

JANUARY 2025

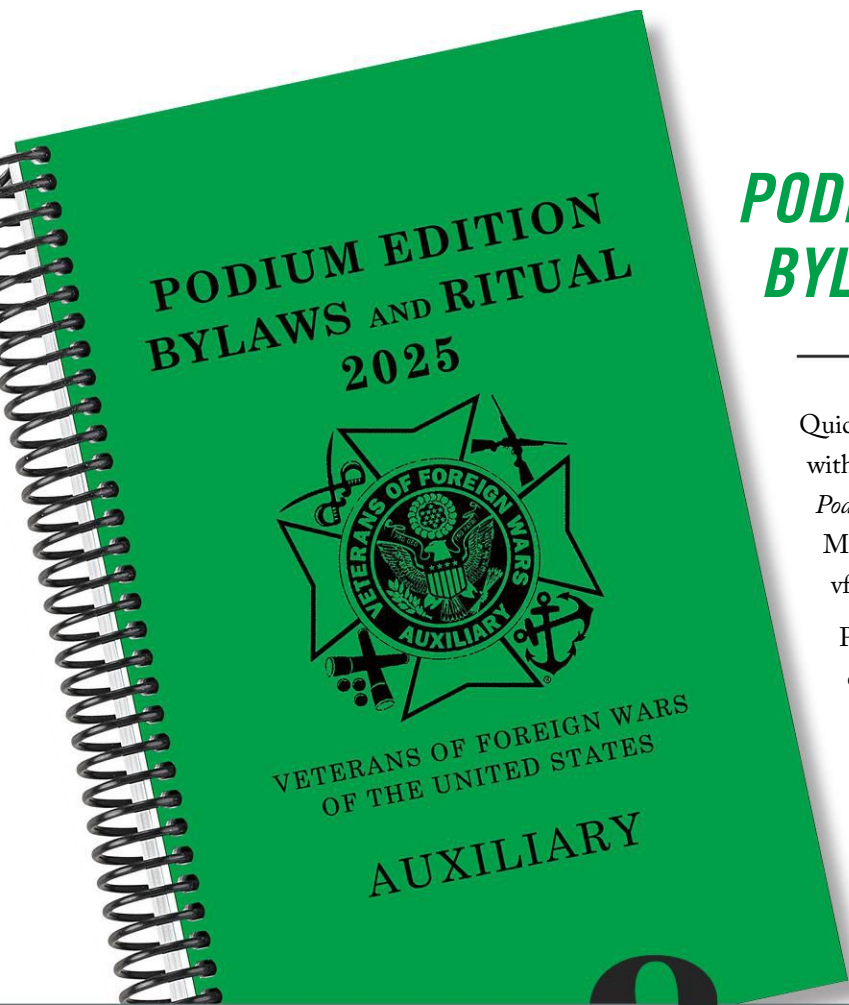
VFW Auxiliary

VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS AUXILIARY MAGAZINE

12TH CAFE
VFW NATIONAL HOME
QUESTIONS?
FOLLOW THE CHAIN
OF COMMAND

NATIONAL PRESIDENT'S
SPECIAL PROJECT
UPDATE
LEGISLATIVE VICTORIES





PODIUM EDITION: BYLAWS AND RITUAL 2025

Quickly reference the VFW Auxiliary's rules and procedures with the most current edition of the *2025 VFW Auxiliary Podium Edition* – available digitally behind MALTA Member Resources, or in print from the [VFW Store](https://vfwstore.org), vfwstore.org and 1-833-VFW-VETS.

Published annually, this must have, go-to reference book contains the organization's most up-to-date rules and regulations. In it you will find the answers to all of your questions, from how to run a meeting to guidelines for Auxiliaries, Districts and Departments. Don't go to a meeting without it!

DATES & DEADLINES

January

JAN 1 New Year's Day

JAN 15 Annual Joint Reviews (AJRs) with Chiefs of Voluntary Services for VAVS representatives due at National Headquarters

JAN 20 Martin Luther King Jr. Day

February

FEB 1-6 National Mid-Year Conference

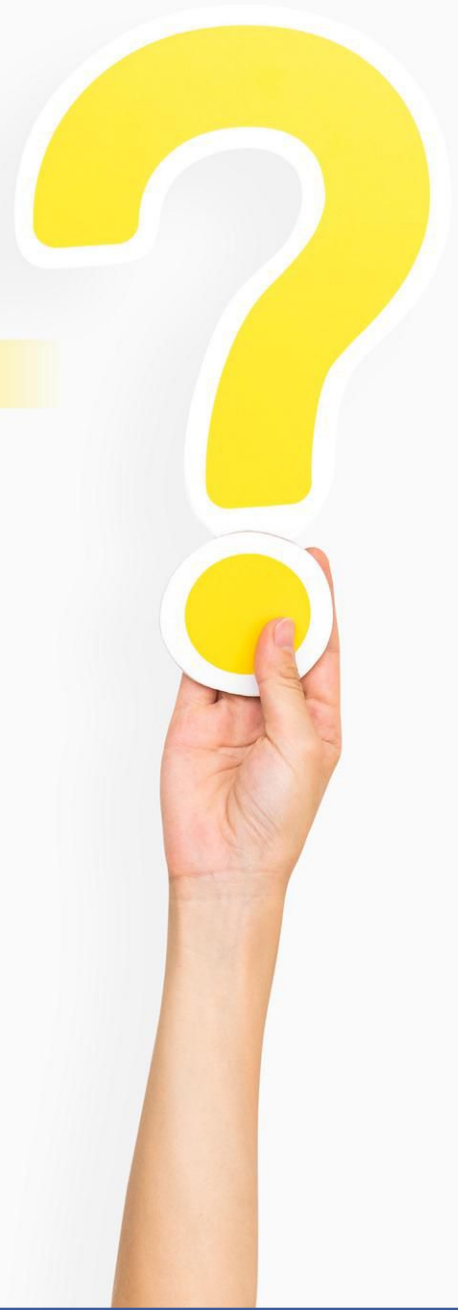
FEB 14 Valentine's Day

FEB 15 Continuing Education Scholarship applications due at National Headquarters

FEB 17 Presidents Day

For more information on awards, see the [2024-2025 National Program Book](#).

QUESTIONS



HERE'S THE BEST WAY TO SEND THEM TO US:

You have questions. We at HQ have or will find answers. The most direct digital line of communication for us to assist you is via our information email account, info@vfwauxiliary.org.

This is monitored every weekday. Once we receive your question or concern in this inbox, we either answer or route it directly to the appropriate staff member who will respond to you.

We do receive questions via Facebook, comments and DMs, and if we can answer them there, we will. However, many times we will refer you to info@vfwauxiliary.org, which serves as our hub for assigning inquiries to the correct staff member.

For example, if a member asks, "How can I learn more about Auxiliary scholarships and contests?" the Programs & Communications team responsible for monitoring and posting on social media can easily answer by providing the correct website link and referral to [MALTA Member Resources](#).

