

JULY 2025

VFW Auxiliary

VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS AUXILIARY MAGAZINE

REMEMBERING
MARY SEARS

INCOMING DEPARTMENT
PRESIDENTS

NATIONAL PRESIDENT'S
SPECIAL PROJECT

WELCOME AUXILIARY 9876
PATTAYA, THAILAND

CONTINUING EDUCATION
SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS





2025-2026 NATIONAL PROGRAM BOOK

Find the *2025-2026 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
- JULY 31 Circle of Excellence – All installation reports received

August

- AUGUST 7 National Purple Heart Day
- AUGUST 9 National Convention begins
- AUGUST 31 Circle of Excellence – All Auxiliaries must be bonded

For more information on awards and deadlines, see the [2025-2026 National Program Book](#).

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FOR UNCOMMON HEROES®



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ABOUT THE COVER: Secretary of State Fred Zimmerman, left, greets three war orphans visiting Madison under the auspices of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary. **LEFT TO RIGHT:** Margaret Craton, 17, England; Konstantinos Sotirhof, 15, Greece; and Beatrice Li Donnici, 17, Italy. The adults in the background include Gwendolyn Johnson, Richland Center, Youth Activities Chairman of the Wisconsin VFW Auxiliary; Rose Schell, Milwaukee, Department President of the VFW Auxiliary; Lyall T. Beggs, Madison, former National Commander-in-Chief of the VFW; and Josephine Brahm, President of the Madison VFW Auxiliary. These youth visited the U.S. as part of an international orphan exchange that was the brain child of Past National President Evelyn Monaco in 1950.

Credit: Wisconsin Historical Society

AUXILIARIES IN ACTION

AND ON THE NATIONAL WEBSITE



We love seeing the amazing things your Auxiliaries do to support our mission. You've sent us your best shots, and we've shared many of them on social media and in our other communications outlets. Now we're showing them off on our National website, too, where members and non-members alike are likely to find us.

While we can't share them all on our site, we can showcase a balanced collection, which we will rotate on a regular basis. Click here to see our latest.

All the more reason to keep sending us pictures of and captions about your volunteer work, projects, recognitions, drives and more.

To submit photos for consideration, email three to five pictures and a short description of your function, community service, celebration or event honoring our veterans and their families to us at info@vfwauxiliary.org with the subject line Aux. in Action – we may ask to share them in our E-Newsletter, social media, website or in *VFW Auxiliary Magazine*.

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*We are more
than just an
organization, we
are family.*

Dear members —

Many years ago, I sat at the base of a tree, and I dreamed of one day being the National VFW Auxiliary President. Little did I know that because of you, the members of this organization, that dream would come true. Having the opportunity of serving with each of you and hearing your stories are memories I will never forget. Thank you for allowing me into your Posts and communities as I traveled around this country and abroad. Your kindness and love will forever be in my heart.

When I told you about our special project, Operation Bottom Cover, you took off running with it. Our military families and veterans in your communities and around this world have benefited from all the diapers and wipes you have collected. It just warms my heart to know that thousands of babies will benefit from the work you did this year. The success of this project lies with each of you. Thank you for all you did for our veteran families.

To Al and Carol Lipphardt and the 2024-2025 VFW Department Commanders and Presidents, thank you for allowing me to be a part of your class. You have served this organization proudly and with dignity and I'm grateful to call you my friend.

A special thank you goes out to the staff at the VFW National Auxiliary Headquarters. We could not continue to grow without your help. To the National Ambassadors and Conference Coaches, thank you for the hours you spent and the dedication you have for your Programs. You are the best of the best and I can't wait to see what you each do next.

To the National Line Officers, you stood beside me when I wanted to make changes, and you were willing to give me your advice to make those changes work. I wish each of you a very successful year ahead and will always be here to encourage you to spread your wings. May each of your years be even greater than the year before.

These past few years would never have taken place if it were not for the members of the Department of Missouri. You have stood beside me and given me that needed push at every phase of this adventure. Thank you for your support and love.

There are no words that describe the love I have for this organization. Over these past years as I went through the chairs, seeing the dedication and compassion our members have for our veterans makes that love grow even more. We are more than just an organization, we are family, and family is always there to help each other out. Thank you for being a part of my family. May God bless each of you.

Loyally,

BRENDA BRYANT
National President



*We look forward
to shining the
spotlight on our
members who have
worked hard this
year to support
our mission.*

Dear members —

We are headed to National Convention early next 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 chronicles National President Brenda Bryant'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 2025-2026 year.

In this edition, we bid a sad farewell to Past National President Mary Sears, who led the organization with her theme of *We Serve Those Who Served America*. Read more about how her dedication to service influenced her personal life and trajectory to the VFW Auxiliary's highest National office.

