

# VFW Auxiliary

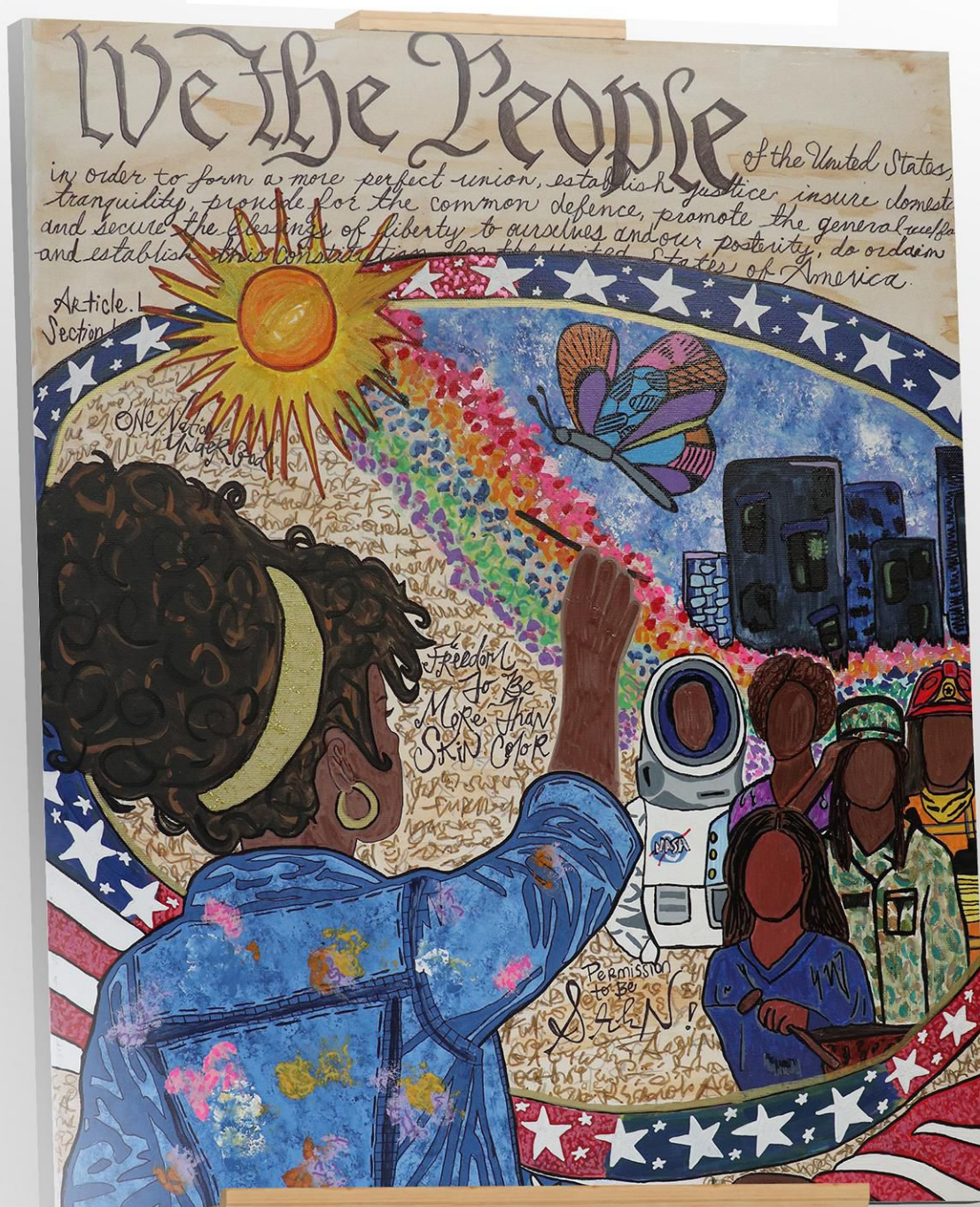
VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS AUXILIARY MAGAZINE

SEPTEMBER 2026

2026-2027  
NATIONAL  
PRESIDENT  
DONNA K.  
MILLS

PATRIOTIC  
ART  
CONTEST  
WINNERS

POST &  
AUXILIARY  
BRING  
NAMESAKE  
HOME WITH  
HONOR





**2026-2027**

## Department of Montana President

Update: Since the publication of the July edition of *VFW Auxiliary Magazine*, Violet Tharp was elected at her Department Convention to the office of Department President.

# DATES & DEADLINES

## September

### National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month

|              |                                                            |
|--------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| SEPTEMBER 7  | Labor Day                                                  |
| SEPTEMBER 11 | Patriot Day                                                |
| SEPTEMBER 17 | Constitution Day                                           |
| SEPTEMBER 18 | National Prisoner of War/Missing in Action Recognition Day |
| SEPTEMBER 27 | Gold Star Mother's and Family's Day                        |

## October

|            |                                                                                                 |
|------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| OCTOBER 12 | Columbus Day & Indigenous Peoples' Day                                                          |
| OCTOBER 31 | Halloween & Patriot's Pen and Voice of Democracy<br>Scholarship contest entries due to VFW Post |

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

# TABLE OF Contents

SEPTEMBER 2026 • VOLUME 91 • ISSUE 1

UNWAVERING SUPPORT



FOR UNCOMMON HEROES®



9

## Features

### 9 2026-2027 National President

National President Donna K. Mills will lead the Auxiliary with her theme of *Serving America's Heroes*.

### 11 Young American Creative Patriotic Art & 3-Dimensional Patriotic Art Contest Winners

Art was judged at National Headquarters; we displayed art from the top National winners of the two-dimensional contest and three-dimensional contest at Convention. See their patriotic expressions.

