

MAKING CONNECTIONS THIS SPRING

As we reach the halfway mark of the VFW 2023-2024 year, I am honored to extend my heartfelt gratitude to each one of you for your dedication, hard work, and commitment to our cause. Your tireless efforts have made a significant impact on the lives of our veterans and their families.

Looking back, we had an exciting Mid-Winter. On the District level, from the Voice of Democracy, Patriot Pen Student, and Teacher of the Year winners were all celebrated and honored. In the VOD audio-essay competition the Department of Pennsylvania first-place winner is Sarah Burrows who was sponsored by McConnellsburg VFW Post 655. Sarah will be moving on to the national competition in Washington D.C. this month. Let's all wish her success and congratulations to the students - they are all winners.

In early March we have a special legislative event – Hats on the Hill. This is an opportunity for all veterans to come together for several days of fellowship and to let our legislators know what the veterans have done for this country. We are not just looking for a handout. We will be talking to the legislators about the needs of all veterans.

I enjoy going out to visit with the members of our organization because I believe we are all brothers and sisters in arms. We all served this country. It may have been during different times and places, but we all have a common experience, we served in combat.

Remember, membership is key. Please call your post membership and do a buddy check. Ask them if they need anything. Show them that you care about their well-being. It does not take much time to do this, and they will appreciate it.

Let's make this department something to be proud of.

STATE COMMANDER GENERAL ORDERS



DAVID W. "SPIKE" GYGER
STATE COMMANDER

Comrades:

Membership is critical to this organization, and we need to become more involved in our communities, events, fairs, carnivals, etc. Have a recruiting table during these community events and let the public know what the VFW is all about and what the VFW's mission is. Have recruiting handouts available and be professional and positive. If you need any recruiting items, please reach out to the Department Membership Team or me.

1. The next Council of Administration Meetings will be on Saturday, April 6 2024 at 9:30 AM at the Presidents Testimonial.

> May 1st, 2024 – Loyalty Day Ceremony at the Harrisburg Capitol Rotunda – Starts at 10:00 AM. More information will be sent out at a future date. Please make every effort to attend.

> The State Convention will be at the Harrisburg Sheraton Hotel – Harrisburg – Dates are 12 through 16 June 2024. Please plan to attend.

Note: We will be having a VFW Riders Ride planned at the State Convention. As of right now, it will be on Thursday around noon. Please encourage all VFW Riders to attend. Profits from this ride will go to my Special Project. We will announce more details as it gets closer to the State Convention.

2. District Meetings Date Changes: Incoming District Commanders are reminded they are to send in their dates for their District meetings. If you have not done so, you are late. Please send them in.

Membership

Contest # 5 - March Membership Madness Commander's Challenge

The Post in each of the Department Divisions with the highest new or reinstated members from March 1, 2024 to, March 31, 2024 will be entered into a drawing for 2 life memberships.

For those post that are doing buddy check, thank you. For those who have not done so, you need to pick up the pace and call them. Especially our members that we have not seen for a while and check on them. This is also a good time to remind them to renew their membership. They would appreciate hearing from you and that you care about them.

GENERAL ORDERS CONTINUED

Contest # 7 - "All Got One – State Convention"

Every Member that recruits five new or recovered VFW Member, verified by the National Membership Program, between February 1, 2024, and April 30, 2024, will be entered in a drawing for a Life Membership. If the member is already a Life Member, an upgrade to Legacy Life Membership will be awarded. If the member is already a Gold Legacy Life Member, they can choose either a \$200 VFW Store Gift Certificate or they may donate the Life Membership to another member of their choice. Drawing will be held on the next business day after the conclusion of the contest.

Contest # 16 - "We did our best" Contest

Every Post who obtains at least **101%** membership, plus reports all mandatory criteria on Page 10 by April 30, 2024, will be entered into a drawing for one (1) of five (5) Life Memberships.

Every Post who obtains at least **101%** membership, plus reports all mandatory criteria on Page 10 by June 30, 2024, will be entered into a drawing for one (1) of five (5) Life Memberships.

* Note: The Post that obtain 101% by April 30, 2024 would be included in the June 30, 2024, but would only be eligible to win one (1) drawing, not both.

Good of the Organization

See section 217 of your National By-Laws. It is time to start your nomination process for your post officers. Nomination start in March, and they are elected in April. Please get them sworn in at the meeting and submit your election reports within a week after your meeting.

Always remember, No one does more for Veterans than what we do.

David W. Gyger
David W. "Spike" Gyger
Commander
Department of Pennsylvania



NATIONAL UPDATE

General Orders No. 8 2023-24 Series

1. INSTALLING OFFICERS:

Installing officers will see that the provisions of Section 216 of the National Bylaws and the Manual of Procedure are properly carried out and that all officers are members in good standing and qualified to hold office prior to installing Post officers for the current year. Post officers shall not be installed or until proof of eligibility has been submitted and properly reviewed.

Post Election Reports must be submitted following Post election of officers in April. We highly encourage all Post Quartermasters to use the online Election Report process featured in the Online Membership System (OMS). Post Election Reports received electronically will be forwarded to the Department Headquarters.

