

The Whole Community is Willing to Help Me

Besides opening a new veterans student center, student veterans at Louisiana State University also earned the Student Veterans of America's Chapter of the Year award in January

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Since 2013, VFW and the Student Veterans of America (SVA) have worked side-by-side to advocate for improvements to student-veteran benefits.

The two groups have many similarities — both are led by veterans advocating for veterans' benefits and serving their communities. In the same spirit of VFW, the SVA chapter at Louisiana State University (SVLSU) in Baton Rouge, La., has given time and energy to help its local community and other veterans.

One example of this was the chapter's hosting of a Thanksgiving dinner for homeless veterans. The group worked with a Baton Rouge, La., veterans transition home, the Garfield House. It provides housing to homeless veterans with mental illness or substance abuse.

Activities such as this also have given the chapter recognition on a national level. SVLSU was given the SVA Chapter of the Year award at January's SVA National Conference in Orlando, Fla.

Helping Vets in the Community

Tyler Kruse, SVLSU's vice president, said about 30 military-affiliated students provided and prepared the Thanksgiving meal for eight of the Garfield House residents and their families. He said SVLSU plans on making the dinner an annual event.

"In total, we served about 45 people," Kruse said. "We provided the turkeys and fried them at the home. And, our members also brought all the other food."

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Kruse is an Army veteran who was an infantryman with 2nd Bn., 1st Inf. Regt., 2nd Stryker BCT, 2nd Inf. Div. He served from 2013 to 2016, which included a training mission in Indonesia.

Now a senior at LSU, Kruse, who expects to graduate next month with a computer engineering degree, said that was the second time they have worked with the Garfield House. Another event done this past fall was a beautification project. SVLSU and Freedom Services, a Baton Rouge-based pressure washing service company, cleaned the outside of the veterans' transition homes.

“The primary focus for our student organization is to help student veterans and help the veteran community, especially those who are falling on hard times,” Kruse said. “We are always there for any veteran who is in need.”

Being a Part of LSU

In total, Kruse said SVLSU has about 110 members and about 30 who are active. He said the opening of LSU's William A. Brookshire Military & Veterans Student Center in 2018 has helped bring veterans together on campus.

“Before the center, we basically were stuck up on the third floor of an abandoned dormitory,” Kruse laughed. “With the center now opened in the heart of campus, we have had an onslaught of new members joining. Not only veterans, but military-affiliated students, such as dependents and ROTC members. The center has changed how we operate.”

Kruse said that before becoming a member of the campus student veterans organization, he never felt a part of the LSU community. He said his participation with SVLSU has changed that.

“I've been extremely involved since then,” Kruse said. “It's opened my eyes to see that there is a lot more going on here than my own personal bubble and that there is this whole community that is willing to help me.”

Advocating for Veterans

One of SVLSU's members was selected to be a part of this year's VFW-SVA Legislative Fellowship. Christopher Lamy, an Air Force veteran, is a second-year law student at LSU. He served from 2006 to 2016. Lamy, a member of the VFW Department of Louisiana, was a K-9 handler in the Air Force security forces and deployed twice to Iraq, once to Afghanistan and once to Jordan.

Lamy, who plans to graduate in May 2020, received his undergraduate degree in criminal justice from American Military University while in the Air Force. The topic he plans to advocate for on Capitol Hill, which is central to the VFW-SVA Fellowship Program, is

veterans' health care and medical marijuana.

“My idea is that veterans should have access to medical marijuana through VA in states where it’s legal,” Lamy said. “I’ve had to research the topic and find all the positive and negative aspects to create my argument.”

Being a VFW-SVA Fellow as well as being a husband and a father to two daughters — ages 10 and 13 — Lamy still finds the time to help SVLSU in community service projects, including the Thanksgiving meal event.

Lamy said he is “happy” to be a part of the VFW-SVA Fellowship.

“The name VFW carries a lot of weight,” Lamy said. “Being able to have that name and all its members behind you while you advocate for them is very significant. After being in D.C. and seeing what happens on the ground, I think it’s a phenomenal opportunity.”

This article is featured in the April 2019 issue of [VFW magazine](#), and was written by [Dave Spiva](#), senior writer for VFW magazine.