

11 May 2022- VFW Post 2894 Community Awards, 2021-2022, Chesapeake City Hall

Each year more than 130,000 students in grades 6 through 8 enter the VFW's Patriot's Pen youth essay contest. The contest encourages young people to examine America's history, along with their own experiences in modern society, by drafting a 300 to 400-word essay, expressing their views on different themes, this year's being, "*How Can I Be A Good American?*" **The winner of Post 2894's Patriots' Pen for 2021-22 is Mackenzie Radford, a 6th grader at Oaktree Academy in Virginia Beach. In her essay, Mackenzie wrote, "How Can I Be A Good American? As I stare at our flag ...I am proud of our country. Be happy and grateful you live here, not many countries get the privileges we have. We have so many freedoms and sometimes we forget to be grateful for that. Respect others. Respect your Country. Love your neighbor. Don't kneel for the [Anthem], don't sit. Stand up high and be proud of who you are and where you come from...There are a lot of people who don't know how lucky we are to live here...God protects us all as a nation...I am a 6th grader and a proud American."** Congratulations, Mackenzie.

The Voice of Democracy Award is VFW's premier scholarship program. Each year, nearly 40,000 high school students compete for more than 2.2 million dollars in scholarships and incentives. These scholarships range up to a national first place prize of \$30,000. The VFW established the program in 1947 to provide high school students the opportunity to express themselves in regards to democratic ideas and principles. Students compete by writing and recording an audio essay on an annual patriotic theme. This year's theme was: "*America: Where Do We Go From Here?*" **The winner of this year's Voice of Democracy contest for Post 2894 was Lucas Evans, a senior at Grassfield High School. His parents are Louisa and David. Here's what he expressed in his essay, "Right now our country is more divided than ever. Divided over political parties and ideologies, divided on what is right and what is wrong, and divided by race...how can it be possible that the United States of America, one of the most respected countries in the world, is more divided today than we were 150 years ago [during the Civil War?]....See, the answer to 'Where do we go from here?' is simple. We go forward because going backwards isn't an option and doing nothing is no better...The question should not be 'Where do we go from here?' but when...'When do we start to move forward?' ...when do we start taking accountability for our actions[?]....When do we stop seeing people in black or white and just start seeing them as Americans, or better yet humans? When do we realize that the only privilege we have is that we are Americans? When do realize that that privilege is a privilege men and women died for?...[Our generation is] the only hope...and if we don't act now the privileges we take for granted today will be what we are begging for tomorrow...We are Americans, we are better than what we been portrayed as. This is the land of the free and home of the brave. A gift given to us by all those who have served. We must not forget that. God bless America!"** With patriotism and dedication like this, Lucas was enthusiastically awarded our Post's Voice of Democracy award.

Our Post **Teacher of the Year** was **Jennifer Siler, a 7th Grade teacher at Hugo Owens Middle School.** The Teacher of the Year program recognizes teachers who promote a sense of national pride in their students. Every year, 7500 VFW posts around the country nominate teachers for awards at the elementary, middle and high school levels. Previous Post 2894 winners have finished first in the nation and third runner-up – truly incredible achievements! There is no more important task than the development of an informed, effective, and responsible citizenry; and that's what our Post nominee for Teacher of the Year, **Mrs. Jennifer Siler has been doing with her students for 18 years – teaching them what it means to be a free American citizen, in the greatest country on Earth, with all the rights and responsibilities that that entails. As Alexis de Toqueville pointed out, each new generation is a new people that must acquire the knowledge, learn the skills, and develop the dispositions or traits of private and public character that undergird a constitutional democracy.** During the segments on Colonial and Civil War eras: she leads trips to Williamsburg and the Hampton Roads Naval Museum; arranges for in-school visits from Civil War reenactment camps; and brings the colonial era to life for her students by having them dress in period attire, listen to a reenactor read writings from George Washington, and use a quill, ink, and wax seal to sign their own copies of the Declaration of Independence. Jennifer writes that she tries to teach "Not only the history lessons, but more importantly the lessons of honesty, integrity, hard work, structure, compassion,

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and empathy that I truly try to instill in my students through, not only instruction, but example as well. I truly love what I do. It is a part of who I am and always will be.” Jennifer was also selected as District 2’s Teacher of the Year – essentially, all of South Hampton Roads. For her passion in teaching and her interest in our future generations, Jennifer Siler is awarded the Post 2894 Teacher of the Year award.

