

VFW OBJECTIVES:

- TO ENSURE THE NATIONAL SECURITY through maximum military strength
- TO ASSIST THE WIDOWS AND ORPHANS and the dependents of disabled and needy veterans.
- TO SPEED THE REHABILITATION of the nation's disabled and needy veterans.
- TO PROMOTE AMERICANISM through education in patriotism and constructive service to the communities in which we live.



Meetings

2nd Wednesday of month – 7:00 pm
VFW Post 2894 Headquarters
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Chesapeake, Virginia 23322

Email: cdpost2894@vfwva.org

Web Site: <https://www.vfw2894.org>

Webpage: <https://vfw2894.org>

Visit us on FaceBook



POST OFFICERS

Commander.....	Bob Gregory
Sr. Vice Commander.....	Susan Vitale
Jr. Vice Commander.....	Mike Kust
Adjutant.....	Dan Eaker
Quartermaster.....	John Peterson
Chaplain.....	Joseph McGourn
Surgeon.....	David Weber
Staff Judge Advocate.....	Matt Hamel
Service Officer.....	Jim Ireland

AUXILIARY OFFICERS

President.....	Sharon Peterson
Sr. Vice President.....	Grace Schweers
Jr. Vice President.....	Nelia Macasaet
Secretary.....	Sandy Dunbar
Treasurer.....	Donna Kust
Chaplain.....	Diane Hostetlar
Conductress.....	Diane Hostetlar
Guard.....	Tara Frederick
Patriotic Instructor.....	Anne Thompson

NATIONAL

www.vfw.org

STATE

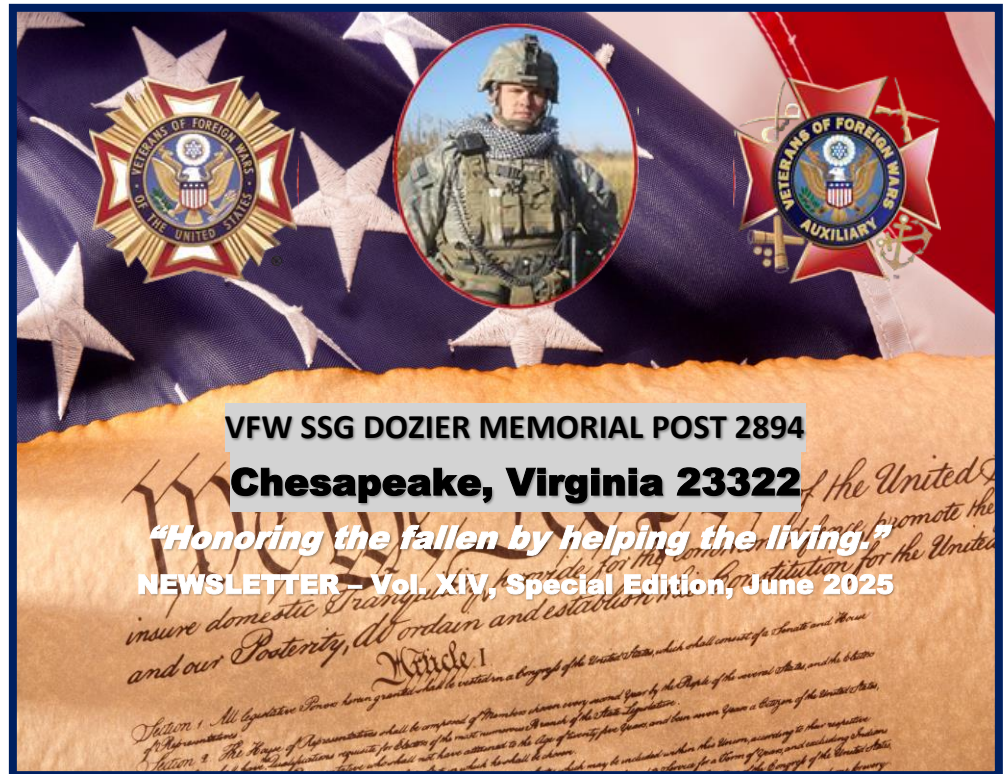
www.vfwva.org

VFW VA DISTRICT 2

www.vfwwebcom.org/va/dist2

VFW Post 2894 GoFundMe

<https://gofund.me/483584b0>



SPECIAL AWARDS EDITION POST ANNUAL AWARDS CEREMONY 29 May 2025

VFW Post 2894 held its annual Awards Ceremony on Thursday, 29 May 2025, in the Chesapeake City Council Chambers. A special awards edition of the newsletter was created due to the number of awardees and associated pictures to honor all those individuals and organizations receiving awards for this year.



