

JULY 2026

VFW Auxiliary

VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS AUXILIARY MAGAZINE

**CELEBRATING
AMERICA'S 250TH**

**INCOMING DEPARTMENT
PRESIDENTS**

**NATIONAL PRESIDENT'S
SPECIAL PROJECT**

**CONTINUING EDUCATION
SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS**

**NATIONAL
PROGRAMS
NEWS**





NATIONAL PROGRAM BOOK 2026-2027

Find the 2026-2027 *National Program Book* behind MALTA Member Resources! This document is filled with useful information about all of our National Programs, their Ambassadors and awards. It can also be a great recruiting tool.

Note: You do not have to print the entire book – you can choose to print **ONLY** the pages you need rather than the entire document.

DATES & DEADLINES

July

JULY 1	Start of the 2025-2026 Program Year
JULY 4	Independence Day: America's 250 th birthday
JULY 25	National Convention begins
JULY 31	Circle of Excellence – All installation reports received

August

AUGUST 7	National Purple Heart Day
AUGUST 31	Circle of Excellence – All Auxiliaries must be bonded

For more information on awards and deadlines, see the [2026-2027 National Program Book](#).

TABLE OF Contents

JULY 2026 • VOLUME 90 • ISSUE 6

UNWAVERING SUPPORT



FOR UNCOMMON HEROES®



7



12



13



15

Features

7 Celebrating America's Semiquincentennial

The United States turns 250 this year!

9 2026-2027 Department Presidents

Meet your incoming Department leaders.

12 National President Lois Callahan's Special Project

Find out how members helped non-traditional students get closer to realizing their career goals.

13 Incoming National President's Special Project

Donna K. Mills' joint special project will focus on repatriating lost service members home with honor.

14 Continuing Education Scholarship Winners

Read students' inspiring stories about their educational journeys.

15 National Programs: What's New

Read about changes to our National Programs for 2026-2027.

17 Art with Heart

Art created by one Life Member in Missouri greets everyone who passes through Kansas City International Airport.

In Every Issue

3 Get Digital

6 Reader's Voice

4 President's Message

22 HQ Memo

5 Editor's Letter

About the Cover

Honoring servicemen and servicewomen who gave their lives for American freedom, Auxiliary National President (1975-1976) Glenn Grossman and VFW Commander-in-Chief Thomas "Pete" Walker unveil the VFW/Auxiliary Torch of Freedom Monument on the grounds of the VFW's D.C. building as part of Bicentennial observances. The work, commissioned by sculptor Felix DeWeldon, honors all veterans of all wars, their spouses and children.

KEEPING PERSONAL DATA SAFE

Recently, we have observed a significant increase in information being posted on publicly accessible websites and social media platforms that contain personal data, including individuals' signatures. If members are not required to log in or sign in to access the content, it should be considered publicly accessible.

In light of this, we respectfully request that you refrain from posting screenshots or posting ANY official correspondence from VFW Auxiliary National Headquarters in its entirety on public platforms, including VFW Auxiliary websites and social media channels (such as Facebook, Instagram, etc.). If information must be shared, please extract only the relevant portions and place them into a new document, ensuring that all personal information is fully redacted. This includes, but is not limited to, signatures, phone numbers, email addresses and physical addresses.

The public distribution of unredacted documents, particularly those containing

signatures, may pose a security risk and may expose individuals to fraud or identity theft. This risk is comparable to sharing images of checks that display banking information.

Additionally, please do not publicly post the mailing addresses of VFW Auxiliary National Line Officers, Past National Presidents, Department Presidents or other Auxiliary Officers and members, particularly

those recovering from illness or surgery. Such information is intended for internal use only. Public dissemination could place these individuals at risk, especially if their homes are unattended during extended recovery periods.

We ask for your continued diligence in safeguarding the privacy and security of our members by ensuring that all personal information is omitted before sharing any materials publicly. Thank you for your cooperation and for your ongoing commitment to protecting the members and the integrity of our organization. ★ NP



get SOCIAL



Instagram
[@vfwauxiliaryhq](https://www.instagram.com/vfwauxiliaryhq)



LinkedIn
[VFW Auxiliary](https://www.linkedin.com/company/vfw-auxiliary)



Facebook
[vfwauxiliary](https://www.facebook.com/vfwauxiliary)



Pinterest
[vfwauxiliary](https://www.pinterest.com/vfwauxiliary)



YouTube
[VFW Auxiliary National Organization](https://www.youtube.com/VFW-Auxiliary-National-Organization)





“Our 2025-2026
VFW Auxiliary
Program Year has
been a season of
excitement and
achievement.”

Dear members —

This month, we celebrate 250 years of collective identity, of standing together, united in purpose and pursuit of freedom as we mark the United States' birthday on July 4. It's amazing to think that for almost half the time our great country has existed, our organization has been serving and supporting its veterans.

Our 2025-2026 VFW Auxiliary Program Year has been a season of excitement and achievement.

From the beginning of our time together, I have dreamed of more fully funding the VFW Auxiliary Continuing Education Scholarship. Auxiliaries, Districts, Departments, individuals and VFW members have embraced the project, generously donating from their whole hearts and deep pockets. We will reveal final totals during National Convention, so for now, I give each of you my sincere gratitude for helping to fund this life-changing project.

With our Stock the Store class project, VFW Commander-in-Chief Carol Whitmore and I could not have picked a more worthy endeavor than completing a vision which began with VFW Past Commander-in-Chief Duane Sarmiento and VFW Auxiliary Past National President Carla Martinez. Our Department Presidents and Commanders raised funds to see the store at the VFW National Home become a reality. Thank you all so very much.

The National Organization has proudly instituted 38 new Auxiliaries this year! We recognize and welcome all of our new Auxiliaries; find them listed in our National Convention Book that will be available to attendees of the 113th National Convention in Reno later this month.

I want to extend a special thanks to the organizers, committees, Departments and the mentors who will remain with these new members until they are comfortable to blaze their own paths to success.

The examples above are success stories that we collectively achieved. Additionally, while traveling across our great country and beyond its borders, I have witnessed successful and innovative special projects and programs. Thank you for what you have accomplished in your Auxiliaries, Districts, Departments and communities. Our members have excelled at advocating and caring for America's heroes and their families. You have been agents of change, and for that, I thank each of you.

