



Convention Highlights

Monday, July 23, 2018
Joint Opening

Outstanding Service Highlights Today's Joint Opening

Retired Navy SEAL David Goggins received two standing ovations after being awarded VFW's *Americanism Award*. "I want to thank VFW very much for giving me this award. It means more to me than anything I have received in my entire life," he said, noting that if his grandfather was still living, it would be the happiest day of his life to see his grandson accept the award. Goggins, a member of VFW's Department of Tennessee, overcame physical obstacles to become a SEAL. He lost more than 100 pounds in just three months to be considered for SEAL training. Formerly holding the Guinness World Record for more than 4,000 pull-ups in 24 hours, the retired chief petty officer today is a motivational speaker and world-class endurance athlete. After he lost several friends in a helicopter crash in Afghanistan in 2005, he started running to raise awareness and support for severely wounded warriors and their families. Since 2005, Goggins has helped raise more than \$2 million for the Special Operations Warrior Foundation, which provides scholarships and grants to the children of fallen special operations soldiers. Goggins noted his high level of respect for his fellow veterans. "I used to look for courage," he concluded. "I thought courage was a man who received the Medal of Honor (MOH). It is, but courage is the man who is willing to put those boots on every single day of his life to go out there and fight for his country."

MOH recipient and Vietnam veteran Donald Ballard spoke about the importance of the Medal of Honor Society's character development program, which is a "resource designed by teachers to provide students with opportunities to explore the important concepts of courage, commitment, sacrifice, patriotism, integrity and citizenship and how these values can be exemplified in daily life." The VFW life member thanked his fellow veterans for their service work: "Without VFW, we would have a hard time getting the benefits we deserve." Ballard was awarded the MOH for throwing himself on a grenade while serving as a Navy corpsman during the Vietnam War. When the grenade did not detonate, Ballard threw it away from himself and his comrades, and it did explode. Concluding his speech, Ballard encouraged attendees to sign a petition that would grant the last WWII MOH recipient a state funeral when he dies. There currently are four living WWII recipients of the nation's highest honor.

Army Command Sgt. Maj. William F. Thetford received VFW's *Armed Forces Award* for his years of commitment to the U.S. military. Earning a Silver Star for his heroic actions in Somalia in 1993, Thetford has been in the Army since 1981. A member of VFW's Department of Florida, Thetford said he joined VFW for its core values. The senior enlisted leader of U.S. Central Command, Thetford said that U.S. troops want to succeed and win. And in the near future, Thetford said those troops will be eager to join VFW. "I promise, today's service members will find their way to you," he said. "You have much to be proud of, and I'm proud to be in your ranks."

VFW's *Dwight D. Eisenhower Award* was presented to Marine Corps Gen. Joseph F. Dunford, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. With seven uncles fighting in WWII and a father who fought with the 1st Marine Division in Korea, Dunford said he was "inspired to serve." While Dunford said Vietnam vets taught him what it means to be a leader, he highlighted a few of the nation's current service members. "Today's armed forces can defend our country," he said. "You have a force that you can and should be proud of."

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Award Recipients Honored

Dr. Barbara Van Dahlen was awarded VFW's *James E. Van Zandt Citizenship Award* for her work as president of the mental health organization, Give an Hour. Through her organization, some 250,000 hours of free mental health care have been provided for veterans and their families. Van Dahlen said she is working to change the perception of mental illness and asked VFW to continue pushing the message of knowing the five signs of someone in emotional distress: personality change, agitation, withdrawal, poor self-care and hopelessness. Since 2016, VFW has partnered with Give an Hour to sponsor A Day to Change Direction, which is a national day of service.

Cynthia Archuleta accepted the *VFW Accredited Service Representative of the Year Award*. A member of Post 5890 in Rio Rancho, N.M., Archuleta has helped more than 600 veterans recoup nearly \$11 million since 2014.