However, if a member has a membership card concern, this will need to be addressed by the Accounting team, so best to send this question directly to info@vfwauxiliary.org.

Social media is not the same as info. as it is not our platform for fielding all questions. Info@vfwauxiliary.org is the best place to direct your questions so we can help you most efficiently.

get SOCIAL



Instagram
[@vfwauxiliaryhq](#)



LinkedIn
[VFW Auxiliary](#)



Facebook
[vfwauxiliary](#)



Pinterest
[vfwauxiliary](#)



YouTube
[VFW Auxiliary National Organization](#)





“Most of all,
I appreciate the
time we spend
together, laughing
and sharing
memories.”

Dear members —

At this point, I am halfway through my visits, and with each visit you astound me with the amazing activities you are doing to support our mission of serving veterans and their families.

We are currently in the hardest times of membership, but we must not stop until June 30. Membership is our voice, and we need every member, so call or make a visit to those members that have not paid their dues. Did you know the VFW passed at their National Convention to accept any qualified Purple Heart Recipient into the VFW? This means you have another avenue to bring in new members.

Have you started working on Operation Bottom Cover? Many of you have already sent in donations or dropped off diapers to veterans or military personnel that have small children who need diapers. A huge thank you to those of you that sent diapers into those areas that were hit by the hurricanes. We are so pleased with how the members have joined together with the VFW to make this project work in your communities.

Do you know of military personnel who don't live in your area but could use diapers? Maybe they are deployed overseas where the cost of diapers is much greater. You can log in to: www.osoamil.org and have diapers sent directly to them. Operation Showers of Appreciation is an organization whose mission is to honor and support military and veterans by providing assistance in everyday life, including addressing needs through their Diaper Assistance Program. All donations sent to us are sent to them and you can then give them the address of the military family you want the diapers sent to and they will do it FREE OF CHARGE for you. So, start logging in and let's start sending diapers to help veterans and military families around the world.

I am looking forward to seeing many of you at our Mid-Year Conference in Cancun, where we can enjoy fun in the sun. The visits I've been on so far have each been very exciting and filled with so much history. But, most of all, I appreciate the time we spend together, laughing and sharing memories. You are doing amazing things out there for our veterans, their families and your communities and I commend you for always looking ahead to the next exciting project. Thank you for allowing me to share all this with you and I look forward to the rest of my visits and learning about the projects you are working on.

The memories you are creating will be part of your roots in the future as we continue, *From Our Roots to Our Branches, Extending Service to Our Veterans.*

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brenda Bryant".

Loyally,

BRENDA BRYANT

National President



Deadlines are approaching. It's time to get prepared for our scholarship contests and remember, there is still time to promote these opportunities.

Dear members—

It's 2025! A shiny, brand-new year, but nearly at the halfway point of the Program Year.

Deadlines are approaching. It's time to get prepared for our scholarship contests and remember, there is still time to promote these opportunities to your family members (for Continuing Education) and out in your communities (Patriotic Art Contests).

In February, submissions are due to National Headquarters for Continuing Education and in March for our Patriotic Art Contests; Young American Creative Patriotic Art (2-D) and the 3-Dimensional Patriotic Art Contest.

We also have deadlines in March for our art contest that includes younger students – Illustrating America.

Do make sure you have the most current information and brochures, as important updates (like rules) change year to year.

Find the latest scholarship and contest information on the [National website](#) or in [MALTA Member Resources](#) under Scholarships and Youth Activities.

Let's also talk a little about who to call, or email, when members need something, whether that thing is information or a document or advice. Who do you reach out to first? Did you know the best way for members to get what they need as quickly as possible starts at the local Auxiliary level? Ninety-nine percent of the time it is actually best NOT to contact the National President or the National Secretary-Treasurer or even National Headquarters first, and for good reason. Learn more about chain of command and why this is important in an article on page 15.

Our next National event is Mid-Year Conference in balmy Cancun, Mexico! Then it's full speed ahead for us on staff to work on preparations for the biggest event of the year, National Convention, this summer in Columbus, Ohio.

AMANDA COOK
Editor-In-Chief

VOLUME 88 NUMBER 4

Editor-In-Chief
Amanda Cook

Contributing Writers
Nicole Panteleakos &
Skye Melcher

VFW Auxiliary Magazine

is published six times per year – January, March, May, July, September and November – by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States Auxiliary, 406 West 34th St., 10th Floor, Kansas City, MO 64111.

Editorial Office

Address all communications for publication to The Editor, VFW Auxiliary Magazine, 406 W. 34th St., 10th Floor, Kansas City, MO 64111, (816) 561-8655, Fax (816) 931-4753. Unsolicited manuscripts and photographs must be accompanied by return postage and no responsibility is assumed for safe handling. Poetry submissions are not accepted. Or email info@vfwauxiliary.org.

