

VFW Posts on Missouri River Attract Visitors

‘Show-Me State’ Posts are supporting community endeavors, partnering with like-minded organizations and making a real difference in the process

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VFW magazine is concluding its 125th Destination Post series in this issue. The series began in April 2024 with Posts in Maryland. Since then, Posts from Washington state to Rhode Island and areas in between have been featured.

This final story takes VFW magazine readers to the “Heart of America,” where two Missouri River town VFW Posts are located on opposite sides of the state.

On the western side of Missouri, mere minutes from VFW National Headquarters in Kansas City, Mo., is VFW Post 7356 in Parkville, Missouri. Situated just steps from the banks of the “Big Muddy,” this Post is located in the middle of this vibrant, bustling small community.

The Post took possession of the historic location last fall. The former power plant for nearby Park University as well as residents of Parkville, the building maintains most of its original features from when it opened in 1918.

Restaurants, antiques shops and art galleries line Main Street where the Post is located, right next to the railroad tracks. Of all the things to do in downtown Parkville, there is nowhere to have breakfast on a Saturday morning after shopping at the farmer’s market or taking a walk along the Missouri Riverfront Trail.

Post 7356 members saw this as an opportunity and are open every Saturday for breakfast. According to Post Commander Joe Wolfgeher, it is a great way to show off the Post, introduce people to the VFW and to raise funds for veterans and community outreach.

“Our Post does not base itself around drinking, but around community service,” Wolfgeher

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said. “Some of these guys will give you the shirt off their back and the last dollar in their pocket if it will help.”

Wolfgeher said that welcoming feeling and spirit of camaraderie is why he joined the Post in 2017. He was driving by the old Post home on the outskirts of town and saw a couple of guys on the lawn. The Marine vet pulled in to check it out.

“They did not try to recruit me,” Wolfgeher said. “The conversation was about my well-being and my needs, not about signing me up. That is why I joined this Post.”

The Post supports Boy Scout Troop 393, one of the largest in the area, according to Wolfgeher. In May, the Scouts joined Post and Auxiliary members and walked English Landing Park, picking up trash as part of VFW’s Day of Service. Members also work with the South Platte Civil Air Patrol.

In April, the Parkville Parks and Recreation Department partnered with the Post and Auxiliary to bring the Easter Bunny to visit with the youngsters in the community.

Buddy Poppy distributions help drive member engagement. It was at one of these drives in 2020 that David Goday was introduced to Post 7356 and signed up on the spot.

Today, the Air Force veteran is the Post junior vice commander.

“When I first joined this Post, I had no idea what the Post did in the community,” he said. “Being here has made me really proud to be a part of it. Being prior Air Force, I really missed the camaraderie experienced by veterans.”

Brent Grooms, a newer member of the Parkville Post, said the stories he had heard about other VFW Posts from his friends were all negative. However, he said that that has not been his experience in Parkville.

Grooms has served 21 years in the Air Force and is hoping to reach 30 years of service before retiring.

‘A LOT OF GOOD PEOPLE IN THIS POST’

Wolfgeher said the Post and Auxiliary work closely together, and there is mutual respect between the two groups.

VFW Post 7356 Auxiliary President Mary Helbock agrees, adding that Auxiliary members strive to be good partners with the VFW.

“Our members are so proud to honor veterans and family members,” she said. “We are excited to have our Post home so that we can combine our traditions and become even more

involved in our community. This location certainly opens up more opportunities for us.”

An annual golf tournament, regular picnics in the park and the large presence the Post and Auxiliary has in the Fourth of July parade are just a few specific areas Helbock highlighted.

Kristiana Wolfgeher is the patriotic instructor for the Post Auxiliary. While she has been a member for six years, she started out as a babysitter during Post events before she was old enough to join.

She said she joined the Auxiliary as a way to be able to spend quality time with her dad (Joe, the Post commander) and have something they could do together.

“I really love the history of our new location,” Kristiana said. “It is truly a special place in Parkville. The building holds roots in the community, which is very fitting for the VFW.”

Auxiliary Treasurer Judith Green gave kudos to the Post members for lending a hand when needed. Her husband, Harold, is the oldest active member in the Post. He is now confined to a wheelchair.

“Members came over and built a ramp for Harold,” Judith said. “I know I can call on them and they will really help.”

Harold agreed, saying, “There are a lot of good people in this Post.”

Member Rick Hamman, who transferred to the Post in 1996, said the best quality of Post 7356 is the close-knit community.

“I think we are special because of the closeness of this group,” he said. “That, and the willingness of everyone to help anyone in need of a little help. I loved coming down and being a part of getting this building ready to open.”

