

SUNSHINE E-NEWSLETTER



December 2025 Issue NO 6

Team Florida

Building Bridges For Veterans



FROM THE DESK OF THE DEPARTMENT PRESIDENT



As we begin the Christmas season, we all will be thinking of our families and friends. We will all open our hearts wider, with respect, knowing that even though many are far away and serving in harm's way at this time of year, they are truly missed, and we pray they are kept safe.

We, the VFW Auxiliary Department of Florida, extend our deepest gratitude to all veterans. Your courage, sacrifice, and dedication have safeguarded the freedoms we cherish. During this season of peace and reflection, we honor not only your service but also the strength and resilience you carry every day. The VFW Auxiliary Department of Florida is committed to supporting you—this Christmas and always. We hope that you and your families will be blessed with comfort, hope, and the recognition you so richly deserve.

As we conclude this year and look forward to the next, we, the VFW Auxiliary Department of Florida, have made strides towards achieving some of the goals outlined in our initiative, **Building Bridges for Our Veterans**. We are actively working on our programs that support our mission of **Bridging the Gap for Our Veterans**, driven by your compassion and dedication to making their lives and those of their families more comfortable through the services they may need. At the end of the day, we will **"Be the Lighthouse in Somebody's Storm"**

Please use the MAP's Program and get your care packages mailed on or before the last date to send them!!!

Wishing you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year

filled with Prosperity and Hope!!!

Michael Yates
President



MARK YOUR CALENDARS

Dept. Commander & President
Joint Homecoming

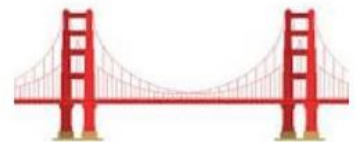
March 13 - 14, 2026

Florida Hotel - Room rates \$139



1500 Sand Lake Rd.

Orlando, Fl.



Phone: 800-588-4656

(Must mention VFW Homecoming)

Hotel Reservations Cut-off

February 16, 2026

Reservations for Banquet on March 14, 2026

Must be sent to Debbie Tilley

904-460-9345 or cell 904-495-3622

dktilley@comcast.net

cut-off February 27, 2026

Auxiliary 7721 Marks 50th Anniversary



VFW Auxiliary 7721 recently celebrated its 50th anniversary, marking 5 decades of service since its founding in 1975, when it was originally known as the Ladies Auxiliary. Over the years, the organization has grown and evolved but its mission remains the same. Supporting veterans, their families, and the community.

Auxiliary 4305 Create Thanksgiving Baskets



VFW Auxiliary 4305 continued its tradition of giving by creating Hospital Thanksgiving baskets for local veterans. Each basket was filled with seasonal treats comfort items, and heartfelt appreciation to bring a bit of holiday warmth to those who have served.



VALENTINE WEEKEND MID-WINTER CONFERENCE



Florida Hotel & Conference Center
1500 Sand Lake Road, Orlando, Florida 32809

February 12-15, 2026

Phone: 407-859-1500

Room Rate: \$145 .00 plus tax

(Mention Veterans of Foreign Wars Mid-Winter Meeting)

Complimentary Self-Parking

CUT OFF DATE - Wednesday - January 21, 2026

Friday- February 13, 2026

8:30 AM - 10 AM Floor Practice & Officers March
10:00 AM: Dept. Chairmen's Meeting (closed meeting)
10:45-12:00 PM: District Presidents Meeting (closed meeting)

Blue Auxiliary Shirt/Black Pants/Black Skirt

**1:00 PM: Council Meeting and
Opening Ceremonies Mid-Winter Conference**

Saturday, February 14, 2026

Blue Auxiliary Shirt/Black Pants/Black Skirt

8:00AM JOINT OPENING
9:30 - 1:00 PM
Mid-Winter Conference

Saturday Evening

**Celebration of Achievement Banquet Tickets only available from
Department VFW Headquarters More Information to Follow**
Dressy - Semi-Formal

NOTE: THIS IS A TENTATIVE AGENDA - ALL TIMES SUBJECT TO CHANGE

Adopt A Veteran

Veterans Village Resident Name: _____

Room # _____

Date/Month of birth _____

Adopting Auxiliary _____

This program is to give extra attention to those residents at Veterans Village. Please DO NOT send them money, instead - send cards on the Holidays, remember them on their Birthday & at Christmas with a special gift.

