

Annual Commanders Report

July 2021 – June 2022

CONTENTS

| | <u>PAGE</u> |
|--|-------------|
| Commanders “year in review” | 1 |
| Post Calendar | 3 |
| Officers and Chairmen | 6 |
| Guest list | 7 |
| Awards and Recognitions: Veteran of the Month Program | 8 |
| Buddy-Poppy Campaigns | 10 |
| Celebrations & Events: Valentine’s Day Post Social Event | 11 |
| Celebrations & Events: Armed Forces Day Post Picnic | 12 |
| Community Awareness: Flag Day Flag Retirement Project | 13 |
| Community Awareness: Suicide Awareness Month * | 14 |
| Fund Raisers: Golf Tournament * | 16 |
| Relief Projects: Ramps for vets | 17 |
| Service Projects: Walking with Vets * | 18 |
| Service Projects: Breakfast with Vets * | 20 |
| Service Projects: Memorial Day Flag Placement * | 22 |
| Service Projects: Clothing Drive | 25 |
| Looking Ahead | 26 |
| Come Join us | 27 |

* Indicates Local News Articles

1ST Lt. Alexander Bonnyman, Jr. VFW Post 12135 (Tellico Village, TN)

The 1st LT Alexander Bonnyman Jr., VFW Post 12135 has completed an outstanding year where they met and exceeded all their goals in support of the VFW Mission, Veterans (& their Families) in need, and Local Community Support and Patriotic Involvement. The secret to their success is simple – the VFW is a volunteer organization, and the **Tellico Village “VFW Community” collectively stepped up, volunteered and were involved and engaged the entire year.**

The Tellico Village VFW Post has been awarded National **VFW All-American** and Tennessee State **VFW All-State** status for two years running – and – all indications are that we’ve qualified for the same recognition for the 2021-2022 Program year (TBD). While we are proud of that status, what is significant this past year is that “making All-American” was not a Post goal. Our goals were to simply to strive to do our best to assist local Veterans with a “hand up” where ever needed, help our local youth and community with expanded programs, and to remember to “take care” of our own veterans along the way! Our position was – if we do all of that, then little things like awards would just naturally follow! The willingness of the Tellico Village VFW Members to donate time and effort was unsurpassed this past year and we are proud of the huge difference made in the lives of Veterans and the local community – that is award enough!

The Tellico Village VFW Post is a relatively new VFW Post which celebrated its 6th year in April and is **continuing to grow in membership as a VFW Post**. We started the past year in TN VFW’s “Membership” Division 9, and anticipate jumping to Division 7 after another outstanding Membership Year where the Post was recorded at 122%. This is two consecutive years with VFW Post 12135 Membership increasing by over 120%, reflecting strong recruitment and retention strategies.

Similar to most organizations, VFW Post 12135 put proactive recruitment strategies in place which succeeded in bringing in over 17 new or transfer members this past year. What became evident in talking to our new members is that Veterans (like most people) want to join winning organizations – or in the VFW’s case – join a proactive VFW organization working to make a real difference in Veterans lives. This report (in total) highlights what these new members saw in VFW Post 12135 and what (they voiced) brought them to join our Post!

Significant in meeting Post 12135’s Membership goals was the **proactive decision to drive Post retention strategies as much as recruitment strategies**. The Tellico Village VFW Post chose to keep focus on its current Post Members with easy actions like birthday calls (thanking them for being a member), to monthly communications informing the Post what they’ve accomplished and what is coming up – all while publicly “thanking” those who made a difference. Additionally, the Tellico Village VFW Post added a quarterly social event where members and their spouses came together to remind ourselves that we are all veterans who should also be proud of what we’ve accomplished in our lives (ie., take a moment and smell the roses!)

Additionally, the Tellico Village **VFW Post took the extra time to recognize and honor our VFW Post Members** in several ways. A very powerful tool - we identified a Post Veteran of the Month award and published in in monthly local news articles. Plus – we partnered with the Tellico Village Quilting Club to present selected members with their “Quilt of Valor”. Significantly, the Tellico Village VFW **Post created a unique award called the Tellico Village VFW Post “Golden Heart Award”**, to be presented to the individual the Veteran QoV awardee selected as “the person” who stood by them over the years – in good times and bad!

During this past VFW Program year (2021-2022) the Tellico Village VFW Post participated in all required and expected VFW Meetings, programs and commemorations to include monthly Post Meetings where Member participation has been increasing commensurate with our increased overall Post membership. But – we also **took the opportunity to invite the local community whenever possible to key commemorations such as Veterans Day, Loyalty Day, Flag Day,**

Memorial Day/Weekend events, etc... A visible community service that VFW Post 12135 continues to provide is the collection and proper “retirement” of U.S. Flags! We have installed and maintain four flag deposit boxes throughout the community collecting more than 1,000 American flags this year which we just retired in a Flag Day ceremony on 14 June. Additionally, Post Members are visible within the local community during Buddy Poppy Campaigns, Veteran Clothing Drives, and multiple other community/veteran assistance activities. In doing all of this – and more - **VFW Post 12135 – and the VFW in general - received a lot of positive community visibility to a myriad of patriotic events as we repeatedly demonstrated the VFW mission in action!** (See our 2021-2022 Post Calendar for chronological dates)