Graphic Design

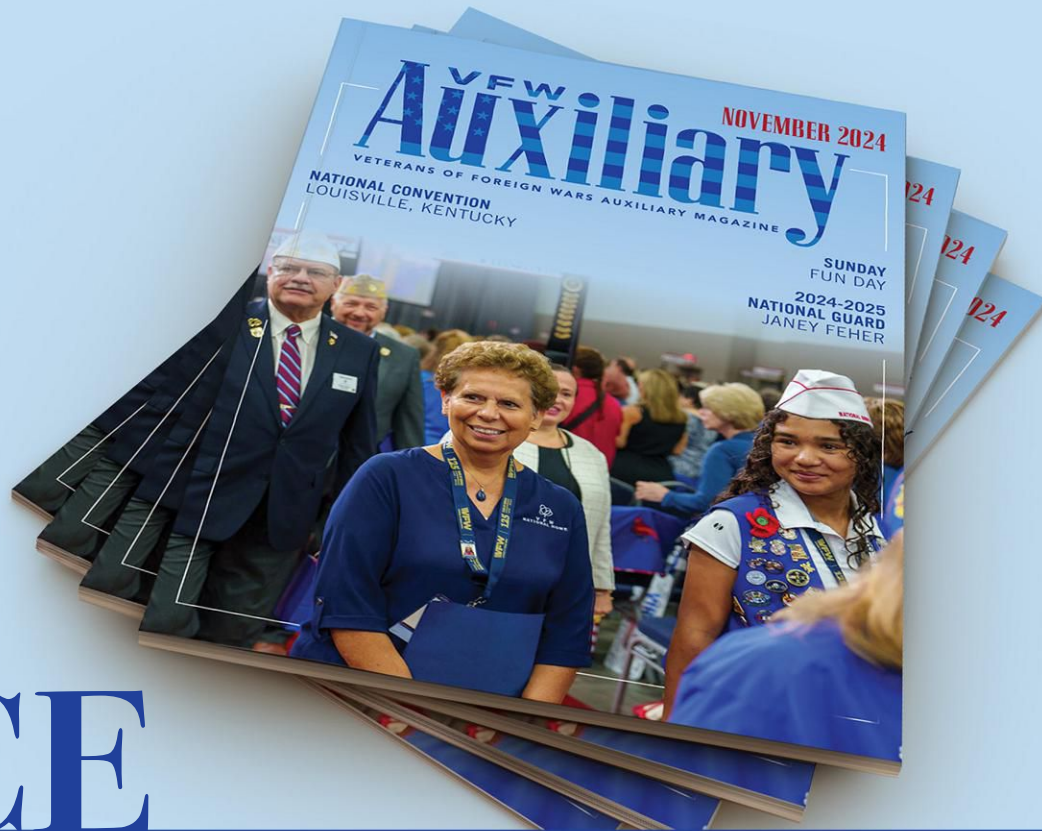
Braden Design
jaclynn@bradendesign.co

Change of Address

Forward address changes to: Circulation Department, VFW Auxiliary Magazine, 406 W. 34th St., 10th Floor, Kansas City, MO 64111. Members may also change their own address or email address in MALTA. Or email info@vfwauxiliary.org.

Website

www.vfwauxiliary.org



READER'S VOICE

This is the space for comments regarding your *VFW Auxiliary Magazine*. Mail your submissions to National Headquarters or email them to info@vfwauxiliary.org, marked "Letter to the Editor." We reserve the right to edit letters for length and clarity. The opinions expressed in Letters to the Editor should not be interpreted as the opinion of the National Organization.

Look who got her own spotlight in the November edition of the *VFW Auxiliary Magazine*? Our very own Janey Feher!

AMBER DANIEL | AUXILIARY 3186 | Covington, Kentucky

I am what some would consider a "newer" member, having joined in 2016. I received the paper copy for a few years before the change to digital. While I did enjoy the paper copy, the change to digital does not deter me from reading it. So many good things being done by our members that deserve our attention, I still want to know what's going on, coming up, etc. If you attend your Auxiliary meetings and someone has a laptop available, maybe a quick group viewing before or at your meeting might make the experience a little less "cold?"

CATHY SULLIVAN | AUXILIARY 450 | Alsip, Illinois

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK!

The editors of *VFW Auxiliary Magazine* want to know what you think about features and articles you see (or would like to see) in the magazine.

While we have appreciated receiving all of your feedback about the National magazine going digital, we also look for constructive comments on what you liked, what you didn't and why as well as what you think we could include that we aren't already covering.

This is your page to voice your thoughts!

Email us at info@vfwauxiliary.org with Letter to the Editor in the subject line or send your letters to:

VFW Auxiliary Magazine,
406 W. 34th St., 10th Floor,
Kansas City, MO, 64111.



PEN PALS FOR LIFE

“TO ANY SOLDIER” PEN PALS FINALLY MEET AT SOUTHERN CONFERENCE

One letter sparked an unlikely friendship between a soldier and a civilian during war time.

During the late fall of 1990, retired Army Master Sgt. Karle Johnson’s family transferred from Kentucky’s Fort Knox to Fort Campbell, but he was not home to help with the move – he had already been deployed. Operation Desert Shield would soon be giving way to Operation Desert Storm, and a difficult road lay ahead.

While overseas, many care packages and letters were shipped to Johnson’s company addressed to “Any Soldier.” They were distributed amongst the soldiers and Johnson urged them to show appreciation by writing back. He set a good example by doing precisely that.

“I wrote four or five letters back and I didn’t expect anyone to write me back,” said Johnson. “I was shocked when I received a letter from Bonnie (Peters). It was the only one, and I couldn’t even remember sending the letter to her. I thought she was nice enough to write me, I’ll write back.” Johnson added that it was always nice to receive mail because it would be a week or more between mail calls due to always being on the move.

“She would send me a letter at least a couple of times a month; she had a real concern for my safety and that of my soldiers,” Johnson said. “I am not sure that I was as dedicated as Bonnie was at writing, but it sure was a joy getting her letters.”

When Johnson returned at the conclusion of his six months in Iraq, he wrote to Peters to let her know he was home safe with his family. Said Johnson, “I did think after this was over, we probably would not send any more letters.”

But Peters, who hails from Tulsa, Oklahoma, continued to write. At first, they exchanged letters three to four times a year, but as the years passed it would become Christmas cards with updates about how each was doing.

“We learned about Bonnie’s family and (she and her husband) learned about ours,” says Karle’s wife Leena Johnson.

“She prayed for me when I was diagnosed with cancer and sent me get well cards; this I’ll never forget,” Johnson said. “She had touched me, and I had this feeling that I just wanted to know she was still there. She lifted my spirits and was a comfort.”

Fast forward more than 30 years later to November, 2023, Johnson and Leena of Cadiz-Trigg County Post and Auxiliary 7890 in Kentucky were headed to the Southern Conference in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The two have been members of the VFW and Auxiliary for more than 20 years. They were still in touch with Peters, so arranged to meet her and her husband, Ron, in person for the very first time during the trip.

“It was exciting to know that after all these years, I finally got to meet the young man I had written to,” said Peters. “I loved hearing more about his life (and) family and meeting



RIGHT: *Auxiliary member Bonnie Peters meets her Army veteran pen pal, Karle Johnson, more than 30 years after she sent him her first letter.*



Leena, his wife. I also learned how it came about his acknowledging my card. My husband, Ron, got to meet Karle too and we had a lovely lunch together.”

According to Leena, when they met the Peters it felt as if the two couples had known each other their whole lives. “Meeting (them) was like meeting our long-lost friends. We had so much to talk about and share.” She credits the VFW and Auxiliary with helping to make the connection happen. “Without us joining we would not had the opportunity to meet my husband’s sweet pen pal.”

Johnson says he considers Peters a blessing. He even thanked Peters’ husband for sharing her with him.

“SHE WILL ALWAYS BE PART OF MY FAMILY.”

They continue to send Christmas cards. ✨ SM & NP



2024 CAFE

*at the VFW
National Home*

AND A HAPPY 100TH BIRTHDAY!

In 1924, the remarkable place we call the [VFW National Home](#) began as one woman's vision of building a special community and better lives for veterans and their families on several hundred acres of land near Eaton Rapids, Michigan.

What endures is a 100-year legacy of helping veterans and their families find success and new beginnings in a safe, nurturing environment. This year also marks a century of our organization supporting the Home; it was the VFW Auxiliary's first continuing National Program. The Auxiliary has been involved since the beginning as vocal supporters, fundraisers and volunteers.

The National Home for Children was officially incorporated in 1925 as a place where families left behind by war could remain together, keeping the family circle intact even when their serviceman didn't come home.

The Home was born of this desire to provide homes for these children - real homes, with comfortable bedrooms, inviting living rooms, plenty of food and happy holiday celebrations, in an idyllic community with a pond for fishing, hills for sledding and beautiful shady trees, with

its own hospital, nursery, playgrounds, fire department and room to raise a few farm animals.

