

# MICHIGAN OVERSEAS VETERAN

# VFW

VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS.

WINTER 26



Elementary Teacher of the Year, Jane VanBuren, pictured with DeeAnn Miller and Mike Martin



Middle School Teacher of the Year, Mike LaMarra, pictured with DeeAnn Miller and Mike Martin



High School Teacher of the Year, Christopher Belch, pictured with DeeAnn Miller and Mike Martin

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Patriot's Pen Winner, Brandon Darnell, pictured with Post 5738 Cmdr Brian Darnell and State Cmdr Reinold Yahnka



Voice of Democracy Winner, Levi Darnell, pictured with State Cmdr Reinold Yahnka and State Pres Debbie Scheetz



## DEPARTMENT COMMANDER, REINOLD YAHNKA

Comrades, Sisters, and Brothers. Time has flown by; we are just three months away from the Department Convention and at the end of my year as your State Commander. I recently returned from the Washington, D.C. Legislative Conference, where we met with our legislators to discuss VFW priorities established by the National Legislative Committee. Thanks to National Legislative team members Kimberly Napoleon and Ray Lopez, all meetings were scheduled before our arrival, and all handouts were readily made available to us. The team consisted of Sr. Vice Commander Larry Thayer, Service Office Director Sidney Love, ADJ/Quartermaster Barry Walter, and Mike Wilson, Director of the National Home, who brought information about the National Home for every state legislator. One of the highlights of my year was

laying a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery on behalf of the Department of Michigan VFW, alongside Auxiliary President Debbie Scheetz. This moment reflected my goal of strengthening the bond between the VFW and the Auxiliary. State Sr. Vice Commander Larry Thayer and Service Office Director Sidney Love assisted with the ceremony. Our final mission this year is reaching 101% membership so the Department of Michigan can again be recognized as an All-American Department. I challenge every member to recruit just one new member. I could not have achieved All-American status as a Post or District Commander without member support, and I am asking for that same commitment now. Achieving this goal will also allow me the honor of being recognized as a Triple Crown recipient at the National Convention. I hope we can reach 101% membership before or during the State Convention. Currently, 78 Posts are eligible for All-American

recognition due to participation in Voice of Democracy and Patriots Pen. To qualify, Posts must also meet remaining Dashboard requirements: four quarters of Community Service reporting, a \$125 VMS donation, purchase of 500 Buddy Poppies, 101% membership, and completion and reporting of a Community Day of Service. There are currently 53 Posts out of 234 that have achieved 101% or higher. All 12 Districts are also on track—needing only to reach 101% membership. Membership is vital to our growth, retention, and sustainability at every level. Thank you for the outstanding work you continue to do in your Posts and Districts. Together, we have proven time and again what this Department can accomplish when we work as one team. Let's finish this year with the same pride, determination, and commitment that define the VFW. One member, one Post, one District at a time—let's cross the finish line strong and show the nation what Michigan stands for. Aim High for Veterans and onward to All-American.

**IN THIS ISSUE**

Dept. Sr. Vice Commander.....2  
 Dept. Adjutant/Quartermaster.....2  
 Dept. Inspector.....3  
 Dept. Activity Director.....3  
 Great Lakes National Cemetery.....3  
 Dept. Camp Trotter Director.....4  
 Pearl Harbor Day Ceremony.....4  
 Wreath Laying At Arlington.....4  
 2025-2026 Day Of Challenge.....5  
 Meet The Candidates.....5  
 Post Reports.....6  
 Aux. President.....7  
 Aux. Jr. Vice President.....7  
 Aux. Youth Activities/Camp Trotter.....7  
 Aux. Chaplain.....7  
 Aux. Americanism Chairman.....8  
 Aux. Chief-Of-Staff.....8  
 Aux. Conductor.....8  
 Aux. Hospital Chairman.....9  
 Aux. Veterans and Family Support.....9  
 Aux. Historian/Media Relations.....9  
 District Commander Reports.....10-11  
 TAPS.....11  
 VFW Store Ad.....11  
 District President Reports.....12  
 Upcoming Events.....12  
 Gold Star Mothers Save The Date.....13  
 2026 State Convention Info.....14-17



**DEPARTMENT SENIOR VICE COMMANDER, LARRY THAYER**

Greetings, Comrades, Sisters, and Brothers! What an outstanding Mid-Winter Conference we experienced this year. It was truly inspiring to gather once again to celebrate the dedication, leadership, and service that define our Department of Michigan. The Voice of Democracy, Patriot's Pen, and Teacher of the Year banquet remain one of the highlights of our year, and it was an honor to recognize such exceptional students and educators who continue to inspire patriotism and civic pride across our communities. We were also privileged to welcome Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief Cory Geisler as our National representative. His remarks and engagement with our members reaffirmed the strength of our organization and the bright future ahead under his leadership. As we move forward, membership remains a top priority. If your Post has not yet achieved its goal, there is still time. Reaching 101% or more by June 30 ensures eligibility for All-State and All-American recognition. I encourage Posts that may need assistance to connect with their District leadership or the Department Membership Director. We are here to support you every step of the way. Membership is the lifeblood of our organization, and every new or retained member strengthens our ability to serve veterans, their families, and our

communities. With spring approaching, please remember that Buddy Poppy distribution, traditionally held the first week of May, is one of our most visible and meaningful programs. While Poppies may be distributed year-round, this period provides a powerful opportunity to engage the public, raise awareness, and generate critical support for veterans in need. If your Post has not yet secured supplies, consider coordinating with neighboring Posts while awaiting your order. As Post elections conclude, I want to remind Quartermasters to promptly forward election results to your incoming District Commander. Timely communication ensures a smooth transition and helps District leadership effectively plan for the coming year. If there is one message I want to emphasize, it is this: you are not alone in your efforts. The Department team and I stand ready to assist you with guidance, resources, or support whenever needed. Your success is our success, and together we continue the proud tradition of service embodied in the VFW. I look forward to seeing many of you at the Department of Michigan State Convention in Kalamazoo, June 9-13, where we will conduct the business of our organization and shape the future of our Department. The convention remains our opportunity to collaborate, share ideas, and consider changes to our State Bylaws. Your participation is vital. Thank you for your continued dedication, leadership, and unwavering commitment to our mission of Still Serving. It is an honor to serve alongside each of you.



