

# CHECKPOINT



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## Celebrity Attracts 'a Lot of Attention'

# Oregon VFW Post has Star Power at Poppy Drive

**VFW Post 1324 in Oregon City, Ore., has turned its Buddy Poppy drive into one of its biggest fundraisers of the year. And Sam Elliott — of “Roadhouse” and “The Big Lebowski” fame — just happened to be in town during this year’s drive.**

While Post Public Information Officer Shawn Dachtler and Poppy Coordinator DJ Ruger said they do not know how much Elliott donated, a photo of him at one of the Poppy distribution areas garnered much online attention. Since being posted on Facebook May 23, it has received more than 25,000 likes, more than 250 comments and more than 50,000 shares.

“I was jumping up and down like a little kid, to be honest,” said Dachtler, who manages the Post’s Facebook page and also serves as Department of Oregon, District 15 scouting chairman.

By the end of the first day that it had been posted, Dachtler said it had reached 2,000 shares and was at 300,000 in “a matter of days.” But he never intended to create a viral post.

“I didn’t mean to do this,” Dachtler said. “It just exploded.”

While Dachtler said he was not aware of any donations coming in specifically because of the photo, it did provide awareness.

“I don’t think you could put a number on it,” Dachtler said. “I do think it added to the success because it made more people in the community realize why we’re out there at these various doors.”

Ruger said Elliott stopped by Market of Choice in West Linn, Ore., a first-time location for the Poppy Drive. Then-senior vice commander, Greg Arnold, was manning the table. Arnold, now Post commander, said when he realized Elliott was at the grocery store, he made a point to speak with him.

“I just stood out by the door to make myself visible,” said Arnold, who served in the Navy for 21 years, including in 1969 and 1971 during the Vietnam War on the *USS Wandank* and *USS Ajax*, respectively.

After introducing himself, Arnold said he explained the history of the poppy drive to Elliott. While the two did not “talk at length,” Arnold said Elliott “seemed to be supportive” of the drive.

“It was mere coincidence, really,” Arnold said of the interaction with Elliott. “I was at the right place at the right time.”

Post members, according to Ruger, were “totally blown away” by the reception the photo received online.

“It got the word out during the Poppy Drive... Celebrities always attract a lot of attention,” Ruger said.

## Turning the Post around

Dachtler said former Poppy Coordinator Jim McDonald had a goal of raising \$50,000 annually through from poppy sales alone.

“We’ve now achieved that three years in a row,” said Dachtler, who served in the Navy from 1993 to 2002 in electronic warfare and was with the Armed Forces Expeditionary Service aboard the *USS Normandy* in the Persian Gulf in 1998.

McDonald coordinated the drive with local grocery store chain, Fred Meyer. Money raised from the drive has gone toward the VFW National Home for Children in Eaton Rapids, Mich., two veterans homes in Oregon, local service officers and to the construction of housing for homeless veterans in Oregon.

Ruger, who recently took over as poppy coordinator, said there are “two critical factors” to how the Post promotes the drive.



Above: Actor Sam Elliott visits with VFW life member Greg Arnold during Post 1324’s Buddy Poppy Drive in May in West Linn, Ore. Elliott, known for his roles in “Roadhouse” and “The Big Lebowski,” donated an unknown amount to the drive. This photo garnered more than 25,000 likes after being shared on the Post’s Facebook page. PHOTO COURTESY OF SHAWN DACHTLER



Above left: Bronze Legacy Life Member Maurice Deets presents a poppy to Reagan Dachtler during the VFW Post 1324’s annual Buddy Poppy Drive. This year’s drive raised \$48,500 for the Post. PHOTO COURTESY OF SHAWN DACHTLER

Above right: Gold Legacy Life Member and former Poppy Chairman James McDonald presents a Buddy Poppy to a community member. McDonald, who recently stepped down as poppy chairman, has been the “moving force” behind the drive, according to current Poppy Chairman DJ Ruger. PHOTO COURTESY OF SHAWN DACHTLER

Post members get permission in advance to set up a table, tell the grocery store representatives about the previous year’s drive and issue certificates or plaques depending on how much is raised at each location.