Today's military and veteran families face different challenges - reintegration, post-traumatic stress, high unemployment and rehabilitation from battlefield injuries, among others - and the National Home has evolved to meet those changing needs.

The 42 single-family home community now welcomes whole families; each can live on campus rent-free for up to approximately four years, during which time they have access to a number of services including child care, mental health care, job training and more while they set goals and establish plans for their future.

This year, the VFW Auxiliary celebrates the National Home's centennial with them. Ahead of that, in September, nearly 400 members gathered at the National Home for the 12th-annual Celebrating America's Freedom Event to pay tribute to a century of supporting our "uncommon heroes" and their families.

On a Midwestern fall day, that, despite pops of sunshine, called for layering and bundling up, CAFE kicked off with a parade led by VFW Auxiliary National President Brenda Bryant down the main street on campus, Vandervoort Avenue.



 VFW NATIONAL HOME



Bryant gave stuffed animal toys to the youngest residents along the route, who in turn gave delighted smiles. Others in the parade, including Department Presidents, Line Officers and National Ambassadors, distributed their own gifts – candy and American Flags – to everyone gathered down the avenue. Attendees then trailed the parade and the chorus and beat of the Glen Erin Pipe Band’s bagpipes and drums, marching past the Margaret A. Armstrong Memory Chapel and Lodge, named for our first National President; a deed of gift hanging inside notes that these buildings were erected thanks to Auxiliary contributions in 1949.

They marched past a playground, where children, including those who attend the Early Childhood Center, play; the EEC was formerly the nursery, built thanks to Auxiliary donations toward the end of World War II. They marched past the Community Center and gym where lunch would later be held, and the Health & Education building, which used to be the hospital; Auxiliary members sponsored and funded the creation of these buildings just before and during the Great Depression through the Health & Happiness fund. And they marched past the individual cottages, beautiful houses in which whole families can now live together; most are sponsored by the Departments for which they are named.

The route ended at the Tribute Park, where a presentation included remarks from Bryant, National Home Executive

Director Mike Wilson, Auxiliary member Susan Eveland, who is the widow of Past VFW National Commander-in-Chief Howard Vander Clute (for whom the Home's Howard E. Vander Clute Jr. Administration Building is named) and two current National Home employees who lived on campus as children: Brian Daniels and Eric Reichstetter, both of whom went on to join the military.

After the presentation, guests embarked on a scavenger hunt to explore the Home's non-residential buildings. Using a map and a list of National Programs, they traveled on foot or by golf cart from one spot to another. At each, they met a National Ambassador, learned about the history of the building and the Auxiliary's involvement with it, then were invited to tour and explore.



PREVIOUS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: CAFE attendees link hands and sing "God Bless America," led by National Soloist Willa Watts. Auxiliary National President Brenda Bryant stops to chat with member Amy DiMauro of Florida along the route of the VFW National Home scavenger hunt and campus tour. (Photo by member GinaMarie Doherty of Rhode Island) Members approach the Health & Education Building. THIS PAGE, LEFT: Bryant waves to the crowd just before the 2024-2025 Parade of Department Presidents begins. (Photo by member Cathy Sullivan of Illinois.) RIGHT: The Glen Erin Pipe Band poses for a pre-ceremony photo and members listen to program presenters. (All other photos by J. Ervin Bates Photography/the VFW National Home and Amanda Cook)

Dominique Garcia, 2024-2025 National Youth Activities Ambassador, said this CAFE was her first visit to the Home and being there in person was a great learning experience.

“Being there as Youth Activities Ambassador made it more special,” she said. “I am honored that Brenda let us be a part of the CAFE event. Having one of us at each place and explaining the history gave a better understanding as to what the Home was and continues to be. You hear and see the videos about what the National Home has done for veterans and their families, but being able to meet the ones that had been helped and hear their story is humbling. Seeing what they have done in their life and coming back to work at the Home and help others shows that the Home is truly about helping veterans and their families. The National Home is more than a home. It’s a small community that takes care of each other.”

Resident Erin R. said the Home has helped her greatly.

“They provide all sorts of services that ease the burden and stress of having to raise two girls alone,” she said. “They have helped me become a better provider and mother to my children. I can’t thank them enough.”

One of her girls has also participated in the National Home's summer work crew with other teenage residents and Erin's grandfather helped build some of the homes on site.

Attendee Sandy Leese of Auxiliary 8951 traveled to CAFE from Pennsylvania.

“The place is amazing,” she said. “I enjoyed meeting those who live here and the program was wonderful, very moving. I loved the cheering and (National Soloist Willa Watts)...it brought tears to my eyes.”



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: National Hospital Ambassador Paulette McCord and National Conductor Sandra Uzell greet members from Wisconsin and Maryland at their station on campus. Bryant presents a donation to VFW National Home Executive Director Mike Wilson as part of the CAFE program. National Home Development Director Sue Alverson joins National Americanism Ambassador Katlyn Burke and other members at the Tribute Park. *(Photos by Amanda Cook and J. Ervin Bates Photography/the VFW National Home)*

Lucille Chavez of Auxiliary 4171 in Colorado said of her first visit to the National Home, “I am so touched by the stories about the child care and how the Auxiliary has helped to establish a safe place for everyone. I am so happy to have come to CAFE and learn so much history of the National Home.”

Past Auxiliary National President Sandi Kriebel recalled a National Home memory she’ll always treasure. It came from a conversation she had with a brother and sister who’d lived at the Home and returned in adulthood.

“They said, ‘Where else can you live and have 127 brothers and sisters to play with? Living at the Home was the fondest memories of our lives.’”

While the Home’s official birthday is [January 7](#), its 100th birthday party will be June 28. Click [here](#) to learn more about the festivities! 🇺🇸 AC & NP



LEFT: Department of Pennsylvania President Andrea Meintel makes her entrance during the Parade of Department Presidents. **RIGHT, TOP TO BOTTOM:** “Buddy”® Poppy Child Layla is at CAFE to help celebrate. The sun peeks through a statue in the Tribute Park where later, Bryant and her National Ambassadors meet for a picture. Teresa Singh of Ohio learns about the Early Childhood Center from National Youth Activities Ambassador Dominique Garcia. (Photos by Amanda Cook and J. Ervin Bates Photography/the VFW National Home)



DUES REMINDER

PLEASE NOTE, IF YOU HAVE NOT PAID YOUR AUXILIARY DUES:

- An annual continuous member **MUST** have his or her 2025 dues received at VFW Auxiliary National Headquarters by June 30, 2025 to maintain his or her continuous years of membership within the organization. There is not a “reinstate” category for membership.
- If an annual continuous member’s 2025 dues are not received at National Headquarters by June 30, 2025, their continuous membership will end and they will then have to:
 - **REJOIN** the organization
 - **PROVE** eligibility again
 - Be **READMITTED** by voting members into the local Auxiliary **AND**
 - **START** continuous years over.
- Again, if an annual continuous member misses even a single year of paying dues on time, continuous years of membership start over at one (1).
- This change will also affect an annual continuous member’s eligibility for a Cancer Grant. If a member does not maintain their continuous membership, they will have to wait one full year before they are eligible for another grant. There remains a limit of two grants per lifetime.