In parallel, Tellico Village VFW Post 12135 consciously **decided that we wanted to give back as much as possible – i.e., to “pay it forward” to local veterans and community youth.** Most of our Post Membership are retired veterans living within the Tellico Village community where we recognized we were fortunate to live with this close-knit community. But we also recognized that there were many outside our community who were less fortunate. With that as a backdrop, we proactively set goals this past year to see where we could make a difference in local Veterans and community youth’s lives. In doing so, our **VFW Post became one of the leading “volunteer organizations” with the Tellico Village Community,** logging over 3500 volunteer hours - and - raising and giving back close to \$30,000 to the local community. Of note - the greater majority of this assistance was provided directly to local Veterans (and their families) as a “hands up”, in many cases allowing them to regain solid footing in their lives! VFW Post 12135 was pleased to receive the VFW TN District 2 Community Service Award for small Posts – but is more pleased to know we made a difference in many veterans and local community lives! (Details contained within our Posts monthly community service reports)

Wait – there’s more! This past VFW Program year (2021-2022) the Tellico Village VFW Post consciously expanded participation in established VFW programs focused on Community Outreach. Already participating in the VFW Core Youth Scholarship Programs (Patriots Pen & Voice of Democracy), VFW Post 12135 **established additional youth programs this past year to include a Veteran in the Classroom Program, as well as a VFW Scouting Program where we supported three local BSA Troops. Additionally, our Post established a VFW Military Assistance Program, adopting and actively supporting the Army Guard 253rd MP Company in Lenoir City, TN.**

This past year Tellico Village VFW Post 12135 orchestrated a signature event focused on making a real difference in Veterans’ lives. Expanding on our previous years efforts of bringing awareness to the National Suicide Prevention Month (Sept), this year our Post **hosted a community-wide Suicide Awareness, Education and Prevention forum with a goal to be part of the solution!** VFW Post 12135 partnered with 5 local community organizations to bring the real experts to this multi-hour educational program: Knoxville Veteran Affairs Suicide Prevention Outreach Program; Loudon County Veteran Service Office; the Stephen Ministry and their “Survivors of Suicide Loss” support group; First Responders from our Tellico Village Fire Department; and the Tellico Village RN/Nursing Group. This well received forum provided insight and perspective to this real-life issue as well as education in recognizing the early signs of individuals in distress, as well as how to point those at risk towards immediate help. (A VFW “Still Serving” Article was in submitted in Oct)

1st LT Alexander Bonnyman Jr. VFW Post 12135 is proud of our program year 2021-2022 accomplishments and are already at “full throttle” heading into the coming year. We thank the National VFW, the Department of TN VFW and TN VFW/District 2 organizations for their guidance and assistance!

Sincerely,

Shawn R. Tallant
Post Commander

1st LT Alexander Bonnyman Jr., VFW Post 12135 (Tellico Village, TN)

1st Lt. Alexander Bonnyman, Jr. VFW Post 12135 at Tellico Village 2021-2022 Calendar

July 2, 2021 – **Buddy Poppy Campaign** aligned with Independence Day.

July 8, 2021 – EXCOM Meeting.

July 10, 2021 - Breakfast with vets @ Little Italy.

July 11, 2021 – District meeting @ Maryville post 5154.

July 21, 2021 – Post Meeting and social hour.

August 7, 2021 – **3rd Annual Post 12135 Golf Tournament** / Fund-Raiser.

August 12, 2021 – EXCOM Meeting.

August 14, 2021 Breakfast with vets @ Little Italy.

August 14, 2021 – **Dept TN/District 2 Flying Squadron Training.**

August 18, 2021 – Post Meeting and social hour.

September 1-30, 2021 – VFW Post's **Suicide Awareness Month Campaign** - American Flag display @ Village Yacht Club.

September 1, 2021 –Chick-Fil-A fundraiser (**VFW Partnership**).

September 9, 2021 – Community-wide Veteran Suicide Awareness program (**VFW partnership with 5 organizations**).

September 9, 2021 – EXCOM meeting.

September 11, 2021 - Breakfast with vets @ Little Italy.

September 15, 2021 – **District 2 Visit/Post Annual Inspection.**

September 15, 2021 – Post meeting and social hour.

October 1 to 31 – VFW Post **Veterans/Homeless clothing drive.**

October 2, 2021 – VFW Post Social - Chattanooga Medal of Honor Museum trip to Chattanooga, TN.

October 9, 2021 – Breakfast with vets @ Little Italy.

October 14, 2021 – EXCOM meeting.

October 20, 2021 – Post meeting and social hour.

October 31, 2021 – Post's **Core Program** Patriot's Pen and Voice of Democracy nominees forwarded to VFW District 2.

November 7 & 8, 2021 – **Buddy Poppy Campaign** aligned with Veteran's Day.

November 11, 2021 – **Veteran's Day Commemoration** event at Tellico Village Yacht Club.

November 11, 2021 – EXCOM meeting.

November 13, 2021- Breakfast with vets @ Little Italy.

November 17, 2021 – Post Meeting and social hour.

December 9, 2021 – EXCOM social at Yacht Club.

December 9, 2021- Breakfast with vets @ Little Italy.

December 15, 2021- VFW Post Meeting & Social - Holiday Open House @ Post CDR's Home.

January 8, 2022 – Breakfast with vets @ Little Italy.

January 9, 2022 – District meeting @ Harriman post 6598.

January 13, 2022- EXCOM Meeting.

January 19, 2022 – Post meeting and social hour.

February 10, 2022 – EXCOM meeting.

February 12, 2022 – Breakfast with vets @ Little Italy.

February 14, 2022 – VFW Post Social - 1st Annual Post Valentine's Day dance @ Yacht club.

February 16, 2022- Monthly Post meeting and social hour.

February 26, 2022 – **District 2 Flying Squadron Training.**

March 10, 2022 – EXCOM meeting.

March 11, 2022- Chick-Fil-A Fundraiser (**VFW Partnership**).