The second factor, according to Ruger, is that Posts can print their own brochures to show where the money goes.

“The really big thing is the back page [of the brochure] that shows how we distributed last year’s funds,” said Ruger, who served during the Vietnam War from 1971 to 1973 and during the evacuation in 1975 with the 1st Reconnaissance Battalion as a reconnaissance Marine parachute and combat diver.

But Ruger said McDonald is “really the moving force” behind the poppy drive’s success.

“Eight years ago, [we raised] maybe \$2,000 a year,” Ruger said. “And because of his organization and the time and effort the puts in, we’re bringing in \$50,000 a year now.”

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# First Afghanistan War Veteran to Lead Arkansas Post

**An Arkansas VFW Post ushered in a trifecta of firsts when its members elected an Afghanistan War veteran as commander.**

Trisha Leslie, who served in *Operation Enduring Freedom* from 2010-2013, took on the role in April for VFW Post 4556 in Pocahontas, Ark. And to her, the accolade symbolizes change.

"Not only am I the first Afghanistan War veteran elected, but I am also the first female combat veteran and the youngest elected commander for our Post," Leslie said. "Too often, we are scared of change and not knowing what comes with it. But in order to evolve and keep the VFW a successful organization, we have to accept change."

When Leslie exited the Army, she knew she wanted to do more, but said she wasn't sure what that "more" would entail.

"Years went by before I figured out what it was I was looking for," Leslie said. "Then the opportunity presented itself when I was invited to a local Post meeting to visit with other former military members. It was then that I realized that I might be able to help out more at home than I ever could abroad."

She hopes to make her Post more inclusive by recruiting younger members and collaborating with the community, as well as hosting fundraisers for both veteran and non-veteran charities.

Leslie said she would like to lead her Post toward "growth and evolution," a task she believes she can accomplish.

"I would like to see just as many dark hairs as gray hairs," said Leslie, who deployed with the 404th Air Support Bn., 4th Inf. Div., and was a multichannel transmission system operator maintainer. "We need to infuse the Post with youth. I'd also like to see more active involvement from all current members."

Nationally, she would like to see younger members join VFW and help rebuild Posts that might have shuttered.

"Too many Posts are closing their doors, and it's leaving a lot of members without a home, a safe space and a forum to speak up," Leslie said. "The brotherhood built at a VFW Post can be just as strong as the one built in the field while serving. I'd love to see them reopen with new life and new excitement."

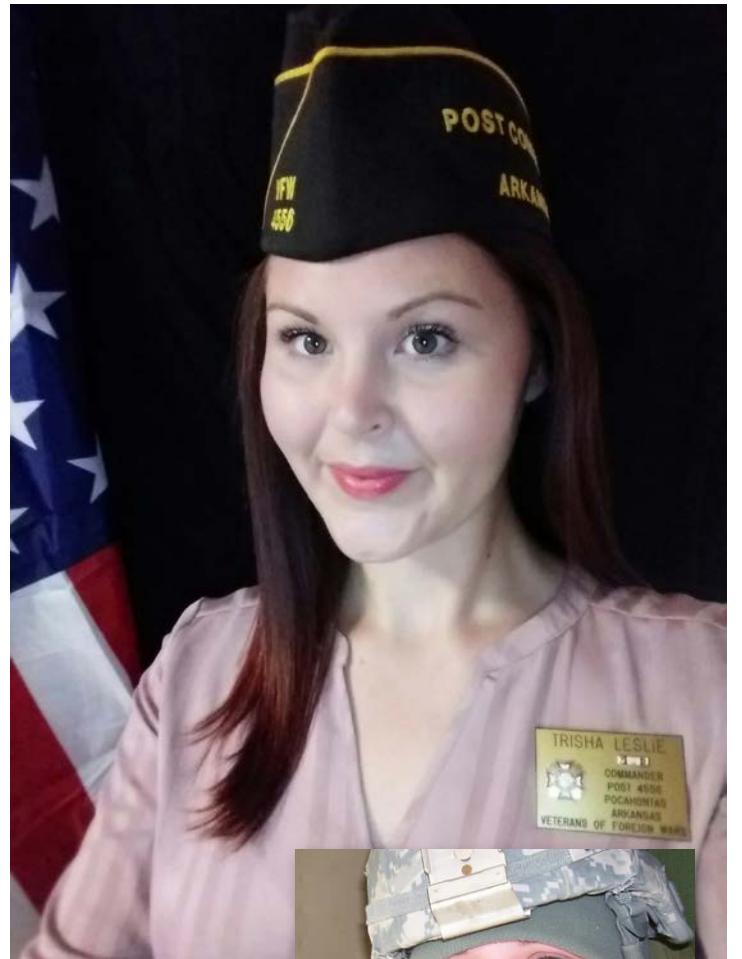
Her tenure thus far has been a "learning experience," but not one without guidance.