KNOW YOUR CHAIN OF COMMAND

AUXILIARY, DISTRICT, DEPARTMENT, NATIONAL

After a VFW and Auxiliary joint meal preceding their monthly meeting in Rockwell, North Carolina at the start of the Program Year, Post 9134 Commander Anthony Rogers and Auxiliary President O'Shannus Wood Perry together told those in attendance: know your chain of command! The directive had come from higher up in the Department, reminding members of the importance of knowing who to contact about what, and not to rush to seek answers from National to problems that could easily be solved or questions that could readily be answered on a local level.

"We don't need to embarrass ourselves by going straight to National!" one member quipped, while another cheekily asked for the direct line to National Headquarters. But all jokes aside, there are a number of reasons not to take a local issue to a National level which go beyond the simple belief that one "shouldn't put their business in the streets," and these include quicker response times, consideration for local customs and, hopefully, a deescalation of potential interpersonal conflicts.

WHY KEEP IT LOCAL?

On an Auxiliary level, there are anywhere from 20 to 2,000 members, give or take, with good odds that an Officer or Past Auxiliary President will know the answer to one's question or have the skills to problem-solve otherwise, but on a National level, we have 475,000 members and a small staff, most of whom would not work directly with members on the sorts of issues or questions that typically arise. Simply put, we only have about one staff member per hundred thousand members who could help you with these issues, which means your inquiries would potentially take a longer amount of time to reach the top of our "to do" piles.

Additionally, we at National do not know the ins and outs of every Auxiliary. Some Auxiliaries prefer casual attire and round table meetings. Others prefer to dress in uniform and focus on floor work. At some, members may

consider themselves family, while at others, they may be more like professional acquaintances than close friends. Your Auxiliary or District Officers are more likely to be familiar with the dynamics of your Auxiliary and be able to guide you in a more personalized way.

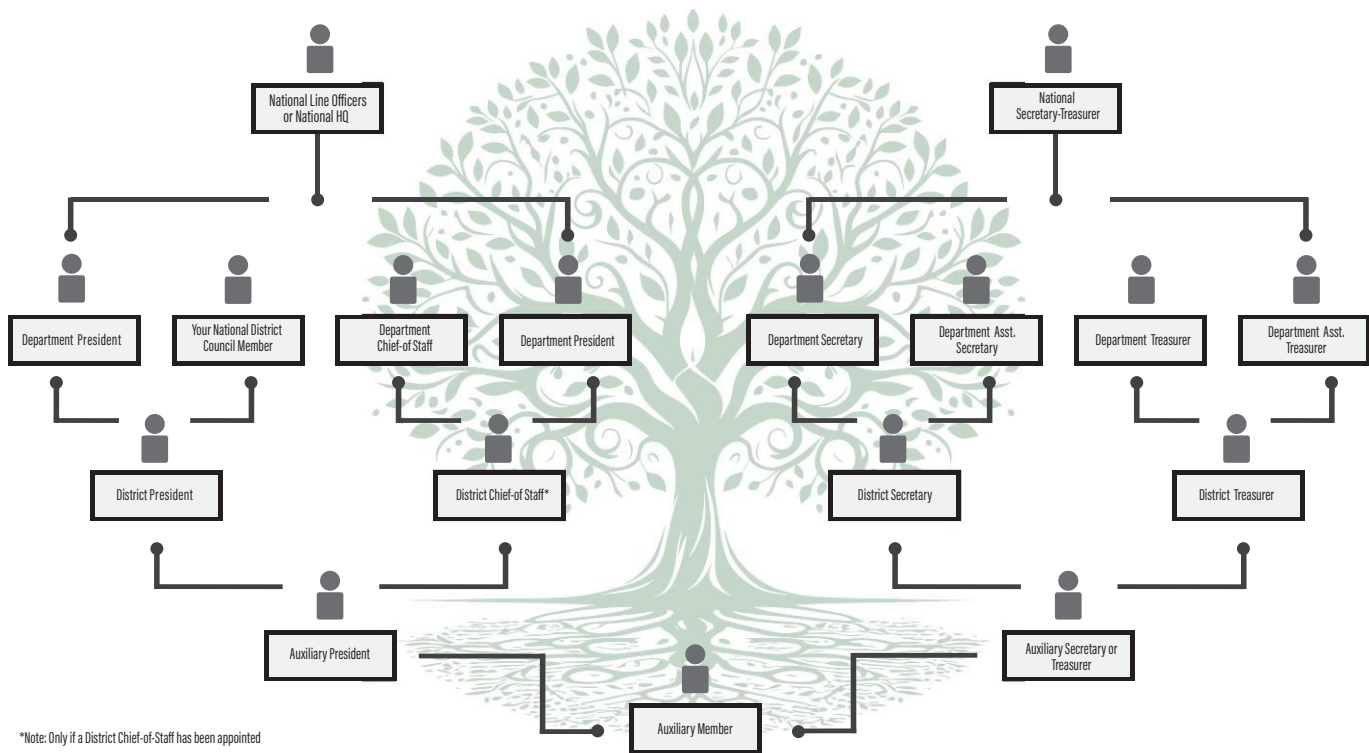
Lastly, many of the issues that reach National Headquarters concern interpersonal conflicts, but we find many of these could be handled at the ground level before escalation has occurred. As a diverse group with members from all different generations, cultures, political affiliations, religions, mindsets and regions, we know that we will not all agree on all things all the time - who does? But we are united in our mission to help veterans, service members, their families and our communities, even if we aren't always on the same page in regards to how. At a local level, Officers and mentors can spend the time needed to truly listen to each side of an issue and help those in disagreement come to a consensus that serves both parties and the organization as a whole. Unfortunately, once such an issue has made it all the way to the National level, it has typically become much harder to do so.

SO WHAT IS THE CHAIN OF COMMAND?

The chain of command starts with your own Auxiliary. Depending upon your question or issue, the best person to whom to address it may be the President, Secretary, Treasurer, Chief of Staff, a Program Chairman or even a member you personally consider a mentor, perhaps a Past President who has been around for a long time.

If your Auxiliary President, Secretary, Treasurer, Chief of Staff, etc. is unable to help, seek out the person in the relevant position on a District level (if your Department has Districts). If they are unable to help or cannot be reached, the next level is Department, again starting with those in the aforementioned positions.

Only after the Department Officers have done their due diligence and concluded that an issue cannot be solved or a question cannot be answered should it be sent along



to the National level. For many issues or questions there are potential other people to contact before reaching out to National Headquarters directly, such as your National District Council Member and/or National Ambassadors.