Emily Cowan Ezell of Cowan Elementary School in Cowan, Tenn.; Sara Coan of Caroline Middle School in Milford, Va.; and Michael Rauenhurst of North Pole High School in North Pole, Alaska, each received the *Smart/Maher VFW National Citizenship Education Teacher Award* for working to instill patriotism in their students.

The Department of Arizona received accolades for 51 consecutive years of membership growth.

Post 12160 Commander Todd Richardson accepted the *Fred C. Hall Memorial Outstanding Post Special Project Award* on behalf of the Sinton, Texas, Post, which distributed supplies in the aftermath of *Hurricane Harvey*.

National VFW Auxiliary President Dee Guillory received the *VFW Gold Medal of Merit and Citation*. Past VFW Commander-in-Chief Brian Duffy accepted a *Distinguished Service Medal and Citation*.

Twisted X Boots Presents \$75,000 Check

President and CEO of Twisted X Boots, Prasad Reddy, presented VFW with a \$75,000 check. Reddy, a native of India, said he "gets goosebumps when he attends convention." He attributed his business success and opportunities to the sacrifices of U.S. veterans. Twisted X sells a line of patriotic, VFW-inspired boots.

Various Speakers

Rep. Emanuel Cleaver (D-Mo.) touted the National WWI Museum and Memorial in Kansas City, Mo., as well as the city's RideKC Veterans Pass, which allows veterans to ride the bus for free. He added that a Fisher House is coming to the Kansas City VA Medical Center. He called for national unity saying, "We owe that to you and those who fought to preserve our freedom." Cleaver presented VFW Commander-in-Chief Keith Harman with a congressional statement honoring VFW, as well as a U.S. flag that was flown over the U.S. Capitol on July 4.

Saying the "American people are tired of politics," Sen. Jerry Moran (R-Kan.) called on VFW to help make sure no veteran is neglected. "There is no group I hold in higher regard than veterans who serve other veterans," said Moran, a member of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee. He added that veterans deserve the best VA has to offer. "VFW and our veterans have an opportunity make America a better country because [they are] role models," said Moran, who noted that his father was a WWII veteran. "No man or woman served their country because they were republican or democrat. They served because of a higher calling."

VFW Department of North Carolina member Scott Stump, CEO and president of the National Desert Storm War Memorial, offered an update on the memorial's progress. It will be located at 23rd and Constitution Avenue in Washington, D.C. He added that construction cannot begin until 110 percent of the funds are in the bank.

VFW Quartermaster General Debra Anderson spoke on behalf of the World War I Centennial Commission, of which she is a member. She announced the Commission's Bells of Peace, a collaborative program calling on citizens and organizations to toll bells in their communities 21 times on Sunday, Nov. 11, 2018, at 11 a.m.

Humana's vice president and deputy chief medical officer retired Air Force Maj. Gen. Worthe S. Holt Jr., discussed the Humana, VFW, Harvesters and After the Harvest campaign Uniting to Combat Hunger. One out of eight Americans, including veterans, struggle to have enough food. "No one should be food insecure," he said. Through the joint campaign, 50,839 meals, at last count, will be delivered to the hungry in the Kansas City area.

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Tri-West President and CEO David McIntyre touted the company's "Be There Peer Assistance Line" available to all service members and their families. The program is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week through chat, email, phone and text. Visit www.BeTherePeerSupport.org.

The Howard E. Vander Clute Jr. Memorial Ride brought in a "record" \$32,748 for the VFW Programs Department, which included \$15,001 from the Department of Virginia riders. Representatives from the VFW National Home for Children in Eaton Rapids, Mich., spoke and introduced 2018 Buddy Poppy Child Chloe Johnson. VFW Post 1503 in Dale City, Va., presented a \$3,000 check to the home, while Post 9972 in Sierra Vista, Ariz., donated \$3,500.

Robyn Anzulis, national Voice of Democracy winner, presented her winning essay.

Al Lugo, who is the director of the VFW Veterans Village, offered his remarks on the retirement community in Fort McCoy, Fla., which opened in October 1991.

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