Also in this magazine, we have news about how members helped offset the rising cost of baby needs for military and veteran families through gifts, diaper and wipe drives and special deliveries to military bases on page 12. Look to page 17 to read about incoming National President Lois Callahan's special project that will increase awards for and awareness about our very own Continuing Education Scholarship.

On page 13, learn about our newest foreign-based Auxiliary in Thailand that Bryant and Past National President Jane Reape visited.

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.

AMANDA COOK
Editor-In-Chief

VOLUME 88 NUMBER 6

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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.

Below are just a few of the responses on Facebook to the post about the passing of Past National President Mary Sears.

So sorry for our loss. Prayers for her family. Mary was a wonderful and lovely National President and I was always thrilled (when she was a National Rep.) for Mississippi. She was a joy to be with. Thanks for the memories, Mary!

ANN BERRYMAN
AUXILIARY 6371
D'Iberville, Miss.

I was at the dedication of the Women in Military Service for America Memorial and spoke with PNP Sears after the ribbon cutting. As an Auxiliary member and woman veteran, I was very proud that day. Thoughts and prayers to her family. RIP.

BARBARA DANIELSON
AUXILIARY 762
Fargo, N.D.

I will miss that great smile and wonderful hugs. RIP my friend. You're now with Sam and you can both rest.

BARBARA MELNICK
AUXILIARY 9978
Anchorage, Ala.

Condolences to her family and friends. May she rest in peace. Another great mentor of our organization.

LORI CANNON
AUXILIARY 7035
Avon, Ohio

Born on Pearl Harbor Day, Mary was a friend...truly a spitfire, ethical and so passionate about our veterans. I'm grateful to have known her and Sam too....and comforted to know they are united in heaven.

PATRICE GREEN
NATIONAL MEMBER AT LARGE

MY VETERAN

The Cunningham Family: Part 2

A FAMILY AFFAIR



Bill Hayes and his comrade while they were stationed in the Philippines with some of the children they made sure had food.

As a child, Carrie Cunningham sat transfixed staring up at her father, Willard (Bill) Hayes who served in the Army Air Corps from 1942 to 1945, as he spun his war stories about his time in the Philippines during World War II.

“Bill enlisted; he could

have taken the exemption owning and operating a farm. While in the Philippines he served as a belly gunner in a B-24,” Carrie said. “He never talked about the combat. All his stories were about helping kids on the island with getting food.”

In the last issue of *VFW Auxiliary Magazine* we began the story of Carrie and Alan Cunningham and their veteran fathers. Alan had never known his biological father, Bernie Swartz, and had requested his military records to learn more about him. Carrie, however, heard about her father’s experience first-hand.

“He once got caught giving food to the kids and the commander started to dress him down,” Carrie recalled. “Bill asked the commander ‘How would you feel if it was your kids in the same situation, starving and going through the dump searching for food?’ At that time, he (Bill) himself had three kids back home.”

Like all good family traditions, stories are passed down through the generations. Her dad’s war stories made an impact on Carrie, and now she sees the ways the retellings have influenced her children.

“Alan and I are continuing where our fathers left off,” Carrie said. “Our beliefs are being passed down to our kids. They know their grandfathers’ history and pass it

A TRADITION OF SERVICE CONTINUES THROUGH GENERATIONS

down to their children. What our fathers did is a point of pride to everyone in our family. The legacy lives on.”

After returning to the farm Bill still felt the need to serve and became a deputy sheriff and a volunteer with the local fire department. After graduating Carrie went on to become a registered nurse (RN).

“My dad was so proud of what I was achieving, first in the family to go to college and on to become an RN,” Carrie said. “My dad gave for all the right reasons. I may not have known that when I left the farm. My dad’s service record is part of my genes and that had a lot to do with my wanting to become an RN.”

Carrie and Alan are both Life Members of Auxiliary 358 in Ballston Spa, New York. Alan mentioned the idea of joining as he was researching his father’s military records. They visited their local Post and joined at the next meeting. As it turns out, the Post already had a special significance to their family.

“Funny how things work; we held our wedding reception 43 years ago at this very Post,” Carrie said. “Our family ties, fathers knowing each other, both of us from neighboring towns, brought up to give back, to help others. We felt joining was the right thing to do.”

Alan also works in the health field and he saw joining the Auxiliary as an opportunity for he and Carrie to strengthen their bonds.

“My wife Carrie and I support each other in everything we do,” Alan said. “When we brought up the idea of joining the Auxiliary we were excited. We got to honor our fathers. We rarely miss a meeting. We are a team working within a team of wonderful and dedicated people.”

The VFW Auxiliary family is happy to have the Cunningham family as part of the organization’s continuing legacy. ★ KB

Remembering MARY SEARS

(1929-2025)

We Serve Those Who Served America



Past National President Mary Sears was raised an only child in a large, patriotic family on the rolling plains of Iowa. Hers was a youth immersed in music and service. She was honored when her family chose her to place a Flag at the grave of her Uncle Arthur on Memorial Day when she was just 5 years old. The day she turned 12 was also, tragically, Pearl Harbor Day.

