

SUNSHINE E-NEWSLETTER

Patriots Pen - Voice of
Democracy Edition



March 2026 Issue NO 9

Team Florida

Building Bridges for Veterans



FROM THE DESK OF THE DEPARTMENT PRESIDENT



As we welcome March, let's reaffirm our commitment to our mission: transforming the everyday lives of our veterans. Volunteering goes beyond simply donating your time; it's about forging meaningful connections, fostering camaraderie, and cherishing the journey we share. With exciting holidays on the horizon, let's seize this opportunity not only to enjoy ourselves but also to amplify our efforts to bridge gaps and create impactful, lasting opportunities for our veterans.

With a few holidays approaching, let's have some fun while we work toward our goals of closing the gaps in the opportunities available to enhance the lives of our veterans and their families. Let's begin with March 4th, a fun day you may want to Hug a GI, March 13 K-9 Veterans Day, March 17 St. Patrick's Day: it's not just the luck of the Irish that drives our success in achieving our goals; it's the commitment each of us has to improving our communities and the passion we share for advancing our organization in support of our veterans. When we volunteer, we do more than serve — we grow. As we grow, we secure more voices in support of our veterans. We must remember the reason for our mission: to improve the everyday lives of our veterans. Volunteering is not just about giving your time; it's about building purpose, creating camaraderie, and enjoying the journey together. Let's recognize a few more important days: March 21, Rosie the Riveter Day; March 25, Medal of Honor Day; and March 29, National Vietnam War Veterans Day, to honor all who served and their families for their sacrifice while their loved ones were protecting our country.

As we begin our upcoming spring season, we must continue Building Bridges for our Veterans by being active, proud Auxiliary Members working our programs and Bridging the Gaps for our veterans as we will Be the Lighthouse in Someone's Storm.

Michael Yates
President



MARK YOUR CALENDARS

Dept. Commander & President
Joint Homecoming

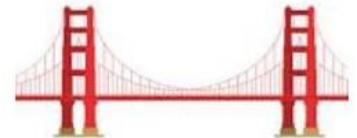
March 13 - 14, 2026

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

2025-2026 Voice of Democracy and Patriots Pen Winners
On Saturday, February 14, 2026 at the Florida Hotel, Orlando , FL
the Department of Florida and the VFW Auxiliary awarded the following awards at the
Youth Achievement Banquet

Monetary awards were also given by the Department of Florida VFW Auxiliary

Patriot's Pen Winners

1st Place – received a plaque and a \$600.00 check – Jaelan McDonald, Sponsored by District 22 Post 4781 Ocala

2nd Place – received a plaque and a \$400.00 check – Era Gibbons, Sposored by District 10 Post 12055 Bradenton

3rd Place – received a plaque and a \$200.00 check – Connor Clay, Sponsored by District 12 Post 6287 Ruskin

Voice of Democracy Winners

1st Place – received a plaque and a \$2,500.00 Scholarship – Katelyn Rosado, Sponsored by District 3 Post 8182 Pompano Beach

2nd Place – received a plaque and a \$2,000.00 Scholarship – Ella Garcia, Sponsored by District 5 Post 3559 Miami Beach

3rd Place - received a plaque and a \$1,500.00 Scholarship – Addison Hunink, Sponsored by District 4 Post 8002 Lakeland

4th Place - received a plaque and a \$1,000.00 Scholarship – Simal Kideys, Sponsored by District 10 Post 3233 Sarasota

5th Place - received a plaque and a \$500.00 Scholarship – Jade Santos, Sponsored by District 14 Post 2811 Gainesville

Patriot Pen & Voice of Democracy Superstars

***Photos not in any particular order.**






VFW
VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS.

**2025-2026
Florida Mid Winter
Celebration of
Achievement
Banquet**



VFW 9610 Auxiliary Volunteers at Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Walk

West Palm Beach, FL – January 31, 2026 — Five dedicated members of the VFW 9610 Auxiliary joined forces to support the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Walk in West Palm Beach. The volunteers began their day before sunrise, arriving at their assigned location by 6:00 a.m. to assist with event activities.

The group was honored to work inside **Hope Village**, a special tent reserved for breast cancer survivors and women living with metastatic breast cancer. Surrounded by stories of resilience and strength, the volunteers described the experience as deeply meaningful and inspiring.