If you have exhausted all of these options or if the question is not appropriate to ask of those in the aforementioned positions, sending an email to National Headquarters is the next step. If you contact us at info@vfwauxiliary.org and describe the question or issue, we will be able to forward it to the person best suited to help you, while sending a direct message to us on social media will only be read by our social media team, who may be able to assist if the issue is social media-related or if the answer is a simple one (for example, a link to the Patriotism Through Literacy list of recommended reads, or the date the next HQ Roundtable is scheduled), but in most cases, the social media team member will ask you to send us the inquiry as an email.

Just remember, the chain of command is much like the chain of judging for National contests: local Auxiliary, District, Department, National.

HOW DO I REACH MY OFFICERS?

For members familiar with [MALTA](#), our online system (also available as a mobile app), it is easier than ever to find contact information for those aforementioned. When looking at your Member Profile, scroll down below Dashboard and Membership/Auxiliary Information to the Officers section. Officers for your Auxiliary, District and Department will be in blue, as each is a clickable link.

Once selected, a pop-up will show their position, full name, email address and phone number.

At North Carolina Auxiliary 9134, members can reach President Perry quickly with a text; she sends regular text messages about meetings, special events and fundraiser opportunities to ensure no one misses anything, so it is as easy as clicking "reply." For those who have opted out of text message alerts and lack access to MALTA, they can also reach someone quickly by sending a message through the Post and Auxiliary's joint Facebook page. Many other Auxiliaries have similar texting systems and frequently monitored social media pages - check with your President and Secretary at your next meeting to find out whether yours does! Additionally, some Auxiliaries and most Departments have their own web pages with Officer contacts, lists of upcoming events and Program information, much like the VFW Auxiliary's National website.

And then, of course, there are directories. Most Departments publish and distribute directories each Program Year just as the National organization does. These typically list the names and contact information for Auxiliary Presidents, District Presidents (if applicable), Conference Presidents, Program Chairmen, the National District Council Members, Officers and more.

National Headquarters thanks you for following this chain of command and we look forward to helping you in any way we can should your inquiry reach us in the future! 🌟 NP

OPERATION BOTTOM COVER UPDATE

Just halfway into the Program Year, members have contributed more than \$50,000 to help military and veteran families who are struggling with the rising cost of diapers for their children through VFW Auxiliary National President Brenda Bryant's special project, Operation Bottom Cover. And that's not all. This generous sum does not include the many community diaper drives hosted by members, in-kind donations of these baby needs to military bases and every time members responded to calls for help when recent natural disasters left thousands without access to necessities.

"As I have been traveling around to the Departments, I have been amazed at what our members are doing,"

Bryant said. "I knew this project would touch the hearts of our members, but I didn't realize it would go much farther than just our organization. There are churches, community groups and recently I heard about a bank in Illinois that is putting out boxes to help us collect diapers. This project will make a huge difference to many members of our military and veterans that live in our communities. Our organization was formed around the family and Operation Bottom Cover is all about family."



Back in early October of 2024, just two months into this project, nearly 300 boxes of diapers that cost \$30 each, plus packs of wipes, were given to military and veteran families in need in states including California, New Jersey, North Carolina, Florida and Pennsylvania, and as far away as Germany and Japan through a partnership

with Operation Showers of Appreciation (OSOA). Diapers traveled to Japan on a MAC flight – a military flight that will transport goods when space is available.

According to Courtney Hilborn, vice president of OSOA, while a box of diapers might not seem like much, it's "like a million dollars to them."

Below are some statements from military and veteran families whose lives have been touched by this project. Last names are omitted for privacy.

"Receiving diapers from OSOA was a fantastic blessing. It helped stretch my paycheck a bit further and with the holidays coming soon, it couldn't have come at a better time." – *Erick*

THIS PAGE: Members from Oklahoma collected diapers and wipes instead of giving National President Brenda Bryant gifts during her Official Visit. **PAGE 18:** Department of Missouri President Amy Jo Lett and other members delivered many cases of donated diapers to Whiteman Air Force Base's Child Development Center.

“Thank you so much, OSOA. My husband and I have been struggling since he got out of the military and I am getting ready to EAS (end of active service), too. The diapers helped us so much. THANK YOU!”

– Linda

“We were so grateful for the diapers and wipes we received from OSOA. It is getting harder and harder to make ends meet and diapers are so expensive. With two little ones in diapers, the cost can sometimes be overwhelming. The donation came at the perfect time.”

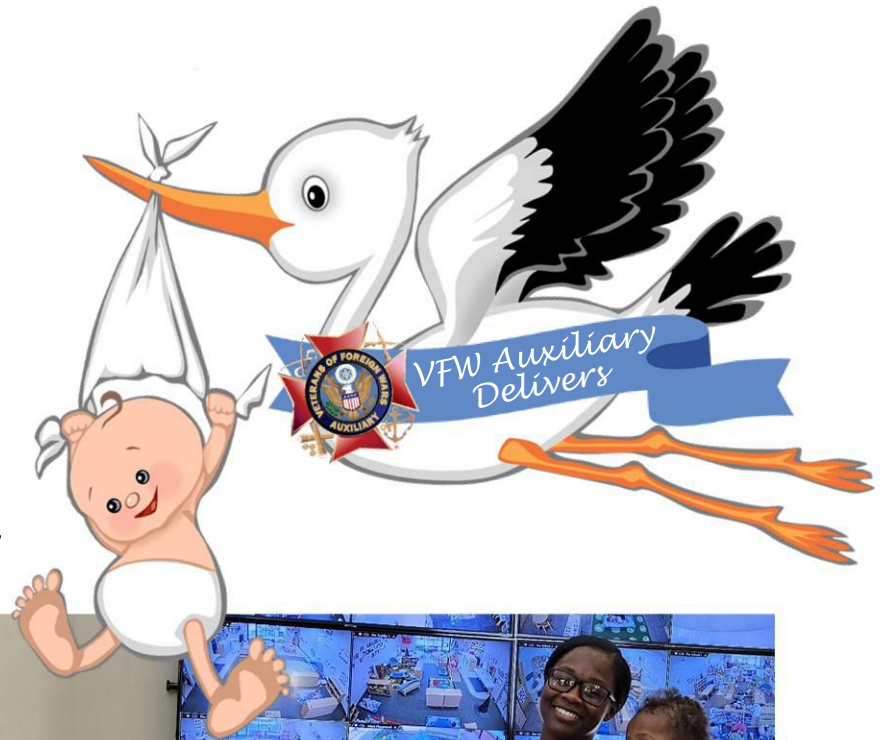
– Jordan

“I can’t believe OSOA was so kind as to provide us with diapers and wipes. They are amazing and we appreciate them so much.”

– Jack

“It is really nice what OSOA does for our families. Regardless of rank, they are taking care of families that need it. Programs like OSOA help alleviate stressors not only for the Marine but also for the families.”

– Allison



THERE’S STILL TIME: HOW CAN YOUR AUXILIARY HELP?