We then moved on to our Public Servant Awards. We recognized that National Police Week was the following week and remembered that when we servicemen and women were overseas protecting our country, all the first responders were here at home protecting our families and communities. We veterans of foreign wars owe you, the firefighters, EMTs, police officers, deputy sheriffs, and state troopers, our utmost gratitude.

Our first Public Servant award went to our **Firefighter of the Year, Master Firefighter/EMT Bradford Turner. He began his career with the Chesapeake Fire Department just over 21 years ago and has won numerous awards from the department including three “Life Saved” awards.** Three years ago he was a member of a FEMA Task Force that deployed to Hawaii. Brad served twenty years as a Firefighter and Hazmat specialist. On the Hazmat team, Brad was the radiological officer and program manager for the monitoring and detection program. The program consists of calibration, maintenance, and repair of approximately 100 meters. Brad has volunteered as a Board member of the Franklin/ Southampton Area Chamber of Commerce. In addition, a group of friends, including Brad and his wife, Mary Ann, started Playful Minds Fun Center, which provides DVDs, iPads, coloring books, stuffed animals, etc., to entertain kids during their stay in the local hospital. On Saint Patrick’s Day two months ago, Brad officially retired from the Chesapeake Fire Department. Brad’s second job, which is now his full-time job, is vice president and co-owner of Southern Charm Garden Center which he and his wife started in 2008 – and we all know who the president is, don’t we... Brad and Mary Ann have two daughters and live in Franklin. For his outstanding performance and commitment to the city of Chesapeake for the past 21 years, Master Firefighter/EMT Bradford Turner is our Post Firefighter of the Year!

Our next award winner for **Emergency Medical Technician of the Year wasn’t a stranger to in our midst since we gave her the same honor three years ago! Field Medical Officer/Firefighter Cheryl King** started her career in emergency medical services in 1996 as an EMT with the East Fishkill Fire Department in New York. When she first moved to Chesapeake in 1998, she worked as a dispatcher, winning Dispatcher of the Year in her second year. She was certified as a paramedic in 2002 and worked for the Currituck Fire Department for 12 years before joining the Chesapeake Department in 2014. **She has received numerous individual and unit awards and commendations both from within the department as well as from outside agencies including the Governor’s office.** One citation stated that she is, “a valuable resource at Recruit Academies, helping train the next generation of our EMS providers... Whether it be her skill or professional and courteous demeanor, Cheryl makes not only her patients, but the other providers she works with feel secure. She is someone you can trust to make the right decision in any situation.” For the past two years Cheryl has been teaching EMTs in the medic program of the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). Never one to stand still, she is currently working on a Bachelor’s degree from Columbia Southern University. In her rare off times, Cheryl enjoys spending time with her children and – this must be a typo – grandchildren. One of her commanders said, “She gets it. She understands our mission statement is to help citizens and make our community a better and safer place. She doesn't do any of this for recognition, but because it's the right thing to do and she cares.” For her passionate concern for the safety and well-being of the citizens of Chesapeake, Field Medical Officer/Firefighter King is our Post EMT of the Year!

Deputy Robert Perdue began his career at the Chesapeake Sheriff’s Office in 2013 and received two prestigious awards last year. One year ago he responded to a call regarding a fight in a housing complex. Upon arriving at the scene he noticed a blood trail leading to a nearby residence. Inside he found two badly injured people, one of whom had been shot. With the assistance of another deputy, Deputy Perdue administered first aid until the arrival of EMS. Thanks in part to his actions, both victims survived. For this he was awarded the **Award of Excellence on October 14, 2021.** The previous summer, Deputy Perdue

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was driving home after work when he heard over his radio about an overturned vehicle. Upon arriving on the scene, he found a car on its roof with flames coming from the engine. The driver was partially ejected but trapped under the vehicle. Deputy Perdue and a CPD sergeant put out the flames with fire extinguishers. Then they and several onlookers worked together to lift the vehicle and pull the driver to safety. For his heroic actions he received the **Chesapeake Sheriff's Office Life-Saving Award**. Deputy Perdue is a credit to law enforcement through his hard work and dedication, and reflects great pride on the Chesapeake Sheriff's Office. Congratulations for being our Post Deputy of the Year!

