



VFW Comes Home for its 126th National Convention

The nation’s largest and most established combat veteran service organization returns to the city where it all began

Aug 07, 2025

COLUMBUS, Ohio — More than 125 years after their first meeting in Ohio’s capital, the nation's largest and most established combat veterans organization, the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) — along with its Auxiliary — returns to its birthplace for the 126th VFW National Convention beginning this Saturday through Aug. 13 at the Greater Columbus Convention Center in Columbus, Ohio.

“Hosting our convention in Columbus is more than a homecoming — it’s a celebration of how far we’ve come and where we’re headed,” said VFW National Commander Al Lipphardt. “As we gather in the city where the VFW was founded, we reaffirm our purpose, renew our energy and look ahead to shaping the future of advocacy and support for every generation of veterans.”

On Sept. 29, 1899, 13 Spanish-American War veterans gathered in a small tailor shop on East Main Street in downtown Columbus to discuss how they could assist their fellow veterans and the dependents of their fallen comrades. Originally founded as the American Veterans of Foreign Service, the organization united with other veteran groups from the Philippine Insurrection and Boxer Rebellion, officially becoming the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States on Aug. 1, 1914.

Distinguished speakers during the convention will include Columbus Mayor Andrew

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Ginther; Ohio Secretary of State Frank LaRose; Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Doug Collins; Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Affairs Stephen Simmons; Taiwanese Veterans Affairs Council Deputy Minister Wu, Chih-Yang; Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) Director Kelly McKeague; United States of America Vietnam War Commemoration Director Major General Edward J. Chrystal, Jr.; Twisted X CEO Prasad Reddy; USAA CEO Juan Andrade; Student Veterans of America National President & CEO Jared Lyon; Military Women’s Memorial President Phyllis Wilson; Humana National Director of Key Relationships Cara Brown; Oracle Health Senior Vice President Patrick Sargent; and Arrow International Director of Veteran and Fraternal Relations Col. Joe Morris, USMC (Ret.).

New for this year’s convention is an awards banquet on Monday night, featuring special guests Medal of Honor recipient James McCloughan and U.S. Representative Derrick Van Orden.

Also new is the [Parade Deck Experience](#) at the Exhibit Hall stage on Saturday and Sunday. The experience will feature a full schedule of 30-minute on-stage presentations, fireside chats, and interviews from military influencers, sponsors, exhibitors, VFW officers and directors. [Parade Deck](#), an online streaming platform, will stream all the presentations from the weekend, as well as the [3rd annual VFW Cornhole Tournament](#).

“Over the past year, the VFW has continued to deliver real results for our nation’s veterans — from securing critical legislative victories and expanding access to VA care, to assisting tens of thousands of veterans and families with earned benefits,” said Lipphardt. “These accomplishments reflect the strength of our mission and the dedication of every VFW member. We are still serving proudly and making an incredible post-military impact in communities nationwide.”

The convention is expected to generate \$14.2 million in revenue for Columbus.

During the business sessions of the convention, delegates will elect and install the national-level chair officers, to include a new VFW national commander, Carol Whitmore of Des Moines, Iowa, the first woman to be elected to the position, as well as recognize prominent

individuals and organizations for their support of the veteran and military communities.

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

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

- [Brenda Bryant](#), 2024 – 2025 National President of the VFW Auxiliary
- [Sean Kingsbury](#), Head of Agent Marketing, [State Farm](#)
- [Tim Jensen](#), Chief Brand Officer and Co-owner, [Grunt Style](#); President, [Grunt Style Foundation](#)
- Jeff Carroll, 2024 – 2025 VFW National Chief of Staff
- Victor Letourneaut, 2024 – 2025 VFW National Budget & Finance Chairman
- Greg Stafford, 2024 – 2025 VFW National Inspector General
- Carol Lipphardt, spouse of Al Lipphardt, 2024 – 2025 VFW Commander-in-Chief

VFW Distinguished Service Medal

- [Duane Sarmiento](#), VFW Past Commander-in-Chief (2023 – 2024)

VFW Distinguished Service Award

- Maj. Samantha Cahill (U.S. Army), VFW Post 5202 Commander, Department of North Carolina

**Accepting via Zoom while deployed to Jordan*

VFW Distinguished Citizenship Award

- Jon Yuspa, founder and CEO, [Honor Flight Nevada](#)

VFW Distinguished Educational Award

- Jake Rademacher, award-winning filmmaker and producer, [Brothers After War](#)

VFW Distinguished Historical Award

- William Duffy, for more than 40 years of preserving the military history in New Jersey

VFW Distinguished Fraternal Award

- Richard Jones, for Hurricane Helene relief efforts in western North Carolina

VFW John A. Biedrzycki Accredited Service Representative of the Year Award

- Belinda Boldoe, Department Service Officer, VFW Department of Georgia

[VFW Smart/Maher National Citizenship Education Teacher Award](#)

- Tim Smiddy, Staunton Elementary School, Staunton, Illinois
- Christie Wingo, Colorado Springs Christian School, Colorado Springs, Colorado
- Nicole Petrosillo, West Milford Township High School, West Milford, New Jersey

VFW Auxiliary Better World Award

- Jacob Schick, CEO, [One Tribe Foundation](#)

The VFW National Convention will livestream its Aug. 11 – 13 sessions at [VFW.org/Convention](https://www.vfw.org/Convention), beginning with the Joint Memorial Service Sunday, Aug. 10 at 8:30 a.m. EST. 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.

For the full schedule of presentations from the Parade Deck Experience and where to watch, visit their special page for [the 126th VFW National Convention here](#).

Only registered and credentialed media from bona fide news organizations will be approved

to cover convention activities. [Click here to pre-register for media credentials.](#)

In addition to business sessions, workshops and committee meetings, a free, four-day walk-in VA claims clinic and health fair are accessible to all veterans, service members and their families registered for the conference.

The 126th National Convention is proudly sponsored in part by [Arrow International](#), [Humana](#), [USAA](#) and [Wounded Warrior Project](#).