March 12, 2022- Breakfast with Vets @ Little Italy.

March 13, 2022- District meeting @ Oak Ridge post 12051.

March 16, 2022 – Post meeting and social hour.

April 9, 2022 – Breakfast with Vets @ Little Italy.

April 10, 2022- District meeting @ Loudon post 5150.

April 1 to 14 – VFW Post’s Spring **Veterans/Homeless clothing drive.**

April 14, 2022 – EXCOM meeting.

April 20, 2022 – Post meeting, social hour.

May 1, 2022 – **Loyalty Day Commemoration** w/guest speaker at Tanasi Golf Club.

May 1, 2022 – District meeting @ Harriman post 6598.

May 12, 2022 – EXCOM meeting.

May 14, 2022- Breakfast with Vets at Little Italy.

May 18, 2022 – Post meeting and social hour.

May 21, 2022 – **Armed Forces Day Commemoration** and Post social/family picnic at Toqua Pavilion.

May 27-30, 2022 – **Buddy Poppy Campaign** over Memorial Weekend.

May 27-June 4, 2022 – **Memorial Weekend** Cemetery flag placement project.

May 30, 2022- **Memorial Day Celebration** @ Village Library.

June 9, 2022 – EXCOM meeting.

June 11, 2022 - Breakfast with Vets @ Little Italy.

June 14, 2022 – **Flag Day Commemoration and US Flag Retirement Ceremony** at Wardrop Farm.

June 15, 2022 – Post meeting and social hour – 2022-2023 Post Officer’s installation).

June 24, 2022- Chick-Fil-A Fundraiser (**VFW Partnership**).

VFW Post 12135 Officers 2021-2022

| <u>Office</u> | <u>Officer</u> |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| Commander | Shawn Tallant |
| Senior Vice Commander | Richard Vinnece |
| Junior Vice Commander | Wayne Schroeder |
| Quartermaster | Jeff Corthell |
| Chaplin | Clyde Griffin |
| 1-Year Trustee | Dave Nichols |
| 2-Year Trustee | Larry Schaefer |
| 3-Year Trustee | Larry Dill |
| Judge Advocate (Appointed) | Rich Norman |
| Service Officer (Appointed) | Tim Jackson |
| Surgeon (Appointed) | Rob Reinbold |
| Adjutant (Appointed) | Brian Mitchell |
| Sgt at Arms (Appointed) | Jimmy Johnson |

VFW Post 12135 Key Committee Chairman 2021-2022

| <u>Key Committee & Programs</u> | <u>Member</u> |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Relief Committee | Tony Newton |
| Membership Committee | Shawn Tallant (Acting) |
| Fundraising Committee | Wayne Schroeder |
| Core Programs Committee | Richard Norman |
| Buddy Poppy Committee | Wayne Schroeder |
| Post Promotion/PIO | Mike Timmer |
| Military Adopt-a-Unit | Jim Halligan |
| VFW Scouting (BSA) | Jim "Otto" Stutz |
| Flag Day & Flag Retirement | Matt Peery |
| Web Master | Jim "Otto" Stutz |

VFW Post 12135

Monthly Post Meeting Guest list

July 2021 thru June 2022

July 2021 - 1

- Dino Hirsch

August 2021 - 1

- Billy Ramage

September 2021 - 3

- Jim Irwin, District 2 Acting Adjutant; Department of Tennessee Senior Vice Commander
- District 2 Commander, Mickey Vickery
- Jim Ericson

October 2021 - None

November 2021 - 1

- Mike Schack, Loudon County Veteran's Honor Guard Commander.

December 2021 - No meeting

January 2022 - 2

- Jim Irwin, Senior Vice Commander, VFW Tennessee
- Steve Weinstein

February 2022 - 2

- Michael Shacklee
- Michael Johnson

March 2022 – None

April 2022 - 1

- Jay Carroll

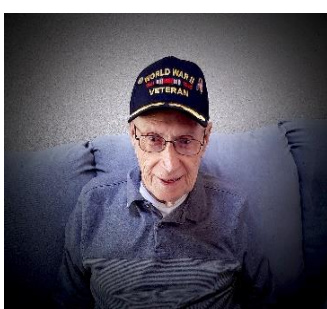
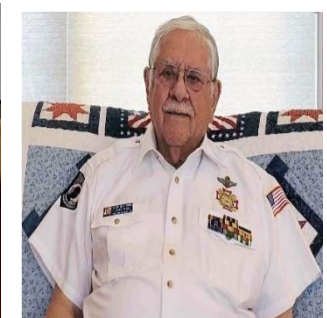
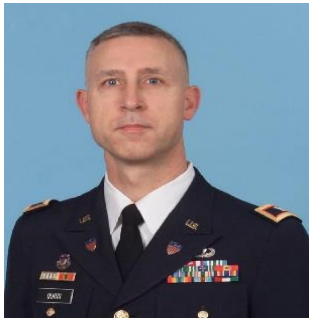
May 2022 - 1

- Michael Thorton

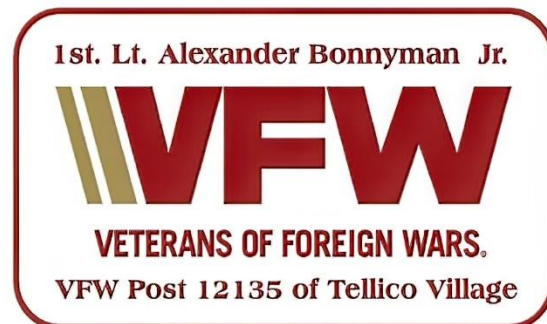
June 2022 - 2

- Steve Postemski
- John Klaboe

Each month since December of 2020, the post has honored a VFW veteran from our ranks, having been selected by the membership committee mainly through DD214 vetting. An article is then created, based on the veterans military and civilian background. The article is published in our local newspaper.



