In-Chief. With your continued support and encouragement, final success is just one year away.

Election to this position is both a profound honor and a solemn responsibility. As I reflect upon the journey that has led to this moment, my heart is filled with gratitude for the trust you bestowed upon me, for the encouragement and support received from so many, and for the opportunity to continue to serve in this distinguished capacity. I am deeply humbled by your confidence in me, and pledge to continue to dedicate myself wholeheartedly to fulfilling the duties of this position.

As no leader stands alone, I am indebted to my mentors and fellow Veterans who have contributed to the person I have become. From insightful conversations to constructive critiques, each interaction helped me better understand the mission and needs of our organization.

Thank you to all of those who came before in the storied history of the VFW, and all that they achieved. Now as only the 11th person to represent the State of Pennsylvania as Senior Vice Commander-In-Chief, I embark on this new chapter, filled with excitement and determination.

I am mindful that leadership is a journey, not a destination. My promise is to never lose sight of the trust you have placed in me, and to honor that trust with every action taken.

As you can expect, my schedule is rapidly filling with events across our great nation and around the world. This means that my attendance at Pennsylvania events will be limited. Please know that you are in my thoughts and I am forever grateful for your support.

Yours in Comradeship



William Roland Jr.
National Surgeon General

NAVY VETERAN WILLIAM ROLAND JR. APPOINTED TO KEY NATIONAL LEADERSHIP ROLE

RENO, Nev. (July 29, 2026) – William Roland Jr., of North Versailles, Pennsylvania, was elected National Surgeon General of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) on July 29, 2026, at the 127th VFW National Convention in Reno, Nevada.

William joined the VFW in 2006 at Post 5008 in East Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, later transferring to Post 914, in West Mifflin, Pennsylvania, where he maintains his Gold Legacy Life membership. He has served in elected and appointed positions at the Post, District and Department levels, culminating with his election as the VFW Department of Pennsylvania Commander in 2025. On the national level, he has served as National Assistant Inspector, Special Aide-de-Camp and served on the Veterans Service Resolutions Committee.



DEPARTMENT COMMANDER



JIM BROWN
DEPARTMENT COMMANDER

IGNITE. UNITE. PUSH FORWARD.

Sisters and Brothers,

WE belong to the Greatest Combat Veteran Service Organization in the world, and the VFW Department of Pennsylvania sits at the forefront in so many ways. With that distinction comes a great responsibility.

WE are Elite — and therefore, WE should act and represent ourselves in such a manner.

I know I would not be sitting in the high office of Department Commander today without the tremendous support, guidance, and advice I have received — and continue to receive — from so many people. Some have been members of the VFW for decades, while others are just getting their feet wet in the proverbial water. Every one of you has something to offer, and every one of us has something to learn.

We must continue to **Educate ourselves and others, Learn from one another, Teach those who will one day lead, and Mentor everyone in what the VFW is truly about.**

Every moment and every situation gives us an opportunity to accomplish at least one of these things.

Knowledge is NOT power alone. Knowledge is ONLY power when it is shared!

When WE stop learning and teaching, WE stop evolving. And if WE do not evolve, **WE will eventually die as an organization.**

TELL OUR STORY

Educating and teaching should NOT stop with us.

WE must make sure the civilian population knows what WE do and understands the many ways WE contribute to our communities, our Commonwealth, and our Nation.

All too often, negativity spreads when one thing goes wrong. Yet, for every negative story, there are countless positive things happening inside our Posts and throughout our Department.

It is our responsibility to tell that story.

WE are sometimes our own worst enemy when it comes to spreading the word about the great things WE accomplish.

Use social media. Use local newspapers, television, radio, and every other news outlet available to you. These platforms give you an opportunity to promote your programs, share photographs of events, recognize award recipients, highlight community service, and showcase the tremendous work being done by YOUR VFW.

Do not keep those accomplishments hidden behind the walls of your Post.

Get out from behind those walls and let the world know the amazing things WE are doing!

MEMBERSHIP IS OUR VOICE

As your Department Commander, you know I am going to talk about **Membership.**

Many of us have heard the phrase:

“Membership is the lifeblood of the organization.”

