

A Testament to Lifelong Learning

Vietnam veteran, 81, graduates from Bristol Community College

Oct 16, 2025

In a moment that inspired an entire community, 81-year-old Vietnam veteran and Purple Heart recipient Ron Cabral walked across the stage at Bristol Community College's 58th Commencement Ceremony on May 17, 2025, earning his Associate in Arts Degree in General Studies.

A member of VFW Post 2045 in Swansea, Mass., Cabral's success was made possible in part by the MassEducate program, a groundbreaking initiative in Massachusetts that provides free tuition and fees for all eligible community college students, regardless of age or income.

Adult learners over 25 who have not earned a bachelor's degree can now attend any of the state's 15 public community colleges tuition-free, with additional allowances for books and supplies.

Cabral's story also highlights the vital role of veteran support networks. His accomplishment was supported by a strong partnership between Bristol's Student Veterans of America (SVA) chapter, American Legion Post 303, and VFW Post 2045. The SVA chapter at Bristol, led by advisor Dennis Cosmo, fosters a community of military-connected students and alumni, promoting academic success, leadership and camaraderie.

"Research shows that elder veterans returning to campus are more engaged, which enhances neural plasticity and contributes to a better quality of life," Cosmo said. "Ron's achievement is a shining example of this phenomenon—his intellectual curiosity and commitment to growth have not only enriched his own life but also inspired others."

Submitted by VFW Department of Massachusetts member Dennis Cosmo, an Iraq War vet. He is currently the Director of the Veterans Center at Bristol Community College and was the 2023 SVA Chapter Advisor of the Year.

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NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

406 W. 34th Street
Kansas City, MO 64111

Office 816.756.3390
Fax 816.968.1157

WASHINGTON OFFICE

200 Maryland Ave., N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002

Office 202.543.2239
Fax 202.543.6719

info@vfw.org
www.vfw.org

at magazine@vfw.org.