2. Posts are encouraged to register their Post delegate online through the Online Membership System (OMS) or by submitting their National Convention Post and Delegate Registration form that was sent to all Posts as part of the Election Report/Convention Registration mailing that went out in February. Advanced registration for the 125th National Convention should be mailed with each delegate's name and address to: Convention Registration, 406 W. 34th Street, Kansas City, MO 64111.

3. Pursuant to Section 403 of the National Bylaws and the Manual of Procedure, each District shall hold an annual District convention for the purpose of electing District officers, such convention to be held not less than ten (10) days nor more than seventy-five (75) days prior to the convening of the Department convention. District officers shall not assume the duties of their office until the Department Commander is installed. District officers shall not be installed or assume the duties of their office until proof of eligibility has been submitted and properly reviewed in accordance with Section 416 of the Manual of Procedure.

4. "BUDDY"® POPPIES DISTRIBUTION:

The distribution of VFW "Buddy"® Poppies will be conducted according to the provisions set forth in Section 711 of the National Bylaws and the Manual of Procedure. Department, District, County Council and Post Commanders should arrange now for the distribution of Buddy Poppies in their respective areas.

In the ongoing effort to provide as much assistance as possible to those serving in the military, we recommend that proceeds or portions from this year's annual poppy distribution be designated for the purpose of providing VFW support to our military. Posts and Departments now have the opportunity to assist qualified military personnel through the VFW Veterans and Military Support Programs.

In keeping with the intent of Sections 219(a)(c) and 704(a)(c) of the Manual of Procedure "Relief Fund," this year's poppy campaign can play a direct role in demonstrating to those who are charged with protecting and defending our way of life that we appreciate and value their sacrifice.

COMMANDERS SPECIAL PROJECT

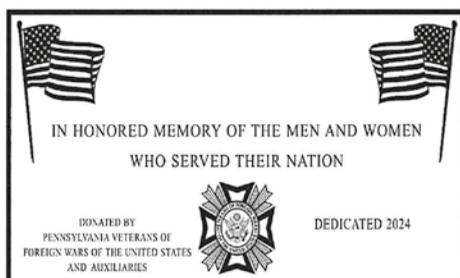
Comrades and Auxiliary Brothers and Sisters,

Our special project for the 2023 -2024 Encourage – Expand – Educate VFW year shall be to place a monument in each of the three National Cemeteries within Pennsylvania. The National Cemetery of the Alleghenies in the west; Indiantown Gap National Cemetery in central; and Washington Crossing National Cemetery in the east. The picture below is what the VFW monument shall look like when it is completed and set. The stone is granite, and the engraved plaque is bronze. Each monument is expected to cost approximately \$10,000 each. Please consider donating to this worthwhile project. Make your check out to PA VFW and in the memo section add Commander's special project. Mail your check to PA VFW HQ, 4002 Fenton Avenue, Harrisburg PA 17109.

We still need some help to get this accomplished. Please sent your donations into HQ.

Should you have any questions, please call me at 717-991-1473 or email me at djc57@verizon.net

The engraved plaque reads:



U.S. AIR FORCE

STATE SR. VICE COMMANDER



BARBARA "BARB" LONCAR
STATE SR. VICE COMMANDER

Welcome Spring!!

We are getting down to the wire for Membership. We need to make a big push to cross the finish line to make our Department 101%. Have you thought about having your Post host a "Spring Fling" Recruiting event in your community or at your Post? You could gather your Post members together and reach out on the phone to your unpaid members. Let them know how important being a member of the VFW is to maintaining Veterans Benefits.

Reach out to your Auxiliary, if you have one, for assistance. They can help you recruit just like you can help them recruit. As veterans and veteran families, we need to work together at our events. We can unite VFW and Auxiliary members and become an even stronger organization.

I know that a lot of Posts are close to Commander Gyger's goal of 101% membership. I have faith in all of you and your Posts to reach this goal. If you need any assistance with setting up recruiting events, reach out to your District Commander and Membership team. You could reach out to other posts and have combined recruiting events.

If you have a small post with less than 100 members (and in good standing with District and Department) look at merging with another post close to you. Merging posts can be beneficial to both posts and gain strength to continue the VFW mission. It can be very expensive maintaining a VFW post so merging can help keep your post going. It can also be difficult to fill the officer positions in the smaller post and combining can also help with these issues as well.

May 1st is Loyalty Day at the State Capitol. Please try to attend this event if you are in the area. We need to show our strength in attending this event so that our politicians take us seriously. We need to show that we will fight for our benefits, and this is a good day to do this.

VFW Day of Service is May 4th in support of our communities. Please plan a Day of Service to your communities. When you do take pictures and share this on your websites along with the Department for our newsletter. We would love to know how you are supporting your communities. You don't have to have just one event on May 4th your post can host these events multiple times during the year. Remember to take photos, wear your VFW gear and complete your Community Service Reports as well.