That is not simply a slogan. It is a fact.

Without Members, WE do not exist.

The VFW Department of Pennsylvania ended the last fiscal year with **57,504 Members.** WE MUST continue to grow that number.

Why?

Because membership gives us a stronger voice.

When WE lobby in Washington, D.C., and Harrisburg, legislators want to know how many Veterans WE represent. They may not listen to one person, but their ears perk up when that one person represents nearly **58,000 Members.**

The math is simple.

If every Member in Pennsylvania recruited or reinstated just ONE Member, WE would double in size.

Imagine what that would mean for our voice on Capitol Hill.

Imagine what that would mean when WE fight to protect the benefits Veterans have earned.

Imagine what that would mean when WE work to create new opportunities and benefits for the Veterans of tomorrow.

Help make OUR voice heard.

Today — and every day — our goal should be simple:

Bring at least ONE more Sister or Brother into OUR VFW PA Family!

WE WILL MOVE FORWARD TOGETHER

The VFW Department of Pennsylvania will experience challenges and successes throughout the upcoming year.

As **YOUR VFW Department Commander**, I will shoulder the challenges and shortcomings that come our way.

YOU, on the other hand, will help create the successes.

And when those successes come, **YOU will have earned the right to bask in them!**

This Department belongs to all of us. Our Posts belong to all of us. Our mission belongs to all of us.

No Commander can accomplish this mission alone.

No District can accomplish it alone.

No Post can accomplish it alone.

WE accomplish it together.

So, as I sign off, I ask each and every one of you to do three things:

IGNITE

Ignite your fire. Ignite your passion. Ignite your commitment to making YOUR VFW better and stronger.

UNITE

Unite as **ONE VFW Department of Pennsylvania.** Set aside our differences, support one another, and remember that our mission is greater than any individual.

PUSH FORWARD

Do not stand still. Do not settle. Do not look backward.

Push forward for success!

Sisters and Brothers, the future of the VFW Department of Pennsylvania is in OUR hands.

WE are Elite.

WE are VFW.

WE are Pennsylvania.

WE are stronger together.

Now let’s **IGNITE** our passion, **UNITE** as **ONE**, and **PUSH FORWARD FOR SUCCESS!**

Together, WE will make it happen.

IMMEDIATE PAST STATE COMMANDER



WILLIAM "BILL" ROLAND
STATE COMMANDER

Thank you for electing me and giving me the honor and privilege of serving as your Department Commander for the 2025–2026 year. It has truly been one of the greatest honors of my life, and I will always be grateful for the opportunity to serve this Department and its members.

As we move forward as members of the greatest veterans organization, I ask each of you to take a moment and ask yourself: Are you, as an individual or as a Post, living up to our mission? I understand that not all of us will always agree or get along, but just as we learned during our military service, the mission must come first. When we put the mission and our Veterans ahead of ourselves, we accomplish great things.

We achieved tremendous success in membership this year! While many people may congratulate the Commander, the credit truly belongs to Membership Chairman Tom Sally and his team, along with the Districts and Posts throughout our Department. Their dedication, hard work, and commitment made this accomplishment possible. This was truly a team effort, and I am proud of what we accomplished together.

And if you are reading this, my parachute adventure is officially over! I want

to thank John Getz and Auxiliary President Robin Kohler for joining me on that unforgettable experience. It was certainly an adventure, and one that gave me a memory I will never forget!

I would also like to extend my sincere thanks to our Department staff for their hard work, support, patience, and, most of all, for putting up with me throughout the year! Your dedication behind the scenes often goes unnoticed, but it played an important role in helping me carry out my responsibilities as Commander. I truly appreciate everything you have done.

Finally, I look forward to seeing the great things Commander Brown and his team will accomplish in the coming year. I have no doubt that they will continue building upon the progress we achieved together and lead our Department toward even greater success.

It has been an incredible year filled with challenges, accomplishments, friendships, memories, and opportunities to serve those who have served our great nation. I am proud of what we accomplished together, but even more proud to have had the opportunity to serve alongside so many dedicated members of our Veterans of Foreign Wars family.

