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Don't Feed The Sharks

VFW Post 6917 out of Las Cruces, New Mexico, hosted the New Mexico Department of Justice Press Release with Attorney General Raúl Torrez, who announced he was filing a lawsuit against Disabled Veterans Consultants alleging the company used unethical practices in filing veterans' Veterans Administration (VA) claims.



New Mexico Attorney General Raul Torrez

Attorney General Torrez met with veterans prior to the Press Release, to hear firsthand about veterans' issues around New Mexico. Those veterans present represented the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), the Disabled American Veterans (DAV), and the American Legion. Also, in attendance for the round table were the VFW Department of New Mexico State Commander Brian Ravak, Past VFW National Commander-in-Chief BJ Lawrence, the VFW New Mexico Foundation Executive Director Len Hampton, Department of New Mexico DAV State Commander Kevin Dasing, along with local Post members from both the VFW and the American Legion. State Commander Ravak recognized Las Cruces VFW Post 10124 Commander Darrel "Rel" Melon for helping organize the Press Release, and VFW Post 6917 Commander Greg Cranmer who offered the location for the Veteran's Round Table discussion with AG Torrez prior to the NM DoJ Press Release on location.

Veterans Disability Center, signaling a strong message to all "Claim Shark" companies in New Mexico, that the predatory practice of stealing benefits from veterans is no longer acceptable in "The Land of Enchantment." Shortly after the Press Release, AG Torrez filed a suit against another New Mexico Claim Shark company. After AG Torrez spoke, he offered the mic to VFW State Commander Ravak, who sounded off on the National VFW position and the VFW legislation priorities being pushed on Capitol Hill to stop "Claim Sharks" that are illegally and unethically stealing up to 10 times the value of VA benefits rightfully belonging to veterans, who unfortunately or unknowingly place their trust in one of these predatory companies.

During the Press Release, AG Torrez publicly announced a lawsuit he was bringing against

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VFW National Council Updates



Tori Haddox

As this VFW year comes to a close, I find myself reflecting on the incredible journey we've shared. It's not just about the meetings, the events, or the ceremonies—it's about the people. The brothers and sisters who stood side by side, serving a cause greater than themselves, continuing the mission long after the uniform was folded and put away.

This year, we laughed together, we cried together. We honored the fallen, supported our veterans, lifted up our communities, and

reminded the world that service doesn't end with discharge—it transforms into purpose.

One of our most emotional moments came during the Parade of Winners. We worked hard, gave our all, and hoped for the best. But sometimes, even when your heart is fully in it, the results don't reflect the effort. Yes, we felt the sting of defeat—but what we did not feel was failure. Because the real victory was in the journey. In the mentoring, preparation, and in the unity and pride we saw in each other. Our efforts made a difference. And we held our heads high, because we showed up with heart and honor.

Through all the highs and lows, we were guided by strong and steady leadership. Commander Brian Ravak led with dedication, passion, and an unshakable belief in our mission. His commitment to service and his compassion for every veteran set the tone for the year.

Senior Vice Commander Jim Haddox was always there—dependable, thoughtful, and ready to step up whenever needed. His support and quiet strength held us together in moments when it mattered most.

And Junior Vice Commander Mack Dyer brought energy, heart, and a fresh perspective that breathed life into everything we did. His dedication didn't go unnoticed, and his efforts helped shape a future we can all be proud of.

There were moments that tested us—long hours, tough decisions, and emotional challenges. But through it all, we stood united. Shoulder to shoulder, heart to heart. Because that's what the VFW is about: family, resilience, and unwavering commitment.

To every member who showed up, who lent a hand, who shared a story or offered a hug when words weren't enough—thank you. You made this year extraordinary.

As we look toward the new VFW year, let's carry forward the spirit that defines us. Let's honor the past, embrace the present, and build a future where every veteran feels seen, valued, and supported.

Here's to another year of service, strength, and solidarity. Together, we are unstoppable.

**Veterans
Crisis Line**

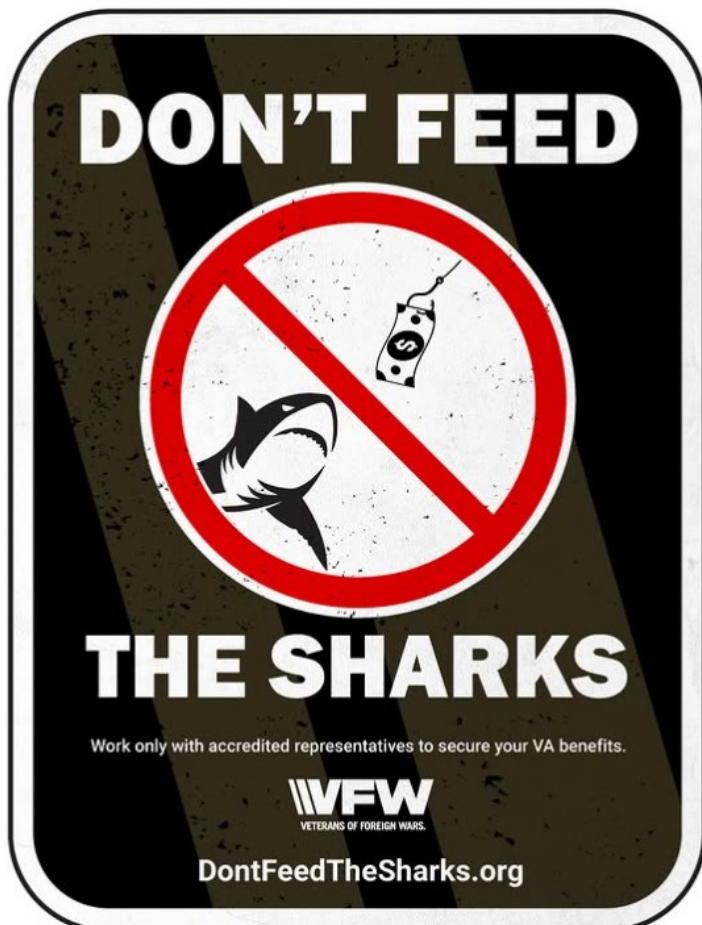
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Don't Feed the Sharks

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AG Torrez seeks to hold the "Claim Sharks" liable for restitution to the New Mexico veterans that were taken advantage of. He also seeks to have the New Mexico Legislatures provide funding from the state budget, to help the VFW, DAV, and American Legion hire more Veteran Service Officers (VSO) within the state.