Contact Kelly Barr for information on who you can Adopt:
719-963-3370



**Share Your Stories,
Share your Light -
Sunshine E
Newsletter Fall
Conference Video**

VFW Post 7721 Miss Poppy, Lilly Rice



Veterans Village - Veterans Day Ceremony

Story by: Betty Noice

On November 11, 2025 under a brisk north wind and a glimpses of sunshine, we traveled to the Veterans Village at Fort McCoy to celebrate Veteran's Day with over 100 attendees. The ceremony began at 1:00 PM in the social hall, led by president Michael Yates as the emcee. The Floral City post 7122 Honor Guard posted the colors, followed by an opening prayer from the Village Chaplain. The West Coast Manatee Homeschoolers, 12 students aged 5 to 13, led the Pledge of Allegiance and Deborah Wilson sang the National Anthem. CW5 Thomas Fetchet, US Army Retired, honored POW/MIA's and explained the significance of the remembrance table, followed by taps from the Honor Guard Bugler.

Distinguished guests included members of the Honor Guard, Department Officers, Village staff, and special guest speaker County Commissioner Michelle Stone, who presented a Veteran's Day proclamation signed by all Marion County Commissioners, along with challenge coins for each resident. The Rainbow Quilters of Citrus County presented handmade quilts to five veterans: Frank Flemming (Army), Robert Richard (Navy), Curtis Boles (Air Force), Michael Clark (Marines), and Susan Hochmayer (Navy).

The cake cutting ceremony followed, where the oldest and youngest veterans shared the first slice, symbolizing the passing of legacy. After a closing prayer and return of the colors, homeschoolers handed out hand made cards and gift bags to all veterans. The event concluded with cake, ice cream, and fellowship, and we were honored with an invitation to return next year.



A Letter of Thanks for a Gold Star Mother.

This expression of gratitude is not written using AI or ChatGPT, it's from my heart, spirit, and soul...there may be mistakes.

September 26, a large box from 1-800-Flowers was delivered to my home. When I retrieved the box, I thought to myself, "it's my husband's birthday today, some kind and thoughtful soul sent him flowers". As any wife of 50 years would do, I opened the box, revealing a magnificent bouquet of yellow roses. However, the enclosed card had my name clearly printed on it, the roses were for me... not my husband, sent to me from the VFW Aux #10167, Holiday, FL.

I cried.....much like I did following the combat theater death of my only son, US Army CPL Frank R. Gross, KIA July 16, 2011, OEF AFGH.

VFW Aux 10167 President, Sarah Roth, sent them to me, in honor of Gold Star Mothers and Families Day, two days later, September 28.

Not long after, I received an invitation to attend a tea for mothers of the fallen hosted at the VFW Aux 10167, Holiday, FL. How could I not attend after receiving such a beautiful bouquet to remember my fallen son and bless me?

I attended the tea party, which was "over the moon" fabulous...but this is not why I am writing to you, the best part is what happened after.

During the tea, VFW Aux 10167 President, Sarah Roth, asked me questions, interrogated me, in a good way. I explained to her that I have been a volunteer at the Fisher Houses at James A. Haley VA Hospital, Tampa, FL. for 13 years now and the same at the USO at Tampa International Airport.

I didn't beg for items, like I have been known to do.... Sarah took it upon herself to begin a collection of items for the FH and the USO. I picked up the donations last week and delivered them to the FH.

This was not the first time this VFVA has come through "big time". Years ago, I asked the Auxiliary if they could possibly donate a rocking chair for the new Fisher House. I had been turned down by the Cracker Barrel that is located near me, here in Oldsmar, FL after meeting with the restaurant management several times.

Two days later, a rocking chair was delivered to the Fisher House, thanks to the generosity of the VFVA 10167.

Please recognize Sarah, if possible. I'm grateful for her rapid response in taking up a collection and supporting me, a Gold Star Mother and volunteer. Additionally, she is also considering to provide a dinner for the families lodging at the Fisher Houses.

Thank you, thank you, thank you!!!