Thank you for your trust. Thank you for your support. And most importantly, thank you for allowing me the honor and privilege to serve as your Department Commander.

It has been my honor to serve you.

STATE SR. VICE COMMANDER



GLENN OWEN
STATE SR. VICE COMMANDER

I would like to thank the membership for the honor and privilege of becoming your Department Senior Vice Commander. It is truly an honor to serve in this role, and I am grateful for the confidence you have placed in me.

According to Section 518(a)(2) of the VFW Manual of Procedure, the Department Senior Vice Commander shall assist the Commander in preserving order, preside in the absence of the Commander, provide such advice and assistance as may be required, and perform such other duties as are usually incident to the office or may, from time to time, be required by the laws and usages of the organization or lawful orders from proper authority.

As I took on this position, I began asking myself: What can I do to help this organization grow stronger?

One of the answers is membership—but membership is about more than simply increasing our numbers. It is about what we do with the members we bring into our organization.

Yes, we will always need new members if this organization is going to flourish. But once we connect with those new members and they join the VFW, what is the next step?

We mentor them. We develop them. We give them an opportunity to lead.

The new members we are welcoming today will be the leaders of this great organization tomorrow. They will be our future Post Commanders, District leaders, Department officers, and perhaps even National leaders.

That means we, as current leaders, have a responsibility to guide and mentor those who come after us. We must share our knowledge, our experiences, and our passion for the VFW. We must make sure new members understand not only what the VFW does, but why it matters.

Our mission is bigger than any one of us. It is about serving the veteran, supporting their families, and making a difference in our communities. If we want that mission to continue for generations to come, we must invest in the

people who will carry it forward.

I also want to congratulate every Post that achieved All-State and All-American recognition this past year. Pennsylvania had a very successful year, and that success belongs to the members, Posts, Districts, and leaders who worked together to make it happen.

But now, we have an opportunity to build on that success and make Commander Brown's year an even better one.

Commander Brown has given us a clear challenge with his motto:

Ignite. Unite. Push Forward.

Let's ignite the passion we have for this organization.

Let's unite as members, Posts, Districts, and Department leaders to accomplish the goals Commander Brown has established.

And then let's push forward—together—to grow this great organization to new heights.

Looking ahead, I am excited to work alongside Commander Brown and Junior Vice Commander King as we move forward together. We may each have different responsibilities, but we share one common goal: to make the VFW Department of Pennsylvania the strongest in the nation.

Together, we can recruit new members.

Together, we can mentor and develop future leaders.

Together, we can strengthen our Posts and Districts.

And together, we can ensure that every veteran who joins our ranks finds a place to serve, grow, and belong.

I am honored to serve as your Department Senior Vice Commander, and I look forward to working with each and every one of you.

Let's Ignite.

Let's Unite.

And together, let's Push Forward!

Thank you, and may we continue to serve our veterans, their families, and our communities with pride.

STATE JR. VICE COMMANDER



JESSICA KING
STATE JUNIOR VICE COMMANDER

Looking Ahead Together

It is truly an honor and privilege to have been elected as the Junior Vice Commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Department of Pennsylvania. I sincerely thank the delegates and every member who placed their trust and confidence in me. I am excited to join the leadership team alongside Department Commander Brown and Senior Vice Commander Owens, and I look forward to working together to advance the mission of the VFW and serve the veterans of the Commonwealth.

As we begin this new year, I look forward to focusing on what makes our organization strong—our members, our Posts, and our commitment to serving veterans and their families. Together, we have an opportunity to grow our membership, strengthen our Posts, and ensure that every veteran knows the VFW is here to serve them.

One of my primary goals will be helping connect veterans and their families with the benefits, programs, and resources they have earned through their military service. Through education and effective communication, we can help ensure that no veteran misses an opportunity to receive the care, assistance, and support they deserve. Whether through outreach events, training, partnerships, podcasts, or simply sharing accurate information, each of us has the ability to make a meaningful difference in the lives of those we serve.

I also look forward to building stronger relationships with communities across Pennsylvania. Every Post has a unique story and plays an important role in

supporting veterans through outreach, community service, youth programs, and advocacy. By sharing ideas, learning from one another, and working together, we can continue to make our Department even stronger.