June 12-16th will be our State Convention in Harrisburg, and we would love to have as many of you attend as possible. Save the date, and mark your calendar whatever it takes for you to remember to attend. This is a great time to ask questions and network with other Pennsylvania VFW members. You can share ideas, learn new things about your VFW, and return with information that you can share at your home post.

STATE JR. VICE COMMANDER



WILLIAM "BILL" ROLAND
STATE JR. VICE COMMANDER

As I traveled to visit our posts and districts, I've noticed that we can do a better job as mentors. I've seen senior vice commander not unprepared to become Commanders, I also noticed young veterans elected to positions unprepared for those duties. We've all heard, 'I went to one meeting and was elected to office.' We need to do a better job at mentorship. I am a firm believer in "Teach, Coach, and Mentorship".

What is a Mentor? A mentor is a person who provides you with the tools, guidance, support, and feedback you need to accomplish your position. They are someone who's held a VFW position to you are currently occupying, so they can advise you on what they have done and worked for them. Their knowledge can provide you with insights on experiences you may have or have limited knowledge of. Mentors can also give you direction when you are struggling.

Qualities of an effective mentor. Not everyone is a good mentor because effective mentors have certain important qualities. These qualities are worth noting. **Enthusiasm for sharing their experience.** It's important that your mentor have the knowledge and experiences, and they are willing to share that information. Good mentors should not be vague in the information they provide. Rather, a mentor should be open and enthusiastic to share their knowledge. The best mentors give

advice because they truly want for you and the post to succeed. **Respectful Attitude.** You do not want a mentor who criticizes you unless it is constructive criticism. This makes for a frustrating and unproductive experience and retaining information is less likely. We want mentors that genuinely enjoy helping others. Good mentors realize they are playing important roles in helping others.

Ability to give honest feedback. A mentor that fails to give honest feedback is setting you up for failure. A mentor needs to be respectful but also be critical when you need it. Feedback should be constructive, direct, and honest. They should also not be afraid of hurting your feelings. You should also be willing to accept feedback. Effective communication between the mentor and you is the difference between success and failure.

Listing and Empathy. A good mentor may have all the answers but if they are unwilling to listen to you, they are going to steer you down the road you want to travel. Your mentor should be asking you questions and not always telling what he or she want you to know. A mentor should be curious to what you want to learn. A good mentor takes your values and input above their own. **Qualities.** Not all mentors are effective teachers. **Enthusiasm to share.** It is important that a mentor have the knowledge but if they are unwilling to share, they are ineffective. A good mentor should be excited and open to share information with you. Mentors genuinely want you to benefit from their knowledge and wisdom to make you and our VFW better.

Conclusion: It would benefit our organization to develop a mentorship program. Remember, the positive things we do today builds a better tomorrow.

STATE ADJUTANT/QUARTERMASTER



JOHN B. GETZ, JR
STATE QUARTERMASTER

Comrades, March has arrived. I understand it is called March Madness, the time when all Posts nominate their officers for the new year, which means all Posts. What we need to do is to nominate a Commander, Sr Vice, Jr Vice, Quartermaster, and Trustees. It also means you need to decide what type of election you are going to do unless the bylaws of the Post state differently. If a person being nominated is not in attendance,

they must present to the adjutant a letter of acceptance prior to the opening of nominations. Nominations of Post officers start in March and remain open till the final nomination and election in April, remember April is election month. You may have an open vote or written secret ballot. Absentee and proxy votes are not permitted. If you use a poll system, check section 217 of the Manual of Procedures before nominating in March. If a discrepancy is made during the election, it must be challenged before the end of the meeting. This is only a briefing on what is coming in March and April. Remember to submit your election reports as soon as you are elected. Do not wait and have the risk of your Post being declared defunct because you did not submit an election report!

STATE CHAPLAIN



REV. PETER R. HOOK
STATE CHAPLAIN

The term “clergy” refers people who are ordained or recognized by a religious community as ritual or spiritual leaders. As such, they can perform religious duties and minister to individuals within a particular faith community.

Generally, their duties include conducting religious services, delivering sermons or religious teachings, providing pastoral care and counseling to congregants, performing religious rituals and ceremonies (such as weddings, funerals, and baptisms), offering guidance on matters of faith and ethics, and leading the overall spiritual and administrative affairs of the religious community.

Depending on their religious or denominational affiliation, clergy are referred to as pastors, rabbis, priests, or imams. With some of these religious leaders, depending on their geographical location and situation, they wear distinctive clerical clothing which sets them apart and identifies them as clergy.

Historically, the term “chaplain” referred to members of the clergy who ministered to people in a variety of settings outside a particular faith community. Chaplains can be found in a variety of settings such as hospitals, prisons, fire and police departments, educational institutions, and the armed forces.

While the clergy minister primarily within a particular faith community, chaplains minister to individuals outside of a faith community from a variety of religious or spiritual backgrounds, including those who may have no faith affiliation. Therefore, most chaplains feel it is best not to wear any distinctive clerical clothing or jewelry or do anything that could hinder their ministry.