VFW Post 12135 was active and visible within the community with its Buddy Poppy campaigns at 3 local venues over the Veterans Day & 4th of July weekends of 2021 and Memorial Day weekend of 2022.



Proudly supporting local veterans and veteran programs:

- BoatRides4Vets
- Building ramps for wounded vets
- Good Samaritan Center – Lenoir City
- Helen Ross McNabb Center
- Loudon County Veterans Resource & Job Fair
- Sen. Ben Atchley State Veterans Home
- SMSD Veteran/Canine Training Center
- Steps House “Homeless Vets Program”
- Veteran Clothing Drives
- Vonore Veterans Memorial Park

Veterans day was celebrated in grand fashion at the Tellico Village Yacht club in 2021 where over 200 community members attended. The information below is taken from the Veterans Day ceremonial program, along with a few pictures from the event.

PROGRAM (Please silence Phones)

OPENING

1. Presentation of Colors
2. Opening Prayer
3. Pledge of Allegiance
4. National Anthem – The Tellico Voices
5. Welcome – VFW Post Commander

MAIN PROGRAM

6. Old Glory – video presentation
7. POW/MIA Table Narrative – Renee Baker
8. Veterans' Toast
9. Veterans' Recognition by Era
10. Military Service Song Melody
11. Keynote Speaker – General Doug Brown, USA (Ret)
12. Military Award Presentation – 1SGT Kevin Meyer, USA (Ret)
13. Patriotic Song Set – The Tellico Voices

CLOSING

14. Flag-Folding Demonstration
15. Flag Presentation to a Gold Star Family
16. Closing Prayer
17. Closing – Bagpiper Mark Warren
18. God Bless America – Shawn Tallant & Linda Robitaille



We dedicate today's commemoration in remembrance of our local war hero P/O P. Franklin "Frankie" Watson, USMC, and are grateful for today's attendance of his Gold Star Mother, Mrs. Stacy (Watson) Couch




VFW Post hosted four social events this past year for Post Members and their families. A well-received new post social event was the February Valentines Dinner-Dance!

Being a post without its own venue, adding events that Spouses can participate in proved to be effective in developing "esprit de corps".



**1st Annual Tellico Village VFW
Valentines Dinner-Dance
Co-sponsored with Humana**



**Date: February 14, 2022
Tellico Village Yacht Club-Lower Level**

6:00pm: *Cocktails*
6:30pm: *Rumba dance lesson*
7:00pm: *Buffet Dinner (cash bar)*
8:00-10:00pm: *DJ & Dancing*



In May of 2021, on Armed Forces Day, the post once again hosted its 2nd annual "Armed Forces Day Post picnic". The picnic serves also as a membership drive, where eligible veterans are invited to a free meal, and check out all the benefits of joining the VFW. This year, we also invited service members from our adopted unit, the 253rd Military Police Company in Lenoir City. Highlights of the event included service award presentations, Gold Heart citation and Quilt of Valor presentations.

TELLICO VILLAGE VFW

2ND ANNUAL VFW PICNIC AND MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

All Members/families of Post 12135 AND member-eligible veterans are invited to an

Armed Forces Day celebration

at the Toqua restaurant pavilion on **Saturday May 21st from 4-7pm.**

The Post will provide Hamburgers, Hotdogs, Macaroni and Potato Salads, beer, water and sodas. We hope you stick around for some comradery with other Vets, and perhaps a game of cornhole!

RSVP ATTENDANCE by May 14th

To bmitchell@tellicovillagevfwpost.org

(So we can order the proper amount of food)

FOR MORE INFO ON THIS EVENT, OR THE VFW

IN TELLICO VILLAGE, CALL SHAWN 703-399-1826



VFW Post provides a community-wide service where we collect old, faded, torn U.S. Flags and properly “retire” them. The Post maintains four flag drop-boxes in a 2-County area that collected over 1000 flags this year. As is our tradition, we formally “retired” these flags on 14 June (Flag Day) at a local farm, as-per protocol.





Tellico Village VFW Post 12135 is trying to impact a growing mental health problem

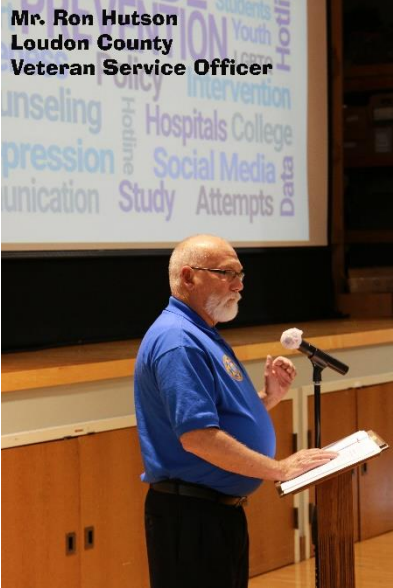
Mike Timmer Post 12135

Suicide rates are highest amongst veterans, teens and the elderly, but everyone in our society feels the pain of suicide loss. Post 12135 has always strived to bring attention in their community to this mental health problem. In prior years the post made signs and banners placed on public grounds accompanied by dozens of small US flags during suicide awareness month in September. This helped to bring attention to the problem, but fell short of offering solutions. **In September 2021, the post committed to facilitating a program that offers awareness and prevention techniques through education and training programs.** Speakers from several organizations highlighted key points in identifying the warning signs of those at risk and how to get them the help they need.