Another priority will be encouraging leadership development and supporting the next generation of VFW leaders. By mentoring our members, embracing new ideas, and welcoming veterans of every era into our organization, we can ensure that the VFW remains relevant, strong, and prepared to serve veterans for generations to come.

As I travel across the Commonwealth, I look forward to visiting your Posts, celebrating your successes, and listening to your ideas, challenges, and concerns. I want to hear what is working in your communities, what challenges you are facing, and what the Department can do to help. Together, we can accomplish great things by supporting one another, sharing knowledge, and remaining focused on our mission of service.

The year ahead holds tremendous opportunity. By working together, communicating effectively, and educating veterans about the benefits and resources available to them, we can strengthen our organization while making a lasting impact on the lives of veterans and their families across Pennsylvania.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve as your Junior Vice Commander. I am honored to be part of the leadership team and look forward to traveling throughout the Commonwealth, meeting our members, visiting our Posts, and working alongside you.

Together, we will continue to honor our veterans, strengthen the VFW, and ensure that every veteran receives the benefits, resources, and support they have earned through their service.

I look forward to seeing you throughout the year.

Together, we can make a difference.

STATE QUARTERMASTER



JOHN B. GETZ, JR.
STATE QUARTERMASTER

Comrades, We have just come off a very successful year for the Department of Pennsylvania. We achieved 101 percent membership, and our Posts and members have continued to do great work in their communities. I want to thank everyone who contributed to that success.

However, there is one area where we still need to improve: reporting what we do.

Our Posts are out there helping veterans, supporting our communities, conducting fundraisers, participating in events, and completing countless projects. But if we do not report those activities, we cannot receive the recognition and credit they deserve. We need to report all that we do—not just some of our projects. Every activity tells the story of what the VFW is doing for veterans and our communities.

Quartermasters and Trustees

Quartermasters, please make sure your Posts are following the proper procedures and that your Trustees are completing their audits as required. The Trustees have an important responsibility to the Post and its membership, and those audits need to be completed properly and on time.

Good financial records and proper accountability are essential to maintaining a strong Post. Please take the time to make sure everything is being handled correctly.

Skill Machines

If you support legislation concerning skill machines, contact your legislators and make your position known. Be informed about the current law and any changes that may take effect, and make sure your elected representatives hear directly from the people they represent.

Protecting Veterans' Earned Benefits

Finally, Comrades, we are facing an important fight in Washington. Proposed federal legislation includes provisions that the VFW has warned could reduce disability compensation for future veterans, potentially affecting benefits for conditions such as tinnitus and sleep apnea. The VFW has made it clear that veterans' earned benefits should not be used to pay for other programs.

We cannot sit quietly and allow our government to take away benefits that veterans have earned through their service and sacrifice.

I encourage every member to contact your Congressional representatives and let them know where you stand. Make your voice heard. Tell them that we will not accept cuts to veterans' earned benefits.

The VFW has always been an organization willing to stand up and fight for veterans. That responsibility belongs to every one of us.

Keep up the great work, Comrades. Continue serving our veterans, supporting our communities, and making sure the good work being done throughout Pennsylvania is properly reported and recognized.

Together, we can continue to make the VFW Department of Pennsylvania one of the strongest Departments in the nation.

NO VETERAN SHOULD FACE THE DARKNESS ALONE

There is a battle that many of our Veterans continue to fight long after they have returned home. It is a battle that does not always have a visible wound, and far too often, it is one fought in silence. Veteran suicide remains one of the most serious challenges facing our Veteran community, and it is a challenge that demands all of us to take action.

According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' 2025 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report, 6,398 Veterans died by suicide in 2023—an average of approximately 17.5 Veterans every day. While that number represents a slight decrease from 2022, it is still far too many lives lost. The report also found that 61% of Veterans who died by suicide in 2023 had not received VA health care during the previous year.

That statistic should make every member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars stop and think.

Our responsibility does not end when a Veteran leaves the military. It does not end when a Veteran receives a discharge, attends a VFW meeting, or walks through the doors of a Post. Our responsibility is to make sure that every Veteran knows there are people who care, people who will listen, and people willing to stand beside them when life becomes overwhelming.

