

Bagpipes Honor Fellow Vets

A VFW life member and Vietnam veteran in Massachusetts learned to play the bagpipes more than a quarter century ago, and he has been honoring veterans with songs ever since

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The hum of bagpipes called out to Frederick Benda Jr. a quarter century ago, and the Vietnam War veteran has not stopped playing them.

Benda, a Life member of VFW Post 872 in Southwick, Massachusetts, was drawn to bagpipes for their ability to pulse together a soundtrack that without words could honor fellow veterans at all the funerals and memorials he frequented since his return from war.

“After I got out of the service in 1972, I carried on with life for some 20 years,” said Benda, who served with the Air Force’s 823rd and 554th Civil Engineering Squadrons at Tan Son Nhut, Vietnam, from September 1970-September 1971. “When I began joining different groups at 50 years of age, I decided to learn how to play the bagpipes to honor our fallen veterans.”

Benda’s journey toward becoming a practicing bagpipes player began after he first joined VFW in the 1990s. Signing up at the now-defunct Post 1847 in Westfield, Massachusetts, 98 miles west of Boston, he appealed to his fellow members, who voted him as Post commander for four consecutive years.

During his time as Post commander, Benda often sat at the helm of VFW functions in Westfield. From Memorial Day functions to Veterans Day programs over the years, the pulse of bagpipes being played captivated Benda.

Benda began taking lessons, learning to play a wide variety of famous songs and eventually joined a kiltie pipe band in Springfield, Massachusetts. Over the years, he and his band have been a fixture at all local and neighboring community functions and parades, veterans’ memorials and honorary events.

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“I also belong to the Vietnam Veterans Liberty Chapter 219 here in Westfield, and we are planning to have a special ceremony to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the war,” Benda said.

Benda said he plans to perform a self-written song during a commemorative march on the official 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War in Westfield. His performance of the song “Never Again Will One Generation Of Veterans Abandon Another” will be its debut.

This article is featured in the 2023 January issue of [VFW magazine](#), and was written by [Ismael Rodriguez Jr.](#), senior writer for VFW magazine.