Within the broad category of Chaplaincy, at least three different types of chaplains can be identified.

1. The Ceremonial Chaplain: Within many organizations there is a person designated as chaplain. The position is basically ceremonial, and from time to time, the chaplain may be called upon to offer a prayer. The U.S. Senate Chaplain, and those within most community and service organizations, are basically ceremonial chaplains. In most cases they are clergy, but not necessarily so.

2. The Caring Chaplain: This is a trained individual who offers person-centered, compassionate care. A caring chaplain will come along side of a person to listen, encourage, and offer comfort and guidance as a caring friend would do. They care for the whole person and treat everyone with dignity and respect. Hospital, hospice care, and nursing home chaplains are almost exclusively caring chaplains.

3. The Tactical Chaplain: These chaplains operate primarily with law enforcement agencies and the first responder community (fire departments and emergency medical services--EMS). They are trained in crime scene protocols, dealing with trauma scenes, and helping those who have been traumatized. In addition to responding to critical incidents, they spend time in the trenches with those involved in first-responder work, establishing trust and rapport. The tactical chaplains are vital members of the first responder team. During critical incidents, they wear an outer garment that identifies them as CHAPLAIN, but nothing that indicates they are with the police department.

Historically, the chaplains in the VFW were considered ceremonial chaplains. They were called upon to offer the prayers and maybe send a card if someone was ill or passed away. That perspective of the chaplain’s role has been changing. The VFW Chaplain exists to minister to veterans and their families. And according to our Congressional Charter, the VFW Chaplain *“shall be concerned with the spiritual needs of the members, and by precept and example, point the way toward a high moral plane for the organization.”*

Blessings as you serve.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Everybody has heard the saying, “First impressions are lasting impressions.” But not everyone knows that it takes only seven seconds for that first impression to be embedded in one’s mind. That means when someone enters your post for the first time, he/she will form an opinion of you and the post within the first seven seconds. And unfortunately, that opinion, once embedded, is very hard to change.

This is why we should make every effort to create a friendly, welcoming environment at each of our VFW posts. Every member, and that includes VFW, auxiliary, and social, needs to realize how important they are in helping everyone who visits our posts to feel valued, respected and welcomed.

Here are some things we should do when someone new enters your post or when meeting someone for the first time.

- 1. Appropriate eye contact:** Make eye contact with the person in a natural culturally acceptable way before you start speaking. Your eye contact is a nonverbal means by which you communicate that you see them and acknowledge their presence. Look at them, but don’t stare.
- 2. Smile:** A culturally appropriate friendly smile is the next thing to do when greeting someone. It is a signal of politeness, universally accepted, appreciated by everyone, and is a major step in making someone feel comfortable and welcomed.
- 3. A friendly greeting:** Link that eye contact and smile with a friendly greeting that includes your first and last name followed by a welcoming comment. Here is an example: “Hi, I’m (first name) (last name). Not sure if I have met

you before. Welcome to our post, nice to meet you.” Remember to speak clearly and confidently.

4. Remember names: Remembering a person’s name shows that you listen and that you really are pleased to meet them. If you don’t hear a name clearly when someone introduces themselves, it’s always good to ask them to repeat it.

5. Introduce first-time guests to one or two other members. Proper etiquette, when meeting someone who visits your post for the first time, would be for you to introduce that person to one or two of your comrades who happen to be at the post. Don’t make a “fuss” over them. Simply treat a first-time guest the same way you would want to be treated when you visit a place for the first time.

These simple gestures make people feel valued, respected and welcomed. In the end, they will pay enormous dividends.

We should expect new people to visit our posts, and we should prepare for them. Therefore, look around your post and see if any dirt and clutter has been allowed to accumulate. If so, begin to tidy things up for your guests. Remember, first impressions are lasting impressions, and you never have a second chance to make a good first impression.

By: Rev. Peter R. Hook
Past National Chaplain

ACROSS PENNSYLVANIA

Post 4843, Ford City, Pa, held a fundraiser for five-year-old River Schafer, who has spent many of his days in Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh. He was born with two rare blood disorders Factor VII (one in 500,000 has this disorder) and Glanzmann Thrombasthenia (one in one million has this disorder) No one in the world is documented with both disorders. River’s great grandfather served in the Korean War and was a life long member of VFW Post 4843. He was always so proud of the VFW’s efforts in serving the community and would be especially proud this one for his great grandson, River. The fundraiser raised over \$15,000.00.



Rick Schafer - River Schafer – Lauren Schafer



VFW Post 33, Greensburg, held a Battle of the Bugle anniversary program for veterans on Dec. 16, 2023. Above, Agnes Lapa presents a wreath in memory of her husband, Chester, and all veterans of the Battle of the Bugle in World War II. The display is shown in the left photo.



Dept. of PA Jr. Vice Commander William Roland attended the ribbon-cutting ceremony at VFW Post 6824 when they became a certified Red Cross Emergency Facility. Left to right: District 14 Commander Phil Price, Auxiliary District President 14 Carolyn Paccio and State Jr. Vice Commander William Roland.



