

# The Founder

The Monthly Newsletter For VFW Post 1 Members

JOHN S. STEWART POST 1



**"THE FIRST POST"**



Medal of Honor recipient Ty Carter poses with Post 1 & Korean War Veterans Assoc (KWVA) members at the annual Founders' Banquet

February 2014

Issue No. 10

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## ***Meeting Update***

**Thursday, February 13th, 7:00 pm**

**Post 2461  
1350 S Broadway Blvd.  
Denver, CO 80210**

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## ***Inside Post 1 - News and Events***

### **Commander's Corner**

By Michael Mitchel

I can't believe it is February already. We've had a full slate of events starting in early November with the Veterans Parade and fireworks show on the Auraria Campus. Our Speakers Bureau spread our message throughout the Front Range, and then a few days after Thanksgiving, we had the Founders' Banquet, followed by Operation Holiday Heroes. In January, the papers were signed and we sold our property at 4300 Pecos Street for over \$700,000.

The Second Annual Operation Holiday Heroes was a wonderful event. Members served as "elves" and purchased gifts (supplied as a result of the successful fundraising on Beanstalk and at the Founders' Dinner) for adopted veteran families.

A few days before the Broncos AFC Championship games, I received a call. Would a wounded veteran like to go to the game with Jake Plummer's season tickets? Freddie Sprankel, who serves on the Post color guard and as a Buddy Poppy volunteer, received the tickets and was interviewed on 9 News.

Speaking of the Color Guard, we are proud to announce that the Post 1 Color Guard will be part of the opening ceremonies for the Rockies Games on July 13th & 27th.

We continue to improve the website. With Brenda Smull's election to Jr. Vice Commander, Sean McClure, an IT professional, is now point on the Website.

Ashley Metcalf started a new role for Post 1: Volunteer Coordinator. Ashely will be assisting Committee members with projects and interacting with the membership to

match members' skills and volunteer interests with projects or events. Don't be surprised if you get an email or call from Ashley.

Speaking of Ashley, Post 1 was proud to be represented at his promotion ceremony on February 1st. Congratulations Ashley for making E-7!



Master Sergeant Ashley Metcalf (left) after his promotion.

Congratulations to Sarah Haynes for taking 1st place at the Colorado Department of Democracy (VOD). She's going to Nationals to compete for a \$35,000 scholarship. Kudos to the Ladies Auxiliary for managing the Post 1 program!

As I look at 2014, I see three major initiatives on top of our annual events. First, now that the Pecos building is sold, we need a building that will meet our current needs. John Keene and I, along with the Building Committee, are actively working with our brokers and hope to have encouraging news soon.

Second, the creation of a 501(c)3 Post 1 Foundation to facilitate fundraising and grant development is upcoming. It will put VFW Post 1 on sound financial footing long into the future. Many grant sources do not recognize our current 501(c)19 status (c19s are unique IRS classifications for Veterans organizations). I met with several

attorneys with a local law firm to discuss the process and application on a pro-bono basis. This will allow us to start raising funds for the financial security of Post 1.

Third, this year we will continue to focus on membership retention and recruiting. We currently have 183 annual members that have expired. Let's work together get that below 100 as soon as possible. We will also continue our support of many community programs and events. Veterans are joining Post 1 because of our involvement in the community. By continuing to grow our membership, we are able to fulfill our commitment to helping other Vets and enjoying the camaraderie of our many social events.

The past year has been a good one for VFW Post 1. I expect next year will be even better as we continue to grow, to serve, and to be there for each other.



Operation Holiday Heroes helped spread some Christmas cheer

## **Distinguished Guests Highlight 114th Annual Founders' Banquet**

By Michael Mitchel

The 114th Annual VFW Post 1 Founders' Banquet was a wonderful evening celebrating the VFW, women of firsts in the military, and those who help our comrades and community.

Our guests included: Medal of Honor recipient Ty Carter as keynote speaker, speakers Commander Darlene Iskra and Captain Linda Bray, and VFW National Commander-in-Chief Bill Thien. Honored guests included members of the Korean War Veterans Association, Women Air Corps (WASP) Pilot Millicent Young, and Tuskegee Airman and new Post 1 member Lt