### 19 Illustrating America

This art contest showcases the talent of younger students grades K-8.

### 21 Bringing Howard Bruce Shorts Home

Post and Auxiliary 5958 in Titusville, Pennsylvania bring Private Shorts home with honor. He is their Post's namesake.



11



19

## In Every Issue

- |                       |                  |
|-----------------------|------------------|
| 3 Get Digital         | 6 Reader's Voice |
| 4 President's Message | 7 My Veteran     |
| 5 Editor's Letter     |                  |

## About the Cover

First-place National winner of the Young American Creative Patriotic Art Contest: We, Too Are "We the People" by 11<sup>th</sup> grader R'mani-Dajoure Harris of Nevada. Her piece is centered around these words in the U.S. Constitution, "A foundation of what America is meant to be... I am showing that Black girls and Black women are part of 'We the People' and that patriotism is not just loving America for what it was, but believing in what it promised and becoming proof that the promise is real."



21

GET DIGITAL

# NEW YEAR, NEW WEBSITE!

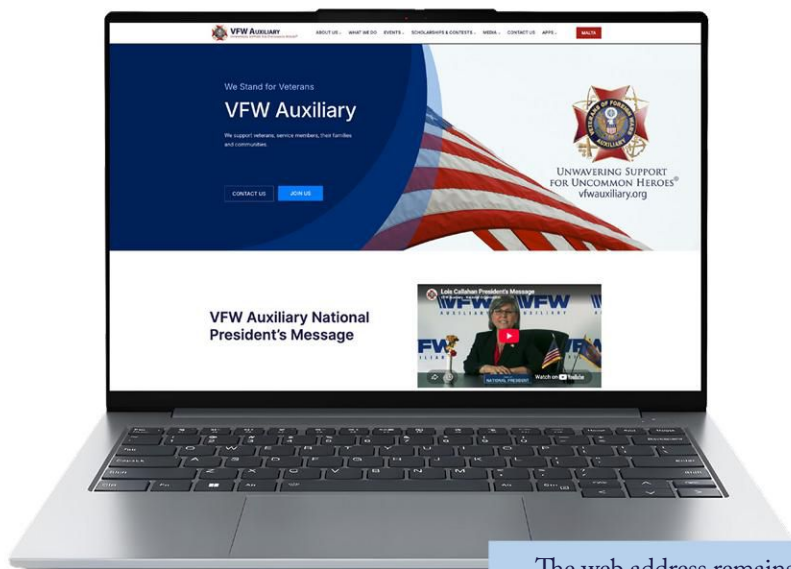


We are so excited to share with you our revamped, renovated, rejuvenated website, available just in time to help us kick off our brand-new Program Year. You will still find information about our 11 National Programs, how to join, the National President's video message, our National Line Officers' headshots, event dates and details,

scholarships applications, *VFW Auxiliary Magazine* archives, Auxiliaries in Action, member benefits and more, but in an easier-to-use format and eye-catching style with accessibility features.

On the site, you will also find our contact us form that links to [info@vfwauxiliary.org](mailto:info@vfwauxiliary.org). Emailing the info account is the best way to ensure that your question or concern is addressed in a timely manner, as the staff who manage this account send your emails directly to the appropriate team member. This way, you get your answer directly from the source!

NOTE that we have seen more and more incorrect artificial intelligence (AI)-generated content on local- and Department-level Auxiliary websites. Be sure that you are getting your content directly from the source, like our *Bylaws and Ritual*, and not relying on AI, because AI can get it wrong, which leads to confusion and sharing of misinformation. We know using AI is very convenient and quite popular as a search tool, but for the time being, it is not a good source of accurate information.



The web address remains the same, so you'll still be able to find us at <https://vfwauxiliary.org/>

## get SOCIAL



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



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



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



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



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





“My theme, *Serving America's Heroes*, is about fulfilling our mission as the VFW Auxiliary.”

Dear members —

WOW! September already! Time is really flying by as I fly to visit Departments during this *Serving America's Heroes* year!

I thank you all very much for the honor of serving as VFW Auxiliary National President for the 2026-2027 year. Best wishes and congratulations to all the newly installed Officers and appointees. Always remember that you have my support.

My theme, *Serving America's Heroes*, is about fulfilling our mission as the VFW Auxiliary – caring for those who have given a part of their life for the freedoms that we all enjoy. *The 2026-2027 National Program Book* not only displays my favorite color, but it also highlights my personal pin, which reflects what I think you all are - the STARS of the 2026-2027 year. I cannot do anything without you, and when you shine your light on those we serve with every project you complete for our National Programs, you are making this a banner year for the VFW Auxiliary.

I look forward to seeing the photos and reading about your projects in articles in *VFW Auxiliary Magazine* and I encourage you to remember to support the 2026-2027 special joint project, Operation Bring them Home, which supports the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) and help us return our fallen heroes to their families and our homeland. Lack of funding is causing closure of important dig sites and environmental conditions are quickly eroding remains, so we must act quickly to bring our missing home.

Your membership is my TOP Priority! Please renew your annual membership as soon as you possibly can and help me and the entire VFW Auxiliary to recruit and rejoin members. We are the greatest veterans' support organization in the world. Help me make sure that every eligible person joins us in support of veterans and their families.

May we carry the excitement of the new year with us always knowing that we truly do make a difference when we *Serve America's Heroes*.