Sometimes prevention begins with something as simple as a telephone call.

“How are you doing?”

And we must be willing to listen to the answer.

Veterans may be dealing with many challenges—pain, health problems, financial difficulties, homelessness, employment issues, relationship problems, loneliness or the difficult transition from military to civilian life. The VA reports that pain was the most frequently identified risk factor among Veterans who died by suicide between 2021 and 2023 whose deaths were reported by VA suicide prevention teams.

As members of the VFW, we have an incredible opportunity to make a difference. We see Veterans in our Posts, at community events, at hospitals, in our homes and throughout our communities. We may be the person who notices that someone who normally participates has suddenly withdrawn. We may be the person who receives a late-night phone call. We may be the person who simply sits down and listens.

Do not be afraid to start the conversation.

Asking a Veteran if they are struggling does not put the

thought of suicide into their head. It opens the door for them to talk about what they are experiencing. We should never dismiss someone by saying, “You'll get over it,” or “Someone else has it worse.” Instead, listen without judgment and help connect that Veteran with the support they need.

The VA offers free VA S.A.V.E. training to teach Veterans, families, organizations and community members how to recognize warning signs and respond when someone may be in crisis.

We also need to remember that **we cannot do this alone**. The VFW, the VA, veteran service organizations, community organizations, families, friends and fellow Veterans all have a role to play. The VA emphasizes that suicide prevention requires a whole-community approach and that support is available even for Veterans who are not enrolled in VA health care.

Every Post should know where to send a Veteran for help. Every leader should know how to recognize the signs of a crisis. Every member should understand that reaching out is not a weakness—it is an act of courage.

Most importantly, we must continue to remind our Veterans that **their service mattered, their lives matter, and they are not alone**.

If you or a Veteran you know is in crisis, help is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Call **988 and Press 1** to reach the Veterans Crisis Line. You can also text **838255**. You do not have to be enrolled in VA health care or receiving VA benefits to use the service.

As Veterans, we were taught never to leave a fellow service member behind.

That commitment must continue after the uniform comes off.

No Veteran should feel that they have to fight their final battle alone. Reach out. Listen. Stand beside them. Save a life.



ACROSS PENNSYLVANIA

Mahoning Valley VFW Post 2076 in Punxsutawney presented a citation to Paul "Rusty" Johnston. The citation from the Department of Pennsylvania VFW recognizes Rusty's service to his nation in the United States Army on his 100th birthday. He is the last surviving World War 2 member of the post. Post officers making the presentation were Junior Vice Commander Chuck Stewart, Post Commander Jim Pallone, Post Quartermaster/Adjutant Bob Lott, Trustee Charlie Smith, and Chaplain Tim Brady.

Rusty Johnston entered the army shortly after graduating from high school. He received a Purple Heart for wounds received in Okinawa and spent half of his enlistment in the hospital recovering from several surgeries. Upon his discharge from the army, Rusty applied for dental school where he was turned down due to not being college material. After all he had been through, he returned to high school and repeated his senior year to bring up his grades. He reapplied to dental school and became a successful dentist in Punxsutawney. Among his many other accomplishments was being the Chief Health Man for the Inner Circle of the Groundhog Club where he read the prediction of Punxsutawney Phil for many years on February 2nd.



VFW Post 7963 recently presented one of our members a gift of his service medals for his 100th birthday on July 19th. His name is Victor Bolcavage and he is a retired First Sgt US Army Aug 1944- Sep 1966. He served in WW2 (Battle of Remagan Bridge Germany), Korea (Battle of Chosin Reservoir where he earned his Purple Heart) and Vietnam.



Pictured: Victor Bolcavage-100th Birthday presented his service medals by Post Commander Vince Gavin.

ACROSS PENNSYLVANIA

VETERANS MOTORCYCLE ORGANIZATIONS UNITE TO HONOR GOLD STAR WIVES DURING THE 81ST NATIONAL CONVENTION IN GETTYSBURG



In a powerful demonstration of remembrance, respect, and unity, the VFW Riders District 15-PA organized the Gold Star Wives Honor Escort Ride on July 25, 2026. With assistance from the American Legion Riders and several veteran and civilian motorcycle organizations from across the region, participants paid tribute to the surviving spouses of America's fallen service members.

