

JANUARY 2024

VFW Auxiliary

VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS AUXILIARY MAGAZINE

**11TH CAFE
GOLDEN SPIKE
NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK**

**FOUND PORTRAIT OF VETERAN
TELLS A STORY**

**LEGISLATIVE
VICTORIES**

**SPOTTING SPAMMERS
& SCAMMERS
ON SOCIAL MEDIA**



PODIUM EDITION BYLAWS AND RITUAL 2024



VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS
OF THE UNITED STATES
AUXILIARY

PODIUM EDITION: *Bylaws and Ritual 2024*

Quickly reference the VFW Auxiliary's rules and procedures with the most current edition of the *2024 VFW Auxiliary Podium Edition* – available digitally behind MALTA member login Member Resources, or in print from the [VFW Store](https://vfwstore.org), vfwstore.org and 1-833-VFW-VETS.

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

DATES & DEADLINES

January

JANUARY 1 New Year's Day

JANUARY 15 • Annual Joint Reviews (AJRs) with Chiefs of Voluntary Services for VAVS representatives due at National Headquarters
• Martin Luther King Jr. Day

JANUARY 31 See the *2023-2024 National Program Book* for January 31 Membership Award deadlines.

February

FEBRUARY 12-17 National Mid-Year Conference

FEBRUARY 14 Valentine's Day

FEBRUARY 15 Continuing Education Scholarship applications due at National Headquarters

FEBRUARY 19 Presidents Day

For more information on awards, see the [*2023-2024 National Program Book*](#)

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FOR UNCOMMON HEROES®



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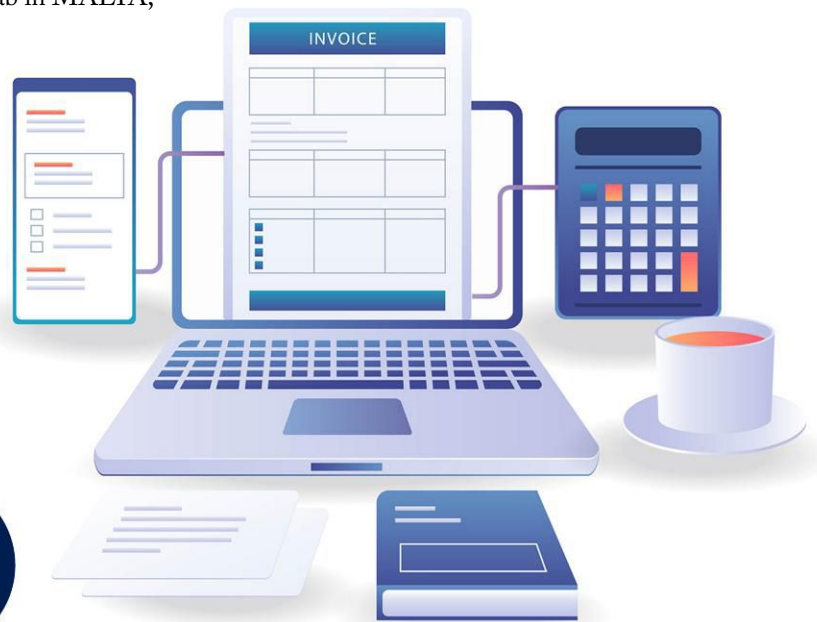
About the Cover

About the Cover: A recreation of the "champagne photo" at Golden Spike National Historical Park in Promontory, Utah that captured a defining moment in America's history. In September, members gathered to learn about the day the "wedding of the rails" united our nation in 1869 at the Auxiliary's 11th Celebrating America's Freedom Event. **Photo:** Amanda Cook

GET DIGITAL

NOW AVAILABLE!

Treasurers at every level of the Auxiliary, look for Bookkeeping software available in [MALTA Member Resources](#). This technology, which can be accessed in the shortcuts area in the Treasurer's Duties tab in MALTA, will help simplify accounting processes and is free to VFW Auxiliary Treasurers. We encourage Treasurers to take a look and see if this technology will serve as a good tool. Department Treasurers have been trained on the Bookkeeping software, and a guide and tutorial video are available behind MALTA in Treasurers' Resources. Please review these before accessing the software, and if you have questions, direct them to your Department Treasurer. If they can't assist, contact HQ at info@auxiliary.org.



If you need technical support only (website issues), contact MALTA support at **(800) 349-3670**.

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*I could not be
more proud and
honored to be part
of the Veterans
of Foreign
Wars Auxiliary.*

Dear Members—

Now I want everyone to know how much I appreciate you allowing the National Officers to attend and present to you information at your Conferences. The Program skits were outstanding and it is obvious how much thought you all put into them.

While at the National Home for the annual board meeting, we broke ground for the Welcome Center Renovation Project, a special joint project with National VFW Commander-in-Chief Duane Sarmiento. It will include a convenience store as well as a newly designed mail center so residents will be able to get mail even after mail room hours; this means if presents are delivered they can pick them up after hours and on weekends.

I am delighted and thrilled I get to see you all aboard the Mariner of the Seas for the National Mid-Year Conference that happens to fall over Valentine's Day: February 12-17, 2024. I hope that you all enjoy it as much as I will.

Our communities benefit from us being in them, and one way we give back is through the scholarships we offer - our Patriotic Art and Continuing Education scholarship contests. Deadlines are approaching in February and March. Let's get out there and make sure we are promoting these and collecting all that beautiful work done by our 9th through 12th graders. Look for more information on our National website and behind MALTA Member Resources, Scholarships.