Chesapeake Firefighter Chris Pecora and his wife hold the award check while his son holds the associated award plaque, with Chesapeake Fire Chief Sam Gulisano observing.

First, we want to express our sincere gratitude to the City Council who graciously allowed us to host the ceremony in their chambers at City Hall. Additionally, we are extremely grateful to all those members of the Post who contributed their time and talent to ensure the tremendous success of this year's event! Kudos to Mark Rios who provided particularly entertaining narratives and Chuck Wolff who created the plaques that were a big hit at the ceremony.

PATRIOT'S PEN Blake Roberts

Each year, nearly 68,800 students in sixth through eighth grades enter the VFW's Patriot's Pen Youth Essay Contest for a chance to win their share of more than \$1.4 million in state and national awards. The essay contest encourages young minds to examine America's history, along with their own experiences in modern American society, by drafting a 300- to 400-word essay, expressing their views based on a patriotic theme chosen by the VFW Commander-in-Chief.

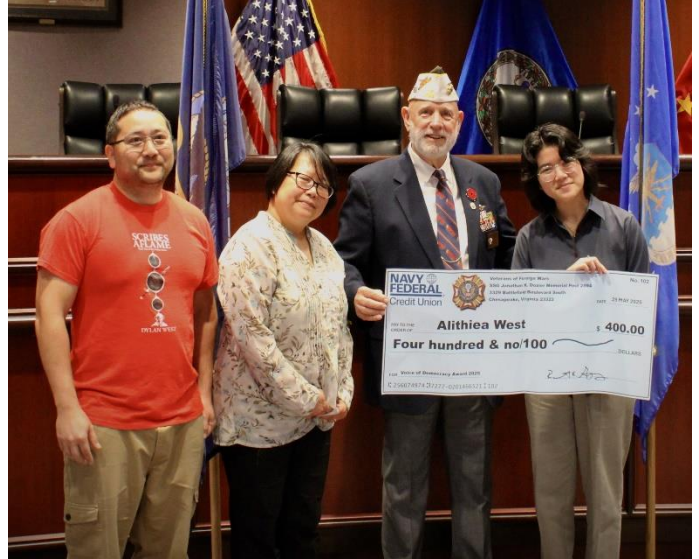
The theme for 2024-25 was "My Voice in America's Democracy." The VFW Post 2894 winning entry was submitted by Blake Roberts, a seventh grader at Hickory Middle School. Blake is an avid scout with Troop 828, holding the position of Chaplain and currently working on his Life Scout rank. He also plays several sports including basketball and soccer in the YMCA youth league program and has a passion for world geography. Congratulations Blake on winning the Patriot's Pen Essay Contest!



VFW Post 2894 Commander Bob Gregory presents Blake Roberts, 2024-25 Patriot's Pen Awardee, with a \$300 check as his father looks on.

VOICE OF DEMOCRACY Alitheia West

Established in 1947, the VFW Voice of Democracy audio-essay program provides high school students with the unique opportunity to express themselves through a democratic and patriotic-themed recorded essay. Each year, nearly 25,000 ninth through 12th grade students from across the country enter to win their share of more than \$1.3 million in educational scholarships and incentives awarded through the program.



VFW Post 2894 Commander Bob Gregory presents Voice of Democracy Awardee Alitheia West with a \$400 check as her parents observe.