It is very important that *ALL* veterans seeking help in navigating the VA, seek an accredited Veteran's Service Officer (VSO), who performs VA intake claims work free of charge; something these "Claim Sharks" charge thousands of dollars to do. Every non-profit veteran's service organization provides accredited VSO representatives to help veterans and separating or retiring service members file their VA claims. The VFW strongly recommends seeking out an accredited VSO to help with one's VA claims, and to actively help put these "Claim Sharks" out of business.



New Mexico VFW State Officers 2024-2025

National Council Member - Victoria Haddox 5890 Rio Rancho
Commander - Brian Ravak 6917 Las Cruces
Sr. Vice Commander - James Haddox 5890 Rio Rancho
Jr. Vice Commander - Mack Dyer 12184 Roswell
Quartermaster - Dave Fouse 7686 Alamogordo
Chaplain - Mark Bowman 3274 Hobbs
Judge Advocate - Vincent BJ Lawrence 7686 Alamogordo
Surgeon - Len Hampton 6917 Las Cruces
Past State Cmdr - Victoria Haddox 5890 Rio Rancho
Inspector - Roger Bartosiewicz 3280 Clovis
Chief of Staff - Kathie Schiebel 6917 Las Cruces
Service Officer - Louis Rossi 5890 Rio Rancho

District Commanders

District 1 - Jamie Poncho 614 Aztec
District 2 - James Berdine 10763 Albuquerque
District 3 - Mary Tutza 6917 Las Cruces
District 4 - Jack Doil 1389 Elephant Butte
District 5 - Danny Cruz 1547 Las Vegas
District 6 - Benjamin Pearce 5610 Espanola
District 7 - Jason Burke 11184 Roswell
District 8 - Justin Knapp 2528 Tucumcari

New Mexico VFW News

Official Publication of the Department of New Mexico Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

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Commander



Brian Ravak

Greetings and salutations to the members of the VFW Department of New Mexico! This VFW year has surely flown by. Travelling around the state I've had plenty of opportunities to meet with many Comrades and Auxiliary members, visited a great number of Posts, and had the opportunity to participate in some really exciting events. I am proud to be a part of this Department, and pleased to report, overall, we are doing great things to take care of our veterans and to advance

the National VFW Goals.

The line officers we have in the state chairs are doing a remarkable job. Senior Vice Commander Jim Haddox is absolutely "killing it" as our Legislative Chairman. Jim led our team on Capitol Hill in early March to advocate on the VFW Legislative Priorities. Without Jim's leadership, we could not advance the many issues we spoke about to our Senators and House Members during the Legislative Conference in Washington D.C. Junior Vice Commander Mack Dyer, who also serves as our State Legislative Chairman, has helped advance state legislation to tackle Claims Sharks in New Mexico. Jim's and Mack's work helped propel House Bill HB-245 through the Veterans Services Committee. And, although the bill died in the Justice Committee, New Mexico Attorney General Raul Sanchez immediately filled suit on two "Claim Shark" companies in New Mexico. State Chaplain Mark Bowman, demonstrates daily what it means to "lead from the front." Mark is passionate about caring for our veterans in our communities and I've seen firsthand his compassion when it comes to caring for our veterans, or families that have lost a loved one. Needless to say, the VFW Department of New Mexico is in good hands with the officers we have coming up the ranks, who are committed to taking care of New Mexico veterans.

Comrades, we've had a very successful year thus far, but I will not blindly say everything is perfect; there are areas we must work on, and stive to do

better. Post, District, and Department officers have an obligation they are expected to fulfill. A couple areas where we can do better are with Community Service, Post Audits, and Inspections. If a Post conducts a Community Service event but fails to report it, *it does not count!* We spend hundreds of dollars, many a miles, and a ton of hours performing Community Service, but we fail to report it. Why do we put in all the work and not take credit for it? We can do better! Post Audits are a Trustee obligation and a VFW Department and National requirement. Trustees are the "watch dogs" of the VFW. Time and time again, when a Post struggles, or worse fails, we can generally look back and see that if the Trustees were just doing their jobs, the Post would likely not have ended up in the state they were in. Commanders, it is your responsibility to ensure that the Trustees are conducting thorough audits. Now, let me get on my Post Inspection soap box for a moment. If Post Trustees are the first line of defense in our organization, then District Commanders and District Inspectors are the second line of defense in protecting our organization. I will take full responsibility for a Post Inspection not being completed this late in the year, but this is something we are going to fix. We are better than that! Thorough, and I mean *thorough*, Post inspections are a necessity. Commanders should demand it, Quartermasters should expect it, and Inspectors must ensure it gets done, thoroughly ... enough said!

I'll end on some high notes and wrap this up with a few highlights over the past couple months. Washington D.C. and the VFW Legislative Conference must be one of the most rewarding events of the year. This is where the rubber meets the road, and you truly witness firsthand that the advocacy the VFW does on Capitol Hill *is second to none!* The VA benefits we have today are a result of those VFW members ten or twenty years ago (or longer ago) advocating for our benefits. A good example is the Pact Act. The Pact Act was the largest VA reform bill since World War II. Without the help of the VFW, the Pact Act would not have gotten across the finish line. When we say, within the VFW, "No One Does More for Veterans," the VFW leads from the front! Bataan Memorial Death March recruiting event was another highlight and successful event.

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Sr Vice Commander



Jim Haddox

Comrades and Auxiliary, I would first like to take this opportunity to thank you all in your efforts to continue supporting Veterans and Veterans issues. Only through collective actions are we able to make gains in our mission.

Since Mid Winter we have seen actions at the Roundhouse with NM245. Although it was held up in the Judicial committee, there has been further

action with the NM Attorney General, which included a press conference in Las Cruces. These actions and increased awareness is a direct result of the membership. Great job to all involved.

We have had efforts to increase our VSO's involvement in areas like Farmington. I would like to thank Mark and Betty Decker for making it happen!

We attended the Washington Legislative conference in Washington D.C, with nine members from New Mexico. We met with our Congressional members and their staff and shared our priorities and spoke on specific issues that are impacting New Mexicans. As we are coming to a close of the VFW year, I would like to encourage you to push for membership, both new and renewals.

I am looking forward to our State convention, and I hope to have your support in the upcoming year! Thanks for all you do!



Dept Quartermaster



Dave Fouse

Comrades, Once again, we had another successful year. The number of members and Posts who are participating in our core programs continues to rise. I hope this continues to rise through the next year.