Wolfgeher said that while the Post will not have a bar, the space is available to rent, something members expect to profit from.

The second floor of the Post features a library which members hope students from nearby Park University will benefit from, as well as veterans. Green velvet couches and military-themed books make for a nice reading experience.

At press time, the rooftop deck was under repair, but the future holds good things for that space as well, according to Wolfgeher.

“We have big dreams and big visions,” he said. If you are traveling to Kansas City, Missouri, take the short drive to Two Main Street in Parkville.

A ‘WELCOMING POST’

A three-hour drive east out of Kansas City across Interstate 70 will land you in Missouri’s wine country, more specifically, the picturesque town of Washington overlooking the Missouri River. It is about a 30-minute drive to Hermann, Missouri, known for its plethora of wineries.

Downtown Washington has well-preserved 19th century buildings styled in German architecture, as this is a community rooted in German heritage.

A short distance from downtown is VFW Post 2661. It is housed in a large Victorian-style home once owned by John B. Busch — older brother of Adolphus Busch, co-founder of the Anheuser-Busch Brewing Company.

A common feeling about the Post among the members *VFW* magazine spoke to was “welcoming.”

“Everyone here made me feel so welcome,” Post 2661 Commander Duane Harlan said. “I never wanted to go to any other place.”

Member Joe Lueckenhoff who lives in nearby New Haven, describes the VFW crowd as a “bunch of friendly people.”

He noted that there are people who got married at the Post home who now have children getting married there, as well.

“We have people asking when we are going to put up the Christmas lights each year so they can come take family photos,” he added. “In fact, the two guys who used to put up the Christmas lights for us, their sons now do it.”

When Post Junior Vice Commander DJ Elbert, also the Post service officer, got out of the Marines, he knew he wanted to be a part of Post 2661.

“When I came home, I saw these same people who were at my high school graduation posting the colors the year before,” Elbert said. “I wanted to join.”

That welcoming spirit extends to the community, as well. Post members are active in the Build a Bed program through Sleep in Heavenly Peace, an organization that aims to provide beds to children who may not otherwise have a bed to call their own. So far, Post members have built 50-55 beds.

The Post’s funeral detail performs about 250 funerals for veterans each year. Bingo is held every Tuesday night, and some 90-100 people show up to try their luck.

Senior Vice Commander Ben Strange said the Post has a good relationship with the Washington JROTC program.

“We work closely with the local JROTC,” he said. “We invite them to everything the Post does.”

Not surprisingly, some of the JROTC students are related to Post 2661 members. Such is the case with Will Riegel. He is the great-grandson of Othmar Jasper, a 105-year-old WWII veteran.

Jasper served in WWII from 1941-45 and earned two Purple Hearts. He landed in France just days after D-Day. When asked what he thought about that landing, he smiled and said, “I was just glad to get it over with.”

On June 29, the VFW hosted a drive-through birthday party for Jasper’s 105th.

STAYING CONNECTED IN THE COMMUNITY

Former Post 2661 Adjutant and Afghanistan War vet Amanda Todd said she enjoys the Post’s annual Celtic Festival, which draws from surrounding communities and introduces a lot of people to the friendly folks at the Post.

“It is a very innovative approach to stay connected to the community,” she said. “This year’s festival is Sept. 6, and it’s going to be bigger and better than before, with dancing, historical items and live music.”

At last year’s Celtic Festival, VFW service officers Troy Williams and Kevin Scott helped 30 veterans with their VA benefits.

In April, the Post had its first golf tournament. It benefited the Missouri Veterans Home in St. James and special Post projects.

The Post also has been known to host mental health and wellness fairs open to the public.

On any given evening, the Post is abuzz with members and visitors convening or sitting on the grand front porch. Many establishments in Washington are not open early in the week, which makes the Post a popular place.

Another point making this Post attractive to visitors is the building itself. While updates have been made, members try to keep the historical integrity of the structure.

“We really try to do everything we can to preserve this building,” Senior Vice Commander Ben Strange said.

Quartermaster Chuck Wickes added with the unique history of the Post home, members are eager to preserve it.

Gary Watermann, who serves with the Post Honor Guard, noted the original fireplace in the billiard room, saying it is “the most beautiful room” in the Post.

If you find yourself in Missouri’s scenic wine country, you are going to want to visit Post 2661 located at 813 Jefferson Street.

This final installment of the Destination Post series was featured in the 2025 September/October issue of [VFW magazine](#), and was written by [Janie Dyhouse](#), senior editor of VFW magazine.