With gratitude,
Toni Gross

Fisher House Volunteer 13 years plus USO
Volunteer 13 years plus
"Serving to honor the service and sacrifice of my son, US Army Cpl. Frank R.
Gross" 711 Satinleaf Ave.
Oldsmar, FL 34677
813-842-1802

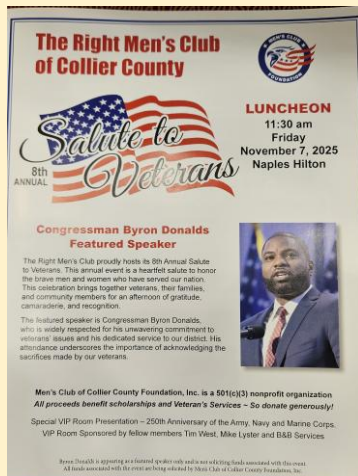
From the Desk of the Program Chairman

Did you know you can look at last year's reporting on the Dashboard to see how your Auxiliary did their reporting? This could be a great training tool for new members who want to learn how to write a report.

Simply go to the Dashboard, change the upper left corner to read Auxiliary , put your Aux number in and select 2025 instead of 2026. Remember: To make the Circle of Champions you MUST be reported in Americanism, Hospital, Legislative and Veterans & Family.

Auxiliary 7721 In Action

Members of Auxiliary 7721 volunteered their time at the annual Salute to Veterans Luncheon hosted by the Men's Republican Club of Naples, assisting with registration and brochure distribution. This event featured Congressman Byron Donalds, candidate for Florida Governor, as a special guest speaker.



VFW Auxiliary 7909 Make Cards for Veterans Day.



VFW Auxiliary 7909

Jacksonville held a cardmaking session on October 13, 2025 for Veteran's Day. We had 3 youth helping us because they didn't have school due to the Columbus Day holiday.

VFW Auxiliary 7909 in Jacksonville hosted a Veteran's Day party at Oak View Nursing Home on November 11th for the 32 veterans who live there. Beautifully decorated cakes, soda, handmade cards, and gift bags were given to each veteran.



Vfw auxiliary 7909 made this banner for Veterans Day to honor the veterans at Oak View Nursing Home in Orange Park, Florida. Each star gives the veteran's name and the branch of service.



Monthly Program Focus: Hospital

How the VFW Auxiliary members participate

- Fundraise for the Department Hospital fund.
- Participate in events and projects at VA facilities voted on by your Auxiliary
- Make up Halloween goody bags, snacks, cards, water etc.
- Volunteer hours earned can be reported to your Auxiliary and the VA. Recruit volunteers..... Making our Veterans Happy with, Kindness, Compassion & Comfort at....
 - VA clinics
 - Domiciliary
 - VA Hospitals
 - Homeless Veteran Shelters

Wow Almost December !!!...

Now's the time for Raffle's, 50/50, bake sale's etc.. To raise money for your Veteran's gifts for CHRISTMAS. Here are some suggestions: Socks, slippers, sweat pants, robes etc..

December 7th – Pearl Harbor Day

December 25th – Christmas day

December 31st – New Year's Eve What are your upcoming plans!!

REMEMBER:

- ❖ Volunteers are always's needed & welcomed
- ❖ Check with your local facilities to see how you can get involved, our primary goal for Hospital Volunteers is to improve patient care.

ALWAYS REMEMBER :

- ❖ **CONFIDENTIALITY** You don't have to wait for a Holiday to participate at a VA center or hospital. Every day is Veterans Day.

Volunteers needed daily at our V.A hospitals, Domiciliary & Clinics.

Here's a few tips for recruiting Volunteers.

- ✓ Emails and phone calls
- ✓ Sign up sheets
- ✓ Talk to your members & non-members (over the age of 14) get them involved
- ✓ Find out what your volunteers' interests are and plan accordingly to events coming up.
- ✓ Be sure to always recognize your Volunteers for a job well done.

Hospital Goals

Patient Center Care: Focusing on the needs and references of patients to ensure they Receive personalized and compassionate care.

Quality Improvement: Continuously evaluating and enhancing healthcare practices and procedures to ensure the highest standards of care.

Staff Development: Providing ongoing training and support for medical staff to maintain and improve their skills and knowledge.

Community Engagement: Building strong relationships with the local community to promote health and wellness through outreach programs and educational initiatives.

Resource Management: Efficiently utilizing hospital resources, including finances, equipment, and personnel to ensure optimal operation and patient care.



Viki Stripling
Vikiplottsdistrict11@yahoo.com
Auxiliary 10539
Okeechobee
Hospital



Monthly Program Focus: Legislative

When the VFW National Legislative Director Kristina Keenan participated in a veterans organization roundtable, hosted by House Minority Leader and House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, she was asked what members of Congress could do to better understand the issues that veterans face. Her response was to host Town Hall meetings to hear directly from veterans in their district.