**DEPARTMENT ADJUTANT/QUARTERMASTER, BARRY WALTER**

Comrades, with the arrival of March, April, and May, we in the VFW get caught between the mindset of closure of one year as it nears an end and the excitement of preparation to meet the challenges of a new year. March brings nominations of Post officers. April brings Post officer and delegate elections. May will bring elections in most Districts, and Department program plans for the new year will be discussed, reviewed, and finalized. This process of leadership renewal has served our organization for over 125 years. But the process only works if every member understands the process and their voice in it. The voice of the individual at nominations and in elections at every level, their participation in the selection of officers, and the development of programs are integral to our success as an organization. We encourage every member to attend and participate in the development of our future. The

current year has been on a very busy run. The Mid-Winter Conference meetings went well. The banquet honoring our District Voice of Democracy and Patriot Pen winners and the State Teacher of the Year winners was the highlight. Congratulations to every participant at every level in each program. We have just returned from our Washington Legislative Conference, where we had the privilege of attending the in-person testimony of Commander-in-Chief Carol Whitmore to the joint hearing of the Senate and House Legislative Committees. This annual opportunity for the VFW to present our concerns and legislative priorities is at the heart of the VFW. Legislative action to influence the care and welfare of all veterans was the reason we were founded in 1899 and continues to be the bedrock on which we stand as an organization. Face-to-face meetings with legislators and staff are key to the delivery of our message. Thank you for your support in sending your legislative team to Washington, DC, to deliver our message, your message, to each and every

Michigan Representative and Senator. It makes a difference! The Department of Michigan Posts are doing the work of the VFW programs in your communities and reporting it. Post enrollment in the National Day of Service in May is headed to another great year of local member participation. Post membership is headed towards another year of combined growth. Post and member support of our programs that support our fellow veterans and other supportive organizations is at an all-time high. But with all of this success, there is much remaining to be done. There are veterans and families in every community that need our support. There are challenges in Lansing and in Washington to be met. We need you, every member, to be involved in those programs that interest you. Not every program, but the program that makes membership in our great organization meaningful to you. Are you willing to do that? Are you willing to be involved in at least one VFW program that gives you purpose? We need you! And working together, the VFW will continue to grow.



**DEPARTMENT INSPECTOR, WILLIAM (BUTCH) OGDEN**

Comrades, we just finished the Mid-Winter conference where the VOD, Patriot's Pen, and Teachers of the Year were honored. Congratulations to all the winners. Currently there are 25 Posts that are 2 or more audits behind. The most predominant issue on audits is the Post doesn't have a relief fund per section 219 and section 704 of the National Bylaws; a relief fund shall be

established and maintained by the Post. The next issue is the bond amount. This amount has to be more than the liquid assets of the Post. Bonds and CDS are considered liquid assets and must be included in the bond amount. As mentioned numerous times, the audit is due by the end of the month following the end of the quarter. The audit is to be completed by the 3 elected trustees; you cannot appoint trustees to fill in. Comrades, when submitting your audit, we don't need the monthly paperwork, only the audit. The audit is to be sent directly to Department. On

inspections I have noticed a lot of Posts haven't updated their Bylaws; it is recommended to review them every 5 years for updated information from the National organization. Also update the registered agent on your incorporation paperwork. All completed inspections should go to the District commander for their review before it goes to Department. As always, feel free to contact me with any questions via email at 1950americanpatriot@gmail.com, phone at (517)304-4069, or mail at William Ogden, 2700 Smith Road, Fowlerville, Michigan 48836.

**DEPARTMENT ACTIVITY DIRECTOR**

**BOB LUTZ**

Comrades, as most of you know, we were experiencing a computer server problem with the community service reports, which put me behind by over 500 reports. The problem has since been corrected, and the reports have been submitted. After getting caught up, I discovered that some of the reports I submitted were not being transferred correctly to the report page; for example, one Post submitted 37 hours of community service hours, and the report showed over 12,000 hours of community service. I am trying to identify the mistakes, but I would appreciate it if Posts would check their reports and make sure they are correct; if not, let me know. The following Districts are 100% in activity reporting: #4, #6, #7, #9, #10, #11, and #13. The following Posts haven't been reported: District #5 Post #2269 (over 2 years now); District #8 Post #830; District #12 Posts #446 and #2053; District #14 Post #4420; and District #15 Posts #7646. If any of these are mistakes, please let me know. A big shout-out to the 100% Districts, and don't stop now. I have also been receiving Auxiliary reports from Posts that don't have an

Auxiliary. As a reminder, if your Post does not have an Auxiliary, you cannot file an Auxiliary Report. On that same note, I am receiving Hospital Reports, which I do not take. Some Posts have more than one member reporting, which is resulting in double and triple reporting. Please ensure only one Post member is reporting. Each Commander should appoint one person to send in the reports, and the other Post members should turn them into that person. Another problem we are having is some Posts are being sent in numerous reports with one report on each; this month alone, I received 13 reports sent in from a Post with one report on each. All you have to do is click on the green

plus sign, and you can report as many reports as you want on one submission. All reports should be done separately and not all on one line (example below.) Remember, the 10th is a hard deadline. If your report is late, you will get credit for the report but not for that month. If you are having some problems with getting your report on time, let me know. Remember to put the value of the hall on your report. If you rent the hall, it is not reportable; you have to donate it to get credit. If you give, for example, a 10% discount on the hall, it is not reportable because the Post is still making money on it. Please reach out to me if you have any questions regarding reporting.

	VALUE	MEMBERS	HOURS	MILES
<b>WRONG;</b>				
donate hall to line dancers X4, scouts X2, homeowners X1	700	7	26	
<b>CORRECT</b>				
donate hall to line dancers X4	400	4	16	
donate hall to scouts X2	200	2	8	
donate hall to homeowners X1	100	1	2	

**GREAT LAKES NATIONAL CEMETERY**

**DANE BEZEMEK**

Comrades, there have been 1,200 internments for the fiscal year through January 2026, with total internments since opening now at 71,836. Construction has been completed on the

restrooms, and they are now available for public use. Spring headstone cleaning will occur on April 11th, 2026. The Memorial Day ceremony will be held on Sunday, May 24th, 2026. Work still

needs to be completed on Committal Shelter number 4; once this work is completed, Committal Shelter numbers 1 and 2 will be closed separately for maintenance and updates.



