

'This is a Labor of Love'

The Virginia VFW Riders honored one of their own last year as then-VFW Commander-in-Chief Hal Roesch II accepted a \$20,000 donation for VFW's Unmet Needs program

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On the final night of then-VFW Commander-in-Chief Hal Roesch II's homecoming tour last year, Virginia VFW Riders surprised him with the largest sum they ever raised through VFW's Vander Clute Memorial Motorcycle Ride.

In front of hundreds of VFW and Auxiliary members from across the country, friends and family, Virginia VFW Riders Chairman William Shepherd and 21 members of the Riders gathered last March in Portsmouth, Virginia, to present Roesch with the \$20,000 check.

"We have always worked hard to raise the most we could each year, but this was an especially important year for us in Virginia," Shepherd said during the ceremony at the Renaissance Portsmouth-Norfolk Waterfront Hotel ballroom in Portsmouth on March 28. "With Hal being our first Chief from Virginia, and with us not being able to attend the normal Vander Clute ceremony for two years, this check had to be huge."

Roesch, whose original homecoming in September 2020 had been postponed due to COVID-19 restrictions, accepted the ceremonial check with pride. A member of the Virginia VFW Riders himself, he then turned the spotlight on his fellow Riders, praising them for their incessant hard work to raise the money during a tough 2020 campaign plagued by the pandemic.

"Virginia's Riders continue to show their commitment to our organization, but also continue to show just how successful you can be with these fundraising activities," Roesch said during the ceremony. "This really sets a standard for years to come."

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The Virginia Riders began their fundraising trek in April 2020, an annual ride that honors the memory of VFW advocate Howard E. Vander Clute Jr., a former VFW Commander-in-Chief, longtime Adjutant General and motorcycle enthusiast who passed away in 2000.

The Riders covered the Hampton Roads region of Virginia, a 100-mile trek that spans across 10 cities and nine counties. They made several stops along the way to collect donations for VFW's Unmet Needs program, which helps veterans in need of financial assistance.

"We took in between five to six stops along the way," Shepherd said. "Most of our stops were VFW Posts, but we also included businesses that support us, as well as an American Legion where several of their members are also members of the VFW. COVID limited some of this, but we still raised the money thanks to our dedicated supporters."

Following the ceremonial check presentation, Roesch also surprised Shepherd, who retired last year as VFW Virginia Riders chairman, with a citation honoring him for his longtime contribution to VFW.

For Shepherd, the citation personified the ultimate sign of respect from a man he considers a role model.

"Hal has been my mentor for years, pushing me to continue my involvement in many parts of the VFW — but especially with the Riders," Shepherd said. "The work we do is great. With so many awesome comrades and Auxiliary members helping, this is a labor of love and never a pain."

This article is featured in the February 2022 issue of [VFW magazine](#), and was written by [Ismael Rodriguez Jr.](#), senior writer for VFW magazine.