Officer Marc Lawrence is our Police Officer of the Year. Officer Lawrence is a Jack of all trades within the Chesapeake Police Department. **His official primary assignment is with the Traffic Enforcement Unit or TEU but he also serves as: the Program Coordinator for Automated Enforcement; as the lead instructor for Accident Investigations; and he continues to offer support to the Field Training Officer Program by training recruit officers. In addition to all that, he serves on the Crash Reconstruction Team and the Department's Underwater Search and Recovery Team.** With the TEU he continually pursues ways to increase highway safety, decrease crashes, and overall promote safer streets. As a member of the Crash Reconstruction Team, Officer Lawrence responded to nearly 75% of the activations of the team. In these responses, he took a leadership role either as the Primary Investigator or was responsible for mapping the accident scene. Officer Lawrence has written, executed, and compiled the evidence from numerous search warrants which has led to charges and pending prosecution where applicable. The complexity of these case requires attention to detail and patience. Beyond the cases Officer Lawrence has been involved in, he assisted other officers with their search warrants for vehicle inspections, cell phones, and medical records and blood from hospitals. Officer Lawrence's dedication to the Citizens of Chesapeake, the Department, his co-workers and teammates, and overall work ethic is exemplary which is why he was selected as our Police Officer of the Year. Congratulations and thank you!

We then moved on to our Special Awards.

Access Partnership is a small organization with a big impact in Hampton Roads because they provide a valuable service to the community. They collect donated medical equipment and supplies and over the years they have helped hundreds – maybe thousands – of people looking for used or slightly used medical equipment at no cost. Access Partnership operates primarily on donations and fund raisers. A few months ago the widow of the oldest veteran in Chesapeake was having problems getting in and out of bed. A couple of elderly women were taking care of her but were having problems operating the manual lift. This is where our extraordinary service officers, Jim Ireland and Gary Dunbar, flew in for the rescue. Jim contacted Access Partnership to see if they had any electric lifts. They didn't but put out a message on their website asking if anyone had one to donate. Within a week another veteran's widow called. Her husband had received one from the VA but passed away before he could use it. She said she wanted to give it to another veteran family who could use it. On January 28th, Gary and Sandy Dunbar and Jim Ireland picked up the electric lift with batteries and a charger from the donor and delivered it to the widow here in Chesapeake who was absolutely thrilled to receive it. We would like present this plaque which is inscribed "Presented to Access Partnership in Gratitude for Your Outstanding Support to Veterans and Their Families from VFW Post 2894 Chesapeake." Additionally, Commander Vazquez presented a donation from the Post to help with Access Partnership's mission.

Every year, we look for fine young Americans who exhibit patriotism, service, and civic duty. We are fortunate that the young citizens of Chesapeake never fail to come through. Tonight, we recognize and honor 15-year old **Jacob Zinn, Last summer, Jacob tackled a challenge by a national organization called Raising Men Lawn Care Service. They have a program called the "50 Yard Challenge" that challenges young people to cut the lawns of 50 people who are veterans, single parents, elderly or have disabilities.** When someone completes it, they get a new lawnmower. Once Jacob agreed to the challenge, he was sent a T-shirt, earplugs and protective eyewear. He mowed lawns throughout Chesapeake and was done with the challenge in 2021. For completing the challenge, Jacob was presented with a brand new lawnmower, weed eater and leaf blower. On behalf of the veterans you served, please accept this plaque of appreciation as well as a donation to your scholarship fund.

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Our last award is to someone very special to the Post. We wanted to **publicly honor Chief Wright's dedication to the city and our veterans during his 40 years of service with the Chesapeake Police Department.** We presented him with a plaque that reads: 'Presented to Chief Kelvin Wright In Many Thanks for All Your Support Over the Years, "Fair Winds and Following Seas" from VFW Post 2894'. Everyone then gave a big hand to the Chief's remarkable career and best wishes in his retirement.