DEPARTMENT CAMP TROTTER DIRECTOR

GARRETT SIELOFF

I am honored to serve as year-round Director at VFW Camp Trotter. I'm Garrett Sieloff: an Eagle Scout who attended Boy Scout camp through childhood, returned as a staff member at 16, and continued to work in outdoor and residential youth programs until eventually earning a Masters of Science in Community Sustainability and most recently served as an Operations Specialist in the U.S. Coast Guard. I've designed experiential ecology curricula, completed a capstone on restoring public trust in municipal water systems, and developed prevention and response protocols in safety critical settings. These experiences reinforce two convictions: 1) residential outdoor programs uniquely build resilience and social skills in youth, and 2) great camps need both heart and

professional rigor. Camp life taught me responsibility, leadership, teamwork, and practical problem solving. Simple summer memories of canoeing, orienteering, and hiking were the foundations of who I became, and I owe a debt of gratitude to the mentors who relayed life skills along the way. I also owe a thank you to the organizers behind that summer camp experience for us young scouts in my youth and am humbled by the opportunity to now be a part of an organization equally minded in mission and vision. As Director, my priorities are safety, accessibility, and strengthening community ties. We will maintain strict licensing and risk management standards, recruit and train excellent seasonal staff, and expand scholarship support so camp remains

affordable. I aim to deepen partnerships with military family services and local supporters to grow year-round opportunities that welcome children of service and all youth with a heart of service. Our mission – to cultivate courage, community, and curiosity through accessible residential programs with a focus on military families – is what brought me here. With summer approaching, please watch for volunteer openings, staff recruitment, and scholarship drives. I look forward to working with staff, volunteers, and donors to keep Camp Trotter safe, welcoming, and life changing. Please feel free to reach out to me if you have questions or want to learn more about the program and ways to get involved: [camptrotterdirector@vfwmi.vet](mailto:camptrotterdirector@vfwmi.vet) | (231)519-4215.

PEARL HARBOR DAY CEREMONY

The Jackson County Veterans Council held the 4th annual Pearl Harbor Day ceremony on December 7th, 2025. The event took place at the State of Michigan Memorial to the USS Arizona located in the Sparks Foundation Park in Jackson, Michigan. The memorial

included a piece of the USS Arizona superstructure that was originally removed when the current structure was installed over the USS Arizona at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. This is the only piece of the USS Arizona given to the State of Michigan. The memorial also included

the names of the 28 Michiganders who served as sailors and Marines that died on the USS Arizona. The guest speaker for this event was US Navy Commander John Wake, who currently serves as the Executive Officer of the Navy Talent Acquisition Group-Heartland.



WREATH LAYING AT ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY



2025-2026 DAY OF CHALLENGE

Comrades, we held the VFW Department of Michigan Day of Challenge at Michigan Technological University on February 14th. It was originally scheduled to be held on January 24th, but due to the extreme weather conditions at the time, we had to reschedule. We had 14 teams, comprising of 6 people per team, sign up this year to compete from various high schools in the western U.P. Due to the rescheduling, we had 8 teams compete. Teams competed in various activities designed by the Michigan Tech University AROTC. Activities were made for teams and individuals to compete using physical strength, problem-solving, teamwork, and knowledge of American events. Some of the events teams competed in were escape room, scavenger hunt, obstacle course, push-ups, weight pull, etc. We had to eliminate the pool this year

due to the rescheduling of the event. The Day of Challenge was attended by State Commander Reinold Yahnka, District 15 Commander Ryan Spence, and program Director Arthur Kreivi. Commander Yahnka gave out the awards for the 1st and 2nd place teams. Calumet High School's JROTC Northstar team came in 1st overall, and the JROTC team from Ironwood High School came in second. All participants were given certificates, T-shirts, and pizza for lunch. Commander Yahnka gave out VFW ROTC medals and certificates to the two AROTC cadets that coordinated all of the arrangements and events. Cadet Scotty Summers and Cadet Kaden Jenson. Commander Yahnka also acknowledged Captain Matthew Cobb with a certificate for his leadership in keeping the cadets involved with the program.



★ MEET THE CANDIDATES ★



CANDIDATE FOR DEPARTMENT OF MICHIGAN SURGEON 2026-2027

# Michael Eckmyre

Endorsed & Supported By:  
 State Commander Reinold Yahnka  
 State Senior Vice Commander Larry Thayer  
 District 9



CANDIDATE FOR DEPARTMENT OF MICHIGAN JUDGE ADVOCATE 2026-2027

# Dann Todd

Endorsed & Supported By:  
 Past State Commanders - Dave Miller, Matt David,  
 John Griffith, Kevin Conklin, and Ray Lopez  
 State Commander Reinold Yahnka  
 VFW Post 10194 - Grass Lake, MI (Home Post)  
 District 4 - VFW Dept of MI  
 His Beloved Bride, Family, Friends, and Colleagues

# ★ ★ ★ POST REPORTS ★ ★ ★

## POST 582 - ORTONVILLE

December 12th Post 582 members along with community groups and volunteers placed 641 wreaths on veterans graves in the Ortonville cemetery. December 17th we celebrated the annual Voice of Democracy, Patriot's Pen and Teachers of the Year, pictured below is 5th District Elementary Teacher of the Year Amy Poole from Oakwood Elementary. And Ortonville Post 582 Honor Guard lead the Ortonville Christmas Parade.



## POST 1138 - MONROE

On March 4th, 2026, Bob Cebina received the Monroe/Lenawee County Every Day Heroes Award. Bob served in the United States Air Force from 1966-1970 and is a Life Member of VFW Post 1138. Bob has faithfully served over the years as Past Post Commander, Past District Commander, and held several Chairmen positions. And, he has performed Military Honors at over 2,500 funerals! Bob is pictured below with his family and Post 1138 Commander Al Bond.





**AUXILIARY DEPARTMENT PRESIDENT, DEBBIE SCHEETZ**

Are you wondering what the VFW Auxiliary is doing for their veterans and their families? I can't write about all of it in this article.