1. Gift money to Operation Bottom Cover through MALTA under gifts – [National President’s Special Project](#) or mail a check to [National Headquarters](#) earmarked [NP Special Project](#).
2. Coordinate with and make a gift of diapers directly to a military base. If you don’t have a contact at the base, reach out to your VFW VMS Chairman, maybe they can help.
3. Host a diaper giveaway for veteran or military families at your Post.

HOW CAN YOUR AUXILIARY DIRECTLY HELP A FAMILY?

1. Share this link to Operation Showers of Appreciation with members: www.osoamil.org. Operation Showers of Appreciation (OSOA) is an organization whose mission it is to honor and support military and veterans by providing assistance in everyday life, including addressing needs through their Diaper Assistance Program.
2. Your Auxiliary can donate directly to a veteran or military family with this need in your area.
3. Don’t forget the wipes. Maybe you can challenge the VFW for every box of diapers you deliver, they can throw in the wipes. Let’s work together. 🌟 AC

VFW ADVOCACY in ACTION

LEGISLATION IN THE 118TH CONGRESS

The 118th Congress was one of the least productive congresses in the past several decades. Legislation was introduced on some of the issues that the VFW considered to be priorities for our nation's veterans. The VFW testified at hearings on behalf of our organization's members, and VFW Action Alerts were sent to our grassroots advocates. However, with the notable exception of one significant piece of legislation, in the end there was insufficient movement on all of these bills. So, the VFW National Legislative Service will again focus our advocacy spotlight and efforts on these crucial issues during the 119th Congress.

THE ELIZABETH DOLE ACT

The *Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act* was introduced in the second session of the 118th Congress. In November 2024 it passed the House, and in December it passed the Senate with amendments and was sent back to the House. In the final days before the holiday break, it passed the House again and was sent to the president's desk. If signed into law, it will provide health care and benefits for veterans, caregivers and survivors. Many of its provisions

will improve existing care and benefits, and we believe some provisions including increased caregiver stipends, expanded benefits for survivors and improvements to long-term care have the potential to save lives.

This bill was the result of a months-long compromise between varying stakeholders, and is an example of how Washington, D.C., negotiations can work. This package was fully funded, and had the backing of dozens of organizations from around the country that advocate on behalf of veterans, caregivers and survivors. It is a solid piece of bipartisan and bicameral legislation, and the VFW is very pleased that Congress finally passed this important bill for our nation's veterans and caregivers.

RETIREMENT AND MILITARY PERSONNEL

Reform to retirement pay and disability compensation policy is long overdue. Congress has not passed substantive concurrent receipt legislation for military retirees since 2004, leaving countless service-connected disabled retirees in challenging predicaments. The VFW has long argued

that Department of Defense (DOD) retirement pay and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) service-connected disability compensation are fundamentally different benefits, earned for different reasons. Yet, those who were medically retired under Chapter 61 before serving twenty years, regardless of disability rating, are required to offset their retiree pay with the amount of VA disability compensation they receive.

Chapter 61 retirees include combat-injured and ill veterans with varying abilities who need to find and maintain gainful employment, as well as those who require round-the-clock caregiver support resulting in financial strain on themselves and their families. Currently, more than 52,300 Chapter 61 retirees with combat-related disabilities do not have full access to their vested retirement pay and service-connected disability compensation. These veterans are unjustly being denied the benefits they earned and deserve.

Members of the 118th Congress seemed to understand the injustice caused by the retirement pay and disability compensation offset as evidenced by bipartisan and bicameral support for the *Major Richard Star Act*. This legislation had garnered the support of 300 members of the House and 62 members of the Senate. Despite efforts to ensure its passage into law, it did not pass as a standalone bill or via the National Defense Authorization Act. Therefore, we must continue our efforts in the 119th Congress to enable Chapter 61 veterans who sustained combat-related injuries

to be entitled to DOD retirement pay and VA disability compensation without offset.

CRACKING DOWN ON PREDATORY CLAIMS COMPANIES

The VFW is concerned that bad actors have been preying on veterans by seeking to access their earned VA benefits. When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, unaccredited consulting groups that the VFW calls “Claim Sharks” viewed the chaos as an exploitation opportunity. Since the passage of the PACT Act in 2022, they have ramped up their efforts even more.

These groups aggressively advertise online and make promises to increase veterans’ disability ratings. Some charge thousands of dollars in fees for their services, and even request VA login credentials to track when veterans receive future ratings increases. If a veteran receives a disability percentage increase years later, often these companies return seeking more money. Furthermore, they routinely obtain medical opinions from affiliated medical providers, which raises ethical concerns.

The *GUARD VA Benefits Act* was introduced early in the 118th Congress by both the House and the Senate, and hearings were held, but the bills had no further movement. This legislation would have reinstated criminal penalties for anyone who charges veterans unauthorized fees relating to VA benefits claims. The VFW has been advocating for this reinstatement to the already existing law. Anyone who assists veterans with the preparation, presentation, or prosecution of VA claims should adhere to established fee caps or be subject to such penalties.



Our HISTORY

Happy Birthday, Auxiliary Departments!



The VFW Auxiliary was formed in 1914 and awarded its charter six years later, in 1920, but at that time, Auxiliaries stood alone; Departments had not yet been formed. This would change in 1925, when Department charters were issued for the first time. Many

President of the VFW Auxiliary. Representatives of several cities were in attendance, including women from Pittsburgh, St. Paul (Minnesota), Denver (Colorado), Albany (New York), Newark (New Jersey), Philadelphia (Pennsylvania), Providence (Rhode Island), Baltimore (Maryland) and East Liverpool (Ohio). At that first Encampment, a treasury was established, National Officers were elected, dues were collected and an executive committee was voted in. The VFW Auxiliary started life with \$6.75 in the bank and a few hundred members excited to make a difference in the lives of veterans.

By 1924, the 10th year of the VFW Auxiliary, membership had grown exponentially. There were now more than 15,000 total members, hundreds of Encampment Delegates and representation from all across the nation. The decision had been made to create Departments, mostly comprising individual states, though some states shared a Department, similar to how some Departments currently share National District Council Members. These were preceded by state councils, the brainchild of Past National President Kate "Mother" Hutcheson in 1923; Departments would have their own Line Officers, just like Auxiliaries and National, plus other elected and appointed Officers, Chairmen, treasuries and Department-wide meetings.

Departments comprised a single state, while others were shared by two or even three states, working closely together.