She was known by many for her warm, easy smile and her leadership that always put those who served first. In May, we lost our dear friend and mentor and in this issue we say goodbye. Sears passed away on Monday, May 12 at the age of 95.

Sears was a Life Member of Coeur d'Alene Auxiliary 889 in Idaho. She joined the organization on the eligibility of her husband Sam, a Korean War veteran who retired from the U.S. Air Force after 20 years of service, which took their family from South Dakota (where they met) to Massachusetts then to California before eventually settling in Idaho.

"I'm sure Sam is in heaven with open arms waiting for her," said Past National President Linda Meader (2006-2007), who described Sears as a "delightful woman." She added, "They were both such a wonderful couple."

SERVICE & DEDICATION

Sears' legacy is one of service and dedication. As a child, Sears loved music and reading, two passions that followed her into adulthood. Her grandmother was a World War I Gold Star Mother. It was on Sears' 12th birthday that Pearl Harbor was attacked; this had a profound effect on her. Her parents were one of 13 and one of eight, and four of her cousins served overseas during World War II. She met her husband, Sam, at the Grand Opening Dance of the USO - they were married shortly before he was shipped out to Korea in 1951. Upon his return, the couple lived on Otis Air Force Base in Massachusetts for nine years, which is where their children, Pamela and Donald Junior, were born. In 1964, her husband was sent overseas for a second time, and again a few years later. After her



husband retired from the military, the family moved to Idaho and Sears landed a job with the county Veteran Service Office, which she would continue for 15 years.

JOINING THE AUXILIARY

It was in Idaho that Sears joined VFW Auxiliary 889. Her first position was that of Auxiliary Conductress; in 1986, she was elected National Guard. "Sometimes I really can't believe this is happening," she said upon her ascension to National President. "How very fortunate I am to be able to serve."

Her theme, *We Serve Those Who Served America*, represented her philosophy and emphasized the Auxiliary's top priority: assisting veterans. She emulated that in her work as a member and in her career as a county veterans service officer. In keeping with her theme, she honored Maude DeVictor as the Unsung Heroine for bringing the Agent Orange problem to the forefront and helping so many Vietnam veterans. Agent Orange and PTS(D) were of considerable concern to Sears years before the terms became widely recognized.

WHAT WE'RE ALL ABOUT

"Mary always had a beautiful smile on her face and her love for veterans showed in her actions," wrote National President Brenda Bryant shortly after learning of her passing.

Bob Wallace, her counterpart as VFW Commander-in-Chief the year she was National President, said, "Mary was a loyal supporter of the *Meet the Challenge* year and just a great person along with Sam."

After serving as National President, Sears remained active in the organization, and in 1997 was among the representatives of veterans' service organizations to cut the ribbon at the dedication of the Women in Military Service for America Memorial. Auxiliary members donated more than \$54,000 during her term.

Said Sears in 1991, helping veterans is "what we're all about," and that is precisely what she did. ★ AC & NP



2025-2026 D E

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Auxiliary 7016
Atmore



COLORADO

Rena Cales
Auxiliary 6461
Fountain



HAWAII

Jo An Hill
Auxiliary 12122
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ALASKA

Willa Watts
Auxiliary 3629
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Buttercup Baker
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Dundee



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Auxiliary 2283
Russellville



FLORIDA

Michael Yates
Auxiliary 10087
Beverly Hills



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Auxiliary 2749
Kendallville



CALIFORNIA

Kathleen Okolski
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GEORGIA

Katie Stanley
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Macon



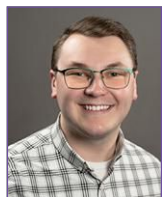
IOWA

Jennifer Saffell
Auxiliary 9127
Des Moines

PARTMENT DEMENTS



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Auxiliary 7521
Tribune



KENTUCKY
Evan Smiley
Auxiliary 11404
Brandenburg



LOUISIANA
Ann Barnett
Auxiliary 1736
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MARYLAND
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Edgemere



MASSACHUSETTS
Theresa Logue
Auxiliary 8819
Billerica



MICHIGAN
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Fraser



MINNESOTA
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Auxiliary 1757
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Tracie Pettys
Auxiliary 3373
Pascagoula



MISSOURI
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Auxiliary 1014
Alton



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Auxiliary 1579
Miles City



NEBRASKA
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Auxiliary 1644
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NEVADA
Ann Marie Holley
Auxiliary 3396
Sparks



NEW HAMPSHIRE
Tracy Kelley
Auxiliary 8641
Merrimack



NEW JERSEY
Gloria Lisicki
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Carteret