But what I can tell you is that I attended the VFW Legislative Conference in Washington, DC, and I was in awe. First, I sat in a room with all VFW and Auxiliary members and listened to our first woman Commander-in-Chief, Carol Whitmore, testify before the House and Senate Committees on Veterans Affairs to "Honor the Contract." I walked with my VFW members on Capitol Hill and sat in meetings with Legislators and their aides. I listened when these VFW members pleaded with these reps to pass the bills like the Major Richard Star

Act, the Foreign Medical Program, and the modernization of CHAMP-VA and to address unrecognized toxic exposures, to name a few. We were telling stories to show how these bills will benefit and help so many veterans. We were advocating for all veterans and their families with our words and just our presence there on the hill. All these years I have been recruiting Auxiliary members, asking people to join this great organization to help our veterans. I always say if you can't volunteer because you are too busy or donate because you have your own expenses to worry about, what you can do is be a number. You can be a number on the hill, so when we say the "VFW Auxiliary has nearly 470,000 members in over 3,500 local Auxiliaries across the United States and abroad," it means something. It means that our veterans have support and have family members

standing by their side advocating for them. This means something. Just think if we can say we have 1/2 a million members to help advocate in DC when these bills are being pushed in Congress; how strong we will be for our VFW. So, my question is, why? Why haven't you joined the VFW yet? If you are already a VFW member, why haven't you signed your spouse, children, grandchildren, or parents up for the VFW Auxiliary? Well, now instead of saying why, just do; just sign them up now in your local Auxiliaries so that we can become stronger, even if you think they will be just a number. Now you understand that being another number does so much more than you knew before. Then maybe they will volunteer in the future, donate \$5 when they can, and become a part of a great organization standing beside another great organization!



**AUXILIARY DEPARTMENT JUNIOR VICE PRESIDENT, JAN PASSMORE**

Congratulations to President Debbie on a successful Mid-Winter Conference. It was a lot of fun and a wonderful learning experience. I had a meeting

with those in attendance that will be District Presidents in the 2027-2028 year. We have had some changes to those of us that will be serving together. There will be a meeting again of our group at the upcoming Department Convention. Additional information will be emailed closer to the Convention. District Conventions

will be coming up soon, and I encourage all that can to attend their individual District Conventions. Elections of officers will be held, and it's important that each member take an active role in determining the leadership of their District for the 2026-2027 year. Wishing everyone a Happy Easter and Spring!



**AUXILIARY DEPARTMENT YOUTH/CAMP TROTTER CHAIRMAN, KELLY SMYCZYNSKI**

Greetings to all! Mid-Winter is behind us. Thank you to Districts 8, 9, 10, and 11 for the beautiful baskets for our Camp Trotter Basket Raffle. The raffle was a huge success! We raised \$725 for Camp Trotter! Do not forget to report if you donated or attended the School of Instruction. The Patriot's Pen and Voice of Democracy District winners were honored at the annual banquet and received their scholarships. The Department of Michigan has amazing youth! The Auxiliaries have done a good job promoting the Illustrating

America Art Contest. Hopefully you will have many entries to choose from. The deadlines for getting artwork submitted for the Illustrating America Art Contest are: Auxiliary March 31st; Department, April 15th; and National, May 5th. The contest is open to current students in grades K-8, with some exceptions noted within the guidelines. Don't forget to report how many entries you received. Also, report if you held an awards ceremony and the total value of the awards given. Reporting for the 4th quarter (and end of year) is April 30th. Please do not wait until the last minute to submit your reports. Also, don't forget to get your Youth Activities National Programs Award form completed and

sent to me by March 31st. Keep your eyes open for youth and youth groups who commit random acts of kindness, serve our veterans, and are otherwise helpful. There are a variety of citations available for download. If you need help locating, downloading, or completing any of these forms, please contact me, and I will be happy to assist. Auxiliary Achievement Awards will be presented at our Convention June 9-13. Districts 12, 13, 14, and 15 are asked to please bring baskets for the Auxiliary Camp Trotter Basket Raffle. Auxiliaries may also donate their own baskets. Please bring them to the table Thursday morning. The drawings will be on Thursday and Friday at Convention



**AUXILIARY DEPARTMENT CHAPLAIN, KRIS GRIFFITH**

We just finished our Mid-Winter Conference, and what a successful conference it was. The highlight was honoring our VOD and Patriot's Pen

students and the Teachers of the Year. Congratulations to all the winners and the sponsoring Posts and Auxiliaries. As we are headed into the last half of this Auxiliary year, we should concentrate on what still needs to be accomplished. Please continue to provide support to our veterans. The

time between holidays is just as lonely, and a card or phone call can lift up someone's day. Thank you for all you do! I look forward to seeing everyone at upcoming VFW and Auxiliary events and at our Department Convention. It has been an honor to serve as your Department Chaplain this year.





### AUXILIARY DEPARTMENT AMERICANISM CHAIRMAN, DIANA WARD

Greetings, Sisters, Brothers, and Comrades. It was great seeing everyone at the Mid-Winter Conference. I hope you enjoyed the presentations for the Gold Star Family Recognition and the POW/MIA program. It was such an honor to be able to do those things for Madam President Debbie. Thank you to Carol Johnson, Della Steege, Annie Anglim, and Pam Teunis for providing me with the information for their loved ones. The students did such a good job with their parts in the POW/MIA program. If you couldn't be at Mid-Winter, both presentations are posted on the Americanism Facebook page. It's hard to believe that we are in the last months of the current program year. Please review your Guide Sheets and report anything you haven't thus far by April 20th, 2026. The deadline for the National Award is due to me by March 31st, 2026. I have only received one submission so far. Your

program could be the winner, so please send me the forms. They are available on the Department website and MALTA. Now is a good time to catch patriotism and patriotic actions in your communities and neighborhoods. Present Certificates of Appreciation to those flying flags, having patriotic displays, or showing their American pride. This will reinforce their actions, and you could put an article highlighting these individuals in your newspapers or local newsletters. Not only does this highlight their patriotism, but it might inspire others to do the same. Remember to tell me how many certificates/citations you give out. Spend some time with kids in schools or other youth groups. Getting the kids involved with patriotic activities will develop into a lifelong devotion and encourage appreciation for patriotic actions. There are great tools for this on MALTA under Member Resources. Here are the upcoming patriotic observances through April 2026. When promoting these dates, be sure to give information about them to educate others on patriotic observances.