I wish to thank our line officers for a term well served and congratulate those upcoming officers in their future endeavors. We will continue to strive in improving our programs, and recruiting to serve the

veterans of New Mexico and their families. Thanks to those who volunteered their time and effort during the Bataan Memorial March weekend at White Sands Missile Range - it was phenomenal! I challenge each Commander in reaching out to these new members, and getting them involved in the VFW and your Post.

Please pay close attention to the deadlines for the convention registration we have established. This is necessary in order to know how much food to order/prepare for the reception.

I look forward to serving you next year as I, once again, will be a candidate for Department Quartermaster. I have enjoyed this position as it has been my way of contributing to the success of this Department. Let's make next year an enjoyable one, by fulfilling all requirements early.

Jr Vice Commander



Mack Dyer

Comrades,

This year has flown by. We have faced many challenges and have persevered. As our 2024–2025-year heads to a close, I want to reflect on some of the great things we have done. I am so proud of what we do every day as a Department. We help our veterans and our communities in so many ways.

Comrade Brown supports our scouting program, as he has done for many years. PSC Haddox stepped up to help see our scholarship program was a success. Our Honor guards across the state have laid so many of our fellow veterans to rest with dignity. Thank you to our great Auxiliary members who are helping support our mission every single day.

Thank you to the Commanders of our Districts and

Posts that have been out there recruiting, consistently pushing to increase our membership, putting us at 97.79% at the time of this writing for the Department, we have six Districts and 25 Posts already at 100% or more. Keep pushing the final few months so we can attain 102% with your dedication. We have 96 comrades with at least one recruit, 14 with at least five, and nine with at least ten. That is outstanding work.

We have faced multiple natural disasters across the state and country this year, and you have stepped up with donations of time, money, and goods to support veterans around our great state and nation. Thank you to Comrade Melon and Comrade Hampton, for their successful standdown in Las Cruces. You do so many amazing things, I can't begin to recognize everyone in this writing, but know that your work does not go unnoticed, and we are the organization we are because of your efforts. It makes me so proud to be a member of this organization, and it is an honor to serve as your Jr-Vice Commander.

Let's finish strong and carry that momentum into our 2025-2026 year.

Dept Chaplain



Mark Bowman

As our 2024-2025 year concludes, I want to thank you for allowing me to serve as your Chaplain. This year has been both rewarding and challenging. A fitting quote is: "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger. Except tail rotors, they will straight up kill you."

Humor helps us cope, and as veterans, we often push boundaries, making us unique. As

your Chaplain, I've aimed to keep spirits high and provide comfort. In tough times, I offered support, a kind word, and a cup of coffee.

Looking ahead to the 2025-2026 year, I hope to leverage my experiences as your Chaplain in my role as Department Junior Vice Commander. I will lead by example and earn your trust as we progress together. Thank you for your support.

VFWA District 15 Council Member



Chrissy Harlan

It was a privilege and an honor to attend the Winter Conference in Arizona and the Mid-Winter Conference in New Mexico. Both Departments celebrated their Voice of Democracy and Patriots Pen winners. It is always exciting to hear the voices and opinions of the future leaders of our great nation. I wish them all the best in the National competition and the

adventures that are to come for them.

Both Conferences and Council Meetings were informational and enjoyable. My sincerest thanks to President Renee, Kelly, Jeanette, Betty and all the members from New Mexico for making me feel welcome. The weather was cold and windy but the friendship and hospitality was warm and comfortable. To President Lynn and the officers and members of Arizona, I treasure your friendship and always enjoy our time together.

Mid-Year Conference was held in Cancun, Mexico. There was a lot of leisure time to reconnect with friends and make new ones. The Council of Administration meeting got a little intense. Last year I moved that all members have access to the same materials that National Officers and National Council Members had access to. The intent was for the members to have the information in time to get with their respective Council Member to voice their opinion before the meeting. The motion was not specific enough so the information was put on Malta for everyone to see but only after the meeting. I made a more concise motion this time that the information be available to all members at the same time it is available to council members. Thank you to Frankie Bill, NDCM Area E, for seconding the motion again. The motion was passed so prior to National Convention all members should check the resources for information on the next council meeting.

A motion was made to help pay for the National President and her Documentarian to visit Thailand and Taiwan to develop and help Auxiliaries in those countries. When the National President called for discussion a very passionate member stood up and expressed her disappointment and embarrassment that the motion was only to pay a portion of the expenses so

the motion was amended to state that the Auxiliary would pay to send them. This entire motion was a surprise to me as it was not on any of the agendas I received. I was able to ask what they thought the cost would be and was told they had no idea. The motion passed. I do not think this is a wise use of our members' money, and to those of you that agree with me I apologize that this happened. As the motion passed, many members believe that this is an important trip and worth whatever the cost will be. Always remember that we may not agree with each other on every issue and that's okay. We don't have to agree on everything, but we all have to work together as a team to fulfill our mission of serving veterans and their families.

Our next big events will be the Department Conventions. I hope to attend both Departments, but in case I can't, I know you will have great Conventions to celebrate your accomplishments and kick off the new term.

New Mexico VFW Auxiliary State Officers 2024-2025

National Councilwoman - Chrissy Harlan *Arizona*
 President - Renee King 2951 *Santa Fe*
 Sr. Vice President - Kelly Fouse 7686 *Alamogordo*
 Jr. Vice President - Michelle Dennison 3370 *Moriarty*
 Treasurer - Penney Howard 614 *Aztec*
 Secretary - Jeanette Garcia 401 *Albuquerque*
 Chaplain - Shelly Ravak 6917 *Las Cruces*
 Conductress - Barbra Santillanes 401 *Albuquerque*
 Assistant Conductor - Dela Sanchez 4384 *Anthony*
 Guard - Marsha Short 10124 *Las Cruces*
 Assistant Guard - Helen Maes 2951 *Santa Fe*
 Chief of Staff - Betty Decker 614 *Aztec*
 Past State Pres. - Beth Miller 6917 *Las Cruces*
 Color Bearer #1 - Brenda Doil 1389 *Elephant Butte*
 Color Bearer #2 - Angela Sandoval 2951 *Santa Fe*
 Color Bearer #3 - Sharlotte Dennison 3370 *Moriarty*
 Color Bearer #4 - Frances Montoya 2951 *Santa Fe*
 Flag Bearer - Nancy Tabb 5890 *Rio Rancho*
 Banner Bearer - Glenn Crawford 8703 *Carlsbad*

District President

District 1 - Betty Decker 614 *Aztec*
 District 2 - Michelle Dennison 3370 *Moriarty*
 District 3 - Marsha Short 10124 *Las Cruces*
 District 4 - Brenda Doil 1389 *Elephant Butte*
 District 5 - Thomas Bullington Jr. 3271 *Clayton*
 District 6 - Margie Carillo 2951 *Santa Fe*
 District 7 - Lequanah Crawford 8703 *Carlsbad*
 District 8 - Suzan Willis 3280 *Clovis*

VFWA President



To Our Veterans,

On behalf of the entire VFW Auxiliary, I want to extend my deepest gratitude to you. Your courage, sacrifice, and unwavering commitment to our country inspire everything we do. Your service has shaped our nation's history, and we remain forever grateful.