2025-2026

DEPARTMENT

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Auxiliary 5806
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Auxiliary 8688
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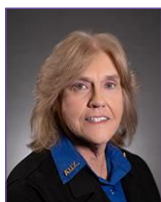
OREGON
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Redmond



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Boiling Springs



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Scott Jamieson
Auxiliary 5390
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East Fairmont



WISCONSIN
Kim McWilliams
Auxiliary 2260
Oconomowoc



WYOMING
Claire Bowles
Auxiliary 9439
Casper

Thanks to Members BABY NEEDS ARE COVERED

WITH NATIONAL PRESIDENT'S SPECIAL PROJECT



From diaper and wipe drives to diaper showers with diaper “cakes” gifted to service member and veteran families struggling with the rising cost of baby necessities, members chose to accept National President Brenda Bryant’s mission: Operation Bottom Cover. In a big way.

EMBRACING BRYANT’S SPECIAL PROJECT

In addition to the many thousands of diapers and wipes given at the community level as in-kind donations at military bases and other local outlets that connect services members in need with resources, members can also be credited with helping these families across the nation and as far away as Germany and Japan through a partnership with Operation Showers of Appreciation (OSOA).

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.

“As I have been traveling around to the Departments, I have been amazed at what our members are doing,” Bryant marveled earlier this Program Year as Operation Bottom Cover was just kicking off. “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.”

Courtney Hilborn, vice president of OSOA, shared the following kind words from a woman whose family received help from Operation Bottom Cover.

“Thank you so much! My family and I really appreciate it and great organizations such as this one to help veterans”
– Jacki*

Just how much was gifted to National President Brenda’s special project? You’ll have to stay tuned for this good news to be announced at National Convention in Columbus, Ohio.

“Operation Bottom Cover takes us to the core of this organization,” Bryant said. “It not only helps the military families, but it is taking care of possible future members of this organization.” ★ AC

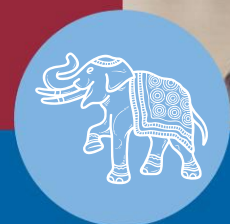
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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: At Auxiliary 3442 in South Dakota, President Nancy Frentz, VFW Legacy Life Member Peggy Parrish and members are working hard for Operation Bottom Cover. Members of VFW Auxiliary 7674 in Fort Walton Beach, Florida provided diapers, baby wipes and formula to the Eglin AFB Airman's Attic as part of National President Bryant's Special Project. The Department of Tennessee donated many boxes of diapers and packages of baby wipes to the families living on base at Fort Campbell to support the project. Members of the Department of Arizona, including President Lynn Pierre, donated diapers when welcoming Bryant to the state.



AUXILIARY 9876 MEMBERS ARE NOT ALONE



NATIONAL PRESIDENT'S VISIT TO THAILAND BRINGS SENSE OF UNITY

When National President Brenda Bryant and Past National President Jane Reape set out for Asia, accompanied by the VFW delegation, they didn't know quite what to expect. Neither had ever been to visit VFW Auxiliary 9876 in Thailand before, as it had only been chartered on May 16, 2024, nor had either previously accompanied the VFW to Taiwan, so this trip was full of firsts.

Taiwan was first on the itinerary. Bryant and Reape were assigned a guide, Hope, who accompanied them from destination to destination. Along with the VFW delegation, they visited a temple, a state-of-the-art veterans' hospital, a veterans' home, a museum of Chinese history, a moving war memorial, a vocational training center and more. One highlight of the trip for both Bryant and Reape was meeting the President of Taiwan, Lai Ching-Te.

A few days later, they were off to their next destination: Thailand. Their plane had a stopover in Seoul, South Korea, where several kind travelers helped them navigate the airport, immigration and customs. In Pattaya, their beachside hotel room had a balcony that looked out over the city, which was especially beautiful at night. The following morning, they had breakfast on the rooftop and were joined by two Auxiliary members for a tour of a botanical garden and park where they

were pleasantly surprised by a meet-and-greet with resident elephants, to whom they fed bananas.

"If you put your back to them, they will rest their trunk on you," said Reape. "Quite a surprise if you're not expecting it!"

The rest of the day was spent experiencing more of the local beauty, art, food and culture, which included a tram tour of the gardens, attending a cabaret drag show, sampling curried soft-shell crab and visiting a VFW Post.

On Sunday, Bryant and Reape were treated to a visit and training with 28 members of Auxiliary 9876, each in her Auxiliary shirt and cap. "There were between six and eight members who drove (more than) five hours to come to this meeting," said Bryant, who was moved by the impressive turnout. "To drive five hours, just to come hear us? That shows us just how much they support their veterans."

THIS PAGE: Bryant and Reape, standing in the center, were moved by the warm welcome from Auxiliary 9876 members during their meeting.