As of press time, I have completed 28 state visits to date and all of you are so wonderful. While meeting new members and seeing friends I already know, both sisters, brothers as well as comrades, you all are working so hard every day while *Banding Together for Our Veterans* and also *Meeting the Challenge* of supporting our VFW members. I could not be more proud and honored to be part of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary. Love can be felt many ways and I love you all.

While I know this is coming out after the holidays, Stanley and our family hope that you and your families all had a safe, fun and loving holiday season.

Loyally,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Carla J. Martinez". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid and personal.

CARLA J. MARTINEZ
National President



We have deadlines headed our way in February and March for our Patriotic Art contests, national anthem singing contest and Illustrating America for younger students.

Dear members—

It's a new year!

Now that we've spent the last couple of months celebrating and taking time to include not only our friends and families, but also our extended VFW and Auxiliary families, let's get prepared for 2024.

We have scholarship contest deadlines headed our way in February for Continuing Education and March for our Patriotic Art Contests; Young American Creative Patriotic Art (2-D) and the 3-Dimensional Patriotic Art Contest.

We also have deadlines in February for the Get Excited for the Red, White and Blue! national anthem singing contest and in March for our art contest that includes younger students – Illustrating America.

Do make sure you have the most current rules, information and brochures, as important updates (like prize amounts and criteria) change year to year. Then get out there and promote these opportunities to youth, faculty and parents in your communities! We want to recognize our talented young people, but we need your help to get the word out.

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

Now is a great time to think about paying your dues. While we have a lengthy grace period – until June – why wait? You do want to be a member in good standing and you don't want to let this lapse. Log in to MALTA to get this handled.

Do you have a unique story? Have you taken some great photos of the wonderful ways you're supporting veterans, service members and their families in your communities? We'd love to hear about it! Send story ideas to be considered for our National magazine (Member/Auxiliary Spotlight, My Veteran, Our History) or our National E-Newsletter or Facebook page (Auxiliaries in Action). Find magazine story nomination forms in MALTA Member Resources, Miscellaneous, and photo release forms for adults and youth under Historian & Media Relations.

I look forward to seeing those attending National Mid-Year Conference in person soon aboard a cruise ship that will host our business and take us to two ports in the Caribbean next month!

AMANDA COOK

Editor-In-Chief

VOLUME 87 NUMBER 4

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VFW Auxiliary Magazine

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

Editorial Office

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

Graphic Design

Braden Design
jaclynn@bradendesign.co

Change of Address

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

Website

www.vfwauxiliary.org

READER'S VOICE



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

Surprisingly, we haven't heard a peep from members about the November edition of *VFW Auxiliary Magazine*!

So instead of featuring your feedback, comments and questions on this page, we'll share some magazine news.

Thanks to a brand-new feature, members will be able to read the digital VFW Auxiliary Magazine better than ever!

Now you can zoom in (see the big plus and minus symbols that appear) on each page. If you zoom out and these disappear, never fear, a quick double-click with your computer mouse will bring the +/- back. Note that the magazine will enlarge specifically where you've clicked on the page. You may then left click and drag the page wherever you'd like to see more.

We hope this makes reading our digital National magazine easier and we are very happy to make this available on all digital issues, even those in the archives.

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK!

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

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

This is your page to voice your thoughts!

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

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

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

DUAL MEMBERS



for soldiers struggling in the aftermath of amputations and other unspeakable wounds.

When she returned to the United States, she and her husband decided to join the VFW.

But there was an issue. “They would take my husband, but I could not join because I (am) female,” said Hosking. She decided to travel instead, seeing 41 countries. “We had a ball!” She is a Life Member of Auxiliary 4005 in Michigan, and after the VFW began admitting women, she joined Post 4005, rising to the rank of Commander in 1995. She is now 105 years old and stepped down as Post Chaplain less than two years ago.

GINAMARIE DOHERTY, U.S. NAVY

In 1991, GinaMarie Doherty deployed to the Persian Gulf. As the ship’s secretary, she was one of 30 chosen to accompany their Commanding Officer to the Kuwait Palace for dinner with the King and his family, a thank you to the U.S. for helping to liberate the nation. While still on active duty in 2012, she attended the Middletown, Rhode Island VFW Veterans Day and Memorial Day events. Says Doherty, “I was touched by how many Auxiliary members stood tall next to VFW members.” Doherty has worn many hats in her Post (8955) and Auxiliary (5390), including several offices and chairmanships. She is the Auxiliary’s

2023-2034 Department of Rhode Island President, and last year served as Junior Vice Commander of her Post.

“I am super honored and excited to be one of (Martinez’s) Department Presidents!” says Doherty. “She is making history... (which) has inspired me to continue to serve.”

In 2023-2024, for the first time ever, our VFW Auxiliary National President is a dual member of the Auxiliary and VFW; Carla Martinez joined the Auxiliary under the eligibility of her father, Harry Creel, and she served honorably in the Navy from 1981-1997. Fellow dual members include a World War II Army nurse, a Desert Storm ship secretary and an Iraq War veteran who’s been in the Auxiliary since age 16.

IRENE HOSKING, U.S. ARMY

The sister of a Pearl Harbor survivor, Irene Hosking was inspired by the attack to join the armed forces herself. Already a registered nurse, she signed up for the Army Nursing Corps and was deployed to Australia in 1942, where she cared





SHERRY WOZNIAK, U.S. NATIONAL GUARD

Service is a family affair for Sherry Wozniak. She joined Connecticut Auxiliary 5446

in 1979 at 16 under the eligibility of her father, Stanley Wozniak, a Purple Heart recipient. “My mother and aunt were very active in the Auxiliary,” says Wozniak. “I joke that in our family when you turn 16 you join the VFW Auxiliary before you even think about getting your driver’s license.”