"I have received tons of amazing support on both the local and state levels," Leslie said, "and I grow more confident every day. I'm confident we are on the path to a bright future."

In order to ensure that VFW is around for years to come, Leslie said younger veterans must invest their time and lives into helping it grow.

"The VFW isn't just for old veterans who want to sit around and drink," Leslie said. "It's for every single man and woman that ever served that wants to carry that sense of pride and family with them beyond their active years. I want the VFW to be a second home, a place where even the newest stranger can be your fastest friend, brother or sister."

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Trisha Leslie, commander of VFW Post 4556 in Pocahontas, Ark., says VFW is not just "for old veterans who want to sit around and drink." Her tenure so far has been a "learning experience," but she said she gains confidence daily and believes her Post is "on the path to a bright future."

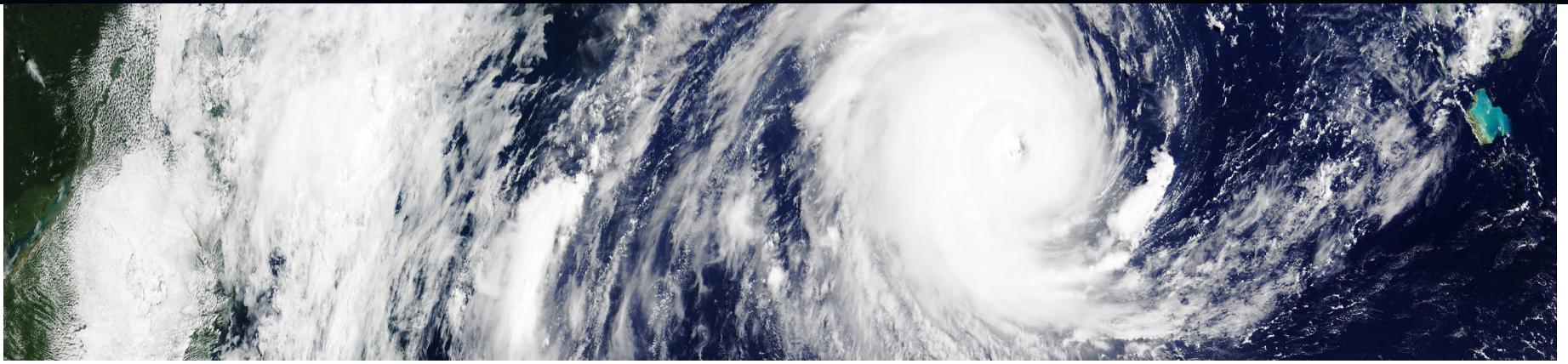
PHOTO COURTESY OF TRISHA LESLIE



Trisha Leslie is an Army veteran who served in *Operation Enduring Freedom*. She deployed with the 404th Air Support Bn., 4th Inf. Div., and was a multichannel transmission system operator maintainer. PHOTO COURTESY OF TRISHA LESLIE

Below: VFW Post 4556 Commander Trisha Leslie, Post Auxiliary president Betty Getson, Post Treasurer Barbara Grimsby and Randolph County Judge David Jansen attend the Randolph County Fair, which ran from Aug. 28 to Oct. 1. In addition to participating in a Pioneer Days parade, Leslie organized the Post's first 9/11 Memorial March. PHOTO COURTESY OF TRISHA LESLIE





*'Adapt and Overcome'*

## VFW Provides Disaster Relief in North Carolina, California

From supporting wildfire-ravaged California to relief efforts in the Carolinas during *Hurricane Florence*, all levels of VFW offer support across the country this year.

