

'This Place is Better Than Ever'

Located in Michigan's popular resort community of Traverse City, VFW Post 2780 is the ideal respite for travelers

Aug 15, 2024

This month, VFW magazine continues its "Destination Post Series." The series features 125 VFW Posts located in sought-after tourist destinations around the country. Featured VFW Posts are those that make a real difference in the communities in which the Posts are located. This month's article takes VFW magazine readers to Traverse City, Michigan.

Located in upper Michigan, Traverse City is a traveler's paradise. Situated on Grand Traverse Bay, visitors can delight in the numerous shades of clear blue water that twinkle like diamonds beneath the sun by day and sparkle under the stars at night.

The shoreline is dotted by resorts with private beaches, many of which are open year-round. Even in the off-season, the city bustles with friendly faces.

Not far from the shoreline is Cherryland VFW Post 2780 on Veterans Way. With 3,500 square feet, the Post has the feel of a military history museum that happens to be located inside a restaurant and vast meeting hall.

For VFW member and Vietnam War veteran Mike Smith, it is an honor to have some of his things from Vietnam on display.

"Everything we do here at this Post for veterans and the community is special," Smith said of VFW Post 2780. "As a member of the Honor Guard, I think the best thing we do is rendering honors to our departed brothers."

Smith recalled his time in Vietnam with the 199th Light Infantry Brigade. He remembers being in the bush for a week at a time and the smell of his fatigues when he returned to camp.

Those same fatigues he wore slogging through the jungles of Vietnam are part of a larger

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

collection of memorabilia from the Vietnam War on display at the Post.

Inside one of the glass display cases is a combat helmet with the words “War is Hell” scrawled on top. The helmet’s rim has a toothbrush, and a small pack of toothpaste protrudes from the top.

The Vietnam War section is one of many in the Post which gives it a museum-like quality. All periods of war are covered as moves one throughout the Post.

“Everything on mannequins has been to combat,” said Roque Torres, Post service officer and docent. “And only ones with heads are from Post members.”

MICHIGAN POSTS MAKING COMMUNITIES BETTER

The state of Michigan has 239 VFW Posts, all of which make a difference in the communities in which the Posts are located. Below is just a sampling of those Posts.

VFW Post 1075 3190 N. Clare Ave. Harrison, MI 48625 (989) 539-6172 Commander Scott Taylor https://www.facebook.com/harrison-vfw1075	VFW Post 5319 120 Veterans Drive Athens, MI 49011 (269) 729-5865 Commander Scott Holmes
VFW Post 1136 633 Ford Ave. Wyandotte, MI 48192 (734) 283-0813 Commander Brian Martin https://www.facebook.com/VFW-Post1136	VFW Post 6464 215 Veterans Drive Fowlerville, MI 48836 (517) 223-9842 Commander William Ogden https://www.facebook.com/p/VFW-POST-6464-Fowler-ville-100064729271357
VFW Post 2406 695 Lansing Rd. Charlotte, MI 48813 (517) 543-1719 Commander Charles Adams https://www.facebook.com/CharlotteVFW2406	VFW Post 9931 3615 S. Towerline Rd. Saginaw, MI 48722 (989) 577-9225 Commander Daren Humes

The uniform of former World War II and Korean War nurse Lorraine Hamilton is prominently displayed. Hamilton was the second-oldest female veteran in the state of Michigan when she died in March.

Just inside the front doors is a display featuring the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars, a deliberate

move by Post leadership with the hope that it will encourage the post-9/11 generation of veterans to feel comfortable.

“We really wanted to make this place something they want to join and be a part of,” Post Quartermaster Derek Braun said.

Among other efforts to attract younger vets, the Post established a kid corner with a Wii gaming system, books, stuffed animals and board games.

“This place is better than ever,” Torres said.

The Grand Traverse Senior Center uses part of the Post’s space three days a week. Boy Scouts, local 4-H youth, and the youth robotics club are among the groups who are not charged to use the Post’s facilities.

“We have a lot of motivated people here,” Post 2780 Commander Eric Boals said. “The amount of community service hours put in each year is phenomenal.”

Boals recalled his son, Pete, being at the Post one day. Pete watched an elderly lady pull up and get out of her car to bring worn U.S. flags for disposal. It was a struggle for her.

“He did not think that was right,” Boals said. “He asked, ‘Why do they have to come in?’”

Pete got to work turning a mailbox into a flag disposal box, which is near the parking lot at the front of the building. Pete used this mission work for his Eagle Scout project.

POST SUPPORTS TRAVERSE CITY YOUTH

In addition to its partnership with Boy Scout Troop 36, the Post works with, or on behalf of, the youth in Traverse City.

Recently, a group of students from the local St. Francis High School came to the Post for a tour. Torres, who is a military history buff, spoke with the students about the uniforms and weaponry on display at the Post.

The Post also participates in the Voice of Democracy and Patriot’s Pen essay competitions, awarding winners each year at a ceremony.

Another youth-centric event occurred last fall when the Post partnered with Bikes for Tykes and assembled more than 350 bicycles. Around the same time, the Post hosted a coat drive for area youth. Coats, hats, gloves, snow boots and snow pants were collected over a nearly three-month period.

In March, the Post partnered with NMC Audio/Visual Students and the office of Sen. Gary Peters (D-Mich.) for the Library of Congress-Oral History Project.

When the Post and Auxiliary members are not busy serving their community, they are busy coming up with ways to bring the community to the Post.

Every Wednesday is Trivia Night at the Post. It is billed as “Friends + Family = Fun.” Prizes are given to the top three teams, and larger prizes are awarded to league-play teams. Tuesday nights are set aside for bingo, where about 60 people show up each week.

If you happen to be in Traverse City around Sept. 14, you will want to check out the Post’s first-ever Patriot’s Day Car and Bike Show. Event organizers plan to use it as a Post fundraiser and hope it becomes an annual event.

With more than 480 members, VFW Post 2780 is the second largest in Michigan. Braun said when you count the Auxiliary, the membership number is close to 1,000.

“The Auxiliary is as much a part of our Post as we are,” said Braun, whose wife, Lisa, is the Auxiliary president. “It is not us and them. It is us.”

Be sure to follow VFW Post 2780 on Facebook at VFW Cherryland Post 2780. And if you find yourself in Traverse City, stop in at Post 2780 located at 3400 Veterans Drive.

This article is featured in the 2024 August issue of [VFW magazine](#), and was written by [Janie Dyhouse](#), senior editor of VFW magazine.