Two years after joining the Auxiliary, Wozniak joined the Connecticut Army National Guard, where she rose to the rank of Master Sergeant. In 2011, she deployed to Tallil, Iraq. Just weeks after returning to the U.S., she joined Post 5446. “I grew up volunteering with the Auxiliary and VFW and worked with members at events and functions, listened to their experiences and wanted to be part of the group of veterans who made the VFW special and wanted to give back to the community like they did.” She is equally active in her Post and Auxiliary, having held many positions in both.

CARLA MARTINEZ, OUR NATIONAL PRESIDENT

During her service in the U.S. Navy, Martinez served in Japan, in Korea and at the Pentagon. She joined the VFW in 2014; at that time, she was already an active member of Auxiliary 409 in Utah. She has held offices in both, including Post Adjutant and All-American District 3 Commander (2018-2019). She served in all chairs on a National level before being elected National President in

2023. She was inspired to join the Auxiliary by her dad. “I wanted to be just like him,” said Martinez. “He was and still is one of my heroes.”

INCREDIBLE WOMEN, INCREDIBLE STORIES

Each of the aforementioned women has served our country in more ways than the average citizen can imagine, from being deployed overseas in the armed forces to volunteerism back at home. For more on the VFW and Auxiliary service of Martinez, Davis and Doherty, see the March 24, 2022 E-Newsletter. For more on the VFW service of Hosking, see the June 14, 2023 *VFW magazine* article on their National website.

“I believe all dual members should serve in as many positions as physically and mentally possible,” says Doherty. “Everything we do, we do for veterans! 🇺🇸 NP



PREVIOUS PAGE: TOP - VFW Auxiliary National President Carla Martinez and VFW National Commander-in-Chief Duane Sarmiento present a wreath at the 2023 Pearl Harbor Remembrance Ceremony. **BELOW** - Irene Hosking, a registered nurse, joined the Army in 1941. **THIS PAGE: TOP** - Sherry Wozniak receives a Quilt of Valor at an award ceremony in 2020. Photo by Toni Leland of the *Norwich Bulletin*. **BELOW** - GinaMarie Doherty with "Buddy"® Poppy Child Layla at National Convention 2023 in Phoenix, Arizona.



ABOVE, VFW Auxiliary National President Carla Martinez waves to members as she arrives on the Jupiter locomotive to Celebrate America's Freedom. Page 11 - Members gather at Golden Spike National Historical Park for 2023's CAFE.



2023 CELEBRATING AMERICA'S FREEDOM EVENT

PROMONTORY, UTAH

In a vast, remote basin at the north end of the Great Salt Lake, railroad workers, engineers, dignitaries and many more folks from near and far curious to see the day unfold converged for an event that would forever unite our nation.

The crowd eagerly gathered on the plains of Promontory, Utah, an area chosen for its flat, even landscape. In the distance, a gentle boundary of mountains punctuated the horizon. They came together to witness the joining of thousands of miles of track to create the country's first transcontinental railroad. On May 8, 1869, Leland Stanford, governor of California and president of Central Pacific, drove the golden spike into the final tie, connecting his line advancing from the West and the Union Pacific line from the East. This "wedding of the rails" was a perilous undertaking of more than 20,000 workers who, for years, endured rough terrain, harsh working conditions and the volatility of newly settled areas to complete the massive project.

In September of 2023, a sea of Auxiliary blue gathered at this historical site, now home to [Golden Spike National Historical Park](#), to pay tribute to the monumental accomplishment for the 11th-annual Celebrating America's Freedom Event. Those 140-plus who attended stood in a landscape largely unchanged since 1869.

With the park reenactors mingling with attendees ahead of their performance following CAFE speeches, it wasn't difficult, members said, to imagine we'd traveled not only out West, but also back to the 19th century.

After National President Carla Martinez surprised members by riding in on the bright blue Jupiter locomotive from the West, a wood-burning Victorian-era replica, CAFE was underway with presentations from Martinez, National VFW Commander-in-Chief Duane Sarmiento and National Park Superintendent Brandon Flint.

A CHANGED NATION:

Coming on the heels of the Civil War, the country had been long divided in more ways than one, and the unification provided by the railroad would prove not only profitable and convenient, but in some ways, healing.

During construction, veterans of the war from both the North and South worked together, side by side, along with freedmen who were formerly enslaved, Chinese immigrants who came to America seeking a better life, hardworking homesteaders and religious missionaries.

"There (is) nothing more important before the nation than the building of the railroad to the Pacific," wrote President Abraham Lincoln in 1859. He would not live to see the completion a decade later, but he was correct about the railroad's importance to a struggling nation.

"Together, these incredible workers would lay nearly 2,000 miles of track. That exact number? 1776," Martinez said. Her home state is Utah and she chose this location

to highlight the lesser-known contributions by veterans, specifically, who transitioned from opposite sides of a battle field to working side-by-side toward a common goal.

Their work was grueling. Laborers were expected to shovel twenty pounds of rock more than 400 times per day, use unpredictable explosives to clear paths through mountains, work long hours in extreme weather and to withstand attacks from members of indigenous tribes distraught over seeing the land they lived off of developed by outsiders.

"These were people from all different cultures, backgrounds, viewpoints and ethnicities, who collectively

represented not only what America was, but what it could be: a land where everybody is welcome, as together we work toward a brighter tomorrow," Martinez said. "Those thousands of laborers embodied the same tenacity, strength, grit and determination of our forefathers, who also dreamed of uniting a nation."