Though they've only been formally in existence for a little over a year, VFW Auxiliary 9876 is an active one. They have participated in VFW Day of Service activities like roadside cleanup, visited and brought supplies to the elderly and disabled, laid wreaths on veterans' graves on Memorial Day, participated in St. Patrick's Day festivities and, on the second Saturday of January, they organized Children's Day activities, which members have been involved in for more than 10 years. This Children's Day, the Auxiliary distributed 500 bags of rice (5 kg. each), gave away bicycles, provided snacks and food, had an inflatable bounce house and held games with prizes for the winners.

Their membership is growing, too. Last year, they had 27 members. As of May 2025, they had more than doubled that.

"Being a part of the Auxiliary allows me to support those who have served our nation and also gives me a strong sense of purpose and belonging to a community that truly matters," said Auxiliary 9876 Secretary Nipaphon Codman, who joined to honor veteran family members. The visit from National leadership was "A tremendous honor."

Bryant was overwhelmed from the moment she walked into the meeting. "Oh my gosh, the love, the feeling

of wanting to be there... those women – and it was all women – they hold this organization very dear to their hearts even though they're not American citizens... they wanted to shake our hands and give hugs (and) they really want to be a part of this organization."

But there are some unique challenges they face both as individuals and as an Auxiliary, which Bryant learned during their meeting. More than 92% of the nation identifies as Buddhist, so the prayers in meetings and the ritual are unfamiliar, as is some of the wording in the Bylaws, and saying the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag doesn't quite make sense. Some Programs, like Scholarships, Americanism and "Buddy"® Poppy & VFW National Home, are more difficult for them to fully participate in, while others, like Auxiliary Outreach, Hospital, Youth Activities and Membership are much easier.

Flexibility, therefore, is a must.

"I would love it if one day their children could do the (Young American Creative Patriotic Art Contest) or Patriot's Pen," said Bryant, but she acknowledged that shipping between the United States and Thailand is very expensive and takes a long time, so some accommodations may be necessary in making that happen. She recommended they hold more informal round table meetings rather than more stylized traditional ones, and while "Buddy"® Poppy drives are not in their wheelhouse, Bryant suggested perhaps making centerpieces or having hat contests instead. Even though Thailand does not celebrate November 11 as Veterans Day, Bryant thought that would be a great day to provide a meal or program for the veterans under whom they joined and/or other local veterans, which would count as Veterans & Family Support, and she believes it is entirely possible to participate in the Americanism Program without being unfair or unfaithful to their own nation.

"They are so proud of their country," said Bryant. "They're very proud of their heritage, but they are also very proud of the veterans that they're working with."

Additionally, said Reape, "Brenda explained (that members can) do the ones that work for (their Auxiliary) but they are not required to do them all."



LEFT: "Auxiliary 9876 participates in Children's Day every year.



She noted that “They are very active in the community.” In fact, most of what Auxiliary 9876 members do is out in the community, said Bryant.

When asked whether she and her fellow Officers have a favorite past project, Codman answered that they don’t have one that stands out above the rest because every activity “comes from genuine intention, dedication and love for what we do. Whether it’s organizing events for veterans or participating in community service, each effort holds meaning for us and brings joy and inspiration.”

Bryant was so pleased and grateful to have been able to visit in person, not only to meet everyone and learn about the good works they are doing, but also to answer questions of both VFW and Auxiliary members. “They need that guidance; we need to set up more information (when we start a new foreign-based Auxiliary)... it was wonderful to talk to them.”

“Brenda’s visit brought pride and a sense of unity among our members,” said Codman. “She provided clear information about the Auxiliary’s rules, policies and procedures, and answered our questions thoroughly so everyone could gain a shared understanding.”

Bryant also recognized how the language barrier may be negatively impacting members who wish to run for office. Because the *Podium Book: Bylaws & Ritual* and *National Program Book* are only available in English, it presents a potential hurdle for those who do not speak or read the language from accessing that information. “They can hold their meetings in Thai,” said Bryant, but for Officers to translate the information, especially on the fly, can be challenging. Bryant believes switching to roundtable meetings can help with that, but she also hopes the National organization will be able to do more in the future to ensure information is accessible to all members, regardless of primary language.

“One thing our members have got to understand,” said Bryant, “is if we really want (foreign-based Auxiliaries to thrive), we have got to start sending somebody to some of these Auxiliaries every year. Otherwise, they’re not going to



make it.” She reflected upon how advantageous it was when her predecessor, Carla Martinez, visited the VFW Auxiliary in Guam last year; she was able to answer many members’ questions and offer important guidance. “We have to have an open mind and stop thinking that the way we do (things) right now, or the way we did (things) 50 years ago, is the only right way.” Working in special education taught Bryant that the way to success for any group is constant change, adaptation and modification. And she truly wants Auxiliary 9876 to continue to succeed.