The theme for the 2024-25 year was "Is America Today Our Forefathers' Vision?" This year's award went to Ms. Alitheia West, a rising 12th grade homeschooler from the Great Bridge area. Since middle school, she has competed in forensics and has advanced to national finals in both speech and debate categories. She is also an experienced actress, having made her professional debut at twelve years old. Her most recent performance was in the Virginia Opera's production of The Sound of Music as one of the Von Trapp children. As a self-described "classical studies nerd," she is passionate about using every podium or stage as a chance to speak truth and to delight one's audience along the way. She hopes to continue this by attending Patrick Henry College in Northern Virginia after graduating high school. Congratulations Alitheia!

SCOUT OF THE YEAR

Justina Williams

The partnership between the VFW and Scouting dates to 1915 when a VFW Post in Everett, Washington, helped establish a local Scout Troop. The VFW Scout of the Year program provides members of the Boy and Girl Scouts to be recognized for their standout citizenship, patriotism, and love of country.



VFW Post 2894 Commander Bob Gregory presents Scout of the Year Awardee Justina Williams with a \$200 check.

This year's Scout of the Year is Ms. Justina Williams, from Chesapeake Girl Scout Troop 15. Justina is currently a senior at Great Bridge High School, receiving numerous awards for her academic achievements. Among them are both the Advanced Placement Environmental and Economics Scholar, the Chesapeake Public Schools Superintendent Scholar Athlete Award, Dual Enrollment Teachers for Tomorrow Student of the Year Award, Certificate of Excellence, Leadership Award, Principal's Award, and Presidential Award. She's involved in travel volleyball and has played for the Great Bridge High School Junior Varsity and Varsity teams for the past four years. She is also a member of the National Honor Society, currently serving as President for her high school chapter. She's been involved with Girl Scouts for over ten years, recently receiving her Gold Award for working with the Chesapeake Humane Society's Crisis Boarding Program. When she graduates, she plans to continue her education at Longwood University,

focusing on Elementary Education. Congratulations, Justina and we wish you the best of luck as you pursue your future goals!

JUNIOR RESERVE OFFICER TRAINING CORPS CADET OF THE YEAR

Alisah Ize-Iyamu

This year's Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps Cadet of the Year is Cadet Alisah Ize-Iyamu, or "Izzie," a senior at Grassfield High School, an honor student, and member of the Air Force Junior ROTC Program. Alisah has been a member of the Grassfield High Air Force JROTC Program for four years and in that time has grown substantially, becoming one of the top four senior leaders filling the position of Fall Semester Squadron Commander. Cadet "Izzy" has a phenomenal attitude and is always positive regarding the JROTC Program and the cadets in the program. The staff often reflect on her military bearing and the fact that she has become the information conduit for our program. If an announcement needs to be made providing information to the cadets, she takes the responsibility personally and ensures all the cadets know exactly what is going on. Because of her can-do attitude and involvement in the JROTC program, Ize has been recognized as a national award recipient in each of her first three years in the Air Force JROTC Program.



VFW Post 2894 Commander Bob Gregory presents JROTC Cadet of the Year Awardee Alisah Ize-Iyamu with a \$200 check as LtCol Dirk Sandstrom (left), Air Force JROTC Senior Instructor at Grassfield High School, and Ize's mother observe.

Izzie embodies the Air Force Core Values of Integrity, Service Before Self, and Excellence in All We Do. She always conducts herself as a positive representative of the program, being a self-starter and showing a great deal of initiative in her role as a squadron commander. During the fall semester she had the leadership responsibility for 54 cadets and always displayed great judgement in making decisions that affected the cadets and the program as a whole.

During her senior year, Izzy expanded her commitment to service by joining the Student-to-Student Club, fostering a deeper sense of community and support among her peers. She

expresses heartfelt gratitude to Mr. and Mrs. Hammers, teachers at Grassfield High School, for their encouragement and guidance within the club.

Izzy is passionate about the arts and plans to attend George Mason University in the fall to pursue a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Graphic Design. She predicts her future will include continuing her journey as an Air Force logistics officer or exploring new opportunities that align with her interests and aspirations.

It is a great pleasure for VFW Post 2894 to present the JROTC Cadet of the Year to Cadet Alisah Ize-Iyamu. We know you will be extremely successful in all your future endeavors!