The cost of the transcontinental railroad would be astronomical

– more than a billion dollars in today's money – but it would also mean substantial savings for travelers. Prior to completion, those who wanted to travel across the country either had to take the risks of doing so in a horse-drawn wagon, or had to go by sea around Cape Horn at the tip of South America, a journey that took six months, which could result in yellow fever, hitting icebergs or capsizing due to storms. This trek would set a person back about \$1,500. The railroad would cut that down to only \$150.



The completion of this monumental task would be so much more than a quicker, cheaper way across the country for travelers or a means of transporting soldiers and supplies from one border to another. It also represented an easier way of exchanging goods and ideas, and it gave everyday people, including the very poorest in each state through which it passed, hope for a better future. Lincoln saw it as a way of ensuring freedom and independence not only for the country, but for individual citizens, each of whom could move out west, study at agricultural colleges and live their own dreams on land they would own, work and pass down to their children.

VFW Commander-in-Chief Duane Sarmiento spoke about the significance of the site.

"Imagine in 1869, coming out here in a train and seeing this country," he said, "and I think that's what freedom is. When we joined this railroad, they came out here and saw the limitless potential of the American dream."

GOLDEN SPIKE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK OF TODAY:

Kathy Smith, Life Member of VFW Auxiliary 904 in Rocklin, California, said she loved attending CAFE at such a unique location.

"The reenactment of the day the golden spike was driven into the tracks along with the history of the day made me feel like I was part of that so many years ago," she said. "It was amazing how that area is still the same as it was (and) to see that the majority of the crowd was VFW and Auxiliary, the sea of blue with the Flags flying on that beautiful sky was heartwarming."

CAFE kicked off with the singing of the rails that preceded the trains' arrival, a distinctive sound that signals something significant is approaching. And for members who attended, it's a tune that rang true. It was bookended by another lovely song even more familiar to our members; "God Bless America," sung by National Soloist Willa Watts as the audience linked raised hands and sang along, together.

★ AC & NP



LEFT - National park employees run the replica Victorian-era locomotives for reenactments of the historical day when the transcontinental railroad united the nation. **RIGHT** - Park reenactors bring history to life. **BELOW** - East meets West. Martinez and Sarmiento shake on it. Photos by Amanda Cook.



PORTRAIT OF A VETERAN

EVERY PICTURE HAS A STORY.

PVT. GRAY PERRY'S TELLS MORE THAN ONE.



Helping with Sunshine Auxiliary 3233's annual spring tag sale led to an opportunity for Life Member Susan Berger to honor a veteran from long ago. It was a journey that began with one single drawing and would take her on many circuitous trails that intersected the worlds of art, military service and high society.

The day of the sale, a handsome face caught Berger's eye – a framed likeness of an introspective Army Air Force Private in uniform accompanied by the words, To Gray Perry – William van Dresser, Boca Raton Field 1943.

"Something about it struck me," she said. "I could not let this beautiful soldier's portrait go to another sale, or worse, to a dumpster. It was also a bit of a mystery to solve, which I thoroughly enjoyed."

So, she paid \$25 for the piece and took Perry home to join her family. What she would later discover is this picture's notable place in history.

THE MUSICAL ARTIST: GRAY PERRY (1898-1995)

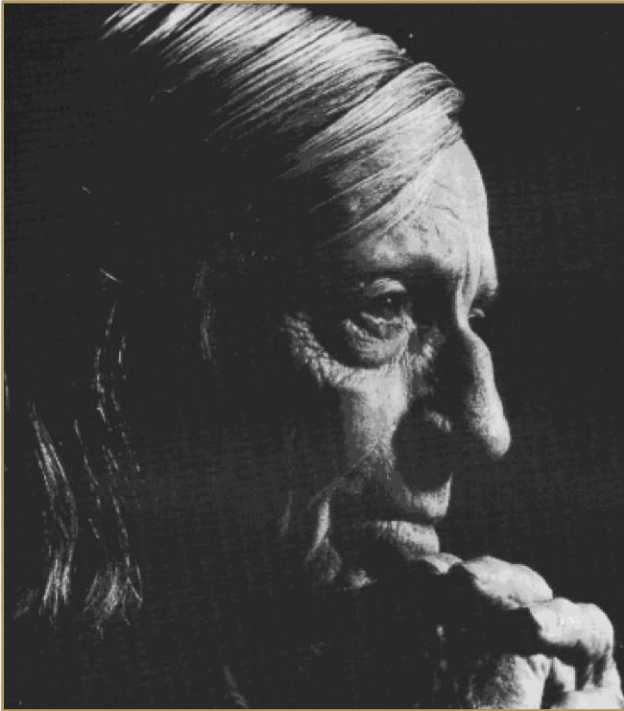
Berger's find captures a service member. It is also art of an artist. Gray Perry did enlist in the military, at age 43 in 1942, and was assigned to the Third Army Air Force band, "a 100-piece band which is made up of some of the finest musicians in the country," according to *The Miami Herald*.

Perry, born to a wealthy agricultural family in Arkansas, was also a great pianist, having trained under some of the best piano masters in the world from Paris to New York, and he was known for performing with the country's top artists. His other legacy was that of mentor and piano instructor. His music career began in church choir at age 5, but by age 15 he began teaching music. (From an obituary featured in *Florida Music Director*, a newsletter of the Florida State Music Teacher's Association.) His teaching experience includes tenures in Florida as a master piano teacher at Manatee Community College and New College and Professor Perry served as a piano teacher at Rollins College from 1926-1928. He was also professor of music at Smith College and director of piano and theory at Springfield Conservatory in Massachusetts.