Travel to each Department has been an exciting and joyful journey. I have been happy and grateful to see our country, from *Sea to Shining Sea*. You have taken me on visits to lakes and rivers, to mountains and grasslands, to big cities and quiet countrysides. It has been an honor getting to know so many of you and to interact with veterans in VA hospitals and retirement homes around the country. Thank you for all your kindness, friendship and hospitality.

To our amazing National Headquarters staff: I cannot begin to thank you for the unwavering and ever-present support. Your countless hours of work have not gone unnoticed. It has been my honor to collaborate with you, the National Line Officers and so many wonderful mentors, including our amazing Past National Presidents who are our ever-valuable and always-patient teachers. I also want to extend a heartfelt thank you to my amazing class of Department Presidents, National Ambassadors and Conference Coaches.

Thank you for always being *The Lighthouse in Someone's Storm*.

LOIS CALLAHAN
National President



*The United States
is turning 250,
which means we're
just days away
from the most
significant patriotic
anniversary of
our lives.*

Dear members —

We are headed to National Convention later this month, so please keep an eye out for the latest news and updates on our National website, vfwauxiliary.org, and in our National E-Newsletter, including a special edition that will capture VFW Auxiliary National President Lois Callahan's Program Year.

We look forward to shining the spotlight on our members who have worked hard this year to support our mission. We also have business to attend to, training and new National Ambassadors who will share their focus for their respective Programs in the 2026-2027 year. Visit page 15 to read about some exciting changes.

As we all know, this is a BIG birthday our country will celebrate this year! The United States is turning 250, which means we're just days away from the most significant patriotic anniversary of our lives. Some of you will clearly recall how you and your Auxiliaries celebrated our country's bicentennial back in 1976. We want to see how you're celebrating America this summer. Are you throwing her a birthday party? Are you getting involved in the America250 initiative? Send us pictures and caption information; we'd love to see how you are commemorating this milestone. Find a story about America's semiquincentennial on page 7.

In this magazine, we have news about how members helped grow our Continuing Education Scholarship escrow fund by supporting Callahan's special project on page 12. Look to page 13 to read about incoming National President Donna K. Mills' special project with incoming VFW Commander-in-Chief Cory L. Geisler called Operation Bring them Home. It will focus on supporting the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency's (DPAA's) tireless efforts to bring peace to families by repatriating loved ones lost in battle and returning them home with honor.

It is always great to see members in person at Convention, and beyond that, we like hearing from you, too, about the National magazine. Send any feedback about this or past issues to info@vfwauxiliary.org for our Reader's Voice section.

What you send us could be featured in one or multiple National communications.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Amanda'.

AMANDA COOK
Editor-In-Chief

VOLUME 90 NUMBER 6

Editor-In-Chief
Amanda Cook

Contributing Writers
Nicole Panteleakos &
Kris Baker

**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
Members may 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.

The following comments were among many kind words and fond memories shared on social media after National posted about the passing of Past National President Peggy Haake.

She was my National President and she was amazing! She always had a great big smile. I can't believe that she is gone. She will truly be missed by all who knew her. Prayers to the family.

MARY RYSER | AUXILIARY 3699 | INDIO, CALIF.

I knew Peggy and Richard for many years long before she was the National President. As National Rep. I attended the Department of Hawaii meetings and helped with many luau fundraisers in Maui and never missed a hospitality room of Hawaii's during many National Conventions. We had many lunches together with great conversations about Alaska and Hawaii. I will miss my friend and fellow mentor. You provided heartfelt advice and care for all. You will be missed.

AUXILIARY 10041 | BETHEL, ALASKA

She was a caring, loving soul to many. Her star will shine bright always, as her smile. R.I.P., sweet Peggy.

ANNA MCKEEHAN | AUXILIARY 5154 | MADISONVILLE, TENN.

To Peggy's family, thank you for sharing such a wonderful ray of SUNSHINE with all of us, whether we were Department Presidents during her year or not, she was always so loving, gracious and there to help any one of us who needed ANYTHING. She sure blessed my life along with others. GOD BLESS and R.I.P., Peggy.

JACKI ULREY - POLAND | AUXILIARY 1125 | GLEN DIVE, MONT.

Peggy, I will always be grateful for your friendship, guidance and most importantly your loving support... I'm grateful to have been able to call you a friend and chosen family.

LA NESA WALLACE | AUXILIARY 2875 | HONOLULU, HAWAII

She was a very special lady. She had a light that shined bright wherever she was. A beautiful soul. My prayers and deepest condolences are with her family, friends and all her many Auxiliary sisters and brothers.

SHEILA FORTNER | AUXILIARY 4862 | UNION CITY, TENN.



Celebrating AMERICA'S

QUARTER MILLENNIAL BIRTHDAY



On July 4th, 1776, as America's Founding Fathers were signing the Declaration of Independence in the Philadelphia State House, young continental militia men gathered around New York preparing for an imminent

British invasion. On July 4, 1876, Cavalry soldiers were being deployed in engagements with indigenous peoples across America's frontier. On July 4th, 1976 America had withdrawn from Vietnam the previous year and soldiers were performing ceremonial duties and training exercises for the Bicentennial, even as the Cold War still loomed. This year on the United States' birthday, the American military will still be feeling the effects of recent conflicts with Iran.

American soldiers have been at the forefront of history for as long as we have been a nation. During this time of celebration, we want to remember all those who fought to keep the ideals of this nation alive through the last 250 years.

The VFW Auxiliary would like to officially send congratulations to all Americans as we come together to celebrate the semiquincentennial of the founding of the United States of America this 4th of July.

This is the biggest patriotic anniversary in many of our lives, and we want to be sure to give it the recognition it deserves. VFW Posts and their Auxiliaries are actively celebrating the United States' 250th anniversary leading up to July 4, 2026, by honoring the nation's 250-year history and its military branches. Activities include promoting the flying of the American Flag, painting

patriotic rocks and hosting Independence Day parties. The VFW is selling themed apparel through the VFW Store to mark this milestone.