Teacher Of the Year – K-5th Grade Tera Tyson

The VFW launched the Smart/Maher National Citizenship Education Teacher Award in 1999 to recognize certified teachers for promoting citizenship education. Three teachers, one from each level (K-5, 6-8, and 9-12) are nominated by local VFW posts and those selected continue to compete at the department and national levels. VFW Citizenship Education programs stimulate interest in America's history, traditions, Americanism, civic responsibility, flag etiquette and patriotism. Teachers who promote civic responsibility, flag etiquette and patriotism are prime candidates for this award.



Ms. Tera Tyson accepts the VFW Post 2894 K-5th Grade Teacher of the Year Award check from Post Commander Bob Gregory.

This year's Smart/Maher National Citizenship Education Teacher Award for K – 5th grades was presented to Ms. Tera Tyson, a fifth-grade teacher at Greenbrier Intermediate School. Ms. Tyson embodies the spirit of citizenship through her dedication to her students, colleagues, and community. She has served as a department chair for many years, leading her team with integrity and setting a strong example for others. Ms. Tyson is also a vital part of the school's Teacher of the Year Committee, continually supporting and recognizing her colleagues' achievements, and is always willing to lend a hand to assist her

fellow educators. Her passion for teaching and her commitment to Greenbrier Intermediate shines in everything she does, bringing energy, creativity and dedication to her classroom every day, setting a high standard for her students and colleagues. Congratulations on such a tremendous achievement!

Teacher Of the Year – 6-8th Grade Wendy Burr

This year's Smart/Maher National Citizenship Education Teacher Award for grades 6 – 8 was presented to Ms. Wendy Burr, a dedicated history teacher at Crestwood Middle School. Wendy exemplifies the principles of citizenship through her role as a respected educator, role model and active community leader. Her involvement extends beyond the classroom, as she dedicates time to mentoring students and supporting Crestwood's athletic programs. Her commitment to shaping students into engaged, informed citizens reflects her dedication to her community and her profession. Congratulations to Ms. Burr for such outstanding achievements!



Ms. Wendy Burr accepts the VFW Post 2894 6-8th Grade Teacher of the Year Award check from Post Commander Bob Gregory.

CIVIL AIR PATROL CADET OFFICER OF THE YEAR Samara Adams

The VFW Civil Air Patrol Cadet Officer of the Year Award recognizes cadet officers for their outstanding achievement and exceptional leadership ability. Cadets recommended for the award must be in good academic standing, are progressing

satisfactorily in the Civil Air Patrol Cadet Program, have demonstrated outstanding achievement in community service and the Cadet Program, and have shown outstanding leadership, a high moral character, and a tremendous level of professionalism in appearance and action. This year's Civil Air Patrol Cadet Officer of the Year Award was presented to Cadet/1st Lieutenant Samara Adams.

Cadet/1st Lieutenant Adams is an outstanding example as a CAP cadet Officer, distinguishing herself as a Flight Commander and a key team member of the High-Altitude Balloon Challenge at the Hampton Roads Composite Squadron during Fiscal Year 2024. Lieutenant Adams, through her leadership and dedication to duty, has led her squadron by example. She takes the time to ensure her subordinates understand what is expected in the areas of drill, uniform appearance, leadership and aerospace knowledge. Her high morals, trustworthiness, and military conduct are of the highest order, worthy of emulation by her squadron contemporaries. She clearly demonstrates that she is a cadet officer of the highest caliber and is outstanding among her peers. Her personal efforts reflect great credit upon herself and the Civil Air Patrol. Congratulations Samara and good luck with your future academic and Air Force endeavors!



VFW Post 2894 Commander Bob Gregory presents Cadet 1st Lieutenant Samara Adams, Civil Air Patrol Cadet Officer of the Year Award as her family observes.