“When Jane and I walked away we both had tears because we could see that these are members who want to be a member.”

“Our Auxiliary may be small in size, but it is filled with strength and heart,” said Codman. “Our spirit of service is more than just a duty, it is a source of great pride.” She added that Bryant and Reape’s visit “reminds us that we are not alone, but part of a strong and important organization that uplifts each other.” ★ NP

LEFT: Bryant and Reape attend a meeting that some members traveled five hours to attend. **RIGHT:** When our National President travels, she “never forgets” to pack a “trunk” full of love for our veterans! Bryant and Auxiliary 9876 Junior Vice-President Nongluk Fernandez paid a visit to banana-eating elephants at a local botanical garden in Thailand.

Congratulations

2025 CONTINUING EDUCATION SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS!

\$1,250
AWARD



BIG 10 CONFERENCE

**MCKENZIE
DEYO**
AUXILIARY 759
NEBRASKA

McKenzie Deyo of Nebraska, a Life Member of VFW Auxiliary 759, is studying nursing, which she describes as "a profession I am deeply passionate about." She strives to make a positive impact on the life of her patients and says this scholarship will help "ease the financial burden" of her education. She will be attending University of Nebraska Medical Center, working toward her Bachelor of Science in nursing.

"Receiving this scholarship would not only relieve financial pressure but also reaffirm my commitment to my nursing goals," she said. "It would enable me to stay on track with my education, ensuring that I am able to contribute to the health care community and provide the best care possible to those in need."



EASTERN CONFERENCE

**KATHRYN
DONALDSON**
NEW JERSEY

Kathryn Donaldson, the daughter of New Jersey Auxiliary 386 member Marybeth Donaldson, is a first-year Master of Science in genetic counseling student. She is currently conducting a research project examining congenital heart defects in twins with the aim of improving early detection. This scholarship will help immensely as the rigorous demands of the program do not allow for full-time employment.

"This scholarship is not just financial support; it is an investment in my ability to become a compassionate and knowledgeable genetic counselor," she said. "I am committed to using my education to advocate for patients, improve access to genetic services and contribute to advancing the field. Your support would help me achieve these goals and make a lasting impact in my future career."



SOUTHERN CONFERENCE

JILL WADDLE
AUXILIARY 1298
KENTUCKY

Jill Waddle is a Life Member of Auxiliary 1298 in Kentucky, currently serving as District 5 President. She is a first responder and firefighter seeking her AEMT (Advanced Emergency Medical Technician) Certification. She has also worked as a Medical Assistant for 10 years and views helping others as her calling; she is fully supported in her endeavors by her chief at the fire department.

"I feel that God has led me to help in my community...I want to volunteer to help our community as our soldiers sign up to fight for our country," she said. "I would be honored to be granted this opportunity to further my career."



WESTERN CONFERENCE

**YVONNE
APRATO**
AUXILIARY 10882
WASHINGTON

Yvonne Aprato is a military veteran and a Life Member of Washington Auxiliary 10882 who has been working as a veterinary technician for 20 years, a position that does not require certification in her state, but with the field changing it is likely this will soon be required, as it is in most states. "I love my job," says Aprato, who will use the scholarship to complete her certification so she can continue to help animals, among them, one that represents our nation's strength and freedom.

"I am not in this field for the pay," she said. "I am in this field for my love of helping animals and I am lucky enough to work on exotics which include the bald eagles, which hold a very dear place in my heart."

Learn more about this scholarship on our [website](#).

2025-2026 NATIONAL PRESIDENT'S SPECIAL PROJECT

CONTINUING EDUCATION SCHOLARSHIP

Incoming National President Lois Callahan was in her late 20s when she decided to return to college. It was a decision that launched a 26-year career as a pediatric occupation therapist.

It was also a move that wouldn't have been easy to make alone. She completed her degree from the University of Central Arkansas and while she was enrolled she benefited from help with tuition, books and supplies that made balancing studies, work and life more manageable. It is in this spirit that Callahan chose to promote and grow the VFW Auxiliary's very own Continuing Education Scholarship that is awarded to four individuals a year to further their education.

"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."

The Continuing Education Scholarship is a well-kept secret that shouldn't be a secret at all! It is vital that we get the word out to our members who, along with their family members, are the individuals who qualify for this opportunity.





In addition to getting more and more members, their spouses and children to apply for this scholarship, we also want to grow the Continuing Education Scholarship escrow fund so we can award more money to students per Conference, per year.

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. ♦ AC

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TO LEARN
MORE.





2025 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 and the shared VFW/Auxiliary Convention app for updates as we get closer to Convention.*

LS = Livestream

FRI, AUG. 8

10:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m. Early packet pickup at atrium between the Hyatt Regency Columbus and Hilton Columbus Downtown hotels.