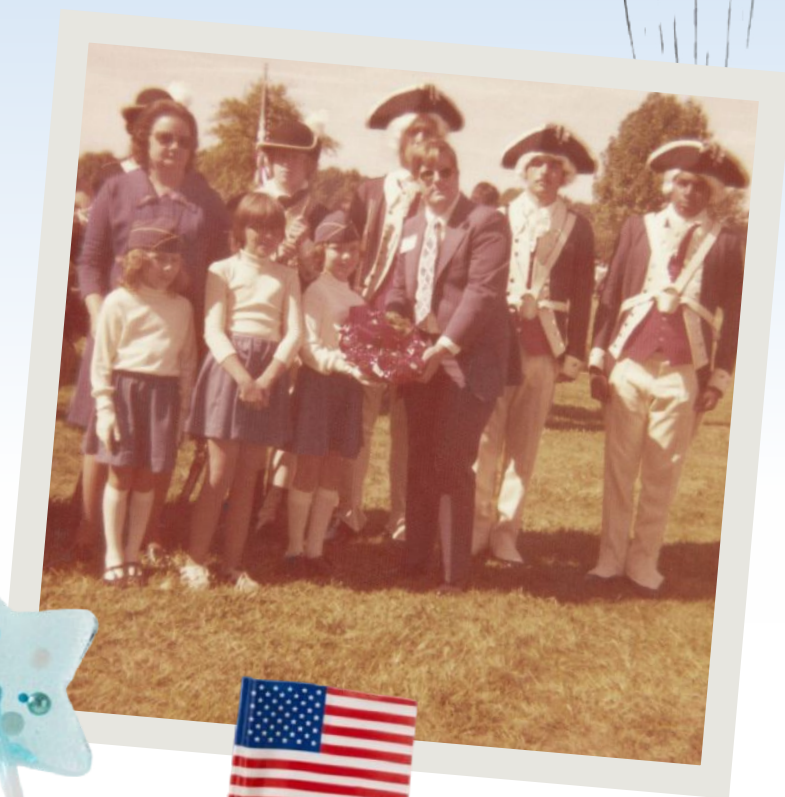
We also recognize the larger America250 initiative. This official, nonpartisan commemoration was created by Congress in 2016 and is encouraging citizens to share their patriotism. The aim is to engage all 350 million Americans through community service, educational and cultural events starting in 2025 and continuing through 2026.

AMERICA250 INCLUDES:

- **America Gives (Service):** Aiming for 2026 to be the largest volunteer year in U.S. history, this initiative urges Americans to pledge to "Give 4th" by volunteering and donating to charity.
- **Our American Story (History):** A nationwide effort to collect, share and archive stories from Americans, with select stories preserved at the Library of Congress.
- **America's Field Trip (Education):** A contest inviting students to express what America means to them, supported by educational toolkits and resources.
- **Civic Engagement:** Focused on "Know America. Love America.," the initiative involves partnerships with more than 50 organizations to host events, including a college lecture series on fundamental liberties.

Across the country, in big cities and small towns, Auxiliary members are organizing commemorative events that celebrate America's history and honor the men and women who defended it. Please send in your pictures and stories from all the ways your Auxiliary will be celebrating.

We can't wait to see all the ways you celebrate and join with National HQ to say "Happy birthday, America." ★ KB



RIGHT: Junior Girls present a "Buddy"® Poppy wreath in memory of war dead – part of Auxiliary 2839, Indianapolis, Indiana's Bicentennial Program. **FROM LEFT, FRONT ROW:** Margaret Sheridan, Past Junior Girls President Tammy Hughes, Junior Girls President Kathy Sheridan, Mr. Kellar, Director, Washington Park Memorial Cemetery. **BACK ROW:** Auxiliary President Rosemary Lynch and Continental Color Guard.

PREVIOUS PAGE: Inspired by the Spirit of '76, Manny Simmons, then the oldest member of Auxiliary 5064, McMinnville, Tennessee, has depicted the evolution of our American Flag with yarn, dye and crochet hooks. Her patriotic project, begun in January, 1975, includes Bicentennial and historical Flags – 16 in all. Before crocheting her Flags, Mrs. Simmons dyed the yarn so all reds and blues are the same shade. She has exhibited the Flags in honor of our country's 200th anniversary. Manny's husband and son have served in the Armed Forces.