Get involved

- Attend a function where your Legislators are going to be.
- Wear your Auxiliary attire so they know who you represent.
- Given the opportunity – introduce yourself.
- Go with 1 or 2 Priority veteran bills in mind, know if the bill is in the Senate or House and be prepared to share with the appropriate legislator.
- Know if they are a co-sponsor of the bill and if they are – thank them! If not ask them to consider the bill. Be sure you know what the number and name of bill is.
- Give them your business card if you have one.

Keep these bills in the minds of your legislators:

- **Major Richard Star Act**
- **TAP Promotion Act**

Bridge the gap to Mental Healthcare for our Veterans

While the reasons are complex and multifaceted, factors such as deployment stressors, combat experiences and difficulty reintegrating into civilian life can contribute to behavioral health challenges and increased risk.

You may wonder what this has to do with Legislative. There are many bills pending legislation regarding our Healthcare Priority Goals such as the H.R. 3627, Justice for America's Veterans and Survivors Act 2025. Be an Advocate and take action on these bills and bring them to the attention of your legislators. When they respond in a positive way be grateful and say thank you

FOLLOW THE BILLS AND TAKE ACTION

'Bridge the Gap' between our Veterans' issues and Legislators Study the issues laid out clearly in the VFW Priority Goals. The goals are grouped under six areas of concern:

- Budget
- Health Care
- Disability Assistance & Memorial Affairs
- Education, Employment & Transition Assistance
- Military Readiness
- National Security, Foreign Affairs and POW/MIA

Among the VFW's most recent and important legislative victories was:

- The expansion of college education benefits for military service members with the signing of the Forever GI Bill.
- Ensuring America's service members and veterans receive the care they deserve - whenever and wherever they need it - by passing the VA MISSION Act.

This information is readily available at:
www.VFW.org/Advocacy



Pam Monroe
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Auxiliary 10127
North Fort Myers
Legislative



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- Dept. President’s Special Project – Kelly Barr Flpresproject2526@gmail.com
- Veterans & Family Support – Ryan Harris ryan.harris.cisa@gmail.com
- Youth Program – Lanaie Reed lanwileth@gmail.com
- Program Advisor - Debbie Tilley dktilley@comcast.net

Keep up to date with the monthly promotions from your chairmen!

TAKE NOTE: “FOR ASSISTANCE LOGGING ON TO OUR REPORTING WEBSITE:

CONTACT DEBBIE TILLEY @ dktilley@comcast.net or call 904-460-9345

DO NOT USE THE CONTACT US BUTTON!”

Dates to Remember for 2025 – 2026

• School of Instruction	Florida Hotel, Orlando FL	July 31 – August 3, 2025
• National Convention	Columbus, Ohio	August 9 – 14, 2025
• Department Fall Conference	Florida Hotel, Orlando FL	October 16 – 19, 2025
• Southern Conference	Montgomery, Texas	November 6 – 9, 2025
• National Mid-Year Conference	Cruise – Key West & Bahamas	February 9 – 13, 2026
• Department Mid-Winter Conference	Florida Hotel, Orlando FL	February 12 – 15, 2026
• C.A.F.E National Legislative Conference	Washington D.C.	February 28, 2026 March 2-4, 2026
• Dept Commander & Auxiliary Presidents Homecoming	Florida Hotel, Orlando FL	March 14, 2026
• National Sr. Vice Conference	TBD	March 19-22, 2026
• National Presidents Visit (Fri – Mon)	Various	March 20-23, 2026
• Veterans Village Picnic	Fort McCoy, Florida	March 21, 2026
• Planning Meeting for Kathy Wright (May change)		April 4, 2026
• Department Judging		April 29-30, 2026
• National Jr. Vice Conference	TBD	May 14-18, 2026
• Department Convention	Renaissance Orlando, FL	June 11-14, 2026
• National Convention	Reno, Nevada	July 24-30, 2026

Patriots Pen VOD Deadlines

Local VFW Post – 31 October 2025

District VFW Chairman – 15 November 2025

Department VFW Chairman – 15 December 2025



Scan the above QR code for the Sunshine E. Newsletter video presentation featuring photos of Auxiliaries from across the state.



Scan the above QR Code to submit stories & photos of your Auxiliary.