**CIVIL AIR PATROL
CADET NON-COMMISSIONED
OFFICER OF THE YEAR
Quinn Ellis**

The VFW Civil Air Patrol Non-Commissioned Officer of the Year Award recognizes cadet non-commissioned officers for their outstanding achievement and exceptional leadership ability. Cadets recommended for the award must be in good academic standing, are progressing satisfactorily in the Civil Air Patrol Cadet Program, have demonstrated outstanding achievement in community service and the Cadet Program, and have shown outstanding leadership, a high moral character, and a tremendous

level of professionalism in appearance and action. This year's Civil Air Patrol Cadet Non-Commissioned Officer of the Year Award was presented to Cadet/2nd Lieutenant Quinn Ellis, promoted to his present rank from Chief Master Sergeant in December of last year.

Over the past year, as a Cadet Chief Master Sergeant, 2nd Lieutenant Ellis distinguished himself as First Sergeant and a key member of the High-Altitude Balloon Challenge at the Hampton Roads Composite Squadron during Fiscal Year 2024. Then Chief Ellis, through his leadership and dedication to duty, led his squadron by example, taking the time to ensure his subordinates understood what was expected in the areas of drill, uniform appearance, leadership and aerospace knowledge. His high morals, trustworthiness, and military conduct are of the highest order, worthy of emulation by his squadron contemporaries. He clearly demonstrates that he is a cadet of the highest caliber and a standout among his peers. His personal efforts reflect great credit upon himself and the Civil Air Patrol. Congratulations Quinn and best of luck on your academic journey!



VFW Post 2894 Commander Bob Gregory presents the Civil Air Patrol Non-Commissioned Officer of the Year Medal and Certificate to Cadet 2nd Lieutenant Quinn Ellis as family members look on.

**FIREFIGHTER OF THE YEAR
Eric Bissell**

The Firefighter of the Year Award is an annual presentation to that firefighter who, in the eyes of their peers, has demonstrated outstanding service to the department and community through the execution of their duties as a firefighter. The firefighter performed these duties in a manner that reflects mission of the fire department and represents the City of Chesapeake.



This year, the 2025 Firefighter of the Year Award was presented to Firefighter/Paramedic Eric Bissell. Firefighter/Paramedic Eric Bissell joined the Chesapeake Fire Department in 2018 after four

years of honorable service in the United States Marine Corps. After graduating from the Fire Academy, he pursued further training and earned his Paramedic certification in 2021, putting his skills to work with four documented life saves. Never one to stop learning, Eric earned his bachelor's degree in Fire Administration in 2024.

In 2023, Eric was assigned to the Recruit Academy as an instructor and mentor, where he made a lasting impact on the next generation of firefighters and EMS professionals. His ability to relate to recruits and break down complex topics makes him an exceptional teacher. He not only trains recruits but also instructs incumbent members in a variety of essential skills, from EMS procedures to fireground operations.



Firefighter Eric Bissell accepts the Firefighter of the Year Award from VFW Post 2894 Commander Bob Gregory.

Eric's commitment to safety and readiness extends beyond the classroom. As a Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA) Repair Technician, he ensures that life-saving equipment is maintained and operating properly. He recently developed and led a department-wide live fire in-service, enhancing our members' skills and preparedness on the fireground. Additionally, Eric has been instrumental in improving our forcible entry training and serves on our Department Burn Team, advocating for safe and effective training practices.

Through his discipline, drive, and commitment to excellence, Eric Bissell embodies the values of the Chesapeake Fire Department. His leadership, dedication to training, and passion for service make him truly deserving of being honored as the VFW Post 2894 Firefighter of the Year.

EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICE PROVIDER OF THE YEAR Chris Pecora

The EMS Provider of the Year Award is an annual presentation to that EMS provider who, in the eyes of their peers, has demonstrated outstanding service to the department and community through the execution of their duties as an EMS provider. The EMS Provider performed these duties in a manner that reflects mission of the fire department and represents the City of Chesapeake.

The Chesapeake Fire Department's 2025 EMS Provider of the Year Award was presented to Firefighter/Paramedic

Chris Pecora!