2026-2027 D E

PREST



ALABAMA

Bunny Murray
Auxiliary 4850
Jasper



COLORADO

Sherri Wright
Auxiliary 5231
Cortez



HAWAII

Jacqueline Thomas
Auxiliary 3850
Wailuku



ALASKA

Tammy Bailey
Auxiliary 9785
Eagle River



CONNECTICUT

Lynn Peet
Auxiliary 1672
New Milford



IDAHO

Roberta Binion
Auxiliary 5423
Mountain Home



ARIZONA

Melissa Martin
Auxiliary 7968
Apache Junction



DELAWARE

Dale Weese
Auxiliary 7234
Ocean View



ILLINOIS

Danielle Krull
Auxiliary 450
Alsip



ARKANSAS

Rhon Mohr
Auxiliary 2330
Searcy



FLORIDA

Kathy Wright
Auxiliary 7909
Jacksonville



INDIANA

Carolyn Patch
Auxiliary 1587
Indianapolis



CALIFORNIA

Angela Prill
Auxiliary 2333
Fairfield-Suisun



GEORGIA

Dawn Lemay
Auxiliary 5897
Lavonia



IOWA

Katherine Mack
Auxiliary 9128
Bettendorf

PARTMENT IDENTS



KANSAS

Kim Butcher
Auxiliary 2715
McPherson



KENTUCKY

Ronald Kohrs
Auxiliary 3186
Southgate



LOUISIANA

Sonja Lambert
Auxiliary 3619
De Ridder



MAINE

Lisa Michaud
Auxiliary 9389
Caribou



MARYLAND

Nancy Shenk
Auxiliary 6027
North East



MASSACHUSETTS

Patricia Wilbur
Auxiliary 6643
Freetown



MICHIGAN

Jason Manke
Auxiliary 5319
Athens



MINNESOTA

Jean Keogh
Auxiliary 5340
Montgomery



MISSISSIPPI

Donna Marquis
Auxiliary 4100
Water Valley



MISSOURI

Anita Crowell
Auxiliary 3976
Sugar Creek



MONTANA

Audrey Mueller
Auxiliary 6786
Eureka



NEBRASKA

Bonnie Gerlt
Auxiliary 2704
Omaha



NEVADA

Douglas (Scott) West
Auxiliary 10054
Pahrump



NEW HAMPSHIRE

Nathaniel Nicholas Jr.
Auxiliary 8393
Milton



NEW JERSEY

Camilla Albano
Auxiliary 7927
Blackwood



2026-2027 DEPARTMENT PRESIDENTS



NEW MEXICO
Michelle Dennisson
Auxiliary 3370
Estancia Valley



NEW YORK
Belinda Cole
Auxiliary 2475
Glens Falls



NORTH CAROLINA
Lin Moore
Auxiliary 5352
Kernersville



NORTH DAKOTA
Sheila Reed
Auxiliary 7564
West Fargo



OHIO
Kathy Correll
Auxiliary 5713
Celina



OKLAHOMA
Frank Matek
Auxiliary 1719
Chandler



OREGON
Terri Steller
Auxiliary 4108
Redmond



PENNSYLVANIA
Cecelia Cook
Auxiliary 2754
West View



RHODE ISLAND
Samantha Fricke
Auxiliary 8955
Westerly



SOUTH CAROLINA
Barbara Shuler
Auxiliary 2779
Orangeburg



SOUTH DAKOTA
Karen Sharp
Auxiliary 2038
Pierre



TENNESSEE
Teresa Johnson
Auxiliary 5066
Collierville



TEXAS
Shawn Terry
Auxiliary 10429
Benbrook



UTAH
Michelle Russo
Auxiliary 3586
Salt Lake City



VERMONT
Sally Choquette
Auxiliary 792
Montpelier



VIRGINIA
Kathy Voss
Auxiliary 1841
Troutville



WASHINGTON
Tracie Tomsen
Auxiliary 10018
Tacoma



WEST VIRGINIA
Linda Smith
Auxiliary 1064
Huntington



WISCONSIN
Charlene Cobb
Auxiliary 1621
Janesville



WYOMING
Morgan Pangus
Auxiliary 9439
Casper

NATIONAL PRESIDENT'S SPECIAL PROJECT HELPS MEMBERS AND THEIR FAMILIES REALIZE CAREER GOALS



VFW Auxiliary National President Lois Callhan, herself a nontraditional student before she went on to a successful 26-year career as a pediatric occupational therapist, had a dream of helping our members and their families make their dreams of furthering their studies and careers come true.

This is why she selected the Auxiliary's Continuing Education Scholarship as her special project, and thanks to members' generosity, future Continuing Education winners' funds will take them further toward their goals. Gifts to the National President's special project this Program Year (at press time in May) had totaled more than \$100,000. We expect that this will allow an additional \$1,000 to be added to each of the four Conference scholarships, increasing each scholarship to \$2,250.

"Departments, Districts Auxiliaries, individuals and VFW members have embraced the project, generously donating from their whole hearts and deep pockets," Callahan said. "We will reveal final totals during National Convention, so for now, I give each of you my sincere gratitude for helping to fund this life-changing project."

The awards, four total/one per Conference, go to members, their spouse or immediate family member to

fund post-high school education for adults 21 and older wishing to advance their careers, complete training or finish their degree.

By using the scholarship for tuition, many past winners have therefore been free to spend other funds on related expenses like additional materials, transportation, housing and/or child care during classes. In 2024, one member used it to help in her journey to become a physician, while in 2023 the widow of a combat veteran used the money to return to school after raising children. In 2022, three of the four winners were Life Members of the Auxiliary, and in 2021, three of the four winners were completing their education in nursing.

"I have a great deal of empathy and respect for continuing students," Callhan said. "Going to school while working and paying bills or taking care of family is no easy task. Obtaining a degree and establishing a career absolutely changed the trajectory of my life and I would love to make that kind of positive impact in the lives of our members and their families."

Learn more about this scholarship [here](#). Read about 2025-2026 Continuing Education Scholarship winners on page 14. ★ AC



2026-2027

National President's Special Joint Project

WITH VFW COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

OPERATION BRING THEM HOME



From the depths of the Adriatic Sea to a remote mountaintop in the Houaphanh Province of Laos, teams of scientists, historians and military personnel that comprise the Defense

POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) work to fulfill their global mission of locating missing military personnel, repatriating them with honor and returning lost loved ones to their families.

They are archeologists, anthropologists, odontologists, researchers and soldiers who come together on missions all over the world to investigate leads, interview witnesses and collect oral histories from international government and military officials, conduct reconnaissance and survey sites for safety and logistics, all with the purpose of providing the fullest possible accounting of lost personnel.

BRINGING THEM HOME WITH HONOR

DPAA works to repatriate U.S. service members who are or were Prisoners of War or Missing in Action from past conflicts.

This is also the 2026-2027 joint special project of incoming VFW Auxiliary National President Donna K. Mills and incoming VFW National Commander-in-Chief Cory L. Geisler. Helping DPAA means helping families find peace and helps fulfill our nation's promise.

"I believe in the mission and promise of the United States military and what supporting the DPAA allows in support of that mission that no service member who sacrificed for their country will be left behind," Mills said. "This project will aid in providing closure for families, fulfill a military ethos and honor the history of the nation.

It also provides opportunities for the United States to develop more intrinsic DNA testing which could lead to medical breakthroughs as well as help solve cases that have gone cold. I encourage any family member of a missing service member to please provide DNA samples to the Armed Forces Medical Examiner or the American Veterans Archaeological Recovery (AVAR) organization which assists DPAA with fieldwork."

The joint special project is reportable under the Veterans & Family Support Program. Also reportable and integral to the DPAA's efforts is what is called a Family Resource Sample (FRS) from surviving family members. DNA is key to identifying loved ones. It is technology that did not exist when these troops were lost.

To support Operation Bring them Home, select the "Make a Gift" tab, then National President's 2026-2027 Special Project in MALTA. Or mail a check to National Headquarters earmarked National President's/ Commander-in-Chief's 2026-2027 Special Project. Members may also mail Operation Bring them Home gifts to the VFW Foundation.

ACCOUNTING FOR OUR MISSING

As it stands today, there are more than 72,000 missing from World War II, more than 7,500 from the Korean War, 126 missing from the Cold War and more than 1,500 missing from the Vietnam War. The DPAA estimates almost 39,000 are recoverable, with the others being mostly deep at sea losses. ★ AC

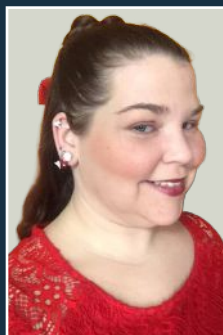
To learn more about DPAA, [visit www.dpaa.mil](http://www.dpaa.mil).



LEFT AND ABOVE: Teams of scientists and military personnel work across the globe to recover and repatriate missing troops.