Please check out the monthly bulletins and Americanism-Michigan Facebook page for more details. March 13 – National K-9 Veterans Day; March 16 – Robert Goddard Day; March 18 – National Supreme Sacrifice Day; March 21 – Rosie the Riveter Day; March 25 – National Medal of Honor Day; March 29 – National Vietnam War Veterans Day; March 1-7 – National Invest in Veterans Week. April 1 – U.S. Air Force Academy Day; April 2 – Day of the Veterans; April 5 – Gold Star Spouse Day; April 6 – Army Day; April 9 – National Former POW Recognition Day; April 13 – Thomas Jefferson's Birthday; April 14 – Air Force Reserve Birthday and America's Day; April 20 – Patriots' Day; April 22 – In God We Trust Day; April 23 – Army Reserve Birthday; April 27 – Morse Code Day. April is also National Military Child Month. You are all doing a wonderful job with this Chairmanship – keep up the great work. If you ever have questions or need assistance, I can be reached on my cell at (810) 955-2931 or by email at legalblaze@aol.com. Keep up the great work!



### AUXILIARY DEPARTMENT CHIEF-OF-STAFF, MARILYN MALICK

Attention Unaffiliated VFW Posts! What does "unaffiliated Post" mean? To the VFW Auxiliary, it simply means a VFW Post that does not currently have an Auxiliary. Have you considered starting one? Forming an Auxiliary is easier than you might think—and the benefits are significant. Why Start an Auxiliary? An Auxiliary can: Provide valuable assistance with event planning and preparation; Support "Buddy"® Poppy drives; Open the door to potential

new members; Assist in recruiting and retaining members to strengthen the Veterans of Foreign Wars; Offer events and volunteer opportunities for veterans' family members; Increase your Post's visibility through greater community involvement; Boost participation in programs, including scholarship and youth initiatives; Expand service to veterans, active-duty military, and their families; Strengthen advocacy efforts for veterans' rights and benefits; and Reinforce the core values and mission of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. How to Get Started. Starting a new Auxiliary begins with three simple steps: 1. The VFW Post must approve the

formation of an Auxiliary by a two-thirds (2/3) majority vote. All Post members must be notified in writing at least 20 days prior to the vote. 2. The Department President appoints an official organizer who is a member of the VFW Auxiliary. 3. At least fifteen (15) eligible new or rejoined applicants must be listed on the Charter application. If your Post is ready to take this important step, I would be happy to assist you. Please contact me, Marilyn Malick, VFW Auxiliary Chief of Staff, at (586)536-6004 or MJMalick@msn.com to get started. Together, we can strengthen our Posts and better serve our veterans, military members, and their families.



### AUXILIARY DEPARTMENT CONDUCTOR, DENISE ARNOLD

What an incredible weekend we shared at the Mid-Winter Conference! As your Department Auxiliary Conductor, it was a joy to see our VFW and Auxiliary families come together in Kalamazoo to celebrate our mission and each other. There is a certain energy that only happens when we gather in person to work on our mission, and this weekend was no exception. One of the highlights of Mid-Winter is always

the opportunity to recognize excellence in our communities. Congratulations go out to all our Voice of Democracy, Patriot's Pen, and Teachers of the Year winners. Watching these young leaders and dedicated educators receive their honors is a powerful reminder of why we do what we do. To our state winners moving on to the National level: we are so incredibly proud to have you representing the Great Lakes State. Thank you to the teachers for all you do for our youth. Between the ceremonies, we got down to business. The training sessions provided by our Department Chairmen were

insightful and incredibly helpful. Thank you to the Chairmen for your hard work in preparing such valuable information to help our local Auxiliaries thrive. President Debbie's Beach Party was an absolute blast. It was the perfect way to shake off the Michigan winter chill and enjoy some much-needed fellowship. Seeing the officers and chairman embrace the theme and let loose a bit really showed the heart and spirit of this organization. I am already counting down the days until we return to Kalamazoo in June for our State Convention. Until then, keep on working to support the needs of our veterans.

**FIND US ON FACEBOOK @VFWMI & @VFWAUXMI**



**AUXILIARY DEPARTMENT HOSPITAL CHAIRMAN, ANN BACKHURST**

What an exciting year with hospital work! Our Department has some very creative and active Auxiliaries. Many Auxiliaries were creative in creating candy tubes for our veterans and, in the

process, recycled many items. Some Auxiliaries took advantage of unusual holidays and created fun projects for those holidays. Approximately 100 Auxiliaries reported on their activities. We are trying to have 100% of our Auxiliaries reporting at least one hospital project; since we have one more quarter to go, I'm sure we will meet our goal. This year we are doing

another MASH (Michigan Auxiliaries Serving Hospitals) goal, where we are asking our auxiliaries to be sure to read the Hospital Bulletin. When they read it, there is a "MASH" word in bold and italics (or underlined). When the auxiliary reports that MASH word in their report, they get extra credit where they can receive a special award at the Department Convention.



**AUXILIARY DEPARTMENT VETERANS & FAMILY SUPPORT CHAIRMAN, APRIL LOWERY**

Employment assistance, educational support, and crisis intervention are three pillars that help veterans successfully transition from military to civilian life. Programs focused on these areas recognize the unique skills veterans bring home—as well as the challenges many face after service. Employment assistance for veterans plays a critical role in long-term stability and purpose. Many veterans leave the military with leadership experience, technical skills, and a strong work ethic, yet still encounter barriers such as translating military experience into civilian résumés or navigating a competitive job

market. Veteran-focused employment programs help bridge this gap by offering career counseling, résumé workshops, interview preparation, certification assistance, and direct connections to veteran-friendly employers. These services not only reduce unemployment among veterans but also help ensure they find meaningful careers that match their abilities and goals. Education is another key pathway to opportunity, and the VFW Student Support Grant helps veterans take this step. This grant is designed to assist service members, veterans, and their families with the costs associated with education and training. By helping cover tuition, fees, or unexpected financial burdens, the VFW Student Support Grant allows veterans to focus on their studies rather than financial stress. Education and training programs

supported by grants like this often lead to better employment outcomes, higher earning potential, and increased confidence during the transition to civilian life. While employment and education support long-term success, immediate help is sometimes needed during moments of crisis. The Veterans Crisis Line (988, press 1) provides confidential, 24/7 support to veterans, service members, and their families. Staffed by trained responders—many of whom are veterans themselves—the Crisis Line offers assistance during emotional distress, thoughts of suicide, or overwhelming personal challenges. Accessible by phone, text, or online chat, this service ensures that no veteran has to face a crisis alone. It also connects callers to local resources for ongoing care and support.



