

# ‘I Made a Promise That I Would Give Back’

## A Nevada volunteer's 70-mile journey to become a VFW Accredited Claims Consultant and fight for veteran benefits

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Debra S. Johnson, 72, lives in Pahrump, Nevada, with her husband Jerome, who is a veteran.

“My daughter, Adrena, is from a previous marriage,” Johnson said. “Her dad was also a veteran. He was 100% disabled, but when he was discharged, they did not know what was wrong with him.”

It took several doctors before Johnson’s ex-husband received the correct diagnosis and rating.

“I made a promise then that I would forever give back to the military community,” Johnson said.

Since then, Johnson has volunteered with different veterans’ groups. She also became a Nevada Veterans Advocate with the Nevada Department of Veterans Services. As an advocate, she informed service members, veterans and their families about available benefits and resources.

Johnson’s neighbor, who is a member of VFW Auxiliary Post 10054, asked her if she could assist Post members with their claims. Although Johnson’s volunteer efforts were similar to the work of a VFW Accredited Service Officer or Claims Consultant, she was not qualified for the role.

“When I realized I didn’t have the necessary qualifications, I asked if I could get training to become accredited with the VFW,” Johnson said. “If, after that, I felt like I could do the job, then I would.”

### 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

For eight months, Johnson traveled between Pahrump and Henderson, Nevada, which is about 70 miles away, to train under VFW Accredited Service Officer Marty Barrett. Johnson received her certification in 2024.

“And so, the journey started,” she said.

As a VFW Accredited Claims Consultant, Johnson spends Wednesdays and Fridays working on new claims. Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays are devoted to researching other claims that have been denied to potentially reverse the decisions.

One of Johnson’s goals is to learn about exposures and how they impact veterans to be sure she is doing all she can to strengthen each veteran’s case.

“I’m working hard to get them the ratings they deserve,” she said. “That’s why it makes me feel so incredibly good when one of my veterans calls me to tell me how I have changed their life — not just financially, but emotionally, too.”

Learn more about the [VFW's National Veterans Service \(NVS\) program](#).