Spec. Ross A McGinnis, Pa. VFW Post 2145 and Auxiliary 2145, Clarion, PA held a Christmas Fun Day for community children. Over 100 kids, accompanied by an adult, attended. They interacted with Santa, Mrs. Claus, Frosty and the Grinch! A fun day was had by all!

ACROSS PENNSYLVANIA



MONESSEN VFW CHRISTMAS PARTY PRESENTATION

Ron Chromulak, Commander of Monessen Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 1190 presented Kelly Buhovecky, general manager of Walmart in Rostraver Township, with an Award of Commendation for Meritorious Service in support of the VFW. Buhovecky then presented the VFW post with two boards that were signed on both sides by Walmart employees and customers expressing their appreciation for veterans. The presentations took place at the annual VFW Christmas party held Saturday, December 19, 2023 at the Early Bird Diner in Donora, which was attended by 31 members and guests. Twenty-eight door prizes were awarded.



PA VFW State Commander David "Spike" Gyger visited the site of the former VFW Post 7599 building. A fire recently destroyed the building. However, the VFW and community members came together and converted the inside of an existing pavilion to create a temporary site. A GoFundMe account has been set up if anyone wishes to donate. Help Reynolds VFW Post 7599 recover: <https://gofund.me/39e4b917>.



Past VFW Commander in Chief Tim Borland presenting State Chaplain Peter Hook with a National Certificate for his commitment to serve the needs of Veterans and their families.



VFW RIDERS District 11 – President David "Rebel" Schnorr presents backpacks with tents, sleeping bags, blankets and a few more items to Homeless Veterans in Luzerne County in the evening on Christmas Day.

ACROSS PENNSYLVANIA

28TH INFANTRY DIVISION 145TH ANNIVERSARY DINING OUT



The Headquarters, 28th Infantry Division 145th Anniversary Dining Out, held at Hershey Lodge on March 9, brought together current and retired division leaders, family members and friends for a night of camaraderie and fellowship.



Left to Right: SFC Jayson Reppard, State Commander David "Spike" Gyger, State Quartermaster John Getz, Jr., and State Judge Advocate Frank McGovern.



Post 7343, Mt. Holly Springs donated items for the State Homeless Veterans program.

Back row – Chaplin Rayn Hoover, Jr. Vice Commander V-Bobby Bear, 1 Year Trustee Trust Bob Wade, Sr. Vice Commander Dustin Berger; Middle Row – 3 Year Trustee Bobby Mundel, and 2 Year Trustee Randy Chornister; Front row – Adjutant Sarah Hoover and Post Commander Rick Bower.



Windber VFW Post 4795 participates in Wreaths Across America



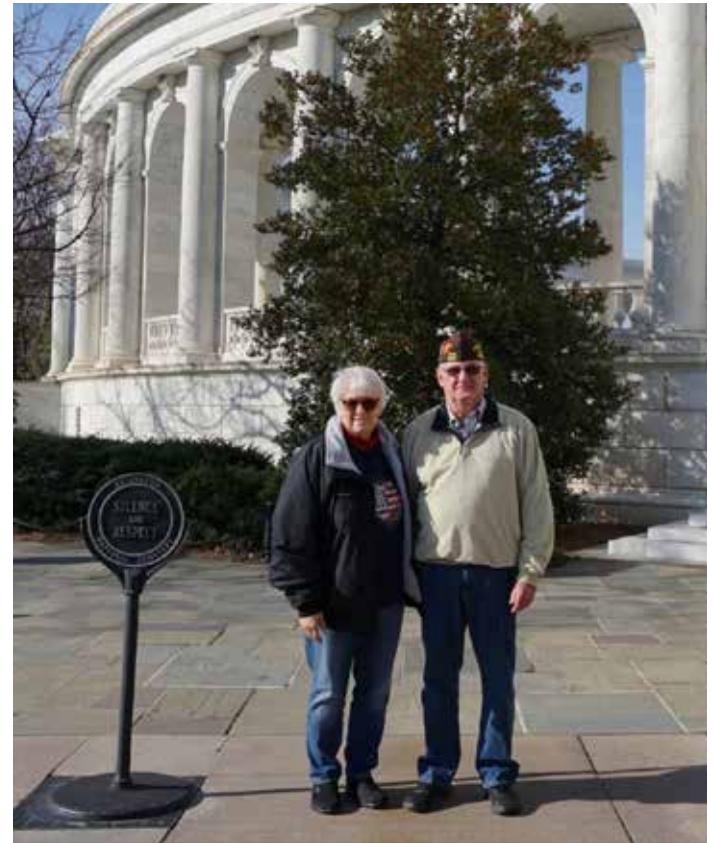
VFW Post 7377, Sankertown, held a children's Christmas party for members and the community on Dec. 17, 2023. Mr. and Mrs. Claus gave each child a bag of toys and each child had a chance to receive one of 10 bicycles. The event featured a craft table, DJ, balloon maker, pizza, hot dogs, candy and, of course, cookies! Twenty-six post and auxiliary members donated 15 hours each and both organizations spent \$5,400 to make the event, which had just over 175 child attendees, possible. This is what we are about and if you're not doing this in your community you should be, no one does more for veterans! PSC Larry Wade Sr.