Congratulations

2026 CONTINUING EDUCATION SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS! \$1,250 AWARD



BIG 10 CONFERENCE

**KRYSTAL
CLEMENS**
LIFE MEMBER,
AUXILIARY 3538
OHIO

Clemens is working toward a bachelor's degree in elementary education and special education, but nine years ago, financial hardship forced her to step away from school and put her dreams of becoming a teacher on hold. She is now back in college, working as a paraprofessional and part-time day care teacher while maintaining a GPA of 3.96. Her dream is to create a classroom where every child feels safe, valued and capable of success. This scholarship will help ease the stress caused by continuing financial strain.

"Growing up surrounded by educators in my family, I saw firsthand how one caring teacher could shape a child's confidence and direction. That influence stayed with me and strengthened my desire to make a meaningful, lasting difference in the lives of children, especially those with unique learning needs... Each day in the classroom I see the joy, curiosity and resilience in my students' eyes. Those moments remind me why I returned and why I refuse to give up."



EASTERN CONFERENCE

**SARAH
PHIPPIN**
LIFE MEMBER,
AUXILIARY 4961
DELAWARE

Phippin has wanted to be in the medical field for as long as she can remember. Early in her college journey, she was diagnosed with a heart condition, Wolf-Parkinsons White Syndrome, which led her to drop out of school. But as she healed, she found purpose again and returned. She is now in her second semester of nursing school, having completed all the prerequisites. The part-time bartender at her local VFW is seeking a second job, but in the meantime this scholarship will help her worry less about funding her education.

"I couldn't be more determined to reach the finish line. Receiving this scholarship (will) help me be able to pay for this semester and help me be able to move forward into the next semester to continue working towards my goal. It would give me the opportunity to focus more on my studies rather than working a second job and potentially falling behind."



SOUTHERN CONFERENCE

**KAYLEA
DAIGLE**
LIFE MEMBER,
AUXILIARY 2775
TEXAS

Daigle is seeking a Bachelor of Science in management, accounting and analysis with the hope of becoming an accountant who specifically helps veterans and small business owners navigate their finances and file their taxes with confidence. Financial struggles have made education a challenge, as Daigle lives with her retired single mother and a teenage brother who recently totaled her vehicle, forcing her to reallocate money set aside for school to fixing the car. This scholarship will help cover that gap so she can pay tuition and buy books without relying on student loans.

"I have seen firsthand how overwhelming financial systems can be, particularly for veterans transitioning to civilian life and for small business owners trying to remain compliant while staying financially stable. I am committed to using my education to make these processes more accessible and less intimidating... My long-term goal is to open my own accounting office that prioritizes employing veterans and giving back to the community that has supported me."



WESTERN CONFERENCE

**CANDACE
STEELE**
DAUGHTER OF LIFE
MEMBER OF
AUXILIARY 2951
SANTE FE, NEW MEXICO

Steele is a registered nurse working with experience in maternal and acute care pursuing her Master of Science in Nursing with the goal of being a Family Nurse Practitioner. Her husband is a special education teacher and they are currently expecting their first child. This scholarship will help offset the cost of tuition, textbooks and/or clinical-related expenses.

"Reducing financial strain would allow me to focus more fully on my academic and clinical training and minimize reliance on student loans during this important stage of our lives. As a future family nurse practitioner, I am committed to providing evidence-based care, advocating for vulnerable and underserved populations and supporting patients through all stages of life. Receiving this scholarship would not only help me achieve my professional goals, but also allow me to continue serving my community with compassion, integrity and dedication to lifelong learning."

2026-2027

NATIONAL



Change can be hard. However, change can also provide new opportunities and a chance for growth. The VFW Auxiliary is a living organization, and we embrace these chances to develop and bring in new members.

The new Program Year is here and it's time to embrace the new. Your National Line Officers have some new ideas on ways to take the Auxiliary forward, and we are ready to roll these out. We want to take this space to highlight

some of the new happenings and explain what this means for our members and veterans.

- We are saying goodbye to one of our Programs as the Auxiliary Outreach Program is ending. While the Program was created with strong intentions, many Auxiliaries found it difficult to execute. "Although the Auxiliary Outreach Program is coming to a close, our mission of service is far from over," said 2025-2026 National Auxiliary Outreach Ambassador Sara Manke.

PROGRAMS NEWS

“The partnerships you have built and the lives you have touched will continue to shape our communities for years to come. I encourage you to keep sharing your stories, supporting one another and finding new ways to serve – because outreach is not a Program, it is who we are.” As the last Auxiliary Outreach Ambassador, Manke wants to thank all the volunteers for their work and for representing the organization in the right way. Reaching out in your community is still encouraged, as are making partnerships with other service groups, and this can be done under the purview of the other Programs.

- This year the Auxiliary will still have 11 Programs. “Buddy”® Poppy and VFW National Home will now be two separate Programs. Each Program will have their own Ambassador with their own unique take on how these Programs will function independently. Each will also have their own distinct Program awards. You will be able to learn more about these and all the Programs at National Convention with a Programs Seminar scheduled for Sunday, July 26 at 1 p.m.
- Say bye-bye to blogs. The National Ambassadors blogs are being retired. In their place we are adding a fifth promotion from the Ambassadors that will be sent out via email. Each Ambassador will also provide one write-up for the National E-newsletter, scheduled throughout the year, to address news and upcoming events. We believe these communications will reach a greater audience and be of timely use for members.
- On February 28 the 13th and final Celebrating America’s Freedom Event was held at the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington D.C. CAFE has been held at sites including the Flight 93 memorial, the Kennedy Space Center, the Punchbowl in Hawaii, Fort McHenry and Mount Rushmore.

- Alert: It cannot be repeated too often; deadlines have changed for the VFW Auxiliary National Illustrating America Art Contest that is in the Youth Activities Program. Please add these dates to all your Auxiliary calendars. The new dates are:

- **DECEMBER 15** – Illustrating America student entries due to participating/sponsoring VFW Auxiliary for judging.
- **JANUARY 2027** – Optional: First-place winner in each grade division from each participating sponsoring VFW Auxiliary are due to the VFW Auxiliary District for judging.
- **JANUARY 15** - Illustrating America first-place winner in each grade division from each participating /sponsoring VFW Auxiliary or optional VFW Auxiliary District are due to the VFW Auxiliary Department for judging.
- **JANUARY 31** – Illustrating America first-place winner in each grade division from each VFW Auxiliary Department must be received at VFW Auxiliary National Headquarters for judging.