With loyalty and respect,

Donna

DONNA K. MILLS  
National President



*We look forward to seeing and hearing about all the creative ways you support our mission in 2026-2027.*

Dear members —

Now that we've enjoyed all that National Convention 2026 had to offer, it's time to rush to the open field of the new Program Year as we focus all of our efforts on *Serving America's Heroes*. We at National Headquarters enjoyed meeting many of you in person out West in Reno. It's so nice to put faces with names and voices of those members we email and connect with by phone throughout the year.

For the second year in a row, we featured a digital art gallery where members could view top National entries from the Young American Creative Patriotic Art Contest, 3-Dimensional Patriotic Art Contest and Illustrating America Contest. We hope you enjoyed seeing their work on the big-screen monitors at registration.

Look for a story about the art beginning on page 11. Now is the time to start promoting these and other Auxiliary scholarships in your communities. Be sure to do so using the latest entry forms, info. sheets and brochures, available on our website and in MALTA Member Resources. It is important that you have the newest resources; scholarship and contest criteria can change year to year. Also refer to your *2026-2027 National Program Book* and our site for a **VERY** important update to deadlines for the Illustrating America art contest as the first contest deadline has moved up by three months! The new deadline to submit student entries to sponsoring/participating Auxiliaries is **December 15**. We want talented students to have every chance of competing for awards.

We elected Donna K. Mills of Pennsylvania as VFW Auxiliary National President. Read about her journey within our organization to our highest National office on page 9. She and VFW Commander-in-Chief Cory L. Geisler will share a joint special project called Operation Bring them Home that focuses on repatriating military personnel lost in combat by way of supporting the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency's (DPAA's) efforts.

This month is also National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month. For us, every day is Veterans Day and we know even one death by suicide is too many. Focus on ways you can promote suicide prevention and share the 988 suicide crisis line (press 1) emergency number.

We look forward to seeing and hearing about all the creative ways you support our mission in 2026-2027. Keep us in mind as you work our National Programs and send pictures and caption information our way to [info@vfwauxiliary.org](mailto:info@vfwauxiliary.org) to be considered for Auxiliaries in Action social media posts.

In a few months, members will travel to sunny Punta Cana, Dominican Republic for Mills' Mid-Year Conference. If you haven't already registered for the 2027 Conference, visit the events page on the National website; the deadline for registration is September 27 (if rooms are not already all booked up).

AMANDA COOK  
*Editor-In-Chief*

## VOLUME 91 NUMBER 1

**Editor-In-Chief**  
Amanda Cook

**Contributing Writers**  
Nicole Panteleakos &  
Kris Baker

### VFW Auxiliary Magazine

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

### Editorial Office

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

### Graphic Design

Braden Design  
[jaclynn@bradendesign.co](mailto:jaclynn@bradendesign.co)

### Change of Address

Members may change their own address or email address in MALTA. Or email [info@vfwauxiliary.org](mailto:info@vfwauxiliary.org).

### Website

[www.vfwauxiliary.org](http://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](mailto: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 is some of the feedback National received after we launched a revamped and redesigned website:

"I just want to say how much I love the new VFW Auxiliary website."

**KOLLEEN HERNDON** | AUXILIARY 6640 | METAIRIE, LA.

It would be greatly appreciate if National encouraged departments to NOT use AI. As a marketing professional, it's insulting and embarrassing to see (Auxiliaries/Districts/Departments) use AI for everything.

**KATELYN FOEHNER** | AUXILIARY 2164 WEATON, ILL.

**FROM HQ:** We encourage Auxiliary members to rely on resources that do not involve AI. In Canva, for example, it is possible to turn off the AI features and create without them, using their version of stock imagery that was created by humans who were compensated for it. Similarly, good old fashioned clip art can be fun and have a nostalgic vibe. Or, best yet, asking an artsy member if they'd like to volunteer their talent to make a poster or flier is a great idea! Our current Americanism Ambassador's focus is on "POP" posters; creating these would be a great way to share information in a fun way and qualify for a possible National award at the same time!)

Yeah, this is endemic. You need to be very careful and use a high quality platform to produce something that doesn't present as AI slop or have inconsistencies. Buyer beware!

**SCOTT JAMIESON**

AUXILIARY 5390 | PORTSMOUTH R.I.

I really dislike all the AI generated posters, etc. Just a personal opinion.

**LAURIE DALE** | AUXILIARY 141 | KENYON, MINN.

**REPLYING TO LAURIE:** They are all over my timeline and I can't stand them either. But its alarming how much misinformation is on them and people/members still post them.

**DEBBIE SCHEETZ**

AUXILIARY 6691 | FRASER, MICH.

## TELL US WHAT YOU THINK!

We all belong to this great organization because we are passionate about serving veterans, service members, their families and communities. We welcome and value your comments, suggestions and questions.

The editors of *VFW Auxiliary Magazine* want to know what you think about features and articles you see in the magazine. **Please email your letters to the Editor to [info@vfwauxiliary.org](mailto:info@vfwauxiliary.org), marked "Letter to the Editor,"** or send them to

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



## Marine veteran and District Commander takes a long walk to visit all the Posts in his District

It was the hottest day of the summer of 2025 in Ohio. Marine Corps veteran Michael Romans was wearing a 42-pound vest and had been walking for 10 miles. He looked down to his only companion on the journey, Ugly Rock, his pet rock he had found on the side of the road. They sojourned on. When he arrived at the VFW Post, the air conditioning hit him like a punch to the gut. He smiled at the veterans assembled there, and then immediately lay down in the middle of the Post for a short rest. He had made it. Now only a few dozen more Posts to walk to.

“Some people are shocked when they hear that I have walked to their Post in some cases from over 10 miles away, or in extreme heat, or cold,” Romans said. “When I explain to them why I am doing this, to bring camaraderie to the District and pride in who we are, they understand. And I’ve been told I am not the normal District Commander they have been used to.”