Chris joined the Chesapeake Fire Department on March 5, 2018. From the start of his career, Chris displayed a strong passion and knowledge for emergency medicine. His dedication to training, education, and mentorship have profoundly influenced those he works with. Firefighter/Paramedic Pecora is always eager to share his expertise, constantly working to improve the skills of his teammates. Whether pairing up with students or offering one-on-one training, he is an exceptional mentor who helps both recruits and seasoned professionals advance their knowledge and abilities. As an Advanced Life Support provider at his station, he has willingly taken on the responsibility of precepting multiple Paramedic students, guiding them to become competent and confident providers within our department.

Chris's leadership and expertise have been critical in several high-pressure incidents, where his decisive actions led to outstanding outcomes. In fact, he has been credited with 4 life saves for his efforts in providing patient care. FF/PM Pecora was also the recipient of the Fire Department's Unit Commendation Award for his efforts on a structure fire where his actions helped control a fire and facilitate the rescue of two trapped individuals. Whether saving a life on an emergency call, overseeing a paramedic student's skill development during a complex incident, or taking command of a chaotic gunshot wound scene, FF/PM Pecora has consistently demonstrated excellence under pressure. His contributions have been recognized by his peers, with high praise for his exceptional response, treatment, and teamwork.

Beyond Chris's clinical expertise, his passion for EMS extends into the community. After responding to calls, he frequently takes the time to engage with children and families,

showing them the apparatus, answering their questions, and fostering trust between emergency responders and the public. His efforts to enhance public understanding of EMS and reinforce the essential role that the Fire Department plays in the community's well-being is phenomenal.

Firefighter/Paramedic Pecora's motivation, professionalism, and commitment to excellence set him apart. He exemplifies the highest standards of prehospital care, and his mentorship has shaped the careers of many within the Chesapeake Fire Department. It is our privilege to recognize FF/PM Chris Pecora as the VFW Post 2894 EMS Provider of the Year.



VFW Post 2894 Commander Bob Gregory presents Chris Pecora with the Emergency Medical Services Provider of the Year Award.

Instructor with expertise in firearms and defensive tactics. In June 2024, she became an invaluable presence at Thurgood Marshall Elementary and Norfolk Highlands Primary. Deputy Gregory instantly connects with students, acting as a trusted friend and mentor. She selflessly provided snacks and drinks to less fortunate students, ensuring they received the nourishment they needed. When a student was viciously assaulted in November 2024, Deputy Gregory sprang into action, supporting school administrators and the victim's family through every step of the recovery process. Her compassionate approach helped the student regain a sense of safety and comfort, embodying the core values of the Sheriff's Office.

Senior Deputy Gregory consistently goes above and beyond, exemplifying the qualities of an outstanding Deputy and role model, and justly deserves the honor of being selected as Chesapeake Sheriff's Office Deputy of the Year.



VFW Post 2894 Commander Bob Gregory presents the VFW Post 2894 Deputy of the Year Award to Chesapeake Sheriff's Department Sheena Gregory (right) as Sergeant Brandy Pascal looks on.

**SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT
DEPUTY OF THE YEAR
Sheena Gregory**



The VFW Chesapeake Sheriff Department Deputy Sheriff of the Year was awarded to Senior Deputy Sheena Gregory. Senior Deputy Gregory has served the Chesapeake Sheriff's Office since July 2015, transforming not only her own career but also the lives of those around her. She has risen to the rank of Senior Deputy, earning her certification as a law enforcement officer and becoming a General

**CHESAPEAKE POLICE
DEPARTMENT
LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICER OF
THE YEAR
Aaron Smith**



The VFW Chesapeake Police Officer of the Year was awarded to Officer Aaron Smith. Officer Smith was raised in Chesapeake, graduating from Hickory High School and continuing his education at Old Dominion University, where he obtained his bachelor's degree in criminal justice. Shortly after graduating in 2015,

Officer Smith joined the Norfolk Police Department and in 2018 he was transferred to the K-9 Unit where he worked as a patrol dog handler citywide. In 2021, Officer Smith transferred to the Chesapeake Police Department, where he has worked in the South Norfolk, Greenbrier, and Great Bridge sections of the city.