But before we can look to the changes and growth of the VFW Auxiliary, we must go back to the beginning. Records do not show the exact date that the VFW Auxiliary National Charter was signed, but the decision was made to backdate it to September 1, 1914, a date that technically precedes the actual formation of then the-Ladies Auxiliary. Our birthday, September 14, 1914, was chosen in honor of the date of the first official meeting of the National organization. Prior to the 1914 National Encampment (now called National Convention), the VFW, still in its formative years, was eager to add an Auxiliary and requested that Delegates from across the country be sent to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to begin setting up such an organization. These representatives included the wife of VFW Commander-in-Chief Rice Means (1913-1914), who was chosen as temporary Chairman. Margaret Armstrong was assigned the role of temporary Secretary; Armstrong would go on to be elected the first-ever National

IN 2025, THE FOLLOWING AUXILIARY DEPARTMENTS WILL BE CELEBRATING THEIR CENTENNIAL:

- Colorado** (initially Chartered as Colorado-Wyoming*) on May 7, 1925
- California** (initially Chartered as California-Nevada*) on May 20, 1925
- Pennsylvania**, Chartered on May 25, 1925
- Illinois**, Chartered on May 26, 1925
- Massachusetts**, Chartered on June 9, 1925
- Washington**, Chartered on June 12, 1925
- Virginia**, Chartered on June 12, 1925
- New York**, Chartered on June 16, 1925, the first to apply for a Charter
- Ohio**, Chartered on June 25, 1925
- New Jersey**, Chartered on June 27, 1925
- Rhode Island**, Chartered on June 27, 1925

Connecticut, Chartered on June 30, 1925

Indiana, Chartered on July 16, 1925

Wisconsin, Chartered on July 30, 1925

Minnesota, initially Chartered on September 2, 1925, but backdated to January 23, 1925

Missouri, Chartered on November 7, 1925

*Wyoming was issued their own Charter on July 14, 1934

*Nevada was issued their own Charter on July 21, 1935

Over the next century, many more Departments were added, until each state had their own. Happy 100th Birthday to the 16 Departments aforementioned! We look forward to celebrating with you throughout the year.

FUN FACTS:

Colorado-Wyoming's first President was Nell French Lowry. They started with five units; Colorado's oldest, John S. Stewart Auxiliary 1, is still active a century later with nearly 200 members.

California-Nevada was led by Alta Mae Cunning and one of their first Auxiliaries was formed more than 110 years ago, originally as a unit of the Auxiliary to the Army of the Philippines, a VFW predecessor organization.

Pennsylvania earned the distinction of the Auxiliary's largest Department by the middle of the 20th century, with 577 Auxiliaries and more than 30,000 members. Adele Fritsch was their first President. The state is the home of six Past National Presidents.

Illinois' early Department projects included distributing stationary to hospitalized veterans so they could write letters to loved ones during their rehabilitation and the building of a cottage at the VFW National Home during their formative years.

Washington started with only six Auxiliaries; they've added more than 50 since. One of their earliest Auxiliaries, 24, was originally named for Colonel Theodore Roosevelt. In 2020, a new Auxiliary 24 was instituted, named for George Washington.

Virginia's first President, Julia Morris, led their membership of 3,326 in 1925; this number has nearly tripled since. While more U.S. Presidents were born in Virginia than any other state, only one Auxiliary National President has represented the state thus far: Dee Guillory (2017-2018).

New York, led by then-President Ada Harrison, was assigned Charter #1. They started with 64 units, which had grown to 443 by 1964, when the National Auxiliary celebrated 50 years of service. Harrison would serve as National President from 1930-1931.

Ohio had several members on the Founding Committee of the VFW Auxiliary, which predates our formation. They

represented Private Eddy Auxiliary 66, which is still active today. In the 1980s and '90s, the Special Olympics was especially near and dear to the hearts of members.

New Jersey was the first Department to focus on Americanization, now called Americanism, and set records for number of members in attendance at the Statue of Liberty birthday celebrations year after year starting in 1936. Anna Holden was their first Department President.

Rhode Island had representatives at the exploratory founding meeting prior to the birth of the VFW Auxiliary. Their oldest Auxiliary, 183, celebrated 105 years on New Year's Eve, 2024. Their first Department President was Henrietta Purdy.

Connecticut started with only 11 Auxiliaries and now boasts exactly four times that: 44. Their first President was Percie Johnson. They were among the first to hold annual events honoring Gold Star Mothers.

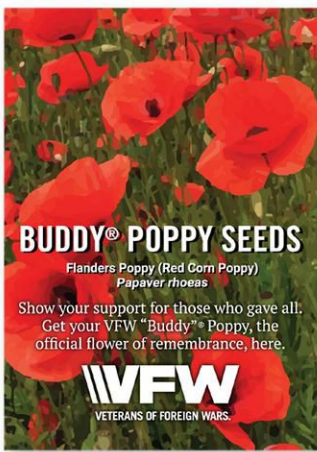
Wisconsin, led by first President Anna Radway, was an early proponent of the Cancer Aid & Research Program; the Department worked hard to help build the cancer aid fund that continues to help members today.

Minnesota's Charter was backdated to 1925, making them the first to be celebrating their centennial this year and it was the home of second-ever National President Sadie Kern. Their first President was Florence Lufkin. 🌸 NP



PREVIOUS PAGE: A news story from the early days of the organization as featured in *VFW Auxiliary Magazine's* predecessor and first official national publication of the Auxiliary, the *VFW Auxiliary Messenger*, in 1925.

ABOVE: Bessie Hankin (right), National President in 1929, models the first official uniform. She was Massachusetts' first Department President.



NEW

NEW! POPPY SEEDS This annual blooms late April thru June and can grow to 12" to 30" tall. Plant in full sun. Approx. 350 seeds per packet.
1250 \$3.00

PATRIOTIC LUGGAGE TAG Includes clear plastic sheet, address card, and strap. 4½ x 2½ x ¼".
1074 \$8.00

VFW
VFWSTORE.ORG



NAVY-CREAM TOTE Front zippered pocket with screened Auxiliary Emblem. Large zippered main compartment with top gusset. Removable interior storage pocket. Pen loop. 600-denier polyester. 26" shoulder straps. 20 x 15 x 7".
1029 \$20.95



NEW

NEW! POPPY COIN Brass, 2". Comes in a clear plastic envelope. **1089 \$11.00**



ROLLING TOTE Locking pull-up handle with in-line skate wheels. 600-denier polyester with screened VFW Auxiliary. Not for checked luggage. 13½ x 18 x 8". **\$51.95**
1134 Teal 1129 Black



NEW

NEW! AUXILIARY LIFE MEMBER COIN Auxiliary Emblem on one side. U.S. flag with Auxiliary slogan on other side. Ceramic. 1¾" diameter.
1947 \$6.00



ANGEL PIN 1½" with red, white and blue enamel fill. Clear center stone. Clutch back.
1777 \$3.00

WEEKLY CALENDAR 13-month, one-week at-a-glance format. For daily planning, appointments and daily records. Pages for addresses and phone numbers. 3⅝ x 6½".
1282 \$9.00



THANK YOU COIN VFW Auxiliary Emblem on one side, "Thank you for your service" on the reverse side. 1¼".
1925 \$3.25



CREAM SHAWL 70/30 polyester/viscose with VFW Auxiliary printed on one end. Fringe on both ends. 26 x 77".
1078 \$24.50