It has been the honor of a lifetime to serve as your Department President this past

Renee King

year. During this time, I have witnessed extraordinary dedication from our members and unwavering support for our veterans across the state. Our mission is clear—to serve those who have served us—and I could not be prouder of the impact we've made together.

To our VFW Auxiliary members: thank you for your time, passion, and the countless ways you serve. From local community events to Department-wide initiatives, your efforts truly make a difference. You are the heart of this organization.

A special thank-you to Commander Ravak, whose partnership and collaboration throughout the year have meant so much. Working together toward our shared mission has been an incredible experience, and I am grateful for the unity and mutual respect we've built.

To the VFW Auxiliary Department Line Officers & Chairmen- thank you for standing beside me, supporting the mission, and helping guide our work every step of the way. Your leadership, dedication, and teamwork have been essential, and I am so proud of what we've accomplished together.

As we look ahead, I encourage each of you to continue leading with kindness, humility, and purpose. Our Veterans deserve our very best—and together, we are stronger.



Commander

Continued from pg 4~

Huge shout out to all the recruiters that helped recruit over 100 new members for our organization. This recruiting event helped our Department leap forward in the pursuit of 102% in membership. With everyone's help, we will get there! Our Department was also blessed to welcome the VFW Auxiliary National President, Brenda Bryant, to the Land of Enchantment. Brenda was a gracious guest, and Department President Renee King and her team did an outstanding job hosting President Bryant. Finally, I'm happy to report that our District

Conventions are nearly complete or will be by the time you are reading this. A huge congratulations to the incoming District Commanders and Presidents. I wish you success in your upcoming VFW year.

There are too many individuals to thank for all their support, but this Department would not be as successful as it is without the unwavering support of so many folks who don't do it for fame or glory but do it for the love of our veterans. Keep on keeping on, *Helping Our Veterans!*

Last Newspaper for Mark and Betty Decker



Both Betty and myself have been doing the paper since 2012. We have had lots of good experiences being your Department newspaper editor and assistant editor over the years. We

appreciate all the articles we have received. Including all the people and Posts that have submitted things to us to publish.

It has come a time when we think new ideas and thoughts need to be put in place for the paper. If there is no turnover, it becomes stagnant and boring. So, no one is learning anything new from the paper. This paper is for Posts, individuals, and the Department of New Mexico on both the VFW and VFWA sides to pass information, engage with the members, give other Posts ideas about what they can do, and to bring us as a Department together.

Christina Backus will be taking over as editor of the paper come June 5, 2025. She will still be using the email vfwnmeditor@yahoo.com. She deserves all of our respect and admiration for stepping up to this important

position. Christina, if you need anything, you know you can call on us to help. Department, send her your announcements. We need to keep the paper going strong in the years to come.

With this changeover, there should be new life and enthusiasm brought to the newspaper again. We have enjoyed your support, seeing the great things everyone has done over the years, and being part of the great teams that have been in place over the past decade plus. We are hoping you are just as excited about a new editor on the paper as we are. I know the Department as a whole will support Christina in the new role she is taking. Please send her your articles in a timely manner. Give her all the support you have shown Betty and me over the years.

Lastly, have a great time in the VFW and VFWA. Remember we are here to help our fellow veterans and their families. But to be effective at this, we must let people see what we do. Brag about yourself, your Post, and your Auxiliary. Let others know what you have accomplished and plan on accomplishing. Without the word getting out, you are just telling it into a box. No one else will see what we do, how we help people, or that we even exist. Use the paper as a means to show your stuff. Continue to do the hard work, but make sure you let others know what is happening.

Membership



Mark Decker

As of this writing, 4/20/25, we are at 7986 out of 8166 for 97.79%. To make the 102% we need to be at 8330 members. We are right now 344 members shy of that mark. This means between now and June 30 we need to average five members a day to join or renew to make our goal. This is possible. We need to contact all lapsed and expiring members as soon as possible.

members around you.

Currently we have 18 Posts at or above 102%. We have another seven Posts over 100% but not yet at 102%. So that makes 24 out of 38 Posts at or above 100%. We have 13 other Posts within 20 of making 100%. So all 38 Posts are well within the range of 100%+. We have three Districts that are over 102%, three others that are over 100%, and two that are within 20 of 100%.

What this leaves us is the at-large. We are only at 87% of at-large members renewed. We need to get more of these members to renew. They are already members, they just need to feel the warmth and fellowship of the VFW. Help the Department of New Mexico excel this year. We are almost to the end of the year. One more big push and we are through 2024-2025 year.

For everyone that has recruited a member, talked to a veteran about the VFW, and been there helping in the background, THANK YOU for all your efforts. This year has been fun and exciting. Let us finish it strong and with an excellent finish.

If you need a list of expired or expiring at-large members, please contact either Mark Decker at madecker19020@yahoo.com or Commander Brian Ravak. They can get you a list of

VFW Post 5432

Scouting America is thrilled to announce that Terry Brown is one of 18 professionals across the USA chosen to receive the prestigious Distinguished Eagle Scout Award! The stringent criterion for this award requires a minimum of 25 years "Time in Service" from the official record date an Eagle rank was earned. The Distinguished Eagle Scout Award (DESA) was established in 1969 by the National Eagle Scout Association to recognize Eagle Scouts

who achieve extraordinary national-level recognition, fame, or eminence within their profession and/or service to the nation and have a strong record of voluntary service to their community. Terry is the Senior Vice Commander and three time All-American and All-State Commander of VFW Post 5432 in Corrales, NM.