Following the opening remarks by post Commander Shawn Tallant, the first presentation was from the Knoxville Veteran Affairs Suicide Prevention Outreach Program. Due to COVID restrictions, their team could not present their program in-house. However, Dr. Autumn Lowry recorded a 50 minute program which illustrated their Community Engagement and S.A.V.E. training. The information presented offered many key points in identifying Veterans at risk, asking the right questions and steering them towards getting appropriate help.



Next Jay Zimmerman who is the Community Outreach Specialist at the VA Medical Center, shared a video created by the Overwatch project of his experiences as an Army medic who was attacked by an insurgent while rendering aid to an injured soldier. He was saved by his good friend Vic, however once state-side, Vic ultimately took his own life. Zimmerman states that Vic was one of the strongest Men he ever knew, and any signs of suicide was totally missed. In the video, he goes on to talk about the importance of intervention between veterans. Of having each other’s back and accountability in securing each other’s safety.



**Mr. Ron Hutson
Loudon County
Veteran Service Officer**

Another VA speaker was Mr. Ron Hudson, Loudon County Veterans Service Officer. Mr. Hudson, a USMC Vietnam Veteran, shared personal experiences he had in dealing with suicide. He also presented the County VA QPR program. QPR is the acronym for Question, Persuade, and Refer which details steps in awareness and prevention when the risk of suicide becomes evident.

The final speaker of the evening was Dr. Kristina Thiagarajan, Ph. D, M.N., R.N.

“Those who commit suicide are not the only victims. Those left behind leave a lifetime of pain and suffering for loved ones”. Dr. Thiagarajan started a support group called “survivors of suicide loss” following the death of her own teen-age son and a close friend in 2019. The need



**Dr. Kristina Thiagarajan
Survivors of suicide loss
& Stephens Ministry**

for support during the grieving process is extremely important, especially in this category. This group, along with the Stevens Ministry, helps to fill this need. Dr. Thiagarajan stated that the problem is epidemic, or specifically “contagion” that they’ve had 7 teen suicides in their local high school in a 2-year span which defines a suicide “cluster”, and a community’s involvement is extremely crucial in order to bring things back to order. She delivered a powerful and personal message and encouraged us as a community to continue shedding light on this mental health problem.

Following closing remarks, Commander Tallant thanked all presenters as well as the 65 in attendance.

Along with the presenting organizations, literature and representatives were available from out other partners, to include First responders and Tellico Village fire Department and the Tellico Village RN/Nursing group.



More than 100 golfers and spectators descended Saturday on Toqua Golf Course to participate in the third annual Tellico Village Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 12135 Golf Tournament.

“I think the turnout is amazing because when we put this thing on and opened it up, it was sold in three days,” Shawn Tallant, VFW post commander, said. “It wasn’t so much that it was a golf tournament, but it’s because of what’s behind the golf tournament. Everything we did goes to the veterans. All I can say to everyone is ‘thank you’ because last year our post helped numerous veterans in need. It was those outside the Village, those who just don’t have the finances or resources. The neat thing is everybody came out for that.”

Ed Frandle, VFW golf tournament director, said the post did not set a prior goal but expects the tournament to yield around \$15,000.

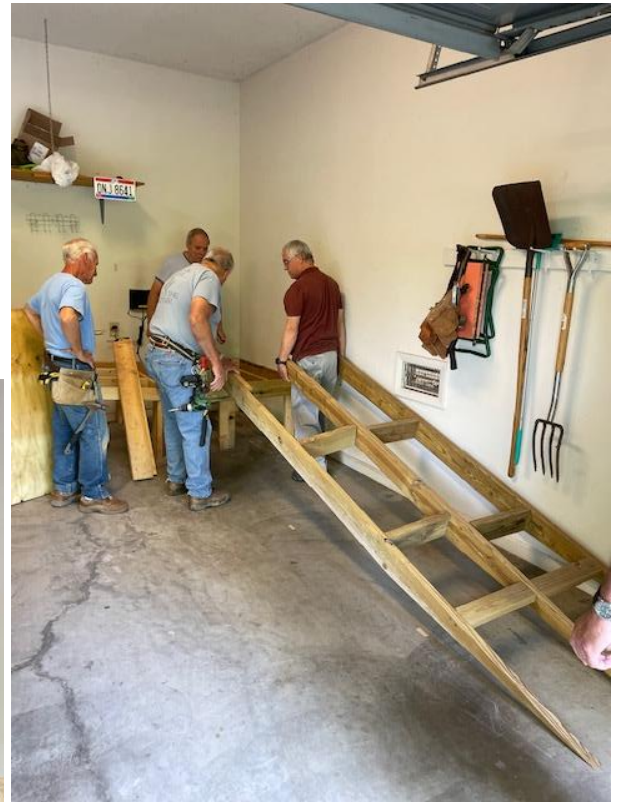
Despite concerns surrounding the pandemic, 45 sponsors from Loudon and surrounding counties chipped in to help.

“This is our third annual event, and it raises funds that need to be used for veterans,” Frandle said. “We had 28 women playing, so I can’t thank them enough for getting behind us. That allows us to connect and expand into more areas. We didn’t know what to expect this year, and out of all of last year’s sponsors, they were all back except three. We picked up 10 new sponsors this year, so we’re getting tremendous support from our folks. ... I view this as a major success. Last year with everything going on, we had 83 golfers. This year, we had 100 and I think that represents the growth that’s going on in the Village.”