Officer Smith has recently been assigned as a Detective to the Gang Suppression Unit, where his focus is curbing gang violence through illicit firearms and narcotics investigations. He also works to prevent gang participation through community outreach and partnership. We are proud to honor Officer Smith as the VFW Police Officer of the Year for 2025.



VFW Post 2894 Police Officer of the Year Aaron Smith (right) displays the award plaque and check flanked by Post Commander Bob Gregory and Chief of Police Mark Solesky.

of violent crimes. Special Agent Rohnke also serves his community and his coworkers as a department chaplain.

Over the past year, Special Agent Rohnke has been assigned to lead several challenging and complex investigations. This year, his tenacity and commitment have led to several great successes and have helped to bring justice to his victims, including sensitive cases of crimes against children. In addition to his reputation for tenacity, Special Agent Rohnke is also admired for his ability to approach the individuals involved in his cases with dignity and respect. Due to his motivation and his unrepachable reputation, Special Agent Rohnke routinely mentors and trains new investigators. His efforts have positively impacted numerous individuals, and he has been a valuable advocate for the communities he serves.



VFW Post 2894 Virginia State Police Officer of the Year Aaron Smith (right) displays the award plaque and check flanked by Post Commander Bob Gregory and VSP 1st Sgt Phil Edmonds.

VIRGINIA STATE POLICE PATROL OFFICER OF THE YEAR Andrew J. Rohnke



2015. He graduated from the 123rd Basic School and was assigned as a trooper to Division Five, Area 31 (Northampton and Accomack Counties). After working uniform patrol Special Agent Rohnke was promoted to special agent and assigned to the Chesapeake Field Office. He is a graduate of the Virginia Forensic Science Academy and specializes in the investigation

The VFW Virginia State Police Officer of the Year for 2025 was awarded to Special Agent Andrew J. Rohnke, currently assigned to the Virginia State Police, Bureau of Criminal Investigation, Chesapeake Field Office. Special Agent Rohnke joined the Virginia State Police as a trooper trainee in

TOP SUPPORTER Habitat for Humanity South Hampton Roads

The Outstanding Support Award was presented to Habitat for Humanity, South Hampton Roads, led by Mr. Frank Hruska, Executive Director. Along with Mr. Marshall Vernon, Home Repair Manager, Habitat for Humanity has been instrumental in supporting projects that improve the living conditions of our local veterans. Specifically of note is their recent innovative program of providing quality aluminum wheelchair ramps to disabled veterans at no cost. By partnering with an anonymous donor for funding and free labor provided by VFW Posts' volunteers and/or Habitat for Humanity employees, there is no cost to veteran families.

Habitat for Humanity also continues to provide home repairs, including roof repairs or replacements, for veterans' families. Habitat has always stepped up to the occasion with materials, labor, and grants to resolve the issues at hand. The Post is especially grateful for their assistance with helping our Headquarters, assisting in the to upgrade to our Post home. A tremendous thank you from all our veterans for all you've done

for us! We look forward to furthering our relationship as we continue to support our veterans in the future.



VFW Post 2894 Post Commander Bob Gregory presents Mr. Frank Hruska, CEO of Habitat for Humanity of South Hampton Roads, with the Outstanding Support Award.

POST Awards VFW Medals



At an Air Force Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps (AFJROTC) Awards Ceremony hosted at Grassfield High School on May 13, the Post awarded VFW medals to AFJROTC members in six of Chesapeake's high schools. The awards recognize the achievements of the cadets and foster their morale and esprit de corps. The awards went to two outstanding cadets, one male and one female, at the respective schools. Here are the awardees:

- Deep Creek – Kaleah Mann & Thomas Gibson
- Grassfield – Payton Williams & Anthony Beggs
- Great Bridge – McKenna Gay & Christopher Zombar
- Indian River – Jessica Weifert & Devin Hurley
- Oscar Smith – Amariyah Naftali & Andric Morales
- Western Branch – Daris Martin & Anthony Gagliardi



Twelve Air Force Junior ROTC cadets receive VFW medals/certificates at the Grassfield High School Awards Ceremony, 13 May 2025.