VFW Post 9517 Easter Egg Hunt

On Sunday, April 13, VFW Post 9517 hosted our annual Easter egg hunt at SASI School football field in Shiprock. We had about 24 kids come out to hunt eggs. They ranged from ages 3-18, in 4 groups: toddler-4, 5-8, 9-12, and teenager.

There were over 3000 eggs placed in the field. Each age group had 2 Easter baskets and a prize in them. The younger 3 groups had a bicycle, while the teenagers had a gift card. After the kids in the age group for that section had 5 minutes to get eggs, all the other kids were allowed into the area to get the eggs. Everyone had fun. All of the kids and parents and grandparents were thankful for the hunt.

The winner of the 5-8 age group's bike said he was grateful for the bike because his old bike was too small for him and he could now pass it down to his

little sister for her to ride. Commander Tommie Yazzie said, "This is a great way for the Post to show how much we appreciate the community supporting us. We are just trying to give back to the community."

Post members had spent much of the previous week packing the eggs and making sure it was ready for the event. Post members spent most of the morning before the hunt, hiding the eggs and getting the prizes in place. This event was a huge project and took many of the Post members and their families most of the week prior to set up. A special thank you goes out to the SASI school and their staff for allowing us to use their football field again this year. Plans are already in the works for next year's hunt. We hope it grows bigger and bigger each year.

VFW 9517 Future

VFW 9517 has many activities coming up soon. On Saturday, May 3 and Monday, May 5 we will be doing cleanup at the Shiprock Veterans Cemetery. On Friday, May 9 the Post will be hosting our 2nd Annual Golf Tournament at Pinion Hills Golf Course in Farmington. We have an ad on another page. On Friday, May 23 and Sunday, May 25 we will be doing Buddy Poppy handouts at 7-2-11 and Bashas in Shiprock from 10-4 both days. On Saturday, May 24 we will have our annual Pulled Pork sale at Tractor Supply Company in Farmington. Pulled pork sandwich, chips, drink, and fry bread for \$7. On Monday, May 26 at Shiprock Veterans Cemetery we will be placing crosses and flags on veterans' graves starting at 6 AM, at 11 we will do the VFW Memorial Day ceremony, and at 12 Noon we have flag retirement and unfolding and refolding of flags.

On Saturday, July 5 we will participate with VFW 614 in Aztec and VFW 4031 in Durango for a Flags and Freedom bike run. This run will start in Farmington, go to Durango VFW Post, then to Auto Doc in Kirtland, head to VFW 614 in Aztec, and return to Farmington. Many raffles and prizes will be given out. Food, drinks, and entertainment will be available at the end of the run.

During this time also, the Post will be tearing down our old trailer house and starting to upgrade the inside of our building.

If you are anywhere close for any of these events, please come out and help or participate. The more people that come out the better.

MOC Membership

Military Order of the Cootie, MOC, is also known as Cooties. Our mottos are: "Keep them smiling in beds of White" and "Closer than a Brother, Busier than a Bee." This is along with the Military of the Cootie Auxiliary, MOCA, also known as Cuties. Unfortunately we are a dying breed in New Mexico.

The Grand of New Mexico, MOC Department, has 4 Pup tents, Posts, and 3 Auxiliaries at the time of this writing. We are down to about 100 Cooties and 50 Cuties. These are the VFW members that have been hard workers and held positions of authority in the VFW. They get invited into the MOC/MOCA.

The main mission of the MOC/MOCA is to do hospital visits and visit the sick and mobility challenged veterans. There is an article elsewhere in this paper about our first visit to the VA hospital in Albuquerque since COVID. But we have visited local hospitals, the VA in Amarillo, and Truth or Consequences veterans' home.

We currently have 4 Pup tents around the state. One Pup Tent and its Auxiliary is hosted by VFW Post 401 and its Auxiliary in Albuquerque and their VFWA. The second Pup tent and its Auxiliary is hosted by VFW Post 614 and its Auxiliary in Aztec. The third Pup Tent and Auxiliary is hosted by VFW Post 6917 and their Auxiliary in Las Cruces. The last Pup Tent moved from Clovis to Hobbs this year, and they do not have an MOCA.

We are looking at trying to start a Pup tent in District 5 or 6 area. We need members to start one. It takes 15 members to start a Pup Tent. The Scratch meeting can happen right after a Post meeting. Or as the one in Hobbs does, it can be

after a District meeting.

I know we have VFW/VFWA members around the state that go to the hospitals, visit sick veterans, help with funerals, or do other things for sick and needy veterans. By joining the MOC/MOCA you are already doing the work. Why not help an organization out and keep up the good work?

At our Mid-Winter hospital visit, we had a few VFW members that were not members of the MOC/MOCA. When they saw what we were doing and the look on the veterans' faces, they decided to become MOC members. There is lots of fun and good times had by the Cooties and Cuties. We will be having a table set up at Convention, so please stop by and see what we do, talk to us about wanting to join, or at least come by and get a couple good laughs.

Both the MOC and the MOCA of New Mexico have been thinking about disbanding for the last couple of years. We are the organization that started the National Home, we are those funny dressed members with the bugs on our shirts, and we are the clowns at the hospitals trying to help the sick veterans forget about their illness if only for a little while.

If you are already a MOC/MOCA member, thank you for your hard work and dedication. If you were a MOC/MOCA member and let your membership lapse, please think of rejoining. And, lastly, if you have never been a MOC/MOCA member, talk to one of us and see what we are about.



VFW Post 3247

Post 3274 experienced a year marked by both favorable and difficult occurrences. Positively, they supported youth sports initiatives, visited veterans in nursing homes, celebrated the birthday of a 102-year-old WWII veteran, and hosted various events, establishing their hall as a central hub in Hobbs. They also adopted Scout Troop 3274 and revitalized the Military Order of the Cootie Pup Tent 5 AHO. Furthermore, they conducted honors for veterans which included ceremonial draping with the American flag, playing taps, and arranging police escorts.

However, there were adverse situations as well. The

Post had to address internal theft and remove a commander involved in criminal activities. Tragically, a Marine Combat veteran committed suicide on their premises, prompting the Post to organize a prayer vigil to honor the fallen veteran and bring the community together.

In an effort to advance and modernize, Post 3274 has initiated the process to rename the Post after hometown hero LCPL Aaron C. Austin, who was killed in action in Fallujah, Iraq. Despite these challenges, Post 3274 displayed resilience and unwavering commitment to serving their community and veterans.