This past August, VFW National Headquarters sent \$25,000 from its disaster relief fund to the VFW Department of California. In September, VFW National sent \$50,000 to the Department of North Carolina for the devastation caused by *Florence*.

Before the hurricane made landfall, the Department of North Carolina designated six Posts across the state as staging areas for receiving and distributing donated items, such as bottled water, diapers and food. One of those Posts was VFW Post 7383 in Cary.

"It was much like a logistics situation in a combat zone," said Post 7383 Junior Vice Commander Tom Baker. "We weren't able to get in some areas until it was safe to do so. That's why we planned to have all the staged sites ahead of time, so that when the storm passed, we would have Posts that had supplies ready to go."

Baker, a Navy veteran who served as a Naval Aircrewman in Iraq from 2009 to 2010, said local residents and "a lot" of VFW members donated supplies for the people affected by the hurricane.

"We even had a truck with supplies come up from Waco, Texas, because they saw our social media push for donations," Baker said. "We are just getting donations from everywhere. It's amazing that it all just started with a social media post and [media] interviews."

Baker believes the reason VFW is so successful conducting relief efforts with short notice in "austere environments" is because of military experience.

"A majority of my 20s were spent trying to figure out how to move men and material, and operate in denied territory," said Baker, a 33-year-old. "With everything our members had to take into account during their service, they now have the experience and skills that allow them to come up with ideas of how to solve problems in a quick manner. I do think our success has a lot to do with us just having to deal with these kind of logistics before."

Tim Woods, commander of VFW Post 2423 in Indian Trail, N.C., said he agrees with that sentiment.

"We all have that military mentality of 'adapt and overcome,'" said Woods, a former Navy machinist's mate who served aboard the *USS Duluth* during *Operation Determined Response* in 2000.

Woods' Post also was a designated staging area for North Carolina during the storm. He said his Post had a lot of community support and received many donated items during relief efforts.

"We've been in contact with our [state's] Department and Posts across the state to find out who needs what in each of the areas," Woods said. "Even if we have limited sleeping hours and have to drive hundreds of miles out of the way to make it to certain areas, we do it."

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VFW Post 7383 member Doug Johnston, an Air Force veteran, hands off a package of water during *Hurricane Florence* relief efforts in Cary, N.C. During *Florence*, Post 7383 was one of the six designated Posts across the state to be a staging area for receiving and distributing donated items. PHOTO COURTESY OF VFW POST 7383



VFW Post 2514 (in New Bern, N.C.) Quartermaster Valerie Minor (left) and member John Caddle, former Post commander, unload disaster relief supplies from Post 7383 in Cary, N.C. during *Hurricane Florence*. As part of relief efforts in North Carolina, VFW National Headquarters sent \$50,000 to the Department of North Carolina for the devastation caused by *Florence*. PHOTO COURTESY OF VFW POST 7383



Commander Tim Woods, of VFW Post 2423 Indian Trail, N.C., cuts a fallen tree after *Hurricane Florence* ravaged the town. Post 2423 was one of the Posts in North Carolina designated as a staging area by the state's VFW Department during *Florence*. Woods is a Navy veteran who served aboard the *USS Duluth* during *Operation Determined Response* in 2000. PHOTO COURTESY OF VFW POST 2423

# Texas VFW Post Brings Christmas Spirit to Community

Children in the Allen, Texas, community have the chance to communicate their Christmas wishes with Mrs. Claus ahead of the holiday, thanks to local VFW Post.