Perry took pride in his students' success, like that of Derek Wieland, pianist, composer and Juilliard graduate; Patricia Trice, who wrote about Perry as part of her dissertation and Charles Turon, who retired as a professor of music at the State College of Florida, Manatee-Sarasota, after 35 years and who has held numerous offices within the Florida State Music Teachers Association. FSMTA also has a student scholarship named the Gray Perry Award. Perry himself was an FSMTA member from the late 1960s until his death in 1995.

"Gray Perry was probably the single most influential person in my life," Turon said. "He truly believed in me. I started piano lessons during my junior year in high school. I had not yet decided what career I wanted to pursue, but because of his teaching and his belief in me, I began to believe in me, too—that I could actually become a good pianist and make music my career."

Perry was 71 when Turon began taking lessons with him. "He had long, gray hair, sometimes in a ponytail, wore cowboy boots and spoke with a distinctive low, gravelly voice.



He had been trained in Paris, and even though he was born in Arkansas, had something of the old country about him. Lessons with him were magical, like stepping back in time to a distant place.”

Wrote Trice, “His professional life as an artist-teacher... was interrupted when, in 1942, he was invited to audition at the Army post in Boca Raton for an orchestra composed of outstanding musicians from the major U.S. orchestras who were selected by audition and invited to enlist. Perry's playing was so impressive that he was invited to become the piano soloist for the Third Army Air Force Symphony (called a Band for organizational purposes).”

THE PORTRAIT ARTIST: WILLIAM VAN DRESSER (1871-1963)

William van Dresser, who captured Perry in his 1943 pastel drawing, was a sought-after portrait artist who worked, “wintered” and eventually settled on the east coast of Florida. While Perry joined the military later in life, Van Dresser came into his own as an artist later as a second career in New York at age 26. This despite growing up with “illustrious parents...well known in national art and literary circles” according to an article published in the *Palm Beach Post* in 1963. “Society leaders and notables of filmdom” sat for Van Dresser’s father.

Although he initially embarked on a career in minor league baseball, Van Dresser would go on to become one of the most prominent portrait painters of the 20th century ¹ as told in *The Spanish River Papers*, a publication of the Boca Raton Historical Society & Museum, in a July 2023 article by Maria Farah. Among Van Dresser’s most remarkable achievements are his portraits of prominent individuals such as Albert Einstein, President Calvin Coolidge, and both Theodore and Franklin D. Roosevelt. ² The artist also immortalized such “screenland sitters” as Charlie Chaplain, Patricia Ziegfield and Richard Bartholemess. Sidenote: Mr. Van Dresser’s wife, Jasmine Stone van Dresser, was an actress who became a respected author in her own right. She penned a 1916 bestseller called “Gibbie of Clam Shell Alley.” The Van Dresser family, including the couple’s young children, were also known for their theatrical productions in New York. (*Biography from Painter & Hall.*)

“Numerous persons, among the wealthy set who follow the horses and who pay handsomely for portraits...have been done by Mr. Van Dresser,” – *The Charlotte Observer*, June 13, 1946.



TOP LEFT - Gray Perry featured in the Automatic Musical Instrument Collectors' Association's Honor Roll in 1991 by Dorothy Bromage. Perry was an honorary AMICA member. **ABOVE** - William van Dresser with one of his beloved Airdale terriers, Michael, in *The Charlotte Observer* on June 13, 1946.

PORTRAIT OF A VETERAN

themselves in Florida newspaper society pages of the day, as did Perry.

So, how did Pvt. Perry become one of Van Dresser's subjects? During the war, Van Dresser painted portraits of officers and their families at the Boca Raton Army Airfield. (BRAAF). There were 50,000-100,000 people stationed at BRAAF between 1942-1947. Some of his works done in various mediums can be found at [The Schmidt Boca Raton History Museum](#). It is also possible their paths crossed at swanky parties hosted by the who's who of Boca Raton.

During World War II, Florida played a crucial part in the war effort, becoming home to hundreds of military installations. Notably, the 5,800-acre Boca Raton Army Air Field was one of the most important installations in the state. Florida's strategic location, excellent flying weather and proximity to vital shipping lanes made it ideal for both Army and Navy airfields.³

THE AUXILIARY CONNECTION:

Intrigued by her rummage sale art find, Berger learned as much as she could about the portrait, its creator and subject, and reached out to The Schmidt Boca Raton Historical Society & Museum, where the Van Dresser piece is now part of their collections.

"He played music and supported the troops. I was a bit sad to part with him, but I know he found a wonderful home where he would have a fitting place of honor for everyone to enjoy," she said.

The Schmidt Boca Raton History Museum is the home of the Boca Raton Historical Society, whose mission is to collect, preserve and present information and artifacts relevant to the past and evolving history of Boca Raton and to maintain a visible role in the education and the advocacy of historic preservation in the community.³

Museum Curator Susan Gillis said welcoming the Van Dresser/Perry work was a wonderful surprise.

"I was very pleased when Ms. Berger contacted me about this portrait and so generously donated it to our collections. We were quite familiar with Van Dresser's name and although we have copies of his works in our museum collections, we had no original works until now. My intern and I enjoyed finding out more about this great artist and his subject Gray Perry, who turned out to be quite a well-known musician himself."

The Van Dresser Portrait of Perry found its way to the

Auxiliary tag sale via another area annual sale benefiting local nonprofits called Karin's Causes, organized by Karin Gustafson, who raises funds from estate sales. In 2022, a fellow Auxiliary member secured what didn't sell for Gustafson and incorporated it into their tag sale inventory.

Berger, who became a Life Member of the VFW Auxiliary in 2018, is actively involved, now serving a second term as Auxiliary Treasurer. She joined on the eligibility of her son Ryan Firestone, who served in Afghanistan and Iraq. Berger's husband, James, is a Navy veteran.

