

Game On

VFW Post in Texas Creates Cybercafé

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A VFW Post in San Antonio, Texas, pioneered a way to welcome younger veterans, provide an alternative way for members to build camaraderie and even treat varying levels of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Led by Post Commander Bill Smith, a retired Army veteran who deployed both to Afghanistan and Iraq during his 32-year military career, Post 8541 used its facility to accommodate a cybercafé.

The state-of-the-art cybercafé, a room riddled with fiber optic cables for high speed internet connected to 12 PCs and six Xbox gaming consoles, became Smith's answer to attracting younger veterans looking for a place to hang out and build comradeship.

Smith, who retired from the service in 2015, came up with the idea while in the military, noticing the impact video games had on active-duty troops.

"When I was in Afghanistan, I was embedded with French Special Forces. When I went to Bagram, I went to JOC [the Joint Operations Center] and was berthing with some guys in 7th Group. As I was sitting there, I kept hearing 'Who shot me? Who did this?'" Smith remembers.

Smith soon noticed that most of the active-duty troops around him played video games in their downtime as a way to decompress from a hard day's work.

He harbored this notion when he took over as Post 8541 commander in 2018, shortly after the Post found itself on the verge of folding due to low membership numbers.

After he was voted post commander, the Post resurrected its membership and has been ranked second in its District as of 2020, according to VFW's Membership Department.

Under Smith, the Post also began targeting Iraq and Afghanistan War veterans to join the ranks of VFW membership. Part of it became appealing to the younger veterans by hosting

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events that include game nights, as well as opening a playroom for members to drop off their children while attending meetings.

"The only way to change it is to get in there and change it," Smith added. "Now I'm not a big tech guy, but I understood that incorporating videogames was the next step as it does help veterans decompress and hangout. Even our older veterans have bought into what we're hoping to get done here with this game-room."

As of early September, however, all VFW Posts across Texas remain closed as mandated by Gov. Greg Abbott in an executive order issued back on June 26.

Smith hopes Post 8541 will open its doors soon, allowing its membership to use its new state-of-the-art cybercafé.

Be sure to watch for in-depth article on Post 8541's cybercafé in an upcoming issue of *VFW* magazine.