

‘Our Goal Is to Continue to Positively Show Up’

A VFW Post in Illinois annually awards scholarships to descendants of veterans, hoping they're inspired to join the military or support vets

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For the past nine years, VFW Post 311’s emphasis on higher education has led to more than \$30,000 in scholarships awarded to high school seniors with family ties to veterans in Richton Park, Illinois.

What began in August 2014 with three \$1,000 scholarships, the Benjamin O. Davis Post 311 Commander’s Scholarship program has since awarded up to six \$1,000 scholarships a year to more than 30 recipients.

“It’s our way of giving back to the descendants of veterans and helping our future leaders,” VFW Post 311 Commander Aretha Spurlock said. “We want to show the community and our young adults that we are still here serving in a positive way. Maybe this inspires them to go on and join the military, or maybe it leads them to support veterans in some capacity.”

The applicants each year are screened by the Post’s scholarship committee, which includes past and current educators and professionals, to ensure they meet the primary requirements to compete. They are then judged on academic transcripts, community involvement and letters of recommendation from high school and community leaders.

Akin to VFW’s national Voice of Democracy contest, Post 311’s scholarship committee also assigns an annual essay theme for participants.

“The students are graduating seniors, and they are asked as a part of their applications to write an essay with the theme being a topic of Americanism or democracy,” VFW Post 311 Quartermaster Arnold Taylor said. “We then review and score their essays and evaluate their personal interviews with the committee.”

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

As is customary, the 2023 recipients were announced on July 10 during Post 311's "Commander's Ball," where the winners read their respective essays to a crowd of VFW members and guests.

The 2023 winners included local seniors Arthur Levi McFadden III and Myia Williams. McFadden, a graduate of Crete-Monee High School in Crete, Illinois, started this fall at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, while Williams, a Thornwood High School graduate in South Holland, Illinois, is attending Xavier University of Louisiana in New Orleans.

Post 311 members have already begun fundraising for the 2024 Benjamin O. Davis Post 311 Commander's Scholarship contest, which opens in April to participants.

"The VFW states that the true character of America is measured by her communities and the people who work to improve them," Spurlock said. "We are a VSO that not only supports veterans, but we support the entire veteran family and dependents. Our goal is to continue to positively show up."

This article is featured in the January 2024 issue of [VFW magazine](#), and was written by [Ismael Rodriguez Jr.](#), senior writer for VFW magazine.