"When my son returned from active duty...he was working and going to school but found the VFW as a saving grace of sorts to help him navigate his return to civilian life," she said. "I was divorced, living alone, and he wanted me to get out and start meeting people again. He joined the Honor Guard at our Post and took me to the Honor Guard dinner. The people were so nice and welcoming, that after a few months I decided to join the Auxiliary. I met my husband at the VFW. I jokingly tell him that it has all the makings of a Hallmark movie. I guess in many ways (the Auxiliary) was a lifesaver for me as well." ✨ AC

¹ "Tampa Artist Taken by Death." *The Tampa Tribune*, September 14, 1950.

² Leone King, "Remembering Cleveland Van Dresser." *Palm Beach Post*, October 2, 1963; and "Tampa Artist Taken by Death." *The Tampa Tribune*.

³ Boca Raton Historical Society & Museum and PR firm Polin Public Relations.



Susan Berger, Life Member of Auxiliary 3233 in Sarasota, Florida, pictured at a "Buddy" ® Poppy drive in her community. Berger found a portrait of a veteran at her Auxiliary's tag sale that now has a home at a Boca Raton museum. She thanks Auxiliary 3233 President Holly Evans for encouraging her to submit her story to National Headquarters.

HQ MEMO:

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

- If your 2024 annual dues were not paid by December 31, you are no longer a member in good standing, which means you are no longer eligible to attend meetings, hold office or receive a Cancer Grant until your dues are paid.
- An annual continuous member **MUST** have his or her 2024 dues received at VFW Auxiliary National Headquarters by June 30, 2024 to maintain his or her continuous years of membership within the organization. There is not a “reinstate” category for membership.
- If an annual continuous member’s 2024 dues are not received at National Headquarters by June 30, 2024, their continuous membership will end and they will then have to:
 - **REJOIN** the organization
 - **PROVE** eligibility again
 - Be **READMITTED** by voting members into the local Auxiliary AND
 - **START** continuous years over.
- Again, if an annual continuous member misses even a single year of paying dues on time, continuous years of membership start over at one (1).
- This change will also affect an annual continuous member’s eligibility for a Cancer Grant. If a member does not maintain his or her continuous membership, they will have to wait one full year before they are eligible for another grant. There remains a limit of two grants per lifetime.



LEGISLATIVE VICTORIES

2023 VFW Advocacy in Action: Legislation in the Spotlight

During the first session of the 118th Congress last year, the VFW National Legislative Service focused attention on three areas of concern: transition from the military, suicide prevention and predatory claims companies. Legislation has been introduced that pertains to each of these issues, and congressional hearings were held during which the VFW testified on behalf of the organization. However, there has not been any substantial movement by Congress on any of these bills. The VFW will continue to focus its advocacy spotlight on this crucial legislation during the second congressional session.



Transition from the Military

H.R. 3933, *TAP Promotion Act*

Leaving service is often complicated by service-related ailments, family needs, loss of identity and support networks, and the required training to enter a new career field. Sadly, the initial year following discharge also comes with increased suicide risk among new veterans, heightening the need to ensure all transitioning service members are connected to post-service benefits and resources as quickly as possible.

One of the best resources to have during this period are accredited representatives who can help file Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Benefits Delivery at Discharge (BDD) claims. Unfortunately, not all service members going through the Department of Defense Transition Assistance Program (TAP) have access to BDD accredited representatives, resulting in lost opportunities to receive timely care and

benefits upon discharge. The VFW believes there is immense value in incorporating these accredited representatives into the TAP curriculum itself. Specifically, the VFW would like to see these representatives physically present in TAP classrooms during VA briefings on resources that can be applied for prior to discharge.

The VFW firmly believes the BDD program is an underutilized tool in the fight against veteran suicide. Directly connecting transitioning service members to accredited representatives in TAP classrooms has the potential to save lives. The VFW urges Congress to pass H.R. 3933, TAP Promotion Act, to require accredited representatives from national, state and local organizations to be included in TAP classes.

VA Benefits Data for Suicide Prevention

S. 928 / H.R. 4157, *Not Just a Number Act*

Successful attempts to eliminate the risk of suicide should not focus solely on whether or not the veteran has recently been seen by a doctor or mental health care provider. The VFW has advocated for years that VA must incorporate more Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) usage data into its suicide prevention efforts. This should include complete information on disability compensation; use of benefits for education, employment, home loans and foreclosure assistance; and participation in housing and food insecurity programs. We must identify, study and utilize information regarding economic opportunity benefit and leverage that information to successfully prevent suicide among veterans. Having a job, a home, food, education and benefits for service-connected disabilities are all factors that must be considered.

All of these programs are administered by VBA, but the VA Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention is operated out of the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). It would make more sense for this office to be elevated to the office of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and for both VHA and VBA data to be included in its reports on suicide. VA must study all resources from its administrations to effectively combat veteran suicide.

The VFW urges Congress to pass S. 928, *Not Just a Number Act*, to direct VA to incorporate benefit usage data into its annual suicide prevention report, and to examine moving the office of suicide prevention to the enterprise level at VA.

Cracking Down on Predatory Claims Companies

S. 740 / H.R. 1139, *GUARD VA Benefits Act*

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

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

Penalties need to be reinstated to the already existing law. Anyone who assists veterans with the preparation, presentation or prosecution of VA claims should adhere to established fee caps or be subject to penalties. The VFW urges Congress to pass S. 740 / H.R. 1139, *GUARD VA Benefits Act*, to reinstate penalties for charging veterans and survivors unauthorized fees relating to claims for VA benefits.



