

'Art Saves Lives, and It Saved This Post'

The Mile High City attracts millions of visitors each year and at the epicenter of its art scene is the oldest VFW charter in the world

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VFW magazine continues its “Destination Post Series.” The series features 125 Posts located in sought-after tourist destinations. Featured VFW Posts make a real difference in the communities in which the Posts are located.

This month’s segment takes VFW magazine readers to Denver, the Mile High City, where VFW Post 1, the oldest VFW charter in the world, has been at the heart of its eclectic art scene for more than a decade.

Located in Denver’s vibrant Santa Fe Art District, VFW Post 1 attracts thousands of visitors on the first Friday of each month during First Friday Art Walks, a signature event that offers a chance for veterans and civilians to connect over art.

“First Friday is what appealed to Post leadership in 2014 to buy what was then a run-down building,” said Jesse Eastburn, current VFW Post 1 Commander and VFW Department of Colorado adjutant. “They saw the potential it had to become what it is today.”

Through its homegrown Veterans Arts Council (VAC), Post 1 uses the monthly event to showcase its members’ unique personalities on studio walls alongside the charter’s rich history, a contrast that creates a timeless depiction of the veteran experience.

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ALL-AMERICAN VFW POSTS NEAR DENVER

The state of Colorado has 85 VFW Posts, all of which make a difference in the communities in which the Posts are located. Below are several All-American Posts near Denver.

VFW Post 6461

753 S. Santa Fe Ave., Fountain, CO 80817

Post Commander Aaron Himes

(719) 382-7957

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/VFW6461>

VFW Post 9644

2680 W. Hampden Ave., Sheridan, CO 80110

Post Commander Todd Van Sant

(303) 789-9733

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/vfw-post9644>

VFW Post 101

702 S. Tejon St., Colorado Springs, CO 80903

Post Commander Danielle Depaolis

(719) 632-2776

Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/VfwPost101/photos/?_rdr

VFW Post 3917

4715 Clearview Dr., Colorado Springs, CO 80911

Post Commander Page Gilmore

(719) 392-8677

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Post3917>

VFW Post 41

305 S. Cleveland Ave., Loveland, CO 80537

Post Commander Mark Lyons

(970) 667-4722

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Post3917>

VFW Post 7829

P.O. Box 1512, Monument, CO 80132

Post Commander Rodney Fetterman

(719) 375-5464

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/p/VFW-Post-7829-Monument-Colorado-100063565061670>

“The more the neighborhood grows, the more our part in it grows,” VFW Post 1 Senior Vice Commander David Bigelow said. “Our unique gallery allows veterans to heal invisible wounds through expression while also granting the community access to interact with us and break through the facade of who veterans are and how we live.”

Founded by Jim Stevens, Rod Ford, Darren Schultz, Will Coukoulis, Kelsey Komarek and Eastburn, the VAC is a multifaceted program that, among other things, conducts outreach for veterans, provides mentorship and promotes their art in the community.

“The VAC attracts veterans who might not otherwise know or interact with the VFW, and as a result, it has helped grow our Post 1 membership and community awareness and involvement,” said Stevens, a former Post 1 commander and current VAC director.

‘THE PROGRAM HAS CHANGED THE TRAJECTORY OF SO MANY LIVES’

Like Stevens, Eastburn has seen VAC blossom over the years. It has drawn national attention from news outlets such as The New York Times and served, most importantly, as a beacon for struggling veterans who have fallen through the cracks.

“Our VAC program is so special,” Eastburn said. “The program has changed the trajectory of so many lives in our veteran community. I’m proud to say I don’t know of one person who has been on our wall that has taken their own life, and I hope we can continue to say that for many years to come. Art saves lives, and it saved this Post.”

After nearly a decade without a Post building and facing the risk of disbandment, members of Post 1 moved into their beige brick home at 841 Santa Fe Drive in 2014 and rode the wave of activity that flooded the Art District each month.

Since then, its membership has grown to more than 1,000 as of 2024, and members such as Stevens, Jerry Rael and Jason Reid have all achieved local and national notoriety for their art.

“First Friday is our most effective recruiting tool, attracting artists who become members (VFW or Auxiliary, depending on eligibility), but also among the 3,000-5,000 visitors who walk in every month,” said John Keene, a former Post 1 and VFW Department of Colorado commander.

“This success has led to our Post hosting VA art competitions, allowing our artists to display and sell their work and hang it in the state capitol.”

The appeal, added Bigelow, is in the novelty that Post 1 presents to the younger generation of veterans.

“We offer a different angle on the veteran engagement through art and embedding ourselves in a city zone not traditionally known for a strong veteran presence,” Bigelow said. “This entices veterans of various age groups and war experiences.”

As a result, Bigelow said the Post often serves as the backdrop for local and state announcements impacting veterans, citing Denver Mayor Mike Johnston’s Dec. 19, 2024,

address to end veteran homelessness.

“Many other local organizations also use our Post as the location for announcing their veteran-related information to the public,” Stevens said. “All of this has helped raise our awareness in the community, which, in turn, has led to Post 1 becoming a hub for veteran activity and is an often-used referral by other community organizations.”

'WE ARE NOT AFRAID TO TRY NEW WAYS TO INTERACT'

To cater to this growing visibility and a diverse membership, Post 1 also offers a wide range of programming that supports wellness, creativity and camaraderie.

From yoga classes to Healing Warrior sessions, music instruction and writing workshops, all veterans, regardless of their VFW membership status, are welcome to participate at no cost.

“Speaking from the perspective of the writer’s group, our classes are not only free but also accessible via Zoom for veterans across the country,” VFW Post 1 Jr. Vice Commander Rolando Rodriguez said. “We have built a space that honors tradition and innovation, making it not only a place of belonging for local veterans but also an inviting stop for traveling veterans seeking connection and healing through shared experience.”

This juxtaposition drew Rodriguez to Post 1, which he discovered a few months before the COVID-19 pandemic shut down operations nationwide.

“I couldn’t believe it was a VFW Post,” Rodriguez said. “I saw veteran artists from all walks of life, real community and a sense of welcoming friendship. Getting involved took some time, but doing so felt natural because Post 1 embodies what service after service truly means. It’s a reservoir of tradition, but also a place that embraces new ideas, offering a path forward for veterans to heal, grow and connect through creativity and community.”

For Stevens, one of the oldest tenured life members of Post 1, this is achieved through the membership’s collective willingness to explore opportunities to extend VFW’s reach.

“We are not afraid to try new ways to interact with our veterans and the community,” Stevens said. “Not everything works, but we find things that do, and continuing that effort means we are not stagnated in the past and not afraid of the future.”

“This kind of action reflects the very spirit of the VFW’s founding — a community coming together to demand change in how the government treated veterans after war,” Rodriguez added. “It was a radical move then, and VFW Post 1 continues that legacy today by reimagining what it means to serve.”

As of the publication of this article, Post 1 has been working on an extensive renovation project to expand its reach and build on its success, again aiming for innovation.

“Our future upgrade plans will tie in additional veteran interest, such as small business incubators and a podcast booth,” Bigelow said. “Once in place, these will be open to all veterans for use and, in turn, expand the support offerings to veterans.”

Since VFW Post 1 does not operate under regular business hours, veterans traveling through Denver are encouraged to call in advance when planning their visit. First Friday Art Walks begin at 5:30 p.m. and run until about 10 p.m.

For more information, visit its Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/VFWPost1>.

This Destination Post Series article is featured in the 2025 July/August issue of [VFW magazine](#), and was written by [Ismael Rodriguez, Jr.](#), associate editor for VFW magazine.