- If you are reading this article, know that new Scholarships brochures are in the works. You can order the latest brochures from National Headquarters, find them behind MALTA Member Resources or on the National website. We’ll make an announcement once they’re ready.
- Speaking of the National website, another big development is the redesigned National website. We hope you will check it out!

Now, armed with this new intel, we hope you are ready to tackle the new year and our mission of *Serving America’s Heroes*. Together, we can make this the best year yet.

✳ KB

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

A HEALING HEART

Kasey Harvey



Surrounded by the hustle of foot traffic and brigades of rolling suitcases just beyond the Transportation Security Administration at Kansas City

International Airport – families with

children in tow, the kids bouncing off to their gates and the promise of a summer vacation, the business travelers with a more determined look and others reuniting with loved ones returning home – is “A Warm Welcome” by Auxiliary 5675 Life Member Kasey Harvey of Odessa, Missouri. It stops everyone in their tracks.

One young visitor raced to the nearly six-foot-tall artwork that is painted with some of the things the artist loves most about Kansas City, like Union Station, Gates Barbecue and the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. The rainbow lights on the soles of the girl's tennis shoes blinked rapidly, signaling her approach.

“Mommy, mommy, mommy! Looook, it’s a purple heart!” she exclaimed with delight while tugging her mother’s arm, which became a horizontal tether to the kindergartner.

Others stop for selfies with the giant heart carefully positioned behind them for the perfect shot. Some of them could even be “heart hunters” who make it their mission to visit each of the nearly 150 regional heart sculptures, each with its own unique design and artist.

A REGION UNITED THROUGH ART

Parade of Hearts is more than art on display — it’s a symbol of Kansas City’s unity.

Each sculpture represents a unique story, but together they showcase the strength, compassion and creativity that define our community.

Launched in 2021, Parade of Hearts set out to unite Kansas City through art. Local leaders and artists transformed the city into an open-air gallery of 100-plus handcrafted heart sculptures. It celebrates Kansas City’s creativity, culture and community spirit. Each heart sculpture, approximately six feet tall, is uniquely designed by local artists—known as “Heartists”—to reflect diverse stories and themes of hope and unity. The project began to support local industries and has since grown into a

metro-wide cultural event that also raises funds for nonprofits, arts, health, education and minority-owned businesses.

Parade of Hearts is a regionwide public art experience that connects more than 60 cities, multiple counties, and two states across the Heartland. The event celebrates creativity, community, and philanthropy, while encouraging residents and visitors to explore Kansas City’s neighborhoods and landmarks. — [Parade of Hearts.](#)



CULTIVATING COMMUNITY ONE HEART AT A TIME

Weston Owen’s story on Kansas City’s website describes the project as “an integral component of the community as a whole. The he(art) installations (can be) spotted in parks, next to local businesses and alongside busy streets throughout the region. And while the amount of talent and creativity in Kansas City is remarkable, what’s even more inspiring is our ability to band together, as one community, around a common cause. Parade of Hearts...has evolved into a regional movement that encourages exploration, tourism, and community pride while raising funds for nonprofit organizations through the eventual auction of each sculpture.”

The Kansas City heart as a symbol of this heartland of America town goes back more than a century – way before the familiar K.C. heart T-shirts and pins

emerged. Its history is connected to early 20th century rail workers and later, the Kansas City Monarchs Negro Leagues baseball team.

KASEY’S HEART

Harvey’s heart is not only an impressive creative outlet, but also a journey.

“I started a therapy journey last year to deal with a lot of my traumas,” she said. “One outlet I found for that was my art but in that I also found out that I was struggling with imposter syndrome, doubting my abilities because I was self-taught and didn’t have a lot of past experience; my trauma was

PREVIOUS PAGE: Missouri Life Member Kasey Harvey is the "heartist" who created a Parade of Hearts sculpture on display at Kansas City International Airport. **THIS PAGE:** Travelers stop for a selfie with Harvey's heart, not knowing the artist is just beyond their frame.

constantly telling me that I wasn't good enough. I came across the ad on Facebook calling for artists for the Parade of Hearts and it piqued my interest. I decided to apply on a whim, really, just to see if I would be good enough to be accepted."

She definitely was. And now her heart greets thousands of visitors.

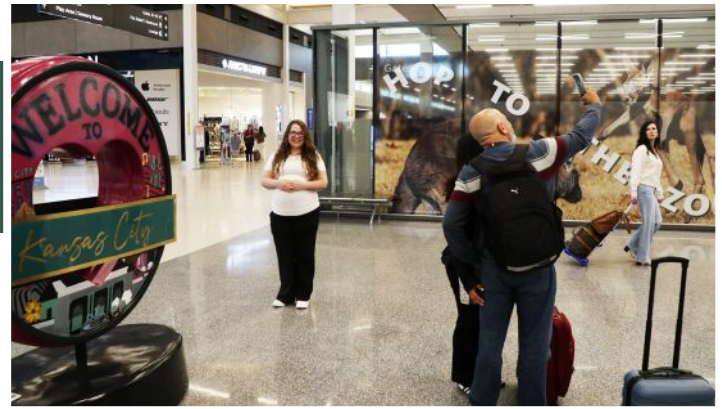
"To find out my heart was going to be placed at the airport was an incredible honor," Harvey said. "So many people from around the world are going to see my heart as they come through Kansas City, especially with the World Cup coming to town. It was also an honor for my heart to be presented in honor of (Riverside, Missouri) Mayor Kathy Rose. I have already had the privilege of watching people come up and admire my work and take photos with it; I have also had so many people send me photos of them in front of the heart and I love seeing that."

Harvey, who "grew up going to the VFW," also is connected to the organization through her role as Post 5675 Manager. She joined the Auxiliary under her grandfather's eligibility – he served in Korea – and her husband is a Marines Corps veteran.

Fellow Life Member of Auxiliary 5675 and outgoing National Legislative Ambassador Amy Jo Lett has known Harvey her whole life and said she can't think of anyone more deserving of being a part of Parade of Hearts. "Kasey wears many hats at our Post," Lett said. "She manages rentals, the kitchen, VFW events, employees and countless behind-the-scenes details that keep things running smoothly. We have worked on many projects together over the years, and she has always been a true go-getter. I, for one, love her energy! Kasey is one of those people who sees something that needs done and makes it happen. Her creativity, dedication, and passion show in everything she does."