SAT, AUG. 9

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

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

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

4:45 p.m. VFW Auxiliary Special Opening (LS)

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

SUN, AUG. 10

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

8:30 a.m.- 9:30 a.m. Joint Memorial Service

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

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

1:00 p.m.- 4:30 p.m. Programs Seminar (LS)

MON, AUG. 11

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

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

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

5:30 p.m.- 10:00 p.m. VFW Awards Banquet, Battelle Grand Ballroom, convention center. Register online by [clicking here](#).

TUE, AUG. 12

8:00 a.m. - Noon Exhibit Hall Open/Registration (Last day for exhibits/registration)

8:00 a.m. - Noon Auxiliary Business Session (LS)

1:30 p.m.- 2:30 p.m. Amwins Presentation

2:30 p.m.- 3:30 p.m. Business Session Continued if Needed

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

WED, AUG. 13

7:45 a.m. - 8:00 a.m. Presentation of Department Presidents with Colors (LS)

8:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m. Officer Election, Installation and Closing Session (LS)

1:00 p.m.- 3:00 p.m. National District Council Meeting, Hyatt Regency Columbus

4:00 p.m.- 6:00 p.m. Joint Reception for Commander-in-Chief and National President (Ticketed event), Hyatt Regency Ballroom

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 112th National Convention behind [MALTA Member Resources](#), National Convention.

2025 PROPOSED RESOLUTIONS

- Proposed Article XI - Discipline
- Resolution No. 1 - From Kentucky - Deceased Life Members
- Resolution No. 2 - From South Carolina - NDCMs
- Resolution No. 3 - From National Resolutions Committee - Sec. 101 Belief in God
- Resolution No. 4 - From National Resolutions Committee - Sec. 210 Meeting Confidentiality
- Resolution No. 5 - From National Resolutions Committee - Sec. 509 Suspension-Revocation of District Charter
- Resolution No. 6 - From National Resolutions Committee - Sec 809 E National Vacancy
- Resolution No. 7 - From National Resolutions Committee - Sec. 809 E Option B National Vacancy
- Resolution No. 8 - From National Resolutions Committee - Sec. 814 Surety Amount
- Resolution No. 9 - From National Resolutions Committee - Sec. 915 Dispensing of Funds

ALSO, ON THE [NATIONAL CONVENTION](#) PAGE AT [VFWAUXILIARY.ORG](#), FIND LINKS TO BROCHURES FROM THE FOUR 2025-2026 NATIONAL GUARD CANDIDATES.

Our HISTORY

THE ORPHAN EXCHANGE OF EVELYN MONACO, PART 1



On June 6, 1950, an 18-year-old German girl was interviewed by the *New York Times*. She was blonde, pretty, and well-spoken, an emerging

feminist from Berlin who'd

witnessed the horrors of World War II firsthand. Her father had resisted the Nazis despite the danger; he'd later be killed for his personal and political views.

Her name was Irmgarde Remme.

Prior to her arrival in the United States, Remme had never before seen Black and white athletes playing side by side, as they did at the baseball game she attended in Yankee Stadium. And she listened as people all around her spoke without fear. This was quite unlike the Germany in which she'd grown up, and while segregation and civil rights violations were prevalent across much of the U.S., to a Berliner in New York, this nation certainly seemed far less divided than her own. Germany had been split in half the year before, with West Germany a parliamentary democracy, and East Germany, a Communist Soviet occupation zone, separated by the Berlin Wall.

With Remme in New York were five other European teenagers and six American youth. The youngest of the group was a Greek boy named Konstantinos, whose last name was Sothiros, or a variation thereof. Konstantinos was barely 15 upon arrival in the states; he was only 10 when the war ended, leaving him orphaned and missing one arm, the result of an exploded mine.

Italian Beatrice Li Donnici learned to speak English while growing up in Rome. The 17-year-old's goal in America was to "see everything." Belgian René Gielis, the eldest at 19, wanted to visit factories and learn more about workers

before returning home. Margaret, an English girl whose last name was either Graton or Craton, was 17 and wanted to compare living in the states to her home across the pond, and Hubert de Lisle of Paris, France, turned 16 shortly after arrival and dreamed of someday being an engineer.

The six American teenagers were each recent high school graduates who hailed from Michigan – Eaton Rapids, specifically, where the VFW National Home campus is. Their names are believed to have been Mike Van Loon, Whitey Robinson, Peter Valek, Patricia Witherow, Dorothy Gray and Barbara Heaton.

Though these 12 young people hailed from seven different countries, five Allied and two Axis, they had more in common than simply having lived through the second World War.

They were orphans.

WORLD WAR II ENDS

World War II ended 80 years ago, on May 8, 1945 (European Front) and September 2, 1945 (Pacific Front). In the aftermath, the VFW Auxiliary changed immeasurably.