MOC/MOCA Hospital Visit

For the first time since COVID hit, the Grand of NM and the Grand of NM Auxiliary did a visit to the VA Hospital in Albuquerque. After the Mid-Winter Conference in January, Grand Commander Don Frias and Grand President Shelly Ravak arranged for the MOC and MOCA to visit the hospital.

The MOC/MOCA and other VFW/VFWA members went to the hospital on Sunday, January 19 to visit the veterans in the hospital. There were about 2 dozen members that visited over 30 patients. Mostly they talked and listened to the patients. Asked how they were doing, saw if there was anything they needed, and tried to make them feel the love and care we feel for them. There were a few blankets handed out by the VFWA of Post 2951.

The members spent almost 3 hours in the hospital visiting 4 different floors. For many of the members, this was a first time visiting people at the VA hospital. All the members came away with a deep feeling of pride, care, and emotions over this visit. Pride in that we as an organization can help these veterans that have given so much for us and now are in the VA for assistance. Care

in that we touched these veterans' lives. Every one of these veterans was thankful we were there and enjoyed the company. Our emotions went from feeling the love to these veterans, to thankful they are getting the help they need, all the way to relief that we can actually see these veterans as people.

The MOC/MOCA is scheduling a visit to the hospital again for the Department Convention. On Thursday, May 29 at 1 PM we will be doing a visit to the hospital. We encourage any member, whether a member of the MOC/MOCA or not, if you are able to come and visit, please do. The more we have the better it is. We would like to have an idea of how many to expect to walk through the halls. The Grand of NM MOC/MOCA will be handing out supplies that the hospital has indicated that they need. But mostly what we do is talk to these veterans and make sure they know they are appreciated and loved.

Remember that the MOC/MOCA is all about "Keeping them smiling in beds of white." We are here to do anything and everything we can to recognize these veterans that are now in the hospital for any reason.

MOC Pup Tent 5 AHO



Over the Easter weekend Pup Tent 5 in Hobbs visited five nursing homes. They handed out over 290 chocolate bunnies to veterans and residents of the homes. This included ten VFW and one VFWA member doing this. The residents enjoyed the candy and mostly the visit and talking to people

VFWA 7686

On December 17, 2024, members of VFWA Post 7686 Auxiliary provided 110 gift bags to the NM State Veteran's Home in Truth or Consequences.

Contact was made with Tammy, the Activities Director of the Veteran's Home. She provided a specific list of items that are useful and appreciated by the men and women residing in the Veteran's Home.

To purchase these items, funds from a recent parking lot sale and collected donations were used. Other donations were given as well, such as the 100 gift bags, tags, ribbons, men's socks and brush sets for the women. Most of the items were purchased at local merchants. The requested items were large print word search and sudoku books, sharpened pencils, body wash, shampoo, hand lotion, and women's socks. The monetary cost of this endeavor came to \$550.00 which breaks down to \$5.00 a bag. Approximately 210 hours were donated by 8 members to gather the supplies, 5 members to stuff and ribbon the gift bags, and made the 2 hour, one-way drive to T or C on December 17th. The time spent there was a

wonderful experience. The Director of the Home and a few of his staff greeted and thanked us personally. Tammy and a few of her staff took us around for a tour of the facilities and the living areas to meet some of the veterans. It was a privilege to hand them a bag and thank them for their services. We met several vets that had experience with our local HAFT, and even a former business franchise owner of a popular eating establishment in Alamogordo.

This endeavor has been helpful to us as an Auxiliary by building a relationship with the staff at the Veteran's Home. Therefore, we can be good stewards of our commitment to serve these veterans and meet their specific needs, whether it be with material things or our time.

We have voted at our Auxiliary meeting to keep an active and growing T or C Veterans line item in our budget. We are excited and look forward to our newly formed alliance with Tammy and her staff to visit with and bring gifts to our loved veterans at the home!



VFWA 7686 Cont.



VFWA National Guard Candidate

Candidate for National Guard 2026



Jeanette Garcia

Dominique (27 years old, a Pharmacy Technician).

I am running for the office of VFW Auxiliary National Guard in 2026

My goal will be to ensure that our Auxiliary members receive information timely from the National organization and are receiving the support they need. I will continue to work with our VFW to ensure our Veterans receive the benefits owed to them and work closely with the families of our Veterans. I want our Auxiliaries to understand the rules, guidelines, and bylaws of the organization and to never be afraid to ask questions.

Our Veterans carry a very special place in my heart. It is an honor to work beside our comrades in the VFW and outside of the organization. Our Auxiliary is very fortunate to be able to work the National programs and be able to help our Veterans and their families. Sometimes the best we can do is lend our Veterans an ear; they just want someone to listen.

Some of my qualifications:

- Member of the Building on the Foundation Team for Sandi Kriebel
- Western Conference: Scholarship - helped to create new criteria for the Scholarship program
- National Ambassador: (2016-2017) - Veterans & Family Support, under Colette Bishop
- National District 15 Council Member: 2017-2019
- Department President: (2014-2015) - Outstanding President of the Year
- Auxiliary President: (2008-2009, 2009-2010, 2015-2019)
- National Awards Received as Department Chairman
- Life Member: VFW National Home

I feel that I can represent the Department of New Mexico and the National Organization not only with my qualifications, but as an Auxiliary member who has the ability to listen, work well with others, can see the vision of the organization and lead with professionalism, integrity, passion, and strength.

Loyally,
Jeanette D. Garcia
Candidate for VFVA National Guard 2026-2027



VFW NATIONAL HOME





VFWA District 15 Council Member Candidate



Betty Decker

Greetings VFW Auxiliaries and Districts,

My name is Betty Decker and I am announcing my candidacy for VFWA District 15 National Council for 2025-2027. District 15 is for both Arizona and New Mexico.

I have been a member of the VFWA since 2009. I am currently a Life Member of VFWA

614 in Aztec. I joined the VFWA under the eligibility of my husband, Mark Decker. I have the full support and endorsement of VFW and VFWA 614.

I have held numerous positions at Auxiliary, District, and Department levels through the years, culminating in being Circle of Excellence as Department President 2021-2022. I have also been District President 3 times, twice being President of the Year. I currently hold Trustee at Auxiliary 614, District 1 President, and Chief of Staff and Tech Chair at the Department level.