Relief Projects: Ramps for Wounded Veterans

Being billed as a 55+ community, Tellico Village has on-going needs for handi-cap access in public venues. To make homes more accessible to veterans and their loved ones, building access ramps in homes has become a repetitive project for post volunteers. The diversity of our community allows us to team up with the Tellico Village “wood workers club”, who assists with providing skilled labor for our projects. The pics below are from the home of a post veteran whose wife has become wheel-chair bound, and needed access to their home. The ramp was built in May 2022.



A time to catch up

By Jeremy Nash jeremy.nash@news-herald.net Aug 25, 2021



Rob Reinbold, Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 12135 surgeon, leads a walk at the Wellness Center.

Jeremy Nash | The Connection

A group of veterans meets Wednesdays at the Wellness Center to fellowship and keep in shape.

The Walk with Vets program has been offered by the 1st Lt. Alexander Bonnyman Jr. Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 12135 for about two years after discussion between post surgeon Rob Reinbold and past commander Jim Jorgensen.

“We just got to talking one day and thought, ‘Hey, it’d be a good idea,’ and since I was the surgeon, I brought it up at one of our meetings that, ‘Let’s just get together and do some walking,’” Reinbold said.

While the weekly walk isn’t flooded with participants, Jorgensen hopes more awareness will yield a higher turnout. Typically, three to six people show up each week, but he said the size doesn’t matter. Simply being with like-minded individuals when catching up and talking about past military stories makes participation valuable.

“I would be lying if I said a lot of war stories weren’t swapped. They are,” Jorgensen said. “Not exclusively that, but a lot of military stories are swapped. Here’s what happens: I can talk to my children, I can talk to my wife about things that happen, I can talk to you, but the veterans, that’s when you get no-holds-barred, you get the real stories. Rightly or wrongly, most veterans have the idea that when they talk to someone that hasn’t had that shared experience, they can’t really open up. This is good therapy for people physically and mentally.

“... What happens is they tend to focus on the funny things, the positive things,” he added. “I can’t remember hearing any negative stories ever. Sometimes those are just too painful even to talk amongst your old friends.”

Reinbold emphasized the walk isn’t solely for those who served their country.

“This is a walk with veterans,” he said. “You don’t have to be a veteran. If you want to just come out here and walk with us, that’s fine. We do try to get the guys to bring family out here, wives or visiting children. It’s just a friendly get-together kind of thing.”

Veterans aren’t required to have served overseas or in a hostile zone, and they don’t have to be eligible for VFW, Jorgensen said.

Walks are 9-10 a.m. on the half-mile Wellness Center walking trail. Shawn Tallant, post commander, estimated members walk about three miles, but anyone is welcome to stop whenever they wish.

“One of the things that we are always about is veterans taking care of veterans,” Tallant said. “That’s also taking care of our own organization, too, or any local veterans. The health of our veterans is an important discussion. We’re here in front of our local community’s Wellness Center.”

Mental health is just as important as physical well-being, Tallant said, noting that will be emphasized when the local post holds a suicide awareness and prevention community program 4-6 p.m. Sept. 9 in the fellowship hall of the Community Church at Tellico Village.

“As we’re walking, we’re talking and we’re hearing what’s going on with the other individuals that you’re walking with,” Tallant said. “That’s really significant.”

VFW welcomes World War II veteran

By Hugh G. Willett hugh.willett@news-herald.net Feb 16, 2022



WWII veteran Wally Hamlin, left, with his son Ed Hamlin, receives his new VFW Post 12135 cap at Saturday's breakfast. At 101, Hamlin is the oldest veteran in the post.

Hugh Willett | The Connection

I WANT HOUSEK
A CRH CO
Couple o

HELP WAN
HARRI 428-2374
Wanted: Hour
SEE MORE JOBS

Trending Now

- 1 Toqua hosts Hawk Invita
- 2 POA retreats Village vote
- 3 Risk Score D RA-Linked I Lung Disease
- 4 American So Clinical Onc 3-7
- 5 Veterans hor elected offic

The Tellico Village Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 12135 welcomed a new member and special guest for breakfast Saturday.

The post hosts formal meetings monthly on the top floor of the Yacht Club but has less formal breakfast get-togethers at Little Italy of Tellico Village.

Wallace "Wally" Hamlin, a U.S. Marine Corps and World War II veteran, is the newest and oldest member of the post. Hamlin, who will turn 102 in October, joins one other WWII veteran.

Hamlin's son Ed said his father's goal had to be to live to 100, but now that milestone has been passed, he wants to be the oldest living WWII vet. Nobody at the meeting was certain just how old Hamlin would have to be to earn that honor.

Post Commander Shawn Tallant said he is working to verify the age of the oldest WWII vet in Tennessee. Tallant welcomed Hamlin into the post and presented him a Post 12135 cap.

"This post is here for you," Tallant told Hamlin.

A native of Idaho, Hamlin was in the forest working as a logger in 1941 when he heard on the radio that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor. He enlisted in 1942 and was trained as a cook. He served on the islands of Saipan, Tinian and Tarawa. Crossing the equator three times, he earned the title "golden shellback."

Assigned to an artillery unit in the 2nd Marine Division, he won commendations for his work as a cook helping feed Marines and build morale during actions in the Pacific Theater. During fierce fighting on the island of Okinawa, the “cook” earned a Bronze Star fighting in combat.

“Every Marine is a rifleman,” Ed said proudly.

Hamlin, who served as a VFW post commander during the 1970s, is proud of being a Marine. He greeted other Marines at the breakfast with a firm handshake and the phrases “Semper Fi” and “Always a Marine.”

Ed said he and his father moved to Tellico Village from Washington state in October because of the freedom enjoyed by residents of Tennessee. He said COVID-19 restrictions were preventing his father from enjoying the precious last years of his life.