Membership numbers soared – doubling, then tripling – and, to accommodate, VFW Auxiliary National Headquarters expanded their staff from five women to more than 40, many of whom worked well into the evenings to keep up with demand. Membership began to skew younger, which led to the abandonment of traditions like secret passwords and the shortening of floor work pageantry as attempts were made to modernize. Women who joined under the eligibility of their husbands following World War I were now the mothers of those who'd been deployed to Europe or the Pacific; tragically, many of these were Gold Star Mothers, each honoring her child's memory by helping those who made it home. And thousands of women who'd been deployed themselves joined the Auxiliary ranks, as the VFW was then men-only regardless of eligibility through service (this changed in 1978).

The VFW National Home was changing, too. There were now even more children and families across the nation devastated by war than there had been two decades earlier, when the campus welcomed their first family, the Polletts. Not only had the fathers of children living at the National Home been deployed overseas, but by 1941, 10 boys who'd grown up on campus joined the Army and Navy. As of 1943, the number of National Home child alumni serving overseas had swelled to 50 boys and two girls. In 1945, five children under age 7 moved to the National Home following the death of their father, who was killed while serving in Germany. They were the first World War II family residents.

Many followed.

By V-E Day, an estimated 13 million children were orphaned in Europe alone; many had no extended family to return to or could not find their families. They were subsequently adopted by strangers abroad, fostered locally, taken in by former neighbors, sent to orphanages and institutions, or simply forced to grow up far too soon, taking on adult responsibilities and fending for themselves when they should have been in the safe care of loving families. In the United States, up to 200,000 children are estimated to have lost their fathers in battle, and a lesser number lost their mothers; while women were not serving in combat roles, more than 500 American women were killed while deployed as nurses, pilots or in military support roles.

The ladies of the VFW Auxiliary were devastated by the stories of these orphans, but members had prepared for this eventuality, as they knew firsthand how war destroyed families. In 1943 they began fundraising for the National Home nursery, which would open in 1946. During this period, Auxiliary members funded the building of the Margaret A. Armstrong Guest Lodge and Memory Chapel and a new hospital wing.

LET FREEDOM RING

In 1950, five years after the war's end, "Operation Freedom" commenced. Also referred to as "Let Freedom Ring," this was an international orphan exchange, the brainchild and special project of VFW Auxiliary National President Evelyn Monaco.

Monaco joined the Auxiliary in 1937 and served as the first-ever President from the newly chartered Department

of New Mexico. When she took office in 1949, she announced the VFW Auxiliary would be partnering with Foster Parents Plan, later renamed Plan International, which was founded in 1937 and came to the United States two years later.

The purpose of Monaco's "Operation Freedom" was threefold: to send graduating high schoolers from the National Home to Europe to visit the land in which their fathers fought, bringing with them luxuries and necessities to distribute among those they would meet on their travels, to invite six orphans from across Europe to the United States, offering these visitors a wonderful time touring the nation and educating the public as a humanitarian effort (or "international understudy") and to publicize the good works of the VFW Auxiliary so that fellow Americans would gain a better understanding of who we are and what we do.

And this is precisely what happened.

At first, when researching the orphan exchange for this article, we found very little, but in the final hour, a photograph was discovered in a misplaced folder in an old filing cabinet, and the caption on the back included the names of these 12 teens. This led to a search of old magazine and newspaper archives, and within minutes, gold was struck: a *New York Times* article from June 1950, with a fountain of information about the orphans, the trip and the VFW Auxiliary – or "Women's VFW" – which led to the unearthing of other articles, photographs and even a Facebook page possibly belonging to one of the European six.

National President Monaco passed away in 1977.

If still living, the teenagers would now range in age from 89 to 94. Their stories deserve to be told. ✱ NP

RIGHT: Youth from Europe and the VFW National Home tour the U.S. on a good will mission as part of Past National President Evelyn Monaco's Operation Freedom orphan exchange.

PREVIOUS PAGE: Young Operation Freedom emissaries ride a float in the VFW's four-hour long VFW Encampment Parade in Chicago in August of 1950.



Learn more about the "Operation Freedom" orphan exchange, Past National President Evelyn Monaco and the 12 student participants in Part 2 of this story, which will be in the November issue of VFW Auxiliary Magazine. If you have any information about the orphan exchange and/or contact information for any of the aforementioned teenagers or their surviving relatives, please contact us at info@vfwauxiliary.org with the subject line Our History.



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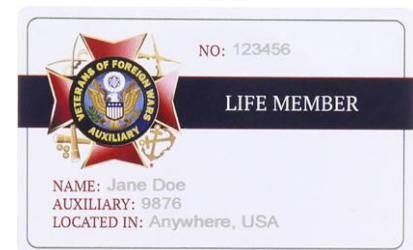
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