When Romans was elected Department of Ohio District 7 Commander, the role felt daunting. It was similar to how he felt when he was elected Commander of Post 5137. He had not been a Junior Vice Commander at the District level and he described his year as Senior Vice Commander like “learning via drinking from a fire hose.” He decided to take a page out of a book he read called “About Face,” by Army Col. David Hackworth.

Be bold. Rebrand your outfit with a new name. Face front and take the extra step. The advice from this book filled the mind of the new Commander. He wanted to come in with some decisive new measures. He knew that a leader, if you can get your troops to all agree on one matter you were off to a great start. He decided his bold action would be to walk to every Post in his District. This would accomplish a couple of things.

“First, they all would think to themselves, ‘what kind of knucklehead have we elected as our District Commander?’ That is the getting them all on the same page part,” Romans said. “Second, it shows them that I care about their Post enough that I will even walk to them.”

Romans started his walking tour in July of last year and completed his goal on June 27 after trekking a total of 267 miles. He has documented the walk on his YouTube channel, GoldilocksandtheBear7077.

The Goldilocks to Roman’s bear is Auxiliary 5137 member Becky Carlino. Carlino has been with Romans for about three years and in that time, she has seen him try a lot of different ways to help veterans.

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**ABOVE:** Last September, District Commander Michael Romans joined the Department of Ohio District 7 for their Founder’s Day event in Columbus, Ohio.

“He’ll try anything ... even turkey bowling or dressing up like the pink bunny from the ‘A Christmas Story’ movie to inspire and bring (Post) members and Auxiliary members together,” she said. “Yet he remains grounded in our history and traditions.”

Carlino said he set the bar high with his walking tour.

“Every walk presented a new adventure. Some with the challenges of heat and exhaustion, others with cold and snow. And each walk ended and started at a VFW Post in our District. At each Post he pauses to meet the people in the room and shares an inside look at the VFW in a positive manner,” Carlino said. “He has people join him on his walks sometimes. But often he is walking and filming alone, sharing his heart, a few laughs, and is always encouraging viewers to join, participate and love their local VFW.”

## BECOMING A COMMANDER

In 2023, the Medina VFW was hosting a fundraiser for Volunteers of America to support homeless and traumatized women veterans. Carlino was there acting as the Volunteers of America development contact. In the middle of the car show, in a sea of 10,000 people, she met Romans at his veterans' services booth. She knew right away he was made for her.

“Not too long after formal introductions, Romans pointed at a 1963 Corvette, and said, ‘Hey, do you know what me and that Corvette have in common?’ I said, ‘You’re both old.’ He laughed and said, ‘Yes, and we’re both sexy vets.’ And the rest they say, is history.”

Carlino says during their history together she has seen Romans grow as a six-time Post Commander and tireless advocate for veterans. He also convinced Carlino to join the VFW Auxiliary and she is now a Life Member.

“He knew as soon as we met, that his Post was going to be an amazing adventure for me. And he was right.”

Carlino remembers an occasion where Romans missed nearly an entire event because he talked with a distressed veteran for over an hour. Afterward he drove 20 miles round trip and to ensure his fellow veteran got home safely to his family. Now this very veteran is in one of Romans' walk videos.

Those closest to Romans have seen his growth, which is now inspiring the next generation of Auxiliary members.

“When he first joined the VFW, I believed it was mostly for the social aspect, but he quickly began taking on responsibilities when needed, stepping up to help drive

events and help branching out, always thinking of how he could improve his Post and make things better for those around him,” said Shiloh Romans, Michael’s son and VFW Auxiliary 5137 member. “Between working with the Honor Guard, leading holiday and festive events at the Post, networking and creating communications with the other Posts and providing information and help to his fellow members or just other veterans in the community that needed a hand, he shows through his actions that helping his fellow man is a core part of himself.”

Whether walking to Posts or leading with words, other Auxiliary members have also followed his example.

“No matter what environment Michael is in, if someone asks what the VFW is all about, you can watch him change into what I call his Marine Corps veteran mode,” said Auxiliary 5137 Life Member Marla Meszar. “He’s passionate when explaining what we can do to help veterans and their families. And you can see the pride and depth of commitment in his face and stature, especially when he talks to prospective members.”

Romans has talked at length with his Post and Auxiliary about how to bring in those prospective members. He is looking for his next mission once his walking tour is finished. Whatever is decided, he knows this mission will again be focused on strengthening connections.

“We believe, looking forward, that we can only grow and evolve as one giant VFW family,” Romans said.

“Not two sides of the house having assorted events, we mean truly coming together to fundraise, honor and support our veteran community. We are stronger together than apart.” ★ KB

Auxiliary 5137 member Becky Carlino with veteran Michael Romans. Romans is a veteran of the Marine Corps and has been elected Post Commander six times.



# VFW AUXILIARY

## National President

*Donna K. Mills*



National President Donna K. Mills' VFW Auxiliary story officially kicked off when she was 16.

"As I like to tell the story, my mother made me do it! She (Bonnie K. Eichelberger) was VFW Auxiliary President the year

I reached the age of 16. When November of 1979 came to be, my mom and her Auxiliary sisters realized that they only needed two members to be 100% in Membership by December 31. That was when my application was completed, signed and taken to the December meeting where I became a member."

She joined under the eligibility of her grandfather, Neal H. Griffin Sr., who served in the U.S. Army during World War II.

