

## Highlighting another one of Michigan's female veterans, Tracy Nagy:

### Breaking Barriers and Leading the Way



The military has long been a proving ground for resilience, leadership, and service, and Tracy Nagy embodies all three. As Commander of VFW District 4 of Michigan and President and Founder of the Servicewomen's Health and Education Resource Organization (SHERO), she is a trailblazer for women veterans. Her journey - from serving as an Army nurse in Iraq to leading efforts to create a more inclusive veteran community - has made a lasting impact on those around her.

In honor of Women's History Month, the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) is proud to highlight Tracy Nagy's service, advocacy, and commitment to empowering fellow female veterans.

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### From Military Service to Veteran Advocacy

Tracy's decision to serve was deeply rooted in family tradition, but it wasn't necessarily expected of her.

"The men in my family have always served - my father, grandfathers, all my uncles. I grew up understanding that this was just what was done in our family," she shares. "But when I told them I was joining the Army, they were shocked. They had expected my brother to join instead."

Despite the initial surprise, her family is now incredibly proud of her service. She spent 10 years as an Army nurse, including a tour just outside of Baghdad, Iraq, which made her eligible for the VFW. During her time in the military, Tracy experienced both challenges and triumphs, from proving herself in a male-dominated environment to gaining unforgettable experiences that shaped her career.

"As a woman in the service, it took significant effort for me to be taken seriously as a strong leader and not just as something nice to look at," she recalls. "Even in nursing, a predominantly female profession, I was still outnumbered by my male peers. I had to work twice as hard to gain equal respect."

Yet, Tracy wouldn't trade her military experience for anything.

"I had opportunities I never would have had as a civilian - target shooting with the Italian Carabinieri, having dinner with an Iraqi sheik and Special Forces general, and even smoking cigars with a U.S. two-star general," she shares. "I explored places I never would have seen and built incredible, life-long friendships."

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## **Joining the VFW: A Journey to Belonging**

Tracy's introduction to the VFW was, unfortunately, a familiar story for many female veterans - one filled with skepticism about her service.

"I was inspired to join the VFW by my uncle, who was a longtime Post Commander. But my first attempt to join didn't go as expected," she recalls.

While attending a fish fry at a local post, she inquired about membership, only to be told - multiple times - that she had to be a veteran to join. Despite explaining her combat service, the assumption was that her husband must be the veteran, not her.

"It was frustrating, and needless to say, I did not join that evening," she says. "Ironically, that Post is no longer in existence."

Years later, Tracy gave the VFW another chance - again, at a fish fry.

"This time, the Auxiliary President approached both my husband and me and asked, 'May I ask, who is the veteran?' I was sold in that moment. That is how you approach a potential member."

Her experience has fueled her mission to make the VFW more inclusive and welcoming to female veterans.

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## **Making the VFW More Welcoming for Women Veterans**

With 46,000 female veterans in Michigan, Tracy believes it's time to change the narrative.

"We can no longer assume that the man is the veteran," she emphasizes. "We must approach every individual with the equal assumption that they served. Instead of assuming, ask, 'Who is the veteran?' or 'Where did you serve?' If they aren't a veteran, they will correct you without feeling offended. However, assuming that someone isn't a veteran because they don't fit the traditional mold can be incredibly offensive."

Her work with SHERO and the VFW is dedicated to breaking these barriers and ensuring female veterans feel seen, supported, and valued.

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## **The Importance of Women Veterans Connecting and Leading**

For women veterans who may feel disconnected from the veteran community, Tracy has one piece of advice: Get connected.

“The VFW has been at the forefront of every major piece of legislation supporting veterans for over 100 years,” she explains. “These organizations know what benefits and resources are available to you. Leverage that knowledge. The veteran community is evolving, with more women and younger veterans stepping into leadership roles. We are moving forward - join us and help lead the charge.”

Looking to the future, Tracy wants to see more women in leadership positions, stronger advocacy for women’s healthcare, and increased visibility for female veterans.

“Women are natural leaders. We should be at the forefront, leading change and ensuring that women veterans receive the support they deserve,” she says.

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### **A Message to the Next Generation of Women in the Military**

To young women considering military service, Tracy offers encouragement, along with a dose of reality.

“If military service is something you’re interested in, go for it. But be prepared to have thick skin. You will likely experience adversity - be ready for it, but don’t simply accept it,” she advises. “Don’t be afraid to stand up for yourself. Strong women pave the way for other strong women.”

As Tracy Nagy continues to lead, advocate, and push for a more inclusive veteran community, she exemplifies the very spirit of service, leadership, and resilience that Women’s Month celebrates.

For her unwavering dedication to veterans and her trailblazing leadership, we are honored to recognize Tracy Nagy as a Women’s Month Honoree.