

# ‘This is a Family Organization’

## **A married couple is currently leading the Department of Michigan, and the Iraq War veteran duo offer young vets advice on how to be active with VFW and have a family**

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VFW officers in the “Great Lakes State” are demonstrating that young members with families can be active in all levels of the organization.

Phil and Lynn Patterson, who were married more than 10 years ago, are leading the Department of Michigan this year — Phil as commander and Lynn as quartermaster/adjutant. Phil said he believes this is the first time in VFW history that a married couple has served in those positions at the same time.

“It’s great working with my wife,” Phil said. “Our lives are consumed by the VFW every hour of the day. We are always talking about the VFW.”

Before both were officers with the Department, they led at the Post and District levels of VFW, too. Both joined VFW in 2009 as charter members of Post 12082 in Ionia, Mich. Lynn was the quartermaster for the Post from 2009 to 2014, and Phil became the commander in 2010.

Phil later served as commander of Michigan’s District 9 in 2011–12, quartermaster in 2012–13, and chief of staff in 2012–13. Lynn was the District quartermaster from 2011 to 2012. Both have served on national VFW committees, too.

Phil said he is a member of VFW because he wants to help veterans and enjoys the “camaraderie” VFW members have with each other.

“All of us have something in common,” Phil said. “And, not everyone has been through what we have been through.”

The couple — now life members of Post 6695 in Plymouth — met while in the Michigan

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Army National Guard. Both were deployed to Iraq in 2004 with the 1073rd Support Maintenance Company. Lynn enlisted in the Army in 1996 and served 12 years, with more than nine years as an active-duty soldier. Phil joined the National Guard in 1987 and retired as a master sergeant in 2010.

On top of heading the Department of Michigan, the couple has four children — 22-year-old Bailey, 18-year-old Madelyn, 9-year-old Emma and 4-year-old Luke — and two grandchildren — 2-year-old Kaiden and 1-year-old Ivy.

“We definitely keep very busy,” Phil said.

He added that young parents sometimes can’t find or afford a babysitter, and advised that if they want to attend a VFW Post meeting, they should bring their children along.

“I’ve run Post meetings with my daughter in my arms,” Phil said. “We stress to everybody that this is a family organization. If you want the family there, that includes children.”

For new, young members who want to get involved with VFW, Phil said having family support also is needed.

“Young couples need a strong family base, as well,” Phil said. “We have done a lot of VFW functions, and we couldn’t have done it without sending our kids to their grandma’s and grandpa’s or their aunt’s houses.”

As for staying involved in VFW, Lynn said she recommends becoming a committee chairman at the Post level in order to learn about the organization and become involved with activities. Lynn also said that young members should get to know the members of a Post.

“Ask as many questions as you can think of,” Lynn said. “There are so many things members can be involved with in VFW. You don’t have to be an officer, but you can have mentors that teach you how to do things.”

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