That was just the beginning of something much larger. Mills, a Life Member of Standing Stone Auxiliary 1754 in Huntingdon, Pennsylvania, has been involved ever since, serving the organization at Auxiliary,

District, Department and National levels in such roles as Department President, Eastern States Conference Membership Coach, Veterans & Family Support National Ambassador and National District Council Member.

"I started tagging along with my mother to her VFW Auxiliary events because she always seemed to be having so much fun doing great things with her Auxiliary sisters and friends for veterans and their families," she said. "So, I checked out the VFW Auxiliary, got bitten by the bug and here I am 40-plus years later being fortunate to serve as 2026-2027 VFW Auxiliary National President and many other offices, etc. along the way."

But Mills' reverence for the organization and its mission started much earlier and goes even deeper than that. Mills comes from a family whose members have served in nearly every branch of the military. Growing up the daughter of a highly dedicated Auxiliary member, she and her brother were involved in every single Auxiliary activity kids could join. The two even entered the VFW's Voice of Democracy Contest, and Mills' entry took first place at the Post level and second place in her District. "I learned a lot about veterans and their families," she said. Having that history and those childhood experiences shaped her character. She wanted to emulate the heroes she had spent her life supporting.

"When I realized one day how many members of my family had served in the United States Armed Forces and when I heard some of the stories about my grandfathers, uncles and great-uncles, I learned what it meant to that



generation to be enlisted and to serve, especially (with) something outside and bigger than yourself, and I knew that I wanted to be just like them,” she said. “It didn’t take much research to learn that (as) an insulin-dependent Type I diabetic (I) wasn’t eligible to enlist, so I felt a little defeated. When I found the VFW Auxiliary and realized I could work to show respect and honor to those who did — who could do something that I couldn’t do for myself, I became dedicated to making sure how very much I valued the sacrifices that were made for me and the United States of America, and that they were appreciated by myself and my family.”

During her year as National President, Mills has goals. They include bolstering Membership numbers, repatriating lost military personnel with honor through her joint special project with VFW Commander-in-Chief Cory L. Geisler that supports the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) – Operation Bring them Home – and making a difference in veterans’ lives all under the umbrella of her theme, *Serving America’s Heroes*.

“Building and growing the VFW Auxiliary is the only way we can maintain a legacy to leave for those who come after us and we should be dedicating ourselves to working toward

this goal every day,” she said and added, “A service member in my family taught me about how you leave no one behind and I am truly saddened when the DPAA loses funding and dig sites must be closed or when environmental factors are destroying remains faster than we can find them.

“If we can make a difference in the life of JUST ONE veteran – provide them housing and a fresh start, feed them, get them needed treatments and VA benefits, involve their children in fun and safe activities and bring a smile to their face when or if they are ill – then we have accomplished our mission.”

As a self-described diehard football fan for as long as she can remember, Mills explained, working in and with teams has always been a way of life for her.

“Cheering with my team of friends and family members watching the Pittsburgh Steelers win the Super Bowl (yeah, it’s been a few years now), staring at computer code with my coworkers to restart a payroll system that crashed because we wanted to be paid that month and working with my VFW Auxiliary brothers and sisters to do good things for others is fun, enjoyable and inspires friendships and makes memories. Who wouldn’t want to be part of an organization that has all this and more to offer.” ❄️ AC

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**ABOVE:** 2026-2027 VFW Auxiliary National President Donna K. Mills with her husband, Frank Mills, prior to his installation as Pennsylvania State Commander in 2009. **PAGE 9:** Mills’ college photo. She graduated from Pennsylvania State University with a bachelors’ degree in computer science.

