

# Virginia Post is Chartered in Less Than Six Months

## After a 12-year absence, a Virginia VFW Post is back thanks to an Afghanistan veteran leading the way

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Alex McKenna has been part of the VFW family since he was 5 years old. His enthusiasm for the VFW has only grown now that he is a member. Most recently, he worked to charter a new Post in Virginia in less than six months.

McKenna's grandfather, who was a WWII veteran, was a charter member of Post 7462 in Piermont, New York. His dad, a Vietnam veteran, took him to a turkey shoot at the Post when McKenna was 5 years old. His grandmother, a Navy veteran, was quite active in the Auxiliary. When McKenna became eligible to join VFW while serving in the Air Force during Operation Southern Watch in 2000, it was his grandmother who signed him up.

"My birthday gift from her each year was renewing my VFW membership," McKenna said. "She did that until she passed away."

McKenna eventually transferred his membership to Post 2226 in Oakhurst, New Jersey, where he served first as junior vice commander and then senior. He was set to become Post commander when he accepted a job in Virginia and moved there in 2019.

In Virginia, he became a member of Post 10574 in Colonial Beach. In 2020, he moved to King George, about 25 minutes away.

"In Colonial Beach, I became junior vice commander," he said. "I moved on to senior vice, but it was a lot of traveling back and forth."

McKenna recalled his Post in New Jersey, where he often found himself at the end of a hard day of work with thoughts of his time in Afghanistan on his mind. He joined the Army Reserve in 2009 and served in Afghanistan with the 668th Eng. Co., out of Orangeburg, New York, in 2012.

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“I went to the VFW when I was having a bad day,” he said. “That was my therapy talking to guys and gals who experienced similar things.”

McKenna found out there was once a Post in King George that chartered in 1969 but eventually closed in 2009 because there were not enough members. He wanted to make VFW available to the veterans in King George.

He decided to start a VFW Post in the community, and he set out to do just that.

### **‘SOMETHING TO BE PROUD OF’**

The challenges of COVID-19 did not deter McKenna. He created a Facebook page for the King George VFW Post and shared it to several community Facebook pages. It wasn’t too long before applications started coming in.

“There was a huge need for it here,” he said. “I got a lot of feedback from people wanting to join.”

Before the first in-person meeting in January 2021, where the group was expected to finalize its charter application, McKenna researched whether King George had lost anyone in Iraq or Afghanistan.

Army National Guard Sgt. Nicholas C. Mason had been killed on Dec. 21, 2004, at Forward Operating Base Marez in Mosul, Iraq, when his dining facility had been attacked by a suicide bomber. McKenna reached out to Mason’s parents, Vic and Christine, to ask their permission to name the new Post after their son.

At the February meeting, it was a unanimous “yes” from the members to call their Post Sgt. Nicholas C. Mason Memorial Post. The charter was approved in March, and the Post’s institution day ceremony was held on May 1.

McKenna said while about half of the Post members are transplants to King George, the other half knew Mason, including WWII veteran Elmer Morris.

“He’s our one and only WWII veteran,” McKenna said.

The Post also has two Korean War vets, a handful of Vietnam and Persian Gulf War veterans and the rest are from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Post Auxiliary will be up and running soon under the direction of Christine Mason.

While the official process allows for a Post to be started in just 90 days, six months is to be commended.

“In today’s world, this is something to be proud of,” said Corey Hunt, associate director of

VFW's Membership Department. "It takes a great amount of research and effort to recruit enough members."

At press time, the Post had more than 50 members on its roster.

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