ACROSS PENNSYLVANIA



State Commander David "Spike" Gyger visited with the Post Officer and attended Post 5207 Convington Township's meeting.



Department Commander David "Spike" Gyger and PSP Valerie DeCorte on Christmas Day visited the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery.



During PA VFW State Commander David "Spike" Gyger's official visit to District 29, he had the privilege of presenting a National VFW Certificate of Special Recognition to Carl J. Smith, Jr. Mr. Smith is the Director of the H.P. Brandt Funeral Home and a VFW member. He was recognized for his unwavering commitment to excellence in communications to families regarding veterans' burial benefits and his outstanding work in the community. Commander Gyger was accompanied by District 29 Commander Richard Stefanik and VFW Rider Western Chairman Anthony Warner.



Pennsylvania EZ-Pass employees from Harrisburg collected Christmas gifts and donated them to needy veterans at the Harrisburg YMCA. From left to right: Melissa Pearl, Department Service Officer Jonathan Hart, Department Adjutant/Quartermaster John B. Getz Jr., Department Commander David "Spike" Gyger, Cecil Mcray from the Harrisburg YMCA and Jenifer Martin.

ACROSS PENNSYLVANIA



At the Pennsylvania Farm Show Recruiting event, left to right, are BG Regan, TAG staff, Commander David "Spike" Gyger, PA VFW, CMSGT Frisco, and Jonathan Hart, VFW Service Officer. General Regan stopped by the PA VFW booth.



State Commander David "Spike" Gyger and State Surgeon William Stellfox visited the Lebanon VA Medical Center and met with the Medical Center Director Jeffrey Beiler and the Chief of Center for Development and Civic Jason Lane.



Pennsylvania Senator Doug Mastriano, an Iraq and Gulf War Veteran and VFW member, visited the PA VFW Membership Recruiting booth at the 2024 Farm Show. From left to right VFW Membership Recruiter, Craig Fisher, PA State Commander David "Spike" Gyger, Senator Doug Mastriano and VFW Membership Recruiter, Greg Stump.



The PA VFW Membership Team, led by VFW State Commander David "Spike" Gyger, had a booth at The Great American Outdoor Show at the PA Farm Show Complex in Harrisburg. The team gained 50 new members, provided 75 "Join Us" info packets to potential new Auxiliary members and approximately 230 veterans received assistance from one of the VFW's Accredited Service Officers. Jeff Walding, VFW State Commander from New Jersey visited our booth.



District 11 VFW Riders

ACROSS PENNSYLVANIA



Kane PA VFW Post 1132 celebrated its 100th anniversary on Saturday, Jan. 27, 2024. On hand for the celebration were State Commander David "Spike" Gyger, PSC Thomas Ace Hanzes, PSC Ron Peters, state representative Martin Causer and state senator Chris Dush. Commander Gyger presented the attendees with a silver poppy which signifies the 100th celebration.



Mahoning Valley VFW Post 2076 in Punxsutawney hosted a day of activities for a group of veterans from the VA hospital in Butler. The annual event included tours of the Punxsutawney Area Historical and Genealogical Society and the Weather Discovery Center. A lunch of beef stew and "groundhog" cookies was provided. Punxsutawney Phil was on hand with two members of the Groundhog Club Inter Circle, who provided facts and lore about groundhogs. The trip concluded with a visit to Gobbler's Knob where Phil makes his annual prediction on Groundhog Day on February 2.



The PA VFW State Commander David "Spike" Gyger visited VFW Post 4843 in Ford City, Pa. He spent time with Post Commander Karl Swigart and was afforded the opportunity to address Auxiliary members during their meeting. Pictured left to right are Karl Swigart, Post 4843 Commander, Lori Anthony, Auxiliary member, Mark Anthony, Junior Vice Commander, Joe Thevenin, past Post Commander, David Spike Gyger, PA VFW State Commander.



Students from District 17 that participated in the VFW VOD and Patriots Pen District 17 Left: Commander Harold Aucker and far Right Sr. Vice Commander Barbara Loncar.

ACROSS PENNSYLVANIA



This year's Veteran's program, hosted by Senator Doug Mastriano, was held at the Capitol in Harrisburg. Fifty Medal of Honor recipients' portraits were displayed. PA VFW David Spike Gyger arranged to have a copy of the portrait of Medal of Honor recipient Ross A. McGinnis presented to his parents, Thomas and Roymaine McGinnis, pictured here with Gyger. SPC McGinnis distinguished himself with acts of gallantry in 2006 while serving in Iraq. From left to right Thomas McGinnis his father, State Commander David "Spike" Gyger and his mother Roymaine McGinnis.



Members of Post 519, Grove City, Pa., visited a local nursing home to donate gifts to veterans that may not have families. Pictured, left to right, are Jim McClellan, Chaplain, Ben Lewis, Commander, past, Frank Bruno, current Commander, Bill Bestwick, past Commander, Milan Mijatov, Senior Vice and past Commander and Jim Arbogast, Quartermaster.



