

The VFW National Convention Returns to Kansas City

The Secretary of Veterans Affairs will headline on Tuesday

Jul 13, 2022

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Secretary of Veterans Affairs Denis McDonough is one of many featured speakers who will join more than 10,000 members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) and its Auxiliary during the 123rd VFW National Convention as it convenes this Saturday through July 21 at the Kansas City Convention Center in Kansas City, Missouri.

“It feels so good to have a full national convention again,” said VFW National Commander Matthew “Fritz” Mihelcic. “For the past two years, we have either had to cancel or alter our plans for our annual gathering. While we were able to conduct the business of the VFW last year, we weren’t able to invite distinguished guest speakers or honor individuals with the VFW’s highest national awards – key elements of what make our national convention such a meaningful event year after year.”

The list of guest speakers and awardees include governor of Missouri Mike Parson; vice minister of the Taiwanese Veterans Affairs Council Wu, Chih-Yang; inspirational speaker, former U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Travis Mills; and former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, U.S. Army General (Ret.) Martin Dempsey, who will receive the VFW Distinguished Service Award on Monday. For Secretary McDonough, this will be the first time he will appear in-person to address the assembly.

“Our members look forward to hearing from Secretary McDonough on some of the critical issues veterans are concerned with, such as addressing workload and improving wait times of claims, laying out a way forward on VA infrastructure and medical facilities, advances in life-saving healthcare, toxic exposure related presumptive conditions, and how he will implement the SFC Heath Robinson Honoring Our PACT Act of 2022.” said Mihelcic. “Not only are these topics of discussion among today’s veteran community, but they are also on the minds of service members and their families as they prepare to transition into civilian life.”

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

The 10,000 VFW and VFW Auxiliary delegates represent the organization's total membership of more than 1.5 million at the weeklong convention. Their mission will be to approve new national priorities to guide the VFW as it lobbies Congress on issues important to the nation's veterans, service members and their families. In addition, convention delegates will also elect a new VFW national commander, Tim Borland, of Sierra Vista, Arizona, as well as recognize prominent individuals and organizations for their support of the veterans and military communities.

For the first time at a VFW National Convention, the immersive experience [Modern Warrior LIVE](#) will be presented on the main stage at 1 p.m., Wednesday inside the Kansas City Convention Center, Hall AB. The film and accompanying live performance, sponsored by [TriWest Healthcare Alliance](#) and [PhRMA](#), explores mental health, post-traumatic growth, and the veteran experience through music, narration, theatrical performance and multimedia.

Other major sponsors of the VFW 123rd National Convention are [Burger King](#), [Humana](#), [Sport Clips](#), [Twisted X](#), [USAA](#), and [Wounded Warrior Project](#). The convention is expected to generate \$14.2 million in revenue for Kansas City.

While only VFW members will be admitted to the business sessions, there are other offerings the convention will host for the public in the convention center's Hall CD. A blood drive will take place on Saturday and Sunday and a free, five-day walk-in VA claims clinic and health fair are accessible to all veterans, service members and their families in Hall CD.

Country music recording artist and entertainer [Teddy Robb](#) will also perform live at 12 p.m., both Monday and Tuesday on the exhibit stage in Hall CD.

Although not open to the public, the VFW National Convention will livestream its July 18 - 21 business sessions at [VFW.org/Convention](https://www.vfw.org/Convention), beginning with the Joint Memorial Service on Sunday, July 17 at 8:30 a.m. CDT. A full schedule of events can be accessed using the "VFW Events" app, available for download at both the Apple App and Google Play stores.

Receiving VFW national awards on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday are:

VFW Distinguished Service Award to [Gen. \(Ret.\) Martin E. Dempsey](#), 18th Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, One of Time's 100 Most Influential Leaders, bestselling author and speaker

VFW Commander-in-Chief's Gold Medal of Merit to:

- [Jean Hamil](#), 2021 – 2022 National President of the VFW Auxiliary
- Lt. Col. Johnie Webb Jr., U.S. Army Retired, Deputy Director of Outreach and Communications, Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency

- Dan Starks, founder, National Museum of Military Vehicles

VFW “In the Foxhole” Awards to:

- Staff Sgt. Christiana Bardsely, U.S. Air Force Reserve
- Alexandra Nowak, former U.S. Marine Corps corporal
- Marine Barracks, Washington, D.C.

VFW “Beyond the Call” Awards to:

- Gina Elise, founder and CEO, [Pin-Ups For Vets](#)
- [Staff Sgt. Travis Mills](#), U.S. Army retired, founder and CEO, [Travis Mills Foundation](#)

VFW National Teacher Award to Lisa Russell, East Elementary School, Mountain Home, Idaho

VFW Fred C. Hall Outstanding Post Special Project Award to VFW Post 3665, Raceland, Louisiana

VFW Accredited Service Representatives of the Year:

- 2019 – 2020: Wendy Griffin, department service officer, VFW Department of Utah
- 2020 – 2021: Nadine Newman, claims consultant, VFW Department of Washington
- 2021 – 2022: Jon Gohn, department service officer, VFW Department of Minnesota

Joseph Allen, VFW National Recruiter of the Year

Daniela Mare, \$30,000 VFW Voice of Democracy winner

Aurora, [VFW National Home for Children](#) 2022 Buddy Poppy Child

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