2025-2026

YOUNG AMERICAN *creative*  
PATRIOTIC ART WINNERS



**FIRST PLACE**

**\$15,000** VFW Auxiliary National Scholarship

Department of Nevada

*We, Too, are 'We The People'*

Artist: **R'MANI-DAJOURS HARRIS**

11<sup>th</sup> Grade

Sponsored by

VFW Auxiliary 12093

1

**SECOND PLACE**

**\$7,500**

VFW Auxiliary National Scholarship

Department of Arizona

*Beyond the Canyon*

Artist: **CHRISTIANA ZHENG**

11<sup>th</sup> Grade

Sponsored by

VFW Auxiliary 3513



2

3



**THIRD PLACE**

**\$3,500** VFW Auxiliary National Scholarship

Department of Pennsylvania

*Patriotic Polaroid*

Artist: **ALLIJAH NICHOL CARMICHAEL**

10<sup>th</sup> Grade

Sponsored by  
VFW Auxiliary 15

4

**FOURTH PLACE**

**\$1,500**

Sandy Germany Department  
of Alabama Scholarship

Department of Michigan

*Through Their Eyes*

Artist: **NYNNA JARVI**

11<sup>th</sup> Grade

Sponsored by  
VFW Auxiliary 3900



5

**FIFTH PLACE**

**\$1,500**

Evelyn McCune Department  
of Kansas Scholarship

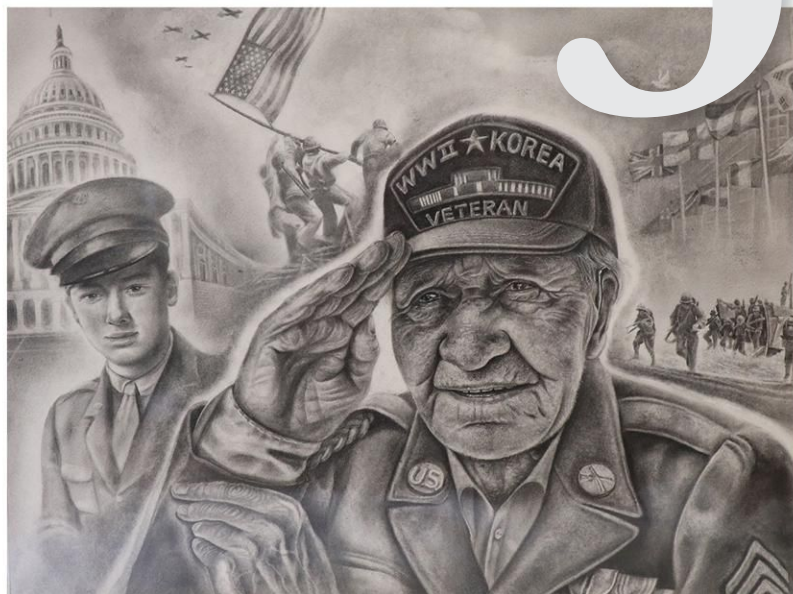
Department of Georgia

*The Beautiful World Created Through  
Their Sacrifices and Hard Work*

Artist: **PHILIP JEONG**

11<sup>th</sup> Grade

Sponsored by  
VFW Auxiliary 5255



6

**SIXTH PLACE**

**\$1,000**

M. Blanche Child Department of  
Kansas Auxiliary 1650 Scholarship

Department of Indiana

*Breath of Life*

Artist: **DANIELLE CUMMINGS**

12<sup>th</sup> Grade

Sponsored by VFW Auxiliary 1954



7

**SEVENTH PLACE**

**\$1,000**

Jean Hamil Department of  
Florida Scholarship

Department of Virginia

*Granddad*

Artist: **MORGAN TAYLOR**

12<sup>th</sup> Grade

Sponsored by  
VFW Auxiliary 1503



8

**EIGHTH PLACE**

**\$500**

Department of Florida VFW  
Auxiliary Scholarship

Department of Florida

*Beyond the Broken Barbed Wire*

Artist: **JORDAN HILL**

10<sup>th</sup> Grade

Sponsored by  
VFW Auxiliary 8093

9

**NINTH PLACE**

**\$500**

Betty Morris Department  
of Maryland Scholarship

Department of New Jersey

*Forever My Hero*

Artist: **AALIYAH SHARMA**

11<sup>th</sup> Grade

Sponsored by  
VFW Auxiliary 2290



**TENTH PLACE**

**\$500**

Juanita Crowe-Durbino  
Department of Tennessee Scholarship

Department of New York

*Still in Battle*

Artist: **KARLI BIGNESS**

10<sup>th</sup> Grade

Sponsored by  
VFW Auxiliary 1143

10

## ELEVENTH PLACE

**\$500**

Lorraine Frier Department  
of North Dakota Scholarship

Department of Tennessee

*Times Square Kiss*

Artist: **GRACE STONE**

12<sup>th</sup> Grade

Sponsored by

VFW Auxiliary 9851



## TWELFTH PLACE

**\$500**

Department of Wisconsin VFW  
Auxiliary Scholarship

Department of Louisiana

*Untamed Freedom*

Artist: **MAKAYLA RHODES**

12<sup>th</sup> Grade

Sponsored by

VFW Auxiliary 4752

# 3-DIMENSIONAL PATRIOTIC ART WINNERS



## FIRST PLACE

**\$2,500** Jane Reape Department of  
New York Scholarship

Department of Wisconsin

*Letters from Home*

Artist: **JET KUBOW**

11<sup>th</sup> Grade

Sponsored by  
VFW Auxiliary 9159



## SECOND PLACE

**\$1,500** National Scholarship

Department of Illinois

*Enduring Unity*

Artist: **IAN HOWATT**

12<sup>th</sup> Grade

Sponsored by  
VFW Auxiliary 5220



3

### THIRD PLACE

**\$1,000** National Scholarship

Department of Virginia

*Defiant Freedom*

Artist: **RACHEL A. ELROD**

10<sup>th</sup> Grade

Sponsored by

VFW Auxiliary 7589



## ANNUAL LIFE MEMBER MEETING, OCTOBER 24, 2026 VFW NATIONAL HOME EATON RAPIDS, MICHIGAN

The VFW National Home's Annual Meeting of the Corporation will be held in Eaton Rapids, Michigan at 9:00 a.m. (EDT), on October 24, 2026, in accordance with the VFW National Home Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws, Bylaw Article IV, Section 1.

### PURPOSE OF THE ANNUAL MEETING

The purpose of the Annual Meeting is to certify the election of two trustees elected by the membership. Elections will take place for open positions in National Home District 5 and National Home District 8 for six-year terms, both ending October 2032.

### ELECTION BALLOTS

**District 5** includes Alabama, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina & Latin/Caribbean Areas

**District 8** includes Illinois, Indiana, Missouri & Kentucky

**For more information, contact:** Lynn Bloomer, Chief of Staff  
3573 South Waverly Rd. Eaton Rapids, MI 48827  
(517) 663-7023 or [lbloomer@vfnationalhome.org](mailto:lbloomer@vfnationalhome.org)

# 2025-2026 ILLUSTRATING AMERICA ART CONTEST NATIONAL WINNERS

## GRADES K-2



### FIRST PLACE WESTON R.

2<sup>nd</sup> Grade  
Department of Arizona  
Sponsored by:  
VFW Auxiliary 1796



### SECOND PLACE EVAN P.

2<sup>nd</sup> Grade  
Department of New Jersey  
Sponsored by:  
VFW Auxiliary 386



### THIRD PLACE ROWAN C.

2<sup>nd</sup> Grade  
Department of Louisiana  
Sponsored by:  
VFW Auxiliary 12065