VFW Post 2195 will host its second "Operation North Pole" event on Dec. 15 in the dining room of Market Street in Allen. Children will speak to Mrs. Claus, who will be set up across town, through a ham radio.

Post member Jim Brevard, a Vietnam War veteran who served from 1964-65 with the Air Force's 619th Tactical Control Squadron, said the idea came from something he and Post Junior Vice Commander Robert Evans did while in the service.

"The radio guys would go down and set up and let the kids talk to Mrs. Claus at the North Pole," Brevard said.

They brought the idea to the Post, according to Brevard, because of their efforts to "give back to the community."

"It gives us a chance to show the community that we're here," Brevard said, "and we've done other community events, and we generally have a lot of people come up and talk to us and ask about the Post and what we do. This presents us with another opportunity for that."

As the only two ham operators at the Post, Brevard and Evans took the lead on the project.

Last year's event, held outdoors, was the first for the Post. Brevard said about 45 children attended to speak to Mrs. Claus. The Post reached out to local police and fire departments to be on-site with a patrol car and fire engine, respectively, for the children to see.

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*Merry Christmas*



TALK TO  
**MRS. SANTA CLAUS**  
AT NORTH POLE

Courtesy VFW Post 2195 Allen, TX



Top: Post member Jim Brevard operates the ham radio in 2017 for children during VFW Post 2195's "Operation North Pole" event. This year's event, in which children can speak to Mrs. Claus via the radio, will be held Dec. 15.

PHOTO COURTESY OF JIM BREVARD

Bottom: Post Junior Vice Commander Robert Evans gives a child the chance to tell Mrs. Claus what she wants for Christmas. "Operation North Pole" is an event VFW Post 2195 uses to get out in the community.

PHOTO COURTESY OF JIM BREVARD

# Help a Hero Scholarship Assists Marine Corps Vet

**Halston Sandford hopes to become an orthopedic surgeon, and with assistance through VFW's Sport Clips Help a Hero scholarship program, he is one step closer to making that dream a reality.**

Sandford, who served as a machine gunner in the Marine Corps in 2009 with the 1<sup>st</sup> Bn., 7<sup>th</sup> Marines at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Twentynine Palms in San Bernardino County, Calif., is a student at Stanford University. While he received financial aid through the university, he said he still had "some financial responsibility left."

The \$5,000 scholarship has covered his remaining expenses for the fall semester, allowing him to focus "completely" on his studies.

"I am honored to receive this scholarship because of the recognition and support it symbolizes from the military-affiliated community, VFW and Sport Clips, as well as the financial responsibility to my school that it helps alleviate for me," said Sandford, who also deployed to Afghanistan in 2012 and 2014 with the 31<sup>st</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit.

Sandford chose to pursue his education at Stanford because he said it's "arguably the best university in the world."

"I wanted to receive the best education I could so that in turn I could be highly successful in my future career," Sandford said.

While Stanford is where he decided to pursue his education, it was his time in the service that helped cement what he wanted to study.

"I have always been interested in the human body and medical care, especially after going through combat trauma care training in the military, so I knew I wanted to pursue a medically related career," Sandford said. "There are many injuries involving joints, muscles and limbs in the military as well as strength sports such as powerlifting, which I compete in, so orthopedic surgery is right in line with my interests and passions."

A fellow veteran at Stanford who received the scholarship told Sandford about the opportunity. The scholarship is significant, according to Sandford, because of the "widespread view" that veterans "aren't smart enough for" or able to succeed in a higher education setting.