Hamlin enjoys playing bingo and eating out at restaurants. He plans on attending as many VFW meetings as possible. Ed said his father’s dream is to someday fly in a helicopter.

There were about 20 post members at the breakfast. Tallant said all veterans are welcome at the regular Saturday morning gatherings. He said he was glad there was a good turnout for the WWII vet.

Post 12135 is named for Marine 1st Lt. Alexander Bonnyman Jr., who gave his life in the battle for Tarawa in the Gilbert Islands of the Pacific during WWII. Bonnyman was awarded the medal of honor.

In March 2015, History Flight, a Florida-based nonprofit tasked with recovering the remains of missing U.S. service members, discovered the remains of Bonnyman and his body was returned to his hometown of Knoxville.

The post also holds a “vet walk” every week starting in front of the Wellness Center.

As post surgeon, Rob Reinhold looks after the health of the members. To further that goal, Reinhold began hosting the “vet walk” about a year ago. Usually about six or seven walkers show up to take a leisurely walk around a portion of the Village.

“We don’t power walk,” Reinhold said. “If someone has trouble walking, we’ll keep it slow.”



U.S. Marine Corps veteran and VFW Post 12135 member Ken Deboer looks closely at a grave in Hickory Valley Cemetery to verify the name before marking it with a flag.

- **Hugh Willett | News-Herald**

Each year over the Memorial Day weekend, the post places flags on all the veteran graves in all the cemeteries of Loudon County. Simply words of gratitude and a salute follows the placement of each flag. This is a service project that no difficulty in finding volunteers.

Loudon County veterans, along with family, friends and neighbors, took time to honor fallen members of the armed forces on Memorial Day.

Originally known as Decoration Day in reference to the practice of decorating graves with flowers, wreaths and flags, Memorial Day is a day to remember and honor those who have died in service to their country.

American Legion Post 120 organized the wreath laying ceremony at the old county courthouse in Loudon Monday morning, Post Commander Mike Brubaker said.

“This is our main focus every year,” he said.

The ceremony opened with an invocation by Danny Thornburg, Chaplain of Post 120 and singing of the 'Star Spangled Banner' by Beth Brakebill, Nancy Blankenship and Courtney Brakebill. Members of Loudon High School Junior ROTC and Post 120 placed wreaths on the fence surrounding the courthouse.

County Mayor Rollen "Buddy" Bradshaw recognized Gold Star Families that had lost loved ones.

"This is not a celebration of freedom," he said. "We gather for a day of mourning."

Bradshaw also recognized the United States as the greatest country in the world and Tennessee as the greatest state in the union.

"God bless these United States," he said.

Guest speaker Wiley Brakebill, assistant athletic director at Loudon High School, asked what we can do to honor those who have died in the service of this country and answered his own question with "We can be a citizen that is worth their sacrifice."

Brubaker closed the ceremony by urging those in attendance to "Remember their names and tell their stories."

Efforts to honor veterans began the previous week when members of local veterans organizations, including the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion, placed U.S. flags on the graves of veterans at local cemeteries.

Members of VFW Post 12135 in Tellico Village were placing small flags on the graves of veterans leading up to Memorial Day. Members visited six cemeteries, comprising of Hickory Valley, Unitia, South Holston, Hackney Chapel, Thompson and Axley Chapel.

Each team of VFW members and volunteers assigned to a cemetery had a list of the veterans buried at that cemetery, but not the actual location of the grave. In some cases graves were easy to find and mark with a flag, in other cases the team searched up and down rows until they could match up the name with a marker.

Ian Smith, who served in the Army from 1997 to 2021, worked with his wife Erica and son Caleb searching Hickory Valley Cemetery for markers of veterans as far back as the Civil War. It was the first time the family had decorated graves for Memorial Day.

Some of the markers, discolored by age and mold, were very hard to read. The Smiths had to get down on hands and knees to make out the names and dates of birth and death carved into the stones.

Ken Deboer, a Marine veteran, said that when he was just 20 years old, he enlisted and soon found himself on the way to war in Vietnam. He said that he honors those who served and especially those who gave their lives.

"We are here to pay tribute to those that came forward and answered the call of their country," Deboer said.

He said he had kept in touch with close friends with whom he served, including one who recently died. He travelled to Nebraska for his friend's burial and has looked up friends on visits to the Vietnam War memorial wall.

Gary Kimball, who served in the U.S. Army from 1969 to 1971, was participating in grave marking for only the second time. He said he will be doing it again.

"It's just something you gotta do," he said.

Mike Shacklee, who served as a helicopter pilot in the U.S. Army from 1979 to 2015, was participating for the first time. He said a friend and fellow veteran had recently talked him into getting involved with the VFW. A veteran of Desert Storm and the Iraq War whose son now also serves in the U.S. Army, he said he often thinks about the friends he lost in war and in training.

"I figured I needed to get off my butt and help other veterans," he said.

Tony Newton, a retired U.S. Army Colonel who served 30 years, was one of the leaders of the team at Hickory Valley. In the tradition of "no man left behind," he was determined to mark every grave on the list. After an hour searching in the rain, the team had only one name that had not been accounted for out of the 64 names on list.

They were unable to find the marker for Virgil Watkins, who died in 2006. The team tried to do research on their smart phones, even calling the church that manages the cemetery. Newton said he would continue to do research and promised to return to mark the grave.

VFW Post 5150 in Loudon was also out marking graves at Riverview, Prospect and Roberson Cemeteries. The marking of 222 graves with American flags was the beginning of three days of service Post 5150 traditionally performs over Memorial Day weekend, said John Cardwell, a career U.S. Army officer who will soon become the Commander of Post 5150.