“We were grateful for the opportunity to contribute to such an incredible organization,” said one member. “Supporting their mission and being in the presence of these courageous women was truly an honor.”

The Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Walk continues to raise awareness and funds for breast cancer research, education, and support programs, with volunteers playing a vital role in its success.



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



Department of Florida VFW Auxiliary

Department of Florida Auxiliaries

Appreciation Gift for Department President Michael Yates

Dear Auxiliary Members,

To show our appreciation to Department President **Michael Yates** for his outstanding leadership and dedication during this **'Building Bridges for Our Veterans'** year of 2025–2026, the Department of Florida Auxiliaries will present him with a special **Appreciation Gift** at the upcoming **2026 Department Convention**.

This presentation will take place during the Auxiliary's business session on **Saturday**, immediately following Department President Mike's Report to the membership.

We invite your Auxiliary to join us in honoring his efforts by contributing to this gift. If your Auxiliary would like to participate, please:

- Make your check payable to **Leona McDermott**
- Mail your check along with the completed contribution form to the address listed below
- Ensure that your contribution is received **no later than April 30, 2026**

Your support will help us express our collective gratitude for President Yates' commitment to our mission and his tireless work on behalf of our veterans.

With appreciation,

Leona McDermott, Chief of Staff
Department of Florida VFW Auxiliary

DEADLINE: April 30, 2026

DETACH AND RETURN THIS FORM TO: Leona McDermott
4444 Royal Fern Way
Palm Beach Gardens, FL 33410

Enclosed is the appreciation gift from Auxiliary _____ in the amount of

\$ _____ 2025-2026 Department President Michael Yates.

Name: _____ Auxiliary Title: _____

Address: _____

Auxiliary Spotlight: VFW Auxiliary 7674



Serving Veterans and Strengthening Community

The Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Auxiliary 7674 plays a vital role in supporting veterans, their families, and the broader community. Through a wide range of projects and initiatives, the Auxiliary exemplifies its commitment to service, patriotism, and volunteerism.

Veterans Assistance Programs

In 2025, VFW Auxiliary 7674 provided \$1,000 in financial support to **NW FL Comfort Quilts**, a nonprofit that helps children of deployed service members. June Scroggin presented the donation to Barbara Ouellette and Anne Marie Wilkerson of the organization.



Veterans Assistance Programs

The Auxiliary also provided support to Truth Ministries, an organization that supports homeless in our community. Pictured is Treasurer Steve Gouthro with some of the goods purchased and delivered by the Auxiliary.



Community Service

Community service is central to Auxiliary 7674's mission. The Auxiliary proudly sponsors the Okaloosa Rugby Club, which in turn assists with VFW events. Club members recently supported Military Appreciation Day at the Landing.



Youth Programs and Scholarships

VFW Auxiliary 7674 encourages patriotism and civic engagement among youth through educational outreach, scholarship programs, and essay contests such as "Voice of Democracy" and "Patriot's Pen." The Auxiliary also sponsors two \$500 scholarships at Northwest Florida State College on an annual basis.

Support for Military Families

Recognizing the sacrifices of military families, the Auxiliary 7674 provides assistance through family support programs, holiday gift drives, and bereavement services. Treasurer **Steve Gouthro** is pictured delivering donated goods to the **Airman's Attic** on behalf of the Auxiliary.



Patriotic Activities

The Auxiliary promotes national pride through events like Memorial Day and Veterans Day ceremonies, flag raisings, and parades. In December, the Junior Vice President and Treasurer participated in the **Wreaths Across America** ceremony at Beal Memorial Cemetery to honor fallen veterans, with support from the Okaloosa Rugby Club.