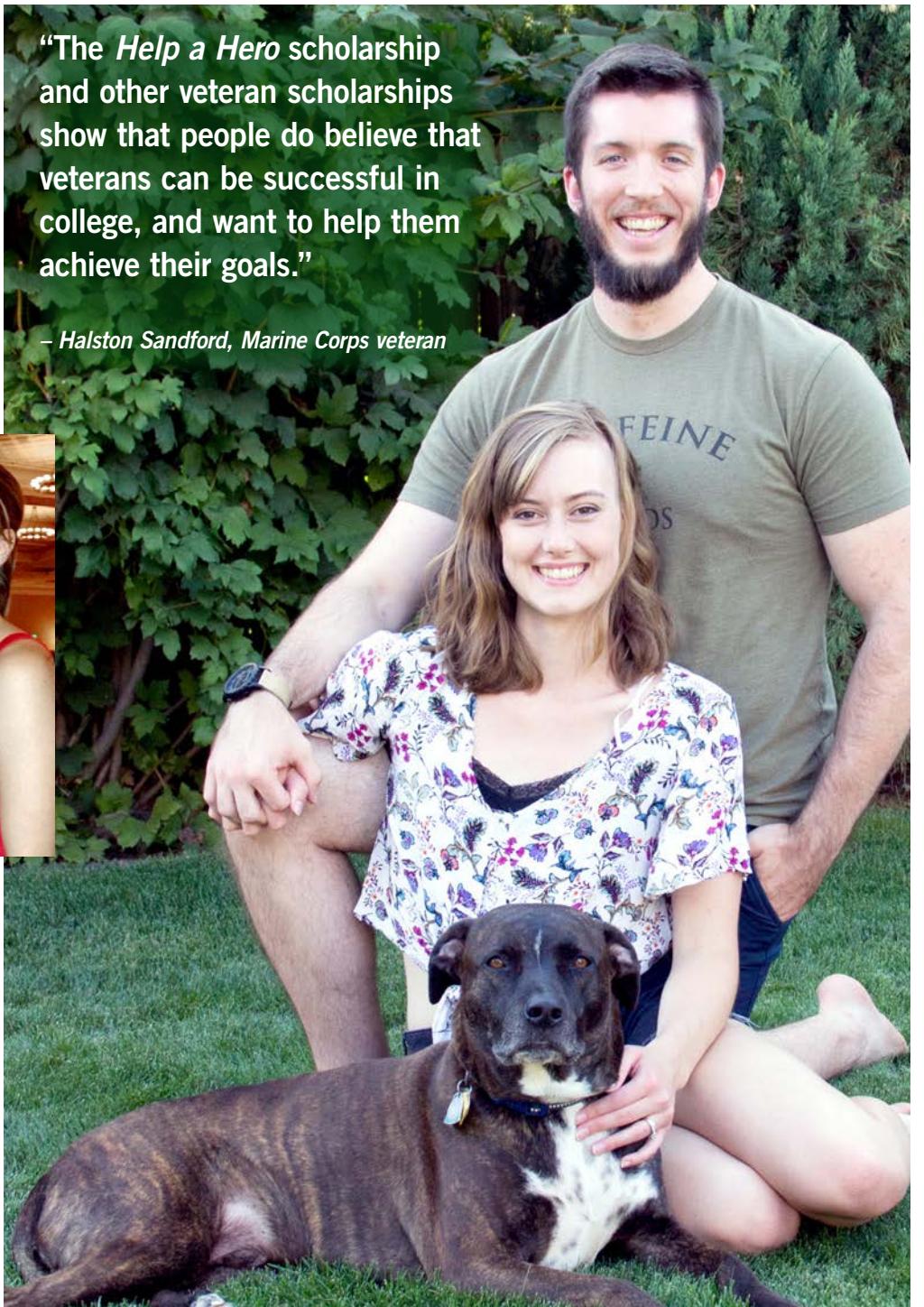
"The *Help a Hero* scholarship and other veteran scholarships show that people do believe that veterans can be successful in college, and want to help them achieve their goals," Sandford said. "This is great for building confidence that we have both mental and financial means to succeed."

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Halston Sandford served in the Marine Corps in 2009 with the 1<sup>st</sup> Bn., 7<sup>th</sup> Marines at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Twentynine Palms in San Bernardino County, Calif. He deployed to Afghanistan in 2012 and 2014 with the 31<sup>st</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit.

PHOTO COURTESY OF HALSTON SANDFORD



"The *Help a Hero* scholarship and other veteran scholarships show that people do believe that veterans can be successful in college, and want to help them achieve their goals."