I have been very outspoken over the years about our goal to help veterans. All other items and events come after that. I believe that no matter what, we must be there to help our veterans.

I hope to see and talk to y'all this year. If you have any ideas that might help the organization, please bring them up. If there are any questions I can answer for you, please ask me. I am here to listen to you and learn from each of you along the way. Together we can make a difference in our veterans lives.

VFWA District 15 Council Member Candidate



Dominique Garcia

Greetings VFWA Department of New Mexico Auxiliaries and Districts,

My name is Dominique Garcia and I am running for National District 15 Council 2025-2027. This is the Councilmember that represents New Mexico and Arizona at National.

I joined the VFWA Jr Girls when I was 5 years old back in 2002. As soon as I turned 16, I

joined the VFW. I joined under my grandfather Joe Salas, a Vietnam Veteran.

I have held many positions in the VFWA over the years in all levels of the organization. Some of the positions I have held are: Auxiliary President twice, Auxiliary Treasurer 3 times, District Trustee 4 times,

Department Guard, Department Chaplain, Department Jr Vice, Department Sr Vice, and Department President, where I made the Circle of Excellence in 2022-2023. I have also held many chairs in all 3 levels. At National I was color bearer for 2023-2024, and currently am youth ambassador and page for Past National President Sandy Krebel.

I believe that I have the institutional knowledge and youth to see things that need to be changed, and the drive to represent the Department of New Mexico VFWA at the National level. I am always willing to listen to ideas and thoughts of how to improve our great organization. I know there is no one person that can know everything, nor have all the ideas to improve this organization. So, if you bring something up to me, we can discuss it and see if it is something we need to pursue in the future. Please ask me questions, bring your concerns, and have discussions with me about the VFWA.

I hope you will vote for me as our next National Council member from New Mexico.

VFWA Department President Candidate

Candidate for Department President 2025



Jeanette Garcia

Pharmacy Technician).

I am running for the office of VFW Auxiliary Department of New Mexico President

My goal will be to ensure that our Auxiliary members receive information timely from the National organization and are receiving the support they need. I will continue to work with our VFW to ensure our Veterans receive the benefits owed to them and work closely with the families of our Veterans. I want our Auxiliaries to understand the rules, guidelines, and bylaws of the organization and to never be afraid to ask questions.

Our Veterans carry a very special place in my heart.

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Loyally,

Jeanette D. Garcia

Candidate for VFWA National Guard 2026-2027





VFW Department Sr Vice Commander Candidate

Recruit
retain

educate
elevate

Candidate for State SR Vice Commander
Veterans of Foreign Wars
Department of New Mexico
2025-2026

I am a Gold Legacy Life Member of VFW Post 12184 in Roswell, NM & lifetime VFW National Home member. I joined the VFW as a Life member of VFW Post 10223, in South Korea in 2003, and was a member of VFW Post 8703 in Carlsbad, before transferring to Post 12184. I have been married to my wife Allison since 2008, we are the proud parents of one son Chase, a sophomore cadet at New Mexico Military Institute (**NMMI**).

I joined the US Army in 1988 as a Chemical Biological, Radiological, & Nuclear (CBRN) Specialist and retired as a Sergeant First Class in 2009, with almost 21 years of active service. My eligibility to join the Veterans of Foreign Wars (**VFW**) comes through service in Operations Desert Storm, Iraqi Freedom, and Korean Defense

I am currently serving as the Department Jr-Vice Commander. JR Vice-Commander District 7 (2024-2025), "All American" Commander of Post 12184 (2023-2025), I have served as Trustee at Post 10223, and Post 12184. Department Chaplain (2024)

My Military Awards and Decorations include the Bronze Star Medal, The Meritorious Service Medal, The Army Commendation, Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, Southwest Service Medal with 3 bronze stars, Iraq Campaign Medal, and Korean Defense Service Medal among others.

I truly believe our organization is the greatest Combat Veteran Service Organization in the world. It has provided me along with thousands of other Veterans with a safe haven to deal with the consequences of our service. I strongly feel that we can continue to achieve great things as a Department, building upon the strong foundation blocks past Department Commanders have set before us. I believe in four guiding principles **Recruit, Retain, Educate, and Elevate**.

We are all recruiters, whether we want to be or not. Our words, actions, and participation in our organization and our community determine the success or failure of the Department. If we want to **retain** those who have earned the right to be amongst us, we must remember that everyone has a story and no two are the same. Everyone brings something unique to our team. We must continue our efforts in **educating** our members and eligible veterans about what the VFW has to offer. We can educate the citizens of our state, and our lawmakers at all levels through our advocacy and the example we set in our communities. We elevate this organization everyday if we recruit, retain, & educate. Let us never forget, or get so caught up in life, that we forget to **elevate** each other.

Thank you for your support as your Department Jr Vice, I hope I can earn it again as your Department Sr-Vice Commander.



Mack Dyer

Candidate for State Sr-Vice Commander 25-26
Department of New Mexico

VFWA Department Treasurer Candidate



Penney Howard

Happy May! I hope all are doing well. I thought that I would tell you a little history about me. My husband Eloy and I were married in VFW Post #614 on Saturday December 26, 1998. On Monday I joined the VFW Ladies Auxiliary as a Life Member. In April I was elected Sr. Vice as well as our one Delegate for Department Convention (it was being held in Farmington that June). Here I am the newby that knows nothing and Dist.

#1 # 614 is always called first to give a vote in Department. There is Eloise running against Louise (I hear murmurs one is from Dist. 1). Well, being the newby I guessed wrong and voted for Eloise - oops! Turns out Eloise won and by a much larger margin than my one vote. I believe Janice Wimmer was Dept. Treasurer at that Convention (1999).

In January 2000 I became #614 President and received "President of the Year" in our Group, then held that office one more year. In 2002 I was

elected Aux. Treasurer and appointed Secretary and held those thru 2014, just Treasurer thru May 2015, then both again from 2018 to present.

I ran up the District Chairs and was Dist. #1 President 2003-04, Dist. 1 Sec/Treasurer 2011-14 and 2021 to present.

In June 2005 I was elected Department Guard and ran the chairs to be Department President 2009-10 where I was "Runner up Dept. President of the Year" at National. I have held many Chairmanships in Department and was elected as Department Treasurer in June 2014 to take PDP Janice Wimmer's place. I have been on the NM VFWA Council since 2003. I am planning on this year being the last year that I run for Department Treasurer. I have a very good Assistant Treasurer, Mary "Girl" Sanchez, whom is a PDP with lots of experience on Department Council, but also two years on National Council. Mary "Girl" is a very qualified Treasurer with both Auxiliary and District and will be very qualified to handle the NM Auxiliary Department's finances.

