

‘A Fun Place to Attend’

Illinois Post brings comedy to local community

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An Illinois VFW Post is using comedy to continue building a bridge between its members and the community.

Dan Schmidt, commander of VFW Post 5694 in Highland, Ill., first got involved with the local comedy scene in 2010 after returning from Iraq, and used that relationship in hopes of gaining younger members. The Post held its first comedy show in January and a second in April.

Schmidt said Post members were “pretty excited” about the idea of hosting a comedy show.

“Part of the reason they were excited about was [that] I had already set up the Post to understand that we needed to modernize, we needed to change, we needed to find new ideas,” said Schmidt, who served one tour in Korea (2000-01) and two tours in Iraq (2006-07 and 2008-09).

He did that by presenting new ideas and approaches at every meeting and “consistently conducting surveys” of the membership and from events the Post held. The first show sold about 100 tickets and 84 people attended, while about 70 attended in April.

The events already have affected membership, according to Schmidt. He said three people who live in neighboring communities and had lapsed memberships at other Posts opted to join Post 5694.

“They re-engaged their membership with our Post, even though they have to drive past three other posts to get to ours because we’re doing fun activities that people want to be involved in,” Schmidt said.

In organizing the events, Schmidt said, he reached out to comedians who helped him when he was doing comedy. And while he said the events produce “a little bit of profit,” the purpose is more about community.

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

406 W. 34th Street
Kansas City, MO 64111
Office 816.756.3390
Fax 816.968.1157

WASHINGTON OFFICE

200 Maryland Ave., N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002
Office 202.543.2239
Fax 202.543.6719

info@vfw.org
www.vfw.org

“We have a great community,” Schmidt said. “They support us wholeheartedly. We support them. But it helps us ensure that the community thinks of us in a positive light, thinks of us as a fun place to attend and spend time. And it gives them one more place to look... It makes us at least an option worth considering.”

The Post will hold its third comedy show in November.

This article was featured in the May/June 2019 issue of VFW Checkpoint. If you're a Post, District or Department Commander and aren't receiving the Checkpoint e-newsletter, please contact the VFW magazine at magazine@vfw.org.