

# 'Why Would I Go Anywhere Else?'

## Members of the Cape Canaveral VFW take pride in their welcoming spirit and care of the community at large

Feb 05, 2026

Rocket launches, ocean breezes and the sound of crashing waves await travelers visiting Florida's Space Coast region. There, the laid back vibes and friendly faces greet those looking to unwind.

It also is a place to which veterans flock following military service, which is why it comes as no surprise to find a multitude of active VFW Posts dotting the shoreline.

Among those is Cape Canaveral's VFW Post 10131. With close proximity to Port Canaveral, the Post is popular with cruisers and is a favorite spot for the community for Friday steak nights.

However, it is the service to the surrounding community that catches the attention of most. Numerous awards are presented on a regular basis to sailors, and events ranging from Vietnam Veterans Day and lunches to recognize police and first responders are commonplace.

According to Post Commander Carl Orvis, the high school JROTC is on the receiving end of Post donations and awards, as is the Cape Canaveral little league baseball club.

"We have sponsored a team here for a number of years," said Orvis, who served in Iraq from 2006-2007. "We also sponsor a Coast Guard unit out of Port Canaveral and have plans to sponsor an Army National Guard Unit out of Cocoa Beach."

During the government shutdown last fall, the Post also held a food drive for military families, Orvis added.

Former longtime Post Adjutant Joe Tichich agrees that the Post is a true community advocate, citing numerous examples.

### 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 Post's military involvement is one of the tenets for which Tichich credits the Post with excelling.

He recalled how one year at Thanksgiving, a Coast Guard cutter was in port and 10-15 "Coasties" were on the ship, unable to leave. The Post had Thanksgiving dinner catered onto the ship from the restaurant chain Boston Market.

The Post also awards "Sailor of the Quarter" for Navy and Coast Guard personnel. Tichich said the Post gives a \$50 award and "embarrasses them a bit" with remarks.

Additionally, Tichich said that each month, the Post gives money to nearby Cape View Elementary School for the purchase of basic school supplies and books.

Members also engage schools in the Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen programs, as well as welcome nominations for VFW Teacher of the Year.

"It's nice when you work with good people," said Tichich, who spent more than 30 years in the Air Force uniform. "Everyone is enthusiastic about what we do. The leadership team in place right now at the Post is the best group of people I have had the opportunity to work with."

Post Adjutant Brian Fairchild said he especially appreciates the opportunity to serve those still in uniform.

"This one is close to me," said Fairchild, who served with the Marines in Iraq and Afghanistan. "We feed the Coast Guard 16 meals once a month on the weekend because at our local Coast Guard station, there has not been a weekend cook in a while."

#### **'A WAY FOR ME TO GIVE BACK'**

Fairchild came to the Post about a year ago following an invitation from Tichich, whom he met at the Coast Guard Exchange in Port Canaveral.

"From the beginning of joining, everyone was very friendly and welcoming," Fairchild said. "I began volunteering in the kitchen and met some really great people. The camaraderie and cooking in the kitchen are two of the biggest things I like about the Post. I love it when someone sticks their head in the kitchen and says, 'Great job,' after we have just finished cooking."

Similarly, Orvis said his experience visiting Post 10131 for the first time was one of welcome. He recalled how when he returned from Iraq, the first group to greet his unit was the Vietnam Veterans of America. They were there handing out sodas and sandwiches. That stuck with Orvis.

“When I first started coming and saw the Vietnam vets at the Post, it felt like it was a way for me to give back,” said Orvis, adding that the Post’s membership is about 85 percent Vietnam veterans. “We are just a pretty welcoming Post, which is important. When the ‘snowbirds’ are down for the winter, every seat in the Post is full.”

Tichich said when he settled at Cape Canaveral in 2013, he discovered the Post was only one mile from his home.

“When I first started going to the Post, my first thought was, ‘Why would I go anywhere else?’” Tichich said. “This Post fits me really well. We have people who winter down here, and they sign up to volunteer for us a month before they even head down for the season.”

Post Senior Vice Commander John Ortolano said the Cape Canaveral Post is the fourth one he has belonged to but finds it to be “the best fit” for him.

