

# Taking Posts to the ‘Next Level’

## Female Post Commanders Seek to be Leaders in their Communities

Mar 15, 2018

Last year, two VFW Posts ushered in a new era. One elected its first female commander and the other elected its first black female commander. Both women hope to increase their Post’s involvement in their communities.

VFW Post 9931 Commander Kimberly Napoleon said she initially didn’t understand “what the impact would be” or how she would be received by her fellow Post members. However, she added that she was honored to be elected commander of the Bridgeport, Mich., Post last July.

“Our Post is predominantly all men, and to have them have enough confidence in me to take us to another level, that meant a lot,” said Napoleon, who served in the Persian Gulf in 1990 as a local purchase agent with the 364th Supply and Service Company.

A “community servant by nature,” Napoleon said her goal as commander is to bring more awareness of the VFW to the community.

“I believe in patriotism,” Napoleon said. “I also believe in giving recognition to those to whom it’s due, such as our veterans.”

Specifically, her passion lies with the Vietnam War-era veterans.

“I know times have changed since they came home, [but I’m] working hard at making sure they get the recognition they do deserve,” Napoleon said.

She also holds “informationals” for veterans, their families and surviving spouses to make them aware of potential benefits.

As a veteran who has been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress, she said she understands the challenges veterans face and the stigmas attached to the diagnosis.

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“I want to really be able to change that and help to be the face and use this [position as commander] to show that there’s life after war, there’s life after trauma and that we can live normal, full lives,” Napoleon said.

Going forward, she hopes to garner more publicity for her Post by being more active in the community, such as going into schools to promote patriotism.

“It’s not about me,” Napoleon said. “I’d rather work in the background, but I want [the Post] to be more visible.”

### **‘Not Just a Title’**

Stacie Higgins became the first female Post commander elected to Boonville, N.Y., Post 5538 last year.

“I don’t look at it any different than the first man,” said Higgins, who earned her VFW eligibility serving in Bosnia in 2001 and Korea in the early 1980s as a cable systems installer.

But the recognition gave her a “sense of pride” because the members put their trust in her.

“It’s not just a title, being commander of a VFW has a lot of different facets to it,” Higgins said.

Her responsibilities include such duties as accounting work, attending community events, visiting veterans in nursing homes and attending military funerals.

Higgins said she wants her Post to be a “front leader” for community service and veteran outreach, specifically helping veterans transitioning from service.

“I thought [joining the military] was way easier than [getting] out because [I had] that mission-oriented sense,” Higgins said. “[But when I work] in the community, most people don’t even know what that means. And that plays a big role.”

She also hopes to make at least one of her Post’s bathroom ADA-compliant.

“We’re trying to build [the facility] up and make it more of an event place for families, not just a canteen,” Higgins said. “And we’re making good progress. We’ve redone the entire hall.”

*This article is featured in the March/April 2018 issue of [Checkpoint](#).*