## GRADES 3-5



### FIRST PLACE SUBIN C.

5<sup>th</sup> Grade  
Department of Nevada  
Sponsored by:  
VFW Auxiliary 10047



### SECOND PLACE REESE D.

5<sup>th</sup> Grade  
Department of Wisconsin  
Sponsored by:  
VFW Auxiliary 1038



### THIRD PLACE GABRIEL C.

3<sup>rd</sup> Grade  
Department of Florida  
Sponsored by:  
VFW Auxiliary 1590

## GRADES 6-8



### FIRST PLACE AMELA H.

7<sup>th</sup> Grade  
Department of Connecticut  
Sponsored by: VFW Auxiliary 10059



### SECOND PLACE OPHELIA C.

8<sup>th</sup> Grade  
Department of Alabama  
Sponsored by: VFW Auxiliary 6073



### THIRD PLACE JOSHUA L.

7<sup>th</sup> Grade  
Department of Washington  
Sponsored by: VFW Auxiliary 2995

# THANK YOU

## TO OUR JUDGES

### WE'D LIKE TO EXTEND A HUGE *Thank you*

to the artists who generously donated their time and expertise to help us recognize so many talented students this year! We're very pleased to share that five of them have volunteered for this important work before and we were thrilled to welcome three new creatives. Our judges for Young American Creative Patriotic Art, 3-Dimensional Patriotic Art and Illustrating America contests include:

### TO LEARN MORE

about VFW Auxiliary scholarships and contests and to find our new Patriotic Art brochure, visit our National website or see Scholarships and Youth Activities in MALTA Member Resources.

Keep up the great work and keep promoting this contest in your communities!

But also, do remember to judge and submit entries according to the rules (see the contest info. sheets) and check to make sure entries meet all the criteria and everything that should be submitted with the art gets to HQ so students from your Department are included in National judging.

**BOB AND LAURA SWEARENGIN** own the Hilliard Gallery in Kansas City, "An elegantly urban and ever-changing gallery." The Hilliard Gallery was voted the best gallery in Kansas City, voted Best Gallery in the State of Missouri as well as one of the top 25 galleries in the United States by The American Art Awards, and Best Gallery in K.C. by the Visit KC Visitors' Choice Awards. The gallery also helps with maintenance of artwork with preservation custom framing. Learn more about their gallery [here](#).

**MAREK GLINIECKI** is involved with Roeland Park Arts Advisory Committee. Read about them [here](#).

**MARY L. WILKENS** of KC Northland Art League is a painter who spent two decades teaching art to elementary students. A current focus of hers is film. She recently starred in an independent film. You can watch it on YouTube by searching the words: Limbo, A Near Future dark sci-fi award-winning short film. Find more about KC Northland Art League [here](#).

**TU WANA WILLIAMS** is an art educator working in the North Kansas City School District at Oak Park High School. She has been an educator for 15 years. She is working on her second master's degree in arts leadership and management. She is also painter and works mostly in acrylics. Her life goal is to own her own art center focused on emerging artists in her local community and high school seniors wishing to pursue a career in the arts. Her dream is to earn a humanitarian award for her work in the community and for her future art center.

**SHON HALL** has been an artist his entire life. He worked as a graphic designer/web designer/art director for 35 years, taking early retirement in 2015. He and his wife created a space in their loft to offer a local gallery once a month in the Columbus Park neighborhood of Kansas City during the spring and summer months as a way to pay it forward for artists who might not normally receive gallery exposure. Learn more [here](#).

**BILL KRZYZANOWSKI**, founder of KrzyzStudio, is a commercial photographer with more than 30 years of experience, specializing in studio and location photography. His expertise spans product, corporate, agricultural, industrial and people-focused projects both regionally and nationwide. He is a returning art judge, having volunteered his time to help the Auxiliary recognize up-and-coming student artists before HQ began showing art at National Convention. Find his website [here](#).

**POLLY ALICE MCCANN**, along with Heather Collinworth, is co-founder of Creative Spark. It is a new art gallery and studio hub that features an arts incubator approach with monthly juried art exhibits, weekly classes and a lively Third Friday Art Walk with live music and vendors. The space supports eight rentable studios for new and emerging artists working in fine art, fashion and jewelry. Creative Spark's vision is to reignite artistic energy and connect the creative community among Independence and K.C.-area creatives. The Spark is all about community-focused programming. Click [here](#) to find online and in-person classes in art, yoga, writing, poetry and creative entrepreneurship.



# LOCAL SOLDIER RETURNS HOME AFTER 87 YEARS

*VFW Post & Auxiliary Named for Him Hold Ceremony to Say Goodbye*

Just four months after the Great War armistice was declared, George and Daisy Shorts of Titusville, Pennsylvania welcomed a baby boy. They named him Howard Bruce Shorts. Bruce, as he was known, had two sisters and one foster brother, and his hobbies included basketball, band and orchestra, varsity football and singing. After graduating high school, he enlisted in the Army Air Corps. Six months after his 20th birthday, with a truncated military training under his belt, he bid his parents farewell, ready to begin his deployment to the Philippines.

Fifteen months later, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor and the United States was at war.

Over the next year and a half, information came in pieces via letters and telegrams: He'd lost 40 pounds. He had been captured by Japanese forces. He'd survived the grueling 65-mile Bataan Death March. He'd made it to Cabanatuan Prisoner of War camp. He was missing in action.

"Don't worry," Bruce wrote to his parents on February 15, 1942. "Have faith and I'll see you soon." It would be his last letter. In August 1942, his parents were informed that he had been considered "missing in action" since May 7. Nearly a year later, April 1943, they learned their son had been taken captive. They were not sent his internment location or prisoner number. Then, on July 3, 1943, the Shorts received a telegram from the War Department.