Riders representing the VFW Riders, American Legion Riders, Patriot Guard Riders, Christian Motorcycle Association (CMA), and numerous other veteran and community motorcycle organizations united to provide an honor escort for attendees of the 81st National Convention of the Gold Star Wives of America, held in historic Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Their participation demonstrated a shared commitment to honoring the families of America's fallen heroes and ensuring that their sacrifices are never forgotten.

The Gold Star Wives of America is a congressionally chartered nonprofit organization founded in 1945 that supports the surviving spouses of military members who died while serving our nation or whose deaths resulted from service-connected causes. For more than eight decades, the organization has remained steadfast in its mission of remembrance, advocacy, peer support, and ensuring that no surviving spouse walks alone.

The escort ride departed from the Wyndham Gettysburg Hotel & Conference Center at 12:00 p.m. on Saturday, July 25, following a riders' meeting and safety briefing. Participants traveled approximately 45 miles through the scenic roads surrounding Gettysburg and Gettysburg National Military Park, making commemorative stops at the Eternal Light Peace Memorial and the State of Pennsylvania Monument, where riders paused for historical interpretation, photographs, and reflection before returning to the Wyndham.

"We are so grateful as an organization for the commitment and support of our mission from the organizations represented here today. No one has ever done anything like this for us before, and again, we cannot express our gratitude enough," said Pam Connors, National Vice President of the Gold Star Wives of America.

"This ride was about far more than motorcycles," organizers said. "It was about standing shoulder to shoulder with families whose sacrifice did not end when their loved one made the ultimate sacrifice. It was our opportunity as veterans and veteran supporters to say, 'You are not forgotten, and neither are they.'"

Gettysburg served as a fitting backdrop for this tribute. As one of the nation's most hallowed grounds, it symbolized sacrifice, courage, and the enduring cost of preserving freedom. By escorting the Gold Star Wives through this historic landscape, the veteran community reaffirmed its commitment to honoring not only those who gave their lives in service, but also the families who continue to carry

their legacy forward.

The ride also reflected an extraordinary spirit of cooperation within the motorcycle community. Although organized by the VFW Riders and American Legion Riders, the event welcomed participation from a wide range of organizations whose shared mission was to honor America's military families. This united effort demonstrated that service transcends organizational boundaries when it comes to remembering our nation's fallen heroes.

About Gold Star Wives of America

Gold Star Wives of America, Inc. is a congressionally chartered nonprofit organization dedicated to providing support, advocacy, and fellowship for the surviving spouses of military service members who died while serving our country or whose deaths resulted from service-connected causes. Through outreach, legislative advocacy, and compassionate support, the organization ensures that the sacrifices of military families are never forgotten.

To learn more or to make a donation, please visit <https://www.goldstarwives.org>.

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THE VFW AUXILIARY



CECELIA "CEIL" COOK
PRESIDENT
DEPARTMENT OF PA VFW AUXILIARY

Hello, Comrades!

It is an honor to be able to send a message to you as your VFW Auxiliary Department President. If the Auxiliary Program Conference was any indication of the upcoming year, I am looking forward to a year filled with enthusiasm and drive.

The Department of Pennsylvania has a very special year ahead! Our own Donna Mills assumed the role of President of the National VFW Auxiliary at the national convention in Reno Nv. What an honor it is to serve with her this year.

As in the past, our main focus is to reignite the enthusiasm in our members

while we work hard to increase the size of our organization. Increasing our membership numbers means that we can be more effective voicing our opinions with all elected officials regarding Veterans benefits and to have a stronger presence within our communities.

My theme this year is **"Simply the Best for our Veterans,"** which goes hand in hand with why our organization was formed; to take care of our Veterans and their families.

I am looking forward to working with Commander Jim Brown and his Line Officers and pledge to them the support of the VFW Auxiliary on all levels of our organization.



TINA HINKLE
MEMBERSHIP CHAIRMAN

Thank you for your military service AND thank you for your membership in the VFW! Do you know that by simply joining the VFW, you are an advocate for the rights and benefits of all Veterans and their families?