I hope that I can count on your support once more for the coming year (my final year) as New Mexico VFWA Department Treasurer.



The National Home has served as a living memorial to America's veterans for over 94 years by helping our nation's military and veteran families during difficult times.

- We provide housing and daycare to the military, veteran and veteran related families participating in our one to four year program.
- Educational, recreational, and enrichment opportunities are available to our families both on and off campus.
- Personal case management services for each family.
- Counseling & other community resources as needed.

If you know a family that could use our help please encourage them to call 1.800.313.4200



V F W
NATIONAL HOME
FOR CHILDREN
Every child deserves a happy home.

Congratulations to all
2025-2026
incoming officers.

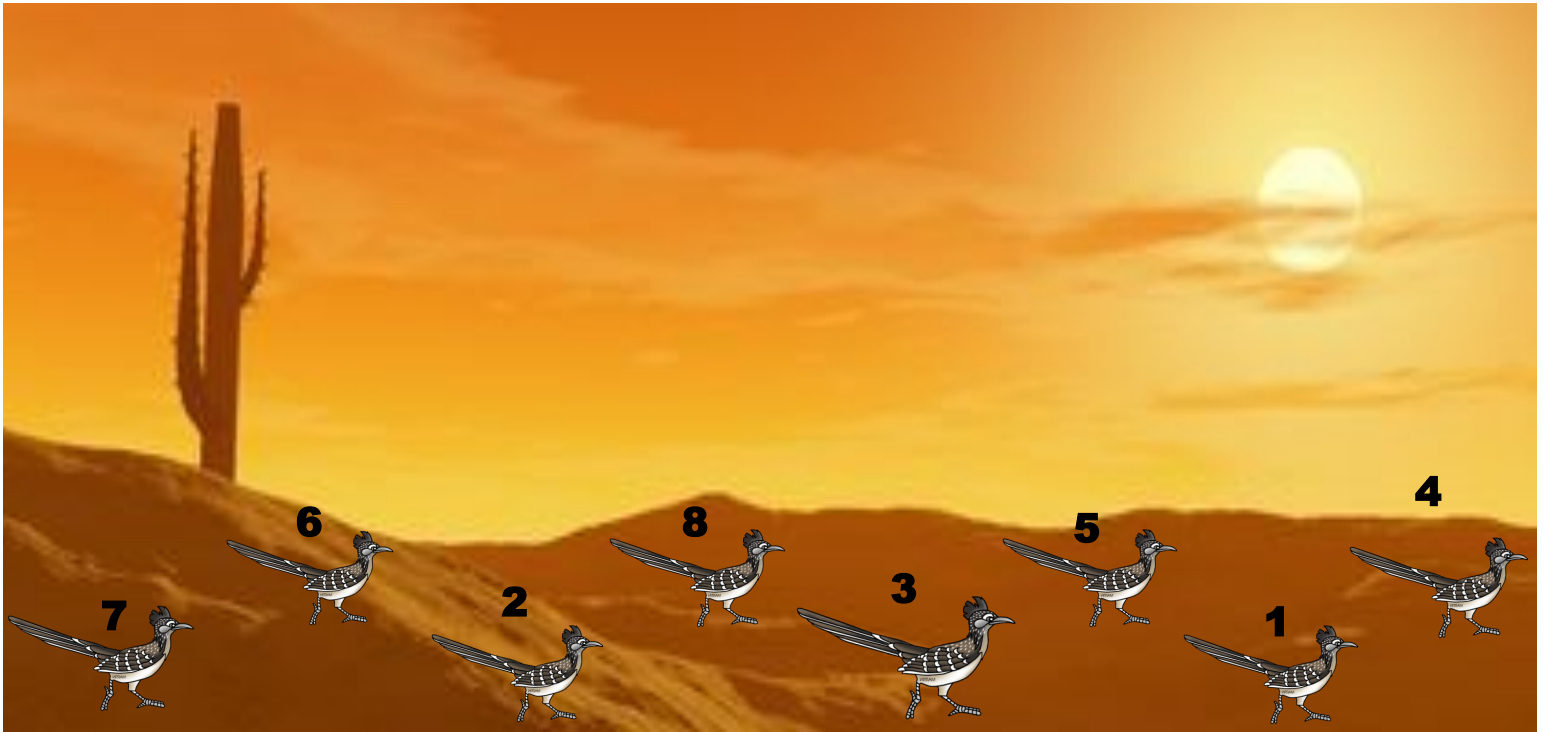
I hope that everyone has a great
year for the
Department of New Mexico!



Kim Harney
VFW Auxiliary
National Chaplain
2024-2025



VFW Membership



In the Race for Membership here are you standings:

District 4—Jack Doil 106.31%

District 1—Jamie Poncho 105.79%

District 5 —Danny Cruz 102.85%

District 3 —Mary Tutza 101.67%

District 8—Justin Knapp 100.84%

District 2 —James Berdine 100.67%

District 6—Benjamin Pearce 97.51%

District 7—Jason Burke 98.62%

Divisions

Division 1—12212—122%
Division 2—9676—115.53%
Division 3—614—111.81%
Division 4—10124—105.95%
Division 5—6917—107.64%

Recruiters

1– Mack Dyer 12184 21
2– Brian Ravak 6917 19
3– Greg Cranmer 6917 18
4– James Berdine 10763 13
5– Jason Burke 12184 17
5– Darrell Melon 10124 17

VFWA Membership

Groups

- 1—Auxiliary 3370 Moriarity 144.2%**
- 2—Auxiliary 8703 Carlsbad 106.5%**
- 3—Auxiliary 9515 Portales 106.8%**
- 4—Auxiliary 614 Aztec 107.3%**
- 5—Auxiliary 6917 Las Cruces 98%**
- 6—Auxiliary 3280 Clovis 100.7%**

In the Race for Membership here are you standings:

District 4—Brenda Doil 103.2%

District 3— Marsha Short 101.3%

District 1—Betty Decker 101%

District 7—Lequanah Crawford 100%

District 2—Michelle Dennisson 98.3%

District 5—Thomas Bullington Jr 95.7%

District 6—Margie Carillo 87.9%

District 8—Suzan Willis 83%