District 28 VFW and Auxiliary hosted their annual VOD and Patriot's Pen Banquet at VFW Post 470 in Erie, PA. VFW State Commander David Spike Gyger gave remarks. Congratulations to all the winners.

Picture from left to right: PA State Commander David "Spike" Gyger, Patriot Pen Winners Reese Lenzi, Davina Willson, Serinety Duarte Smart Mather Teacher Elizebeth Courteau, District 28 President Jody Mallory, VOD Students winners 1st Place Graham Hanneman, 2nd Place Madelyn Sheffel, 3rd Place Phineus Butcher and Thomas Hazes, Past State Commander and State VOD Chairman.

Back Row – District 28 Commander Michael Staab.

FLAGS FOR HEROES EVENT WILL RETURN TO MYERSTOWN



On the Memorial Day and 4th of July weekends, Frienden's Lutheran Church, located along Route 422 in Myerstown, Lebanon County, will display about 200 American flags on its lawn. This impressive undertaking and visually stunning sight honors our fallen military members, first responders and community heroes by also listing their names on a large banner, which will be placed near the church's parking lot.

That beautiful scene will happen again at the same time in 2024, but this time the annual event will be kicked off with a special Opening Ceremony on the morning of Saturday, May 25th at 11 am.

The event is organized annually by the Myerstown-Elco Rotary Club, but this year the team will collaborate with the Myerstown VFW to create the ceremony.

ACROSS PENNSYLVANIA

VOICE OF DEMOCRACY



On the afternoon of January 30, VFW Post 655 in McConnellsburg was visited by the VFW State Commander and State Auxiliary President. The purpose of their visit was to award a SFHS student for being chosen the State Winner of the VFW's Voice of Democracy Essay Competition.

Each year, the National VFW Commander names the subject of the essay, which this year was: "What are the greatest attributes of our Democracy." Voice of Democracy is an oral essay, wherein the students write their

speech, then record it orally. The judging is based on the content and delivery of the topic.

Every VFW Post in Pennsylvania is supposed to provide the information to a school, or schools in their area. Located in Fulton County, SFHS students submit their essays to VFW Post 655, which in turn, submits them to VFW District 30. The essays are judged by the District, and their choice of winner is submitted to the state level. The state then selects the best essay. This year, that essay was submitted by a SFHS student named Sarah Burrows.

VFW State Commander David W. "Spike" Gyger and VOD Chairman Thomas "Ace" Hanzes presented Sarah with a jacket denoting her as the Pennsylvania State VOD winner. They also presented her a VFW backpack filled with goodies. In addition, she received a first-place trophy, winner's certificate and check in the amount of \$5000. State Auxiliary President Mary Jean Mastridge presented Sarah a certificate and check for \$500. Ed Stenger presented Sarah a check for \$500 on behalf of VFW Post 655.

Sarah's essay was forwarded to the National level to compete with the best in the nation. She and her parents will attend the National Award Ceremony in Washington DC in March along with the Pa. VFW State Commander and Auxiliary President. National awards go up to \$35,000.

Attending the ceremony in addition to the State VFW representatives and Sarah were Joshua and Mini Burrows (Sarah's parents), Mrs. Barton (the SFHS teacher who coordinates the program for Post 655), SFHS Principal Mr. Hollinshead, and representatives of VFW District 30, VFW Post 655, VFW Post 655 Auxiliary and The Fulton Honor Guard. About two dozen people attended the event.



First-place winners in the Voice of Democracy and Patriot Pen essay contests from each district in the Department of Pennsylvania were recognized during the state VFW's Mid-Winter Conference.



State Commander David "Spike" Gyger and Auxiliary President, Mary Jean Mastridge escorting VFW PA State VOD winner Sarah Burrows at the VFW National Legislative Conference. Sarah was the ninth place winner at the National contest and received a \$3500 scholarship.



PA VFW State Commander David "Spike" Gyger and Mary Jean Mastridge, PA VFW Auxiliary President, presented Sarah Burrows with PA's first-place Voice of Democracy trophy and awards. Sarah was sponsored by VFW Post 655 and District 30, McConnellsburg, Pa.



At the Voice of Democracy competition were, left to right, front row - Auxiliary PDP Valerie DeCorte, State Commander David "Spike" Gyger, PA State VOD winner Sarah Burrows with her parents and Auxiliary Department President Mary Jean Mastridge. Back Row - National Council Member Glenn Umberger, State Quartermaster, John Getz, Jr., State Sr. Vice Commander, Barb Loncar, and Auxiliary Chief of Staff Brenda Johnson.

ACROSS PENNSYLVANIA

2024 VFW WASHINGTON CONFERENCE

The 2024 VFW Washington Conference was held March 3-7, 2024, in Washington, D.C.

For nearly 75 years, the VFW's annual Washington Conference has provided an opportunity for VFW leaders from each state to personally lobby their respective lawmakers and watch as the VFW's current Commander-in-Chief testifies on Capitol Hill before the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees on behalf of veterans.



