

'A Lot of Pride in Our Community'

Located on the largest Native American reservation in the state of Oregon, VFW Post 4217 earned All-American honors for the first time in Post history

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VFW Post 4217 in Warm Springs, Oregon, for the first time in its history, earned All-American Post honors for 2019-2020. For Post Commander Tamera Calhoun Coffee, who has led the Post since 2013, this honor was something she and her Post members worked hard to attain.

“This was something I had been thinking about for some time,” Calhoun Coffee said. “It was the one honor that I really wanted to earn, and I had tried for several years.”

Located in the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs — the largest reservation in the Beaver State — the VFW Post was established on June 26, 1952.

Calhoun Coffee’s grandfather, a WWII veteran, was a charter member of the Post, which is in north central Oregon. His 11 brothers also were members of the Post, which, according to Calhoun Coffee, was the first VFW Post chartered by Native American veterans.

Calhoun Coffee, who served in 1991’s Persian Gulf War, said that while the membership is small at around 40 members, the community knows it can call on the Post.

“We strive to always be there and do what we can in our community,” she said. “There is a lot of pride in our community for the veteran population.”

At the peak of COVID-19, the Post distributed bottled water, food and other donated items to veterans and their families. Calhoun Coffee has been working with families who lost loved ones to the pandemic by getting the appropriate grave markers and flags.

The Post now has members who are not Native American, Calhoun Coffee said. Members range from Korean War vets to those from Afghanistan and Iraq. She is currently the only female veteran.

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“We are good at representing or supporting events in the community,” Calhoun Coffee said. “We are reliable. Even if it’s only one or two of us, someone is always there.”

She added that the Post is typically called upon to present the colors at various community events and meetings. Since the membership is largely Native American and the Post is located on a reservation, the eagle staff is presented with the U.S. flag.

The eagle staff represents the honor and importance of a particular tribe or tribes.

Each June, a powwow is held in Warm Springs to commemorate the 1855 signing of a treaty between the U.S. and the confederated Native American tribes in central Oregon.

The Post plays a big part in the event and also uses the occasion to raise money for a new Post home.

Since the Post began, its home has been an old government building from the 1940s, Calhoun Coffee said.

When she got out of the Army in 1992, Calhoun Coffee decided to move back to Warm Springs. There, her grandpa signed her up for the VFW. She said she had never given much thought to the place where her grandfather and uncles hung out.

“I really just thought it was a family thing,” she said. “You know, a gathering place for us. Then I find out they actually held meetings there.”

In its heyday, the Post created a baseball field in the community and sponsored uniforms for teams. While the field name is no longer VFW Field, it remains in use by youth baseball teams to this day.

“I think our Post has always had an impact on the community,” said Calhoun Coffee, who served with the 411th MP Company out of Ft. Hood, Texas.

Though her grandfather has long since passed away, Calhoun Coffee said she knows he would have a lot of opinions about how his granddaughter is running the Post he helped charter.

“I think he would be proud of me, though,” she added.

Calhoun Coffee said she would like to see VFW continue to be a powerhouse among veteran service organizations.

“I would like to see it as strong as it was on the day of inception,” she said. “Maybe even stronger and overflowing with members.”

This article is featured in the 2021 November/December issue of [VFW magazine](#), and was written by [Janie Dyhouse](#), senior editor for VFW magazine.