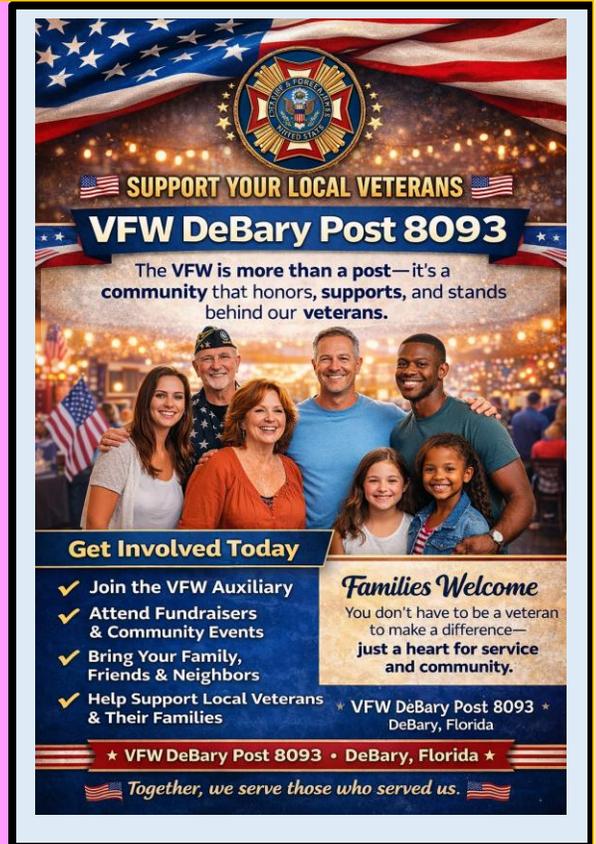
Conclusion

VFW Auxiliary 7674 is dedicated to serving veterans, their families, and the local community through a wide array of projects and initiatives. Their ongoing commitment helps to strengthen patriotic values, provide essential support, and foster community spirit. We welcome all our members to come to our meetings to discover how you can help your Auxiliary with these and other events. New ideas are always welcome.

VFW Auxiliary 7909 Spreads Valentines Day Cheer

On **January 19th**, Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary 7909 in Jacksonville, FL hosted a heartfelt Valentine card-making event. Members came together to craft **100 handmade cards**, each paired with a bag of candy, to bring joy to local seniors.

The cards and treats were delivered to a nearby nursing home, where they brightened the day for residents and reminded them they are loved and appreciated. This simple act of kindness reflects the Auxiliary's ongoing commitment to community service and caring for those who came before us.



SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL VETERANS

VFW DeBary Post 8093

The VFW is **more than a post**—it's a **community** that honors, **supports**, and stands behind our **veterans**.

Get Involved Today

- ✓ Join the VFW Auxiliary
- ✓ Attend Fundraisers & Community Events
- ✓ Bring Your Family, Friends & Neighbors
- ✓ Help Support Local Veterans & Their Families

Families Welcome
You don't have to be a veteran to make a difference—**just a heart for service and community.**

★ VFW DeBary Post 8093 ★
DeBary, Florida

★ VFW DeBary Post 8093 • DeBary, Florida ★

Together, we serve those who served us.

VFW Auxiliary 8189 Celebrates Gold Circle Supporter

VFW Auxiliary 8189 proudly congratulates **Wendy Mayger**, recently recognized by the **National VFW Auxiliary** as a **Gold Circle supporter**.

Wendy has been a dedicated Auxiliary member for **45 years**, beginning her service at Post 6611 in Pennsylvania. Over the years, Wendy and her entire family have contributed immensely, serving in numerous positions and supporting the mission of the Auxiliary.

Thank you, Wendy, for your decades of hard work and unwavering commitment to veterans and their families!



Attention:

The **Sunshine E Newsletter** has a new email address.

From now on send your **submissions to:**

vfwauxflssenl@gmail.com



Member Submission By: Mike Moyer

VFW Post/Auxiliary....Past, Present, Future

My name is Michael Moyer, I am Sr. Vice President of a VFW Auxiliary here in Florida, for the past 2 years. I started this journey with some lofty goals, I felt a sense of purpose to be part of an organization whose mission is to support our veterans, past, present, and currently serving. Whose mission is to support and uplift our community with outreach programs and assistance during difficult times and our youth with programs, art and essay contests.

I felt that this was a perfect scenario for me, coming from a family that is peppered with veterans, and was a lifelong public servant, paramedic, police officer, youth sports coach and business owner. My mentors have told me to (*do the right thing, follow the rules and run it like a business*) which my Auxiliary has done very successfully by following these simple pieces of advice.

But it didn't take long to realize that trying to achieve these goals, trying to achieve the missions set forward by the VFW Auxiliary, that there would be challenges. Some challenges are easy to work through; some challenges are more difficult than expected. But I thought the VFW Auxiliary has been around 100 years or so, and National & State Auxiliary organizations have drafted rules to guide the local auxiliaries to complete their missions through these challenges.

But I was perplexed that our current challenges haven't been addressed, but maybe by bringing some of these challenges to a conversation a solution is possible.