Department of PA Leadership and Legislative Chairmen representing Pennsylvania
Left to Right: Jim Brown, Legislative Co-Chairman, Rich Cassey, Jr., Legislative Co-Chairman, State Commander David "Spike" Gyger, Sr. Vice Commander Barb Loncar, Jr. Vice Commander Bill Roland and State Quartermaster John Getz, Jr.



Department leadership attend legislative hearings during the 2024 VFW Washington Conference.



Department of Pennsylvania VFW and auxiliary represent Pennsylvania veterans at the 2024 VFW Washington Conference.



Making legislative visits were, left to right, State Quartermaster John Getz, Jr., Sr. Vice Commander Barb Loncar, State Commander David "Spike" Gyger, Auxiliary National Chaplain Donna Mills, Pa Legislative Co-Chairman Jim Brown.

ACROSS PENNSYLVANIA

STATE COMMANDER DAVID "SPIKE" GYGER'S TRAVELS THROUGH PENNSYLVANIA VISITING VFW POSTS.



VFW Post 3945 Morningside



VFW Post 3474 Dunmore



VFW Post 6675 Pittsburgh



ACROSS PENNSYLVANIA

STATE COMMANDER DAVID "SPIKE" GYGER'S TRAVELS THROUGH PENNSYLVANIA VISITING VFW POSTS.



VFW Post 6082 Peckville



VFW Post 7252 Brockway



VFW Post 7251 Throop



THE VFW AUXILIARY

UNWAVERING SUPPORT FOR UNCOMMON HEROES



MARY JEAN MASTRIDGE
PRESIDENT
DEPARTMENT OF PA VFW AUXILIARY



As I continue my visits to our Pennsylvania Veteran Health Centers and Homes, I am overwhelmed by so many smiles, hugs and handshakes. They were brave in combat and their courage is still apparent. My time with them is brief, but they still manage to tell me short stories about their wedding, their grandchildren or their creations in arts/crafts. We owe these Veterans and those who have passed a never-ending debt of gratitude. They left their loved ones to face untold horror. They were prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice for future generations of Americans. As survivors who gave us the gift of FREEDOM, they deserve every kindness we can bestow upon them. Our VFW and Auxiliary volunteer program is amazing and our representatives and deputies do a great job making sure our Veterans have all they need. As your time permits; reach out to the representative at your closest facility and volunteer. Spending some time with our nation's real heroes can be a life-changing experience.

As we continue our visits to Districts across this Department – it is heartwarming to make new friends and renew old friendships. Our VFW and Auxiliary family is like no other! The bonds we have and the memories we continue to make will remain in my heart forever.

Let us focus on completing this "Let Freedom Ring" year with great accomplishments and sharing our passion with our new members of both the VFW and Auxiliary.

Our 2024 Department Convention marks the 100th Convention of the Pennsylvania VFW Auxiliary. We look forward to celebrating this milestone with our Comrades at the Sheraton in Harrisburg!



SANDY BRENNER
AUXILIARY CHAIRMAN 2023-2024

MENTORING FOR LEADERSHIP

The act of mentoring is a series of ongoing and little successes. An effective mentor understands that his or her role is to be dependable, engaged, authentic, and tuned into the needs of the mentee. It is so imperative that all of us both in the VFW and the VFW Auxiliary continue to mentor on all levels.

There is huge value in mentoring our members for future leadership roles. We must always be working toward finding our replacement in serving Veterans, their families and our communities. Never, never feel as though you have completed this task.

Creating leaders to advance our mission is a daily way of life. No matter how much knowledge we each obtain, there is always more to learn, more to absorb and more to share. Always use your voice in a positive tone. Leadership is learned by a previously taught example. Whether a brand new member, a seasoned member or one who just found the time and desire to join in serving, we want to form a caring relationship with them. Let them feel your passion for serving our Veterans, their families and our communities.

"Tell me, and I forget; teach me, and I may remember, involve me, and I learn." *Ben Franklin*

Please take some time and checkout our website for all up-to-date information and lots of support materials, including the 2023-2024 Program Book

www.vfwauxpa.org

PERIODICALS



(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: State Commander David "Spike" Gyger and State Adjutant/Quartermaster John B. Getz, Jr.

Produced 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

SAVE THE DATE

Department State Convention
June 12-16, 2024

CELEBRATING AMERICA'S FREEDOM EVENT
SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 2024
VFW NATIONAL HOME

The Department of PA VFW Auxiliary has chartered a bus to the VFW National Home for the 2024 National President's CAFÉ.

We will leave from Department Headquarters on Friday, September 6th at 6:00 A.M. for the Saturday CAFÉ program in Eaton Rapids, Mi. and we return on Sunday, September 8th.

All VFW and Auxiliary members are welcomed and encouraged to join in the opportunity to visit the National Home and participate in this program.

All registration information can be found on both the VFW and Auxiliary websites.

Don't miss out! Make your reservations now!