

VFW Celebrates 115 Years of Service

Sep 25, 2014

On the evening of September 29, 1899, thirteen men — veterans who had fought on Cuba during the Spanish-American War — gathered at a tailor shop in Columbus, Ohio. They shared their accounts of what was then, the most popular war in America's history, but further, to discuss how they could assist their fellow veterans and the dependents of their fallen comrades.

These men could not have known then what would grow from such humble beginnings. The simple and selfless desire to care for those who share in the common bond forged by war, laid the foundation for what has grown to become the multifaceted organization that is the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

Arguably the most recognized veterans service organization in America — and certainly the oldest and most accomplished — the VFW has evolved into nothing short of a powerhouse for veterans. It's the veterans service organization that has positively impacted the life of each American veteran, or at the least, helped to provide them the promise of opportunity and a better future.

Since its inception so long ago, the VFW has been a determined advocate for all veterans, service members and military families. Generations upon generations have joined in its cause, each as steadfast and determined to help fulfill the VFW mission as the last.

Before the VFW came into existence, veterans did not receive health care for wounds received in combat; most of them didn't receive any treatment for any disease or illness acquired as a result of military service; pre-VFW veterans had no reasonable expectation of receiving compensation of any sort.

The men who founded the VFW challenged the status quo and by doing so, helped shape the future for veterans forever.

It was the VFW that demanded America promise to graciously and appropriately care for those who bear the burden of war and put their lives on the line in defense of our nation and way of life. And throughout the years, it has been the VFW that has remained tenacious and resolute in its fight to ensure that America lives up to that promise.

Over its storied 115 year history, the VFW's efforts led to the establishment of the Veterans Administration. It helped to create the Montgomery and Post-9/11 GI Bills. It was a key player in the development of the national cemetery system. It led the fight for compensation for Vietnam vets exposed to Agent Orange and for veterans diagnosed with Gulf War Syndrome. It was a powerful force in the passing of a record VA discretionary budget, the VOW to Hire Heroes Act, the reinstatement of military Tuition Assistance programs and most recently, the Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act of 2014. These

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achievements offer merely a glimpse into its long list of legislative accomplishments.

But, the effect the VFW has had on the lives of those who've worn the uniform, as well as those of their families, extends far beyond its advocacy efforts. Its programs and services are second to none and have provided a hand up to millions of those who have needed it and deserved it the most. Its service officers have helped hundreds of thousands of veterans recover billions of dollars in benefits and compensation from the VA. It has provided millions of dollars in grants to military families who've fallen on hard times, millions of free calls home for deployed and hospitalized veterans, and raised billions of dollars for needy veterans through its "Buddy" Poppy program.

VFW Posts have and continue to act as pillars of support in communities across America and abroad. Posts are often the first to organize and offer aid or assistance to local veterans and military families in need. They are the patriotic pulse of local communities, working to foster patriotism in our nation's youth, inciting good citizenship, erecting memorials, maintaining cemeteries, organizing community events and donating millions of volunteer service hours within their communities each year.

Though much has changed over the years, today's VFW operates by the same creed upon which it was formed back in 1899. It exists only to care for those who fight to ensure America remains a nation free from tyranny and fear. It's an organization that was created by veterans, for veterans, and owes all that it has accomplished over its many years to its members; the lifeblood of the organization.

No one has, does or will do more for veterans.