**AUXILIARY DEPARTMENT HISTORIAN/MEDIA RELATIONS, BLANCHE BROWN**

VFW Auxiliary Historians are special people. They look at events, activities, and memories differently than others in our organization. Historians see things through the eyes of how an activity promotes our programs, who will see this information, and how it affects our veterans. We are the messengers for our veterans, military, community, VFW, and Auxiliary. And how we do that is important, to promote our organization and help our veterans. The knowledge of what we are all about and what we do for our veterans, military, and community

is in our hands. As we move through our year, our Auxiliaries have fundraisers to help us carry out our programs: programs for our youth scholarships, promoting patriotism, enticing new members, hospital participation, and many programs for our veterans. We document our activities and events to let our members and communities know what is taking place so they can join us in the celebration, volunteer their help, or recognize our efforts. If we do this properly, the community will become involved and join our mission to take care of our veterans. We do fun and educational activities to accomplish this, including visits with Santa, dinners, scholarship award presentation ceremonies, parades,

hospital volunteering, and working with community organizations and events that recognize our veterans. Historians and members promote many events and activities by various social media outlets to reach everyone. People find their news from many avenues. You can find our promotions on Facebook, in newspapers, radio, TV, bulletins, email, and newsletters. I hope you have enjoyed hearing about various events in your community. Historians continue to let people know what you are all about. Remember to document what you do in your Auxiliary Scrapbooks, so future members can appreciate what has been done for your programs and veterans and learn from those before them.



**SERVICE DOESN'T STOP  
WHEN WE'RE DONE SERVING.**



**Today'sVFW.org**



## DISTRICT COMMANDER REPORTS



### DISTRICT 4 COMMANDER, BRIAN MARTIN

Comrades, Brothers, and Sisters, the last few months have been a powerful reminder of the strength, service, and sacrifice that define our great organization and the urgency of the mission that continues. At our Department of Michigan Mid-Winter Conference, we proudly recognized our Teachers of the Year, as well as our Patriot's Pen and Voice of Democracy winners. These outstanding students and educators will represent the Department of Michigan at the National level, and we know they will carry our banner with pride and purpose. Congratulations to District 11 and especially Post and Auxiliary 5738 for providing both our Patriot's Pen and Voice of Democracy winners! But alongside these celebrations, we were dealt a heartbreaking loss. On January 19th, we lost a true pillar of the VFW, Past District 4 Commander Eric Bell, who also served as the Supreme Commander of the Military Order of the Cootie. His sudden passing is a traumatic blow not only to District 4 but also to the entire National Military Order of the Cootie and Department of Michigan. Eric was a leader, a true friend, and a relentless advocate for our National Home and our veterans. Our love and support go out to his wife Katherine and son Anton. For those who would like to contribute, donations from

Posts, Auxiliaries, or Pup Tents are deeply appreciated. The family, relying on a life insurance policy that tragically missed vesting by just two months, now faces unexpected hardship. Donations can be made to the Department of Michigan, Eric Bell, on the memo line, attention to Barry Walter. This loss should be a wake-up call for all of us. Take the time to ensure your personal affairs are in order. Veterans, spouses, and family members, please make sure your wishes are known, your plans are updated, and that your loved ones are not left to navigate grief while buried in paperwork. It is one of the most selfless final gifts we can offer. This quarter, I have continued to work diligently to advocate for veterans' legislation across Wayne County and the State of Michigan. I have met with State Representatives, Senators, and the new Director of Wayne County Veterans Services to push forward initiatives that support veteran health, benefits, housing, and local outreach. But advocacy is not a one-person mission. That is why I am calling on every member (Post or Auxiliary) in District 4 and throughout the state to join us through the VFW Action Corps. Sign up, respond to National Action Alerts, and make your voice heard at every level. One of our most urgent national priorities is the Major Richard Star Act, which addresses unfair compensation penalties for combat-disabled veterans. Although the bill has broad bipartisan support, it now sits in the Armed Services Committee, awaiting

a hearing. Without that hearing, it goes nowhere. We must act. Call, email, and write your representatives. Urge them to move this legislation forward. It takes just a few minutes to make a lasting impact. At the state level, we continue to champion nine key legislative priorities. These are coordinated through the Michigan Commanders Group and can be found at <https://michigancommandersgroup.org/Legislative/>. The website allows you to generate letters of support for your local elected officials simply by entering your name, address, and email. It could not be easier, and persistence matters. Contact them early and often. Show them that veterans in their district are paying attention. With spring approaching, our VFW Riders are eager to get back on the road. Please stay vigilant and watch for motorcycles as the weather warms up. Support our Riders' efforts. Not only do they represent the VFW with pride, but they also raise awareness and funds for many of our critical programs and missions. And finally, I cannot overstate the importance of membership. Our strength lies in our numbers. Every member is a voice, a vote, and a volunteer. If you are reading this, I challenge you to bring one new member to your Post this quarter. Reach out to a veteran you served with, invite them to an event, and remind them that the VFW is still fighting for them, with them, and because of them. We are the Fighting Fourth. We are a family. And we go all the way, and then some.



### DISTRICT 5 COMMANDER, DANE BEZEMEK

Greetings, Comrades, it was a great time celebrating our Posts' students at our Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen Banquet. We had some very talented students. A shout-out to Post 6691 and

Kaitlyn, who took first place for Patriot's Pen, and Post 1008 and Luke, who took first place for Voice of Democracy. They represented the Fighting 5th District well at the Department of Michigan Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen Banquet. Thank you to our District Inspection team on completing our District Inspection, we have a few things to focus on, but

they are low-hanging fruit and easily accomplished. We remember the 139 District Comrades who completed their final watch this past year and stand watch in their stead. We have our 82nd Past Commanders and Past Presidents Banquet on March 29th at Post 1008; we look forward to honoring our past with you. The District Convention will be held at Post 1008 on May 3rd, 2026.