Harvey was drawn to Parade of Hearts as an opportunity to hone her talent and to be a part of a project that gives back to the community.

"I have always been a creative person," she said. "I have enjoyed many different crafts over the years, always exploring and trying to figure out where my passions were. My passion really started to grow a few years ago when I started to dabble in graphic design. I really found a love for it and decided to teach myself. Over the course of a couple years, I continued to learn as much as I could until I felt I



was good enough to start taking on a few projects and then those projects turned into more projects and I found it was really something I enjoyed doing. As I continued graphic design, I wanted to find a way to bring that same passion into something more physical and decided to try my hand at painting."

The great news of being selected to be a "Heartist" coincided with even more wonderful news.

"I am just very proud and honored about the small role that I played in this year's Parade of Hearts," she said. "It is such an amazing project and being a part of it exceeded my expectations. I also found out I was pregnant shortly after picking up the heart to be painted. My husband and I had been trying for a long time, so to receive that news was an amazing blessing. It made the project more challenging being pregnant and trying to paint such a big piece, but in the end I got it done and I am happy with the way it all turned out (and) proving to myself that I am good enough and I can actually call myself an artist."

ENCOURAGING BELONGING

Northland Mayor Rose, to whom "A Warm Welcome" was dedicated, spoke at the unveiling of the piece on a particularly stormy April morning.

To have an art installation dedicated in my name, in a national airport that welcomes millions of travelers from around the world each year, is truly humbling," she said. "This placement...represents the spirit of our city, our culture of hospitality and our commitment to public art as a unifying force. It speaks of the continued momentum of our community on the global stage and the many people who make that progress possible."

She went on to add, "It fosters belonging, strengthens community and inspires collaboration. It turns everyday moments into opportunities and leaves a lasting impression on everyone it touches. It ensures that every person who passes through—whether for a moment or a lifetime—feels a sense of welcome and possibility." ♦ AC

Note: Even though Harvey's artwork is behind airport security, you can visit it, even if you aren't flying anywhere. Here's how to get a [guest pass](#).

MY VETERAN

William W. Durkee Jr.

THE WAY HOME

One year ago, just after National Convention in Ohio came to a close, VFW Auxiliary 2394 Life Member Kelly Durkee-Erwin was headed back to Massachusetts when she received some important news: her father, Vietnam veteran William W. Durkee Jr., was coming home from the hospital.

There was just one issue. With physical struggles caused by the stroke he had the day before his daughter left home, he wouldn't be able to access his house via the stairs. He needed a wheelchair ramp.

"I was at the airport (so) I put out a desperate Facebook post asking for help," says Durkee-Erwin. "Before I could (board) my flight home, I received a (message) from Erika Westbrook of the Department of Rhode Island. She was at a resource event with Jim Collins, founder of New Englanders Helping Our Veterans. Jim said, 'Give me your number, you're getting a ramp.'"

Westbrook describes the moment as "like coincidence, but fated." It was serendipitous that she happened to be standing next to Collins when she saw the Facebook post and knew that his nonprofit had helped veterans in similar situations in the past. She asked, "Have you got an extra ramp in your equipment barn than you can donate? She's trying to get her dad home." Collins replied, "Absolutely."

FATHER & DAUGHTER

Durkee-Erwin, who is currently Auxiliary Senior Vice-President, has been a member of the organization since 2004, having joined under the eligibility of her father, a member of VFW Post 2152 who served in the U.S. Army and spent time stationed

in Korea. During National Convention in Columbus, Ohio, Durkee-Erwin was officially inducted into the Circle of Excellence, but while celebrating the end of her year as Department President, her beloved father was never far from her mind.

Described as a man who "lit up the room... and could tell a heck of a story," William "Duke" Durkee dedicated his life to service, from the ROTC in his youth through his retirement from the City of Waltham Massachusetts Community Preservation Committee at age 80. He was the first in his family to attend college, earning his MBA from Boston College in 1970. In addition to the VFW and American Legion, he volunteered with Boy Scouts of America

and served as Waltham City Councilor. He and his wife of 61 years, Mary Anne, raised four children. An active man who climbed Mount Washington in his mid-70s, Durkee was eventually slowed down not only by the stroke, but by complications from Alzheimer's. By this time last summer, he was no longer able to walk even with his cane, and being transported by family members carrying him up and down the stairs in and out of his home was not only potentially dangerous, it terrified him.

"I was in tears," Durkee-Erwin remembers, the emotion still palpable in her voice so many months later. "It was horrible because I was away; I didn't know what to do."





WITHIN ONE WEEK

Durkee-Erwin was asked to provide photos of where the ramp would go and her father's DD-214 to New Englanders Helping Our Veterans, which she was able to do right away as she had it saved to her phone. Within one week a ramp was installed on the side of her parents' house.

"I asked, 'How much do we owe you?'" she recalls. "They said 'Oh no, we put it in, we maintain it and when you don't need it we come take it back, inspect it and reinstall it at the next person's house.'"

According to their website, "New Englanders Helping Our Veterans (NEHOV) was founded a decade ago by Collins to honor his best friend who had served in Vietnam and returned with PTS(D)." Collins' friend passed from suicide, a tragedy that inspired Collins to devote himself to helping fellow veterans "in any way he could." The group's focus is on unmet needs, from financial assistance to medical supplies and, of course, wheelchair ramps.

"We're basically a little nonprofit that tries to help veterans," Collins explains. "I started about 10 years ago when I retired." He expected it to be a commitment of a couple of days a week, but "now it's 24/7." He doesn't mind, though. He enjoys the work. If a person is a veteran, Collins and NEHOV do what they can to help make their life a little better with help from fellow do-gooders in his community, including a friend who owns a medical supply store. They also accept donations of equipment like motorized scooters and furniture that they can then get to a veteran in need. Regarding Durkee-Erwin and her dad, Collins said simply, "We just made it happen."

A HEARTFELT THANK YOU

As a VFW Auxiliary member, Durkee-Erwin is used to helping veterans and their families: that's par for the course. What she is not used to is being the recipient of that Veterans & Family Support style assistance. "We hear these stories, we know these people, but I never had to (put out a request) for myself or a family member who needed it immediately before. I've never had to ask for help." She is not only grateful help from NEHOV

existed when she needed it, but she was especially moved by Westbrook's quick work to coordinate, as Westbrook had never met Durkee-Erwin's father, and the two don't even belong to the same Department.