SPOTTING

SPAMMERS & SCAMMERS

ON SOCIAL MEDIA

If you're following us on Facebook, you may have noticed that we've launched new features, diversified content and are posting more pictures from the National President's travels, postcards, Auxiliaries in Action, Throwback Thursdays, the VFW National Home and others sent in by you - our members!

As a result, our engagements are high and interactions between individual members, members and the general public and with Auxiliary Headquarters happen frequently. This is great! But the dark side is attracting even more spammers and scammers than usual. Some of these are very clever and while we try our best to delete their comments before anyone responds to them, sometimes they slip through. We've therefore been alarmed to see many members engaging with these "phishing" accounts. Below are some tips on spotting and avoiding them.

HEARTSTRINGS & FLATTERY

Our recent influx of spammers and scammers has been from accounts that have used the pictures of (likely real) military men and women in uniform, making them harder to spot while evoking empathy. Some even claim to be currently deployed and in need of assistance.

This makes us feel compelled to respond, as they seem like the veterans and soldiers we help every day. If you are reasonably certain this is a scam, block the user without engaging. If you are unsure, direct them to either our website or that of the VFW, but do not do any more than that. Offer no personal information or assistance, and do not give out your personal email address or phone number.

Recently, most of the scammers we see on our page reply to comments our members have made on our Facebook posts. They generally start with a compliment and end with a plea to send them a friend request, or wording similar to "I've been so moved by your words, I would like to get to know you better."

SPAMMER VERSUS SCAMMER

Spammers post many messages on Facebook that are all the same (think copy/pasted). While spam is generally posted by bots (computer programs/robots), spam is often created by real people or businesses, then mass shared with the intention of getting attention or making sales. It's best to report and ignore online spam or delete it in your email inbox.

Scammers are people or bots looking to harm real people in some way. Many are phishing attempts - think "fishing for information" - as they try to steal your password protection question answers, credit card numbers and other personal information. These include the more obvious, asking for gift cards or cash, and the subtle, including "games" that ask for your favorite holidays, first cars, high school mascots or things like "combine your mother's maiden name with the first street you lived on to get your Hollywood stage name!"

WAS I HACKED?

If your account or email address is sending out messages you didn't write, this is a sign you were hacked. The most common way is through phishing. In addition to what is described above, this can happen when a Facebook user receives a message or email telling them there is an issue and they need to follow the link to log in now. The person clicks the link, puts in their login info and has no idea it has just been handed over to a scam artist. Sometimes

these links are sent by friends with messages like "I just found this picture of you online! Click here to see it." Do not click on any potentially suspicious links. If from a friend, verify that they sent message by calling or asking in person, not through Facebook. If from a stranger, delete.

If you are hacked, try to recover your account as quickly as possible. Change your password and, if possible, your email address, and enable two-point authentication, which would require anyone trying to log in to your account to enter a code texted to your phone or sent to your email address. If it is too late for this, get messages to your friends and contacts through a means other than Facebook (phone, email, at a meeting) to tell them what happened and whether you have created a new account. Make sure they know which is you and not a cloned account. Cloned accounts look like a friend's real account - most are copied from individuals active on Facebook - and will try to draw you in with private messages, often saying things like, "I had to create a new account" to trick friends into communicating with them. Before accepting, check to see if you're already friends; if you are, this is likely from a cloned account.

INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

And last but not least, we've recently seen frequent replies, from the same senders, to members' posts that contain either pornographic links or unauthorized sales of fake Auxiliary items. We do our best to report, ban and block these as soon as we see them. 🚫 NP



Our HISTORY

TWISTED X CEO & PRESIDENT'S MOMENT WITH AUXILIARY PRODUCES THOUSANDS FOR SCHOLARSHIP

One individual's hope to be an American citizen changed the future for hundreds of students who will be the future of our country.

Twisted X President Prasad Reddy always wanted to learn something different. He and one of his friends had been watching a lot of Hollywood movies, which drove the desire to explore something new. So, they flew to the United States from Chennai, India, where Reddy would achieve a master's degree from Ohio University.

Once he graduated, he began working in Michigan. During this time, Reddy experienced feeling very welcomed in the country, and was impressed by opportunities that opened up for him, which influenced his decision to become a U.S. citizen.

"America is the one country in the world who took care of people that needed help..." he explained. "It has values in the sense that let's take care of the people who are less blessed than us. No matter which country they are from. People are people."

In 1980, right after Reddy received his citizenship in Grand Rapids, Michigan, he walked out of the hall

and three to four Auxiliary members said, "Welcome to America." These members would give him a Flag and a Constitution booklet.

"Then it hit me actually what happened..." Reddy said.

"That I took on is a responsibility to be a good citizen. I just didn't know what to say. I don't even know if I thanked them. It was just a totally different feel; it was better than when I took the oath."

Having that Flag in his hand and hearing the words "Welcome to America" from Auxiliary members would inspire him to learn more about the VFW/Auxiliary. Twisted X would later support the VFW in 2013 but also start sponsoring the VFW's Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen scholarships in 2018.

When Reddy first stepped into the position as President and CEO of Twisted X, a sustainable western footwear company 15 years ago, the small company was in bankruptcy but has since come back under Reddy's leadership. Twisted X is on a continuous double-digit growth and profit run each year making the company 20 times the size of when Reddy first began with it.



Twisted X President and CEO Prasad Reddy presents the first place national winner of the 2022-2023 VFW Voice of Democracy \$35,000 T.C. Selman Memorial Scholarship award during the VOD Parade of Winners ceremony at the VFW Legislative Conference held in Washington, D.C.