*Private Howard B. Shorts, who was previously reported a prisoner of war, died on Thirty June in the Philippine Islands. The Secretary of War shares your grief and extends his deep sympathy.*

On July 11, 1943, a memorial service was held to honor the life of Private Shorts; family, friends and members of the community filled to capacity First Presbyterian church. The Titusville Herald reported that "a likeness of the deceased soldier lay on (the) communion table," and Reverend Caldwell gave the eulogy. "He was one of our very own, nurtured in our community life, educated in our schools, worshiping in our fellowship, our friend and companion. Now, he belongs to the Nation... We, his fellow citizens, are met in gratitude for his costly service." The pastor went on to say that the "last word" from Bruce came by way of his unit's chaplain's wife. "He had loved to sing. From boyhood he had sung in our church choirs. In the Army, he promptly began to sing as one of the regular quartet in the camp chapel. Perhaps in these last months, he could not sing, but now, he sings again."

But with no body recovered, Bruce's family was denied the closure that comes from placing a hand to the wood of a Flag-draped casket to say those final goodbyes. Instead, a cenotaph – or a headstone placed on an empty grave – was erected in Kingsley Cemetery, and the name of Howard Bruce Shorts was etched into the Tablet of the Missing at

the Manilla American Cemetery in the Philippines, along with those of 36,285 of his fellow soldiers from World War II. His loved ones knew he'd been killed, and yet he was still missing.

In February 1946, the VFW was ready to institute a new Post in Titusville, Post 5958. Senior Vice Commander Joseph Taylor suggested they name it "after the first person from Titusville to make the ultimate sacrifice in World War II." It was Shorts. Eight decades later, VFW Auxiliary National Headquarters put out a call to members on social media: "do you know of any soldiers declared missing who have since been recovered thanks to the efforts of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA)?"

Pamela Sopher, a Past Department President from Pennsylvania, responded right away. "The soldier our (VFW) Post is named after – we were told recently that his remains were finally found. His name is Bruce Shorts."

## THE DPAA AND DNA TESTING

Michal Ewing, Bruce's niece, was one of two relatives who submitted their DNA for testing by DPAA about a decade ago. The DPAA's Family Members Guide explains that one of their greatest challenges is locating relatives "whose DNA can be compared with the remains of missing Department of Defense personnel to determine a match or provide an exclusion." The DPAA utilizes the expertise of forensic genealogists, among others, to identify the collected remains of the missing using whatever tools are at their disposal, including, but not limited to, familial DNA matches, physical evidence like crash site debris or personal artifacts, dental records and POW camp records. With time not on their side, the race is on to identify as many of the fallen as possible, especially in Vietnam, where soil erosion has complicated the process. Countries in which they are currently actively searching include Germany, France, Italy, Cambodia, Laos, Korea and the Philippines, among others.

In October 2025, the DPAA was able to definitively determine that Bruce Shorts had died, not in June, as reported to his parents, but on October 27, 1942. The causes were dysentery, malnutrition and malaria. He was buried in a mass grave, number 702, in the Cabanatuan Camp Cemetery. Now that his remains have been positively identified, a rosette will be added beside his name on the Tablet of the Missing, and as of press time his remains were set for repatriation to his hometown of Titusville.

Daisy and George have since passed away, as have their other children. But several members of the family remain. On June 29, 2026, they gathered at Bruce Shorts VFW Post 5958 for a ceremony in his honor during which a plaque that had been presented to the family by the U.S. Army was donated to the Post Home. Displayed on it are Shorts' medals and certificates for a Purple Heart and a Bronze Star, awarded posthumously.

Post 5958 Commander Charles Caselluccio led the ceremony. Department of Pennsylvania Commander Jim Brown, also a member of Post 5958, was in attendance, as were Sopher, Department POW/MIA Committee Chairman Ronald Peters, a number of VFW and Auxiliary members and the local news.

"We live in such a small town," said Sopher. "It's the sort of place where everybody knows everybody, and if you don't, you know somebody who knows somebody else. No one is truly a stranger." Still, Sopher was surprised when she saw a friend at the ceremony who came forward when the family gathered. "I had no idea she was a relative of Bruce Shorts."

It is serendipitous that Shorts should be returned to his Pennsylvania home now, at the start of the 2026-2027 Program Year. National President Donna K. Mills, also a Pennsylvania native, and Commander-in-Chief Cory L. Geisler have made supporting the DPAA their joint project this year. They're calling it Operation Bring them Home.

"It feels really amazing," that Shorts' remains have finally been identified, said Mills. "Someone that close to home, a Post (where) I have many friends." She hopes it brought closure to the family. Sopher believes it did.

"It was overwhelming," said Sopher, who intends to be there when his remains are repatriated, which will likely include a special escort followed by a service. She is not the only one looking ahead. Wrote Brown after the Post Home ceremony, "We look forward to the day our brother returns home and is given a proper military burial."



And to families of the missing who are still waiting for closure? To them, Mills says, "Keep hoping. Help us find a way. Support (Operation Bring them Home). Just don't lose hope." ★ NP



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Men's

### HEATHER GRAY JACKETS

- 100% polyester sweater fleece
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- **Ladies' runs small**
- VFW Auxiliary embroidered on left chest
- **No additional embroidery available**
- Imported; decorated in the USA

7274 Ladies' S-4XL \$72.00 (runs small)

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- VFW Auxiliary lasered on front chest
- 100% polyester polar fleece
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- Super soft feel
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**STAR NECKLACE** 17" chain with lobster clasp. 1½" charm.

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