On May 27, Cardwell and other members of Post 5150 were at Food City collecting donations and handing out an artificial red poppy to those that contributed. Cardwell explained that the red poppy symbolizes lives lost in battle and is a reference to the poem "In Flanders Fields," an homage written by Canadian military officer John McRae to men killed in a WWI battle.

"The red poppies started growing on the graves of the men that died in the battle," Cardwell said.

The money collected through the poppy event is used strictly for relief to veterans and their families, including providing food or shelter to those veterans in need. He said the event is always a success in Loudon.

Cardwell said that the VFW is embarked on several plans to locate, identify and mark the final resting places of as many Loudon County veterans as possible. The VFW will, with the consent of family, put up markers and clean the gravestones of any veterans. Some veterans do not have information on the markers that identify them as veterans, he said.

"We found six graves at Riverview that had military markers that were not on our list," he said.

Yvonne Wagner, of Philadelphia, is a U.S. Army veteran who cannot join the VFW because she was never deployed to a foreign war but she stopped by to donate to the poppy event because she supports the organizations' work with veterans.

John LeCrone Sr., a U.S. Army veteran who served from 1959 to 1963, was helping collect donations. He said he has been involved with Post 5150 for 17 years. He said he treats every Memorial Day as a solemn occasion.

"It's not just a holiday," he said. "It's a day to honor veterans."

Our VFW Post held two clothing drives (Oct & Apr) this past year that were once again a huge success! The residents of Tellico Village are very generous. Each drive hundreds of bags were filled with clothing, much of it brand new. Proceeds are distributed to veteran and other organizations throughout Eastern Tennessee.



TELLICO VILLAGE VFW

CLOTHING DRIVE
FOR LOCAL VETERANS IN NEED

DROP OFF MENS AND WOMENS SPRING/SUMMER CLOTHING
AT THE WELCOME CENTER APRIL 4TH - 16TH

MEN'S AND WOMEN'S SPRING / SUMMER CLOTHING CONSISTING OF JACKETS, SWEATERS, SHIRTS, PANTS, JEANS, SHOES, BOOTS, SOCKS, AND PURCHASED UNDERWEAR CAN BE DROPPED OFF AT THE TV WELCOME CENTER ONLY DURING THE PERIOD LISTED ABOVE. CLOTHING SHOULD BE PACKAGED IN BOXES AND PLASTIC BAGS. NEW AND GENTLY USED ITEMS SHOULD BE BROUGHT INSIDE THE LOBBY AND PLACED WHERE DIRECTED.

OUR VFW POST IS GRATEFUL FOR YOUR CONTINUED GENEROSITY!

Tellico Village VFW Post 12135 is already in full motion heading into the 2022-2023 VFW Program Year. We have filled and installed a full cadre of Post officers and have completed a list of Post Committee and Program Chairman. And – we have a 2022-2023 Post Calendar of events prepared to bring forward to its Members at the July 2022 Post meeting.

We are kicking off the new year with one of our signature events - the **Post’s annual BoatRides4Vets Program** where we provide local Veterans and their families a day “on the lake”, just so they can get away from life’s problems for a day! We orchestrate this full day fun event where local families volunteer about 40 boats where we embark Veterans and their families for a day of boating, swimming or fishing! This year’s BoatRides4Vets is scheduled for 17 July – and is anticipated to be another resounding success.

Continuing our journey to make positive difference in Veteran’s life’s, we **have partnered with 4 other Veteran organizations (VFW & American Legion) and over 60 local support and employment organizations for a Multi-County Veteran Resource Fair.** This Veteran Resource Fair will provide Veterans free resources in; Confidential Medical screening and Legal Services; Veterans Administration Access; Disabled Veteran Outreach; Food and Housing; Networking; Employment; and & Educational Opportunities. This signature event is scheduled for 16 September – and is also anticipated to be a huge success.

Tellico Village VFW proudly sponsors the



8th Annual BOAT RIDES 4 VETS

Sunday July 17, 2022 9:30am to 5pm.

- Hosted by the WindRiver Marina, Lenoir City, TN

A FREE DAY ON THE WATER FOR ALL VETERANS, ACTIVE MILITARY AND THEIR FAMILIES. Boat rides, fishing, tubing and swimming for veterans, military and their families on Ft. Loudon and Tellico Lakes. Spend an hour or the entire day...!

For additional information call 520-444-9333 or send a message to Matt Mutt Manifold muttf16@gmail.com.

Volunteer boat captains needed!!!!



MultiCounty VETERANS Resource Fair

September 16, 2022 10 am - 2 pm

War Memorial Building
103 B Street, Lenoir City, TN 37771

All Veterans Invited
Spouses & Children are Welcome

Free Resources Include

- Confidential Medical screening and Legal Services
- Veterans Administration Access
- Disabled Veteran Outreach
- Food and Housing Assistance
- Networking, Employment, & Educational Opportunities
- Complimentary Luncheon

For More Information contact LCVRJF@gmail.com or 865-408-8061

1st Lt. Alexander Bonnyman Jr. VFW Post 12135

- ✓ An “All American” VFW Post, located in Tellico Village TN. We meet at 7pm every 3rd Wednesday of the month at the Tellico Village Yacht Club.
- ✓ We host a “Breakfast with Veterans” the 2nd Saturday every month, 0830 @ Little Italy Restaurant in Tellico Village. All veterans are welcome to join us. No agenda – just telling stories with other Vets over “eggs & sausage”. Come join us!
- ✓ Find more info @ www.tellicovillagevfwpost.org.
- ✓ Contact us at; 865.408.8061, or, email commander@tellicovillagevfwpost.org.