Ortolano is known to give a detailed tour of the Post and its property, which includes a memorial garden. His knowledge of the Post and its displays such as the Wall of Honor would make one assume he has spent the entirety of his VFW career at Post 10131.

On the tour, he points to the Medal of Honor parking spot near the door, which is reserved for member Melvin Morris. Ortolano said Morris was awarded the nation’s highest military honor in 2014 for his actions in the Vietnam War in 1969.

### **‘THE MORE, THE MERRIER’**

Orvis and other members commend the Post’s Auxiliary for its partnership and hard work to ensure the Post’s full calendar of events are a success.

Auxiliary member Rhonda Silva has been with the Post for 10 years and is the canteen manager. Her welcoming smile and kind disposition make her a valuable addition to the overall team. She earned her eligibility from her son, Andrew, who has been in the Air Force nearly 15 years.

She maintains TV screens in the front room of the Post where slideshows of past events play on a loop for all to enjoy.

When the Post celebrated its 50th anniversary on Oct. 4, Silva spearheaded the effort to turn the Post into a gala-inspired atmosphere.

With her own children frequently helping at the Post, Silva said she wanted others to know everyone is welcome. To that end, she created a cart for kids complete with coloring books and crayons.

“The way I see it, the more, the merrier,” she said. “We are a great, great team here.”

Everyone works so well together, and we are just a very friendly Post.”

Another Auxiliary member, whom Tichich fondly refers to as the “Mom of the Post,” is Mickie Kellum.

A 35-year member of the VFW Auxiliary, Kellum is a go-getter, serving as the catalyst who started the first-ever Cape Canaveral Veterans Day Parade in 2024. Last year’s event on Nov. 8 was even bigger, she said.

“We are really excited about this,” Kellum said at the barbecue following the parade, which included a VFW float. “Parades are important. We are a city between two military bases, and it is important to recognize our veterans.”

The parade included a bagpiper, JROTC units, Shriner’s in their little cars, and a complete patriotic experience with the parade route lined with spectators waving U.S. flags.

Afterward, “Jersey Mike,” who winters in Florida, was cooking up burgers and hot dogs on behalf of Post 10131. Cape Canaveral Elementary School volunteers were passing out free drinks, and The Triple Shot Band performed for a few hours under the hot Florida sun. A bouncy house and vendors selling their wares added to the day’s festivities.

“This parade is going to be even better (this) year,” Kellum said enthusiastically.

Having recently completed six years on the Cape Canaveral City Council, Kellum is credited with leading the efforts to redevelop the city’s Veterans Memorial Park.

At the Post, she came up with the idea for a Veterans Memorial Garden on the property. There, a bench is dedicated to Kenny Gibson, aka “The G Man,” a beloved member of the Post who died in 2024. In the middle of the garden is a small tree donated by Walmart in honor of World War II vets.

Kellum said that the tree did not produce a leaf until the day Gibson died, and then it started to bud. During the dedication of the garden in September, Kellum was surprised to learn that members had agreed the garden itself was dedicated to Kellum herself.

Kellum’s eligibility in the VFW Auxiliary comes from her husband, Jeffrey, who died in 2023. A Vietnam War vet, Jeffrey held an Unlimited Coast Guard Master of Towing license as a Merchant Marine officer for more than 50 years. He and Kellum sailed around the world in a tugboat and had quite an adventure. His celebration of life service was held at the Post.

Post Chaplain and Gold Star Father Don Weaver’s words regarding his fellow veterans at VFW Post 10131 best sums up the attitude of all those serving the Cape Canaveral

community: “Without veterans, there is no America.”

If you find yourself on Florida’s Space Coast, just an hour east from the hustle and bustle of Orlando, swing by VFW Post 10131 located at 105 Long Point Road, Cape Canaveral, Florida, 32920. To see more photos from VFW magazine’s visit to the Space Coast, check out our Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/VFWmagazine](http://www.facebook.com/VFWmagazine).

*This article is featured in the 2026 January/February issue of [VFW magazine](#), and was written by [Janie Dyhouse](#), senior editor for VFW magazine.*