– Halston Sandford, Marine Corps veteran

Marine Corps veteran Halston Sandford is a recent recipient of VFW's Sport Clips Help a Hero scholarship program. He received \$5,000 to assist with his expenses while attending Stanford University. He is pictured with his wife, Kendra, and dog, Clyde. PHOTO COURTESY OF HALSTON SANDFORD



## VFW's Sport Clips Help a Hero Scholarship

### Did You Know...

- Sport Clips Help a Hero Scholarship has awarded almost \$5 million in scholarships since 2014?
- More than 1,100 veterans and service members have received scholarships?
- In 2018, nearly \$790,000 was awarded?
- Scholarships of up to \$5,000 will be awarded to qualified applicants?
- Scholarships are restricted for tuition and fees only and will be paid directly to accredited schools?

### Eligible Applicants Must:

- Be a U.S. citizen.
- Be retired, honorably discharged, active duty or a member of the National Guard or Reserve.
- Have completed Basic Training and follow-on training, such as Advanced Individual Training, "A" school, training battalion or technical school.
- Separated with or currently hold a military rank of E-5 or below.
- Demonstrate a need for financial assistance.
- Participate in, be accepted to or currently enrolled in a VA-approved program or school at an accredited post-secondary institution.

## VFW Department and Post Commemorate World War I Aviators

During two events on Oct. 6, the VFW Department of Illinois and Post 112 in Wichita, Kan., commemorated the lives of two World War I Medal of Honor recipients, Army Air Service lieutenants Harold Goettler and Erwin Bleckley, on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their deaths.

Bleckley, 23, of Wichita, was an aerial observer and Goettler, 28, of Chicago, was a pilot. Both men were with the 50<sup>th</sup> Aero Squadron and were awarded the Medal of Honor for helping supply Americans of the Army's 77<sup>th</sup> Division, the so-called "Lost Battalion," who were surrounded by German troops in the Argonne Forest. The Lost Battalion consisted of several companies of more than 550 doughboys.

In 1918, the two aviators set off in a DH-4 biplane to search for the American troops to drop supplies. During a low pass, the aircraft was brought down by German small arms fire. The plane crashed in allied territory, but both men died as a result of the attack and were posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor in 1922.

Goettler's remains are buried at the Graceland Cemetery in Chicago. The VFW Department of Illinois honored the aviator 100 years after his death with a wreath-laying ceremony at his gravesite.

"These two men sacrificed themselves for their brothers on the ground," said Department of Illinois Commander Donald Boyer, who was a part of the ceremony in Chicago. "I was very honored to commemorate those who served during WWI."

Boyer, a Vietnam War veteran who served as a Army combat engineer with the 14<sup>th</sup> Combat Infantry Battalion at Camp Evans, said it is important to preserve "the memories of those men" for future generations.

"It's just amazing to think about all the men who fought and were in the trenches during WWI," Boyer said. "We have all carried that tradition forward, from WWI to today's wars."

After the Wichita ceremony for Bleckley, members of Post 112 decided to change the Post's name to commemorate the Wichita native. The Wichita Post is now named VFW Erwin Bleckley Post 112. Bleckley is buried at the Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery in Meuse, France.

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VFW Department of Illinois Commander Donald Boyer (left) and Illinois District 3 Commander Samuel Scaife carry a wreath for WWI pilot Harold Goettler, during a ceremony on Oct. 6 at Graceland Cemetery in Chicago. Two VFW lead ceremonies commemorated two Army Air Service aviators 100 years after their deaths. Both men — Harold Goettler and Erwin Bleckley — were posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor after their deaths.

PHOTO BY CARL SORENSEN/VFW DEPARTMENT OF ILLINOIS

## California Post Rededicates Memorial for War Dead



Last year, VFW Post 1351 in Martinez, Calif., was challenged by VFW's 100 Cities/100 Memorials program, which gives Posts grants for restoring local memorials. But since the city of Martinez didn't have a war monument, the Post, along with a local American Legion post, decided to build one in the city's veterans memorial park. In less than one year, the Post made the idea come to fruition.