"She didn't have to worry about veterans in Massachusetts," says Durkee-Erwin. "There is enough need for the veterans in Rhode Island. (But) Erika heard my call, found a guy and made it happen." That spirit of interdepartmental camaraderie, coupled with one nonprofit (New Englanders Helping Our Veterans) jumping in to assist members of another (the VFW and VFW Auxiliary) has forever touched Durkee-Erwin.

"My heart is so full from the kindness," she says. "It was just amazing."

Last October, Durkee-Erwin's father was placed in hospice care. On January 4, 2026, about two weeks shy of his 86th birthday, William "Duke" Durkee passed away, surrounded by family. Thanks in part to that wheelchair ramp, the storyteller, Army veteran and grandfather of five was able to remain in his home until the very end.

Durkee-Erwin will not soon forget NEHOV, Jim Collins, Erika Westbrook and the assistance her family received, but at the same time, she recognizes that that's just what we do as members of veterans service organizations, not for awards or distinctions, but because it feels good to serve those who served.

"Thank you to all of volunteers who silently help every day with no expectation of a thank you," she says. "We see you, and love that you represent the best of the VFW Auxiliary." ♦ NP



Massachusetts Life Member of Auxiliary 2394 Kelly Durkee-Erwin presents Erika Westbrook, Life Member of Auxiliary 916 in Rhode Island, with a Good Job Award for her help in coming to the aid of her senior veteran father whose home needed modifications for accessibility.



2026 NATIONAL CONVENTION SCHEDULE

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

All meetings are held in the convention center unless otherwise noted. **Times for various functions are subject to change.** Meeting rooms will be posted closer to meeting dates and are subject to change. Check the National website for updates as we get closer to Convention.

FRI, JULY 24

10:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m. Early packet pickup at the Eldorado Resort · Casino

SAT, JULY 25

8:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m. Exhibit Hall Open/Registration

10:00-11:30 a.m. Conference Meetings

Noon-1:30 p.m. 45-Plus Club Luncheon
(Reservations required)

5:00-6:00 p.m. Circle of Excellence Ceremony

SUN, JULY 26

8:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m. Exhibit Hall Open/Registration

9:00-10:00 a.m. Joint Memorial Service

10:45-11:30 a.m. National District Council Member Training

11:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Past Councilors' Club Luncheon

1:00-4:30 p.m. Programs Seminar & Training, AMBA Benefits Presentation

6:00-10:00 p.m. VFW Awards Banquet, Reno Ballroom, Silver Legacy Resort · Casino

MON, JULY 27

8:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m. Exhibit Hall Open/Registration

8:00 a.m.-Noon Joint Opening Session

1:00-5:00 p.m. Auxiliary Opening Business Session

TUE, JULY 28

(Last day for exhibits/registration)

8:00 a.m.-Noon Exhibit Hall Open/Registration

8:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m. Auxiliary Business Session

1:30-2:30 p.m. Auxiliary Business Session Continued (if needed)

6:00-8:00 p.m. VFW Patriotic Celebration

WED, JULY 29

7:45 a.m. Presentation of Department Presidents with Colors

8:10-11:30 a.m. Officer Election, Installation and Closing Session

3:00-5:00 p.m. Joint Reception for Commander-in-Chief and National President (Ticketed event), Convention Center

POST-CONVENTION

THURS, JULY 30

9:00 a.m. - Noon National Council of Administration meeting, area between Silver Legacy Resort · Casino and Eldorado Resort · Casino. Look for signage.

5:00 p.m. Cocktails I 2026-2027 National President Donna K. Mills' Celebration.
6 p.m. Dinner July 1 is the registration deadline. Click [here](#) for the fillable form or visit the National website, Convention. The location is in the same room as the Council of Administration meeting.

HQ MEMO

PROPOSED RESOLUTIONS TO THE NATIONAL BYLAWS

Find all the details on proposed resolutions and revisions to the National Bylaws to be presented at the VFW Auxiliary's 113th National Convention behind [MALTA Member Resources](#), National Convention.

2026 PROPOSED RESOLUTIONS

- Amended and Postponed 2025 Resolution No. 4
- No. 1 - From Dept of WV – Sec. 102 D
- No. 2 - From Dept of IL Officers – Sec. 208 B
- No. 3 - From Dept of IL 8th Dist. – Sec. 208 B
- No. 4 - From Dept of OK - Sec. 206 B 3
- No. 5 - From Dept of OK – Sec. 207 D
- No. 6 - From Dept of OK – Sec. 208 A
- No. 7 - From Dept of OK – Sec. 209 B3b
- No. 8 - From Dept of OK – Sec. 209 B3d
- No. 9 - Dept of OK - Booklet of Instructions H 2
- No. 10 - From Committee – Sec. 201B
- No. 11 - From Committee – Sec. 208 B

ALSO, ON THE [NATIONAL CONVENTION](#) PAGE AT [VFWAUXILIARY.ORG](#), FIND LINKS TO BROCHURES FROM THE FOUR 2026-2027 NATIONAL GUARD CANDIDATES.

NEW! 250TH ORNAMENT

This "2026 America Semiquincentennial" ornament showcases the American flag, the Statue of Liberty, and the Constitution. The ornament includes "Veterans of Foreign Wars" below, creating a unique keepsake to mark this historic milestone. 2½" x 2½" x ¼". 3 oz. Made in the USA. 1063 \$29.95

NEW



VFW
VFWSTORE.ORG

CLICK TO SHOP ONLINE!



DANGLE EARRINGS

Stainless steel with sterling silver ear wires. 2½". Made in the USA. 1711 \$17.00



NEW! DANGLE EARRINGS

Stainless steel with sterling silver ear wires. 1¾". Made in the USA. 1867 \$18.00



SUNSHADE Blue with silver lettering. Polyester. 60 x 28". Made in USA. 1234 \$13.95



Back

Front

LAUREL GREEN T-SHIRT

- Unisex sizing
 - 100% combed ring spun cotton with screened design
 - VFW Auxiliary on left chest
 - Auxiliary emblem on back
- 7750 S-4XL \$21.00



POPPY SEEDS
Approx. 350 seeds per packet. 1250 \$3.00



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



LED PIN Four flashing lights. Pin back. 2 x 1½". 0520 \$9.00

PATRIOTIC HEART NECKLACE 1" charm on 17" chain with lobster claw. Soft enamel in silver plating. 1253 \$6.00