

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

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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

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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.”

This article is featured in the November/December 2018 issue of [VFW Checkpoint](#).