With local approval, the posts built a monument commemorating Martinez natives who were killed in all wars since WWI. The black granite memorial was placed at the Martinez Veterans Memorial Park, which was dedicated in June 1988. The park was rededicated in June 2018, during its 30-year anniversary.

PHOTO COURTESY OF POST 1351

# Illinois Post Raffle Winner Hits it Big

VFW Post 4600 in McHenry, Ill., made national headlines late last summer when its Queen of Hearts raffle jackpot reached more than \$7 million. Having grown for two years, the Post leadership decided that during the Sept. 18 drawing, they would draw until they had a winner.

According to Post Commander Dwane Lungren, the line to buy tickets at the Post grew to about an hour and a half leading up to the big drawing.

To accommodate the masses on the night of the big unveiling, the Post used four outside parking lots in addition to its own. Some 50 volunteers, 30 staffers and 10 police officers worked the event.

With seven envelopes, each containing one playing card, remaining after two years, the winning number was drawn on card four.

The winner was Lori S., who was not among the hundreds of people on hand for the drawing. Lungren told the *Daily Herald* that the winner was “totally flabbergasted” when he called her to tell her she had won.

“After I told her, there was silence on the other side. I told her to settle down,” Lungren joked. “She is from Illinois and that’s all I’m going to say.”

Lori was able to keep 60 percent or \$4.2 million of the \$7,080,528, which is \$2.8 million after taxes.

The Post got 20 percent of the winnings, which it will use for veterans programs and to make Post renovations. The additional 20 percent will be used as the base for the next game, which starts in January.

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PHOTOS BY PATRICK KUNZER, DAILY HERALD

Above: Hundreds of people cheered on Sept. 18 at VFW Post 4600 in McHenry, Ill., after the \$7 million winning ticket was drawn in the Queen of Hearts raffle jackpot.



Middle: Post 4600 Senior Vice Commander and event emcee Ben Keefe shows the winning queen of hearts card after the drawing.



Bottom: Senior Vice Commander Ben Keefe stirs the stock tank full of raffle tickets with an oar before the Queen of Hearts raffle drawing. The raffle went on for two years with no winner being drawn. Post leaders decided to have one night where they would draw until the winner was announced.



NOVEMBER | DECEMBER 2018

## CHECKPOINT

VFW NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS • PUBLICATIONS  
406 WEST 34TH STREET, KANSAS CITY, MO 64111

### Posts with the Most VFW POSTS OF 1,000 MEMBERS OR MORE AS OF OCT. 3, 2018

Rank	Post No.	Location	Members	Rank	No.	Location	Members
1	1503	Dale City, VA	2,699	11	76	San Antonio, TX	1,309
2	27	Wiesbaden, Germany	2,556	12	10047	North Las Vegas, NV	1,265
3	9972	Sierra Vista, AZ	2,025	13	9342	Ansbach, Germany	1,237
4	8862	Vicenza, Italy	1,792	14	4647	North Highlands, CA	1,233
5	8180	Songtan-Si, Korea	1,706	15	4372	Odessa, TX	1,194
6	9785	Eagle River, AK	1,677	16	63	Boise, ID	1,157
7	10692	Grafenwoehr, Germany	1,653	17	6873	Abilene, TX	1,101
8	2485	Angeles City, Philippines	1,628	18	4709	Conroe, TX	1,084
9	392	Virginia Beach, VA	1,574	19	2391	Saint Augustine, FL	1,063
10	1114	Evansville, IN	1,430	20	7234	Ocean View, DE	1,047
				21	56	Leavenworth, KS	1,034
				22	2111	Chula Vista, CA	1,026
				23	549	Tucson, AZ	1,024
				24	4809	Norfolk, VA	1,013
				25	6506	Rosedale, MD	1,004
				26	972	Terre Haute, IN	1,001
				27	628	Sioux Falls, SD	1,000