### DISTRICT 9 COMMANDER, MICHAEL ECKMYRE

I was very proud to be a part of the Department of Michigan Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen Banquet on January 31st. District 9 President Della Steege and I are shown here escorting the District 9 VOD winner Autumn Gillis to the banquet. We would also like

to congratulate Leighton Latz for winning the District 9 Patriot's Pen essay contest. We are proud of all who entered. The winter months have been rather harsh this year, so I hope everyone is staying warm and safe. Also remember to check on your loved ones and especially the veterans who are struggling and don't always ask for help. Watch for various dates this summer as the Vietnam Memorial moving wall makes its way through

Michigan, with a stop in September in Chesaning, Michigan, at the Chesaning Showboat Park. Lastly, I would like to take this opportunity to announce my candidacy for Department Judge Advocate for 2026-2027. My experience in the military and my 35 years of retail management have taught me how to be thorough and detail-oriented. I feel I can be a strong Advocate and serve our Department well.



**DISTRICT 15 COMMANDER, RYAN SPENCE**

Greetings from District 15, the snowy Western U.P. As we finish up our Mid-Winter Meetings this year and look forward to a fresh new year in 2026, I want to thank my District for the opportunity to serve as the Commander of District 15. Our Inspections are nearly complete and

looking good so far; most of our Posts are getting their reports done, and our membership numbers are looking good with over 95%! February marks our Daily 3 raffle start, and the next combined Dept/District raffle tickets have been distributed for sale. Our Day of Challenge, while getting delayed, kicked off February 14th. Congrats to our VOD and PP winners from Hubbell Post and Ontonagon! Looking forward to our next District meeting in my

hometown of Norway on April 12th. We'll be borrowing the Legion for the extra space while the Auxiliary meets at my Post. Lunch will be at the Legion Hall after the meeting and for the raffle drawing. Also, we'll continue mine and former District Cmdr. Art Krevi's Pampered Pups challenge for Blue Star Service Dogs. If you'd like to see me or Art with colored nails, please donate; it's for a good cause! Till next time, stay warm and stay safe.



**WE WILL NEVER FORGET**



**ROLL CALL OF DEPARTED COMRADES**

LISTED BY POST NUMBER	LAST NAME	FIRST NAME	AGE	SERVICE	WAR
<b>422 Delton</b> Burger, Wilbur L. 80 Marines/Vietnam Horihan, Stephen M. 78 Vietnam	<b>2406 Charlotte</b> Milke, Bruce E. 84 Marines/Cuba Sebolt, Earl E. 79 Army/Vietnam	<b>4659 Shelby Township</b> Julien, James A. 88 Army/Korea			
<b>796 Port Huron</b> Olszewski, Gary R. 78 Air Force/Korea	<b>3676 Sault Ste. Marie</b> Trouvé, Raymond 93 Army/Vietnam	<b>5857 Onaway</b> Van Dyke, Johnas T. Jr. 75 Marines/Vietnam			
<b>827 Kalamazoo</b> Haus, George J. 79 Air Force/Vietnam	<b>3701 Lakeview</b> Burns, Jerry 89 Army/Vietnam Kelley, Edward 77 Navy/Vietnam Paulson, Douglas 78 Marine/Vietnam Wood, James 90 Air Force/Korea	<b>6864 Cadillac</b> Masten, Barry M. 78 Air Force/Vietnam			
<b>1669 Royal Oak</b> Hegedus, Gary L. 80 Army/Vietnam	<b>4090 Portland</b> Fryover, John 76 Navy/Vietnam Randall, Carl A. 79 Navy/Vietnam	<b>7581 Wayland</b> Stull, Harman A. 93 Army/Vietnam			
<b>2292 Edmore</b> Drain, Carmon 95 Army/Korea Buckner, Thomas 79 Army/Vietnam	<b>4406 Belding</b> Pena, Joel D. 69 Marines/Desert Storm	<b>8846 Muskegon</b> Wabindato, Jacob 76 Army/Vietnam			
<b>2335 Mecosta</b> Doerr, Vernon E. 91 Army/Korea Ketchum, Ronald L. 79 Army/Vietnam		<b>9363 Flat Rock</b> Reed, Ernest 78 Marines/Vietnam Spears, James 85 Navy/Vietnam			

**VFW STORE AD**

**NEW**

**NEW! WOOBIE HOODIES**  
With large tactical patches on both sleeves to attach a variety of patches.  
7026 Green, S-3XL \$65.00  
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Sleeve detail

VFW K-9 TACTICAL PATCH Hook-and-loop. 3 x 3½". 8199 \$8.00

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TACTICAL PATCHES Hook-and-loop. 3½ x 2". \$6.25 each

8226	8268	8218
8333	8284	8219

Prices valid through 8/31/2026

To place your order, call 1.833.839.8387 or go online to VFWSTORE.ORG

# AUXILIARY DISTRICT REPORTS



## DISTRICT 6 PRESIDENT, ANGELA WOOD

Greetings from the District 6 Auxiliary! January brought very cold weather not only to Michigan but also throughout the Midwest, Eastern, and Southern U.S. Don't forget to check on veterans that are not able to get out during extreme cold and snowy weather.

Make sure they know they are not alone and resources are available through the VA, the VFW, and other government and nonprofit agencies. Millions of Americans have seasonal depression, and it can increase PTSD symptoms. The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is available for veterans and their families. Whether facing mental health struggles, emotional distress, alcohol or drug use concerns, or just needing

someone to talk to, caring counselors are available 24/7 by call, text, or chat. At our recent VFW & Auxiliary Mid-Winter Conference, we honored 24 youth at our Voice of Democracy, Patriot's Pen scholarship banquet. This group of youth are a glimpse of patriotism and love for veterans our youth have in America today. What an amazing group we had this year. Stay safe and thank you to all our veterans for their service.