Membership in the VFW and its Auxiliary **strengthen the voice** that the VFW has on Capitol Hill. That combined voice is loud and proud, standing for the legislation that benefits all Veterans. Now, more than ever, we need to increase the membership of the VFW and its Auxiliary so that important work can be done. There are Veterans relying on the VFW for its stand on doing the right thing for all Veterans.

Each of us can actively strengthen that voice by inviting eligible Veterans to join the VFW and inviting their family - their parents, grandparents, siblings, spouse, children and grandchildren, 16 years and older - to join the VFW Auxiliary. If you have relatives that can honor your service by being an Auxiliary member, please recommend and recruit them for the Auxiliary now.

Auxiliary Membership applications are available through your Post's Auxiliary. If your Post does not have an Auxiliary, or to locate an Auxiliary in another area, please visit <https://www.vfwauxiliary.org>. Click "Join Us" to learn more about becoming an Auxiliary member.

Get excited about recruiting! The 2026-2027 Membership year offers incentives for VFW and Auxiliary members that recruit new and/or rejoined members for the Auxiliary! There are two National Membership Awards for recruiting five new and/or rejoined Auxiliary members and two awards for recruiting twenty new and/or rejoined Auxiliary members. Contact me or your Department Membership Chairman for details/form to qualify for these awards and information on additional awards that may be offered by your Department.



Having a VFW and its Auxiliary present at community events is important for awareness and an excellent way to attract new members. Even if membership applications are not completed at the event, it is an opportunity to share membership eligibility, connect Veterans with resources for assistance, and provide information supporting VFW/AUX programs such as Buddy Poppy, National Home, Legislation and Scholarships. Share those Membership QR codes! The VFW and the Auxiliary each have their own - they are convenient and provide easy access to up-to-date information.



Together we can grow the VFW and its Auxiliary membership to do amazing things for Veterans, their families and the community!

VFW
VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS.

PERIODICALS



2026

- September 7

Labor Day
(Department Headquarters closed)
- September 11

Patriot’s Day
- September 19

POW-MIA Day
- September 28

Gold Star Mother’s Day
- October 12

Columbus Day
(Department Headquarters closed)
- Nov 1 – 9

Eastern Conference, Germany
- Nov 3

Election Day
- Nov 11

Veterans Day
(Department Headquarters closed)
- Nov 13-14

Commander’s Testimonial, Erie, PA
- November 26-27

Thanksgiving Holiday
(Department Headquarters closed)
- December 24-25

Christmas Holiday
(Department Headquarters closed)



VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS.

(ISSN 0745 4031)

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF

THE DEPARTMENT OF PENNSYLVANIA VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS

Act of March 1879

Dedicated to the comradeship of those who borne arms in defense of the USA, to the principle of informed and active patriotism, working to keep us strong and free.

Periodicals postage paid at Harrisburg PA Post Office.
Four issues printed Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter.

Dept. of PA Veterans of Foreign Wars, 4002 Fenton Ave., Harrisburg, PA 17109-5943 State HQ - (717) 234-7927 - Fax: (717) 234-1955 - www.vfwpa.org - Facebook: "VFW Department PA"

Editors: Pennsylvania Department Commander, James Brown

Printed by **The ENVISION Group, Inc., Camp Hill, PA** | www.envisionprint.net

Postmaster: Send address change to PENNSYLVANIA VFW NEWS, 4002 Fenton Ave., Harrisburg, PA 17109

2027

- January 29-30

Mid-Winter Conference, State College
- January 18

Martin Luther King, Jr
(Department Headquarters closed)
- February 15

President’s Day
(Department Headquarters closed)
- Legislative Conference, Washington, DC
- March 5 - 7

Women’s Veterans Conference
Doubletree by Hilton, Reading
- Mar 26 – 29

Good Friday & Easter Monday
(Department Headquarters closed)
- April 8 – 10

President’s Testimonial,
Cranberry Twp, PA
- May 1

Loyalty Day
- May 31

Memorial Day
(Department Headquarters closed)
- June 9 – 13

Department Convention, Erie, PA