"I said the day we come out of bankruptcy 100% we're going to be involved with the VFW," Reddy explained. "And in 2013 I paid the last check to the bankruptcy creditors and the next thing I told our marketing person is 'Let's go see the VFW' and the rest is history." The VFW was the first organization that Twisted X became involved with.

"Prasad and his company, Twisted X, have had a profound impact on the VFW," VFW Foundation Executive Director Lisa Baronio said. "Prasad shares his story with many of becoming a citizen and the warm welcome he received from the Auxiliary just after receiving his citizenship. The thing is, Prasad radiates light and brings out the best in people. His long-standing relationship with the VFW, the Auxiliary, and the Foundation has not only manifested itself in philanthropic support of the Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen, but through the genuine caring, grateful, gentle nature Prasad emotes through his family, his employees and those who have had the opportunity to share time with him."

Baronio added that that quality of seeing the good in people and programs will be Reddy's legacy.

"I am grateful for every encounter and every conversation I've had with Prasad, and I realize I have come late to this relationship with the Auxiliary, VFW and Foundation," she continued. "Every encounter I've had with Prasad, I always think... if I absorbed even 10% of how Prasad lives his life as a humble, grateful and generous person, my life would be much richer because of it. I have never met anyone like Prasad Reddy."

Outside of the VFW, Twisted X sponsors six other organizations. The company gives 10% to 12% of its profits to charity, one of those being Tough Enough to Wear Pink, a western rodeo company that raises funds for breast cancer research.

Besides supporting these organizations, Twisted X and Reddy have the philosophy that children are the future, especially after growing up in India. He explained how lower-class kids weren't blessed with the same opportunities that kids from the upper- and middle-class had.

Reddy believes that if kids are given the opportunity, they will become good students and citizens.

"If we could provide them the guidance and the education and the means to help themselves..." he said. "That's the best we can do because kids are the ones that are the future of the country."

"While Twisted X is not the sole supporter of VOD, their contributions have a huge impact on the program," Baronio added. "Prasad is involved, together with others, in the selection process of the winners. Every year (he could), Prasad has traveled to Washington D.C. to the Parade of Winners celebration and speaks not only to the audience, but to the winners on the stage, and then joins the winners in a post-event celebration. Many of the students get to know him and understand why this program is so important and the responsibility it holds to be a Voice of Democracy scholarship recipient."

This is why Twisted X provides internships for high school and college students as well as sponsoring VFW's Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen scholarships.

"I think most of the time, when the kids are thinking right, have the right values then patriotism is a part of that," Reddy said. "Providing good opportunities, providing good guidance to kids will automatically make them good, responsible citizens." ✨ SM



Twisted X President and CEO Prasad Reddy. His footwear company emphasizes compassion as one of its highest priorities. Photo from Twisted X.

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VFW
VFWSTORE.ORG



Ladies'

Men's

PATRIOTIC T-SHIRT

- 100% polyester
- Distressed patriotic sublimated design with Auxiliary Emblem shadowed on front and back

7868 Ladies' V-neck
S-2XL \$34.00
3XL \$40.00

7867 Men's crew neck
S-2XL \$34.00
3XL \$40.00
4XL \$42.00



FLAG PIN 1 x 1"
1717 \$3.50



BLUE HEATHER JERSEY AUXILIARY CAP

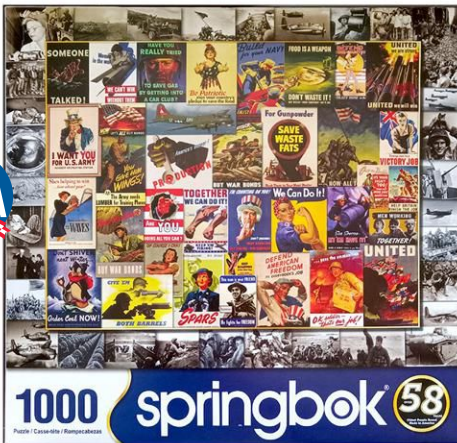
Cotton jersey with white embroidery. Six-panel, medium profile structured cap; fabric strap with two-piece hook-and-loop closure. 7232 \$18.95



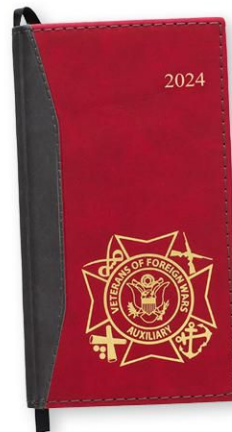
20 OZ. TUMBLER
Double wall, stainless steel, copper lining and plastic lid. 3142 \$15.95



LIFE MEMBER CAP Navy blue cotton twill, embroidered Auxiliary Emblem, Life Member. Six-panel, medium profile, structured, adjustable hook-and-loop back strap. 7266 \$19.95



PATRIOTIC PUZZLE Vintage war photos and posters. 1,000 pieces. Finished size: 30" x 24". Average time to complete: 8-10 hours. For ages 7+. Made in the USA. 1235 \$20.00



WEEKLY CALENDAR 13-month, one-week at-a-glance format. 3 5/8 x 6 1/2". 1282 \$8.00



PONYTAIL CAP Elastic criss-cross ponytail opening. 100% polyester with leather US Flag patch. With "Est. 1899" on red tag. Adjustable hook-and-loop back strap. Imported. 7154 \$16.95

SUICIDE PREVENTION PIN Silver tone with translucent enamel. Rubber back. Engraved on back. 1 1/8". 1724 \$3.25



VETERANS & MILITARY SUICIDE PREVENTION