## DISTRICT 9 PRESIDENT, DELLA STEEGE

Hello, Sisters and Brothers of District 9. I predict everyone enjoyed the holidays and spent as much time with loved ones as possible and that everyone is staying healthy and happy in 2026. Our District official visits were completed in November, and we did find that most of our Auxiliaries are doing very well. Although there are a few that

need some additional assistance to get back on track. Some very knowledgeable members and I are hard at work assisting those in need. Our District Convention is scheduled for May 16th, 2026, in St. Louis at Post #3055. This meeting is where we nominate and elect new officers for our upcoming year, 2026-2027. I encourage all to attend and reconnect with friends and maybe enjoy having some fellowship with other active members of the Auxiliary. We are planning to have a Past District Commander/Past District

President Banquet, date and place to be announced, so keep your eyes open for further information. Our District continues to remember our veterans by sending out cards, valentines, and personal care items throughout the year. Please remember to make donations to our hospital representative at Aleda Lutz VA Center in Saginaw. As District 9 Auxiliaries work with their communities, we spread the recognition of our veterans' needs, the VFW priorities, and our purpose to help all our veterans.



## DISTRICT 14 PRESIDENT, ANN BACKHURST

Winter hit District 14 hard this year with snowfalls ranging from 139 to 160 inches of snow; however, being the Yoopers we are, it didn't stop our Auxiliaries from working for our veterans. Highlighting some of their activities, I will start with

them numerically. 3165 - Negaunee had successful fundraisers like "Make N Take," where the public and members made crafts. They also held a successful "Make Ravioli" event and signed up a couple new members! 3676 - Sault Ste. Marie was very busy with OPERATION: SANTA DROP, where they sent out 10 boxes to active-duty service members both overseas and in the USA. 3676 also did a Breakfast with Santa for the

community, and Post families donated funds to help fix the roof of a Post member and supported an Auxiliary member following the death of an 11-year-old daughter, helping with funeral funds. 5114 - St. Ignace had a Christmas party for children and a Christmas party for special needs adults and made wreaths for Native American graves. And 4420 - Manistique held a Veterans Day lunch for over 50 veterans.

## UPCOMING NATIONAL & STATE EVENTS

- **2026 Auxiliary Pool Tournament:** March 19-21 at VFW Post 2496, Alpena, MI
- **2026 MVAW Leadership Conference:** May 11-13 in Grand Rapids, MI
- **2026 National VFW Dept Adj/QM Training Conference:** September 10-13 in Kansas City, MO
- **2026 MVAW Woman Veterans Conference:** April 9-13 in Grand Rapids, MI
- **2026 National Home Jr Vice Conference:** May 14-16 at VFW National Home
- **2026 National VFW Fall Legislative Conference:** September 14-17 in Washington, D.C.
- **2026 National VFW Dept Sr Vice Cmdr Training Conference:** April 16-19 in Kansas City, MO
- **2026 Memorial Day Services:** May 24 at Great Lakes National Cemetery and Ft. Custer National Cemetery
- **2026 POW/MIA Recognition Day:** September 18 - Every Post
- **2026 Post 6248 Gold Star Mothers Banquet:** April 25, 1:00pm, at VFW Post 6248, Decatur, MI
- **2026 Michigan State Convention:** June 9-13 in Kalamazoo, MI
- **2026 Commander-in-Chief's Homecoming:** September 24-27 in Milwaukee, WI
- **2026 Michigan Pool League Tournament:** April 23-25 at VFW Post 1888, Southgate, MI
- **2026 Camp Trotter Golf Outing:** June 26 in Newaygo, MI
- **2026 Big Ten Conference:** October 15-18 in Kalamazoo, MI
- **2026 Department Planning Meeting:** May 9, 9:00am, at VFW State Headquarters, Lansing, MI
- **2026 VTS:** June 27 at Camp Trotter
- **2026 Michigan Fall Conference:** October 28-November 1 in Mt. Pleasant, MI
- **2026 VFW National Convention:** July 25-29 in Reno, NV

**GOLD STAR MOTHERS BANQUET - SAVE THE DATE**



JOIN US FOR OUR ANNUAL  
**GOLD STAR MOTHERS**  
*Banquet*

SATURDAY, APRIL 25, 2026  
VFW POST 6248  
560 N PHELPS, DECATUR, MI 49045

(\$18/PERSON, MAKE RESERVATION BY APRIL 17, 2026)

	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	
	24	25	26	



**2026 Michigan State Convention**  
**Radisson Hotel, Kalamazoo**  
**June 9-14**

**HOUSING FORM**

**Department of Michigan  
Veterans of Foreign Wars  
107<sup>th</sup> Department Convention  
Tuesday June 9, 2026 - Sunday June 14, 2026**

To Make Reservations Call:  
Radisson Plaza Hotel  
100 W. Michigan Avenue, Kalamazoo MI 49007  
Phone 269-343-3333

**Cutoff date is May 15, 2026 or until block fills (whichever occurs first)**

Please make your reservation as soon as you receive this information.

If you are planning on golfing on Wednesday June 10 please plan accordingly.

Reservation must be guaranteed with a major credit card  
To reserve your room, please call 269-343-3333.  
You may be best served by asking for the front desk and bypass the  
automated reservation answering system.

**To receive the group rate, you must request the Group Rate for  
VFW SPRING SUMMER CONFERENCE 2026**

Group: Department of Michigan Veterans of Foreign Wars  
VFW Spring / Summer Conference 2026  
Tuesday June 9, 2026 -Sunday, June 14. 2026

Room rates:

Standard Rooms: \$154.00

Suites: \$204.00

Higher rates will apply for 3 or 4 person occupancy.

Rates are subject to 6% State Tax  
And 5% Occupancy Tax

A credit card and valid photo identification will be required upon check-in

Self parking for hotel guests is \$15.00 per night

Valet parking is available

Day attendees parking rate is \$15.00 per day  
(parking passes available at convention registration)



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DEPARTMENT OF MICHIGAN  
VFW AND AUXILIARY  
107th ANNUAL STATE CONVENTION AD BOOK

RATES:

FULL PAGE AD - \$125.00

1/2 PAGE AD - \$90.00

1/4 PAGE AD - \$70.00

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To pay with credit card complete information below and email ad to Jan: [bookkeeper@vfwmi.vet](mailto:bookkeeper@vfwmi.vet)

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**THE DEADLINE FOR ALL ADs IS MAY 15, 2026**

MESSAGE: (PLEASE PRINT)

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