While the VFW Post and its Auxiliary generally share a symbolic relationship, they face several interpersonal and structural hardships.

Older VFW members (WW2/Korean War era) have historically struggled to integrate younger veterans, such as those from Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan wars. This sometime leads to a "cold shoulder" environment where newer members don't feel welcome.

Auxiliary members, who join based on a relative's service rather than their own, may experience a "less than status" compared to Post members. Sadly, female veterans, in particular, reported being treated differently or having their veteran's status overlooked in favor of being viewed as only Auxiliary material.

Common internal challenges include excessive socializing, members feeling unneeded or uninvolved, lack of respect for members holding office (*both Post & Auxiliary*) and persistent gossip or personality conflicts that distract from the mission. Non-members that are guest and DMO's (drinking members only) that express their negative opinions, but are not part of the solution, which hinders the ability to accomplish our mission.

Both organizations face long term memberships decline, which threatens the survival of VFW Posts and its Auxiliaries. This creates financial pressure and reduces the ability to perform civic duties and complete our mission.

I am not seeing any "boots on the ground" anywhere in the near future, and as the Post membership declines, the Auxiliary membership increases, especially here in Florida and across the country. This makes me optimistic that when both organizations work together toward a common goal, which in this case, membership should be near the top.

Auxiliaries must navigate strict compliance requirements, such as annual financial reporting, meeting specific membership growth targets to remain in good standing.

Success often depends on whether the Post Commander and Auxiliary President can work together effectively for the benefit of both organizations. When leadership fails to coordinate, it can result in the demise of an organization that means so much to so many people.

Let us not forget why we are here today and every day.

Let us not forget who we are here for... Veterans...past, present, and currently serving.

Thank you for your time and let's have a conversation for the betterment of both organizations.

From the Desk of the Department Secretary

Auxiliary and District Secretaries please make sure you are giving a copy of your minutes to the Auxiliary and District Presidents and Treasurers.

**Thank-you,
Debbie Tilley**

4th of July Snack Table & Picnic

Viera VA
2900 Veterans Way, Melbourne, FL 32940
Thursday, July 2nd
8am & 10am

VFW Auxiliary 4206 will be providing a Snack Table & then serve Hamburger or Hot Dog meals to the Veterans and chat with them.

If you're able to attend, we'd appreciate the help and I'm sure the Veterans would enjoy the company.

We hope to see you there!

If you'd like to help support this event with a monetary donation we would very much appreciate that.

You may do so via check, made payable to:
VFW Auxiliary 4206 mailed to; 3201 Dairy Rd. Melbourne, FL 32904
or
via our Zeffy at: <https://bit.ly/HelpUsHelpVeterans>



For more information please see our event at:
<https://bit.ly/July4thSnackTableAndPicnic>



VFW Post 7721 Auxiliary Connects with Local Veterans at Collier County Expo

VFW Post 7721 Auxiliary members Colleen Walker, Linda Ramos, and Betty Bailey proudly represented the organization at the annual Collier County Veterans Expo on Saturday, March 21. The team hosted a membership and information table, offering attendees an opportunity to learn more about the Auxiliary's mission, ongoing community initiatives, and support programs for veterans and their families.

The Veterans Expo brings together a wide range of services and resources, making it easier for veterans to access information, connect with organizations, and find the assistance they need. By participating in this event, the Post 7721 Auxiliary continues its commitment to supporting local veterans and strengthening community partnerships.



“Every act of support is a bridge we build—one that helps veterans cross from challenge to confidence, and from service to the brighter future they deserve.”

S. Delaqua



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



Monthly Program Focus: Veterans & Family Support

VETERANS CRISIS LINE: HELP IS ALWAYS AVAILABLE

Every day, Veterans and service members face challenges that can feel overwhelming. The Veterans Crisis Line is available 24/7 for support, guidance, and a listening ear. If you or someone you know is struggling, call **988 and press 1**, text **838255**, or chat online. Remember, every Veteran matters, and no one has to face a crisis alone.

One life lost is one too many.

SUPPORT SPOTLIGHT: VFW STUDENT VETERAN SUPPORT PROGRAMS

As the spring semester approaches, student veterans across the country are preparing for a new chapter of academic challenges, growth, and opportunity. Transitioning from military service to campus life can be both exciting and overwhelming, which is why the VFW Student Veteran Support program plays such an important role. Designed to empower veterans as they pursue higher education, this program offers a network of resources that help ensure student veterans thrive both inside and outside the classroom.

Through direct outreach, campus partnerships, and dedicated VFW mentors, the program helps student veterans navigate common hurdles such as accessing VA education benefits, managing financial stress, and adjusting to the pace of academic life. VFW Posts near schools often collaborate with local Student Veterans of America chapters to create welcoming spaces, host networking events, and provide guidance on everything from scholarship opportunities to career readiness.

As the spring semester begins, the Student Veteran Support program reinforces the message that no veteran must navigate their education journey alone. With encouragement, advocacy, and a strong sense of community, the VFW helps student veterans build confidence, stay engaged, and achieve their academic goals. It's a commitment that reflects the VFW's belief in education as a powerful pathway to success and continued service. For more information, visit: vfw.org/assistance/student-veterans-support.

VFW SERVICE OFFICERS

Veterans in our community come from all walks of life, but all deserve their well-earned benefits. Knowing who your local service officers are and how to put a Veteran in contact with them is key to building the bridge to support our Veterans!

VA CLAIMS & SEPERTATION SUPPORT

The VA claims process can be confusing and one that service members and veterans shouldn't try to navigate alone. That's why the VFW's National Veterans Service (NVS) was established to help all veterans, service members, their families and survivors. This is a service the VFW is proud to offer -- FREE OF CHARGE -- to anyone seeking assistance with the claims process. Visit:

vfw.org/assistance/va-claims-separation-benefits

🔔 Report Your Activities!

Submit your Auxiliary program reports at vfwauxfl.org to qualify for Department awards. For **National awards**, use the official form on MALTA and email it to Ryan.Harris.CISA@gmail.com by **March 31**. Include photos and details to make your entry stand out!



Ryan Harris
ryan.harris.cisa@gmail.com
Auxiliary 4305 Wintergarden
Veterans &
Family
Support



Department Officers 2025 – 2026

President

Michael Yates
1620 W. Evergreen Drive
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(330) 233-2133
Brusdtwice1@gmail.com

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Bashibee4@yahoo.com

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Conductor

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rkabala@tampabay.rr.com

Chief of Staff

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33410
(561) 386-6108
leemvfw@comcast.net

Know your Department Chairmen:

- Americanism – Michelle Butler American.patriotic.2526@gmail.com
- Auxiliary Outreach – Becky Kieffer bkiso2012@gmail.com
- Buddy Poppy / VFW National Home – Jennifer Holland Jenniferlholland72@comcast.net
- Extension Revitalization & Mentoring – Sherri Golder sherrigolder@gmail.com
- Historian / Media Relations – Kathy Ingall shanily.05@gmail.com
- Hospital – Viki Stripling wikiplottsdistrict11@yahoo.com
- Legislative – Pamela Monroe Anamcarax2@icloud.com
- Membership & Mentoring – Holly Evans hadams1221@hotmail.com
- Scholarships – Carrie Messer messerca@gmail.com
- 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	Washington D.C.	February 28, 2026
• Legislative Conference		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

UNSWERING SUPPORT



FOR UNCOMMON HEROES™

VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS AUXILIARY

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

MEMO

Date: December 15, 2025
 To: Department Senior Vice Presidents
 Department Secretaries
 Department Treasurers
 From: VFW Auxiliary National Headquarters
 RE: 2026-2027 Program Year

When we moved the VFW Auxiliary Senior Vice Conference from January to March, it was agreed that National Headquarters would inform Departments of any Program or major Budget changes in December.

Here are the changes for the 2026-2027 year:

There will no longer be an Auxiliary Outreach program. However, there will still be eleven (11) programs because Buddy Poppy and National Home will be their own programs.

There will not be a Celebrating America's Freedom Event (CAFÉ). Therefore, no money will need to be budgeted for this.

We will put a stipend in National budget to help the Department Presidents attend the VFW Legislative Conference in Washington, D.C. in March 2027.

Following the National Convention in Reno, the Department of Pennsylvania will have a Celebration for newly installed National President Donna Mills, on Thursday, July 30, 2026. The VFW Auxiliary National Council of Administration meeting will be that morning, July 30, 2026..

Illustrating America deadline dates will change: Student entry will be due to Auxiliaries December 15th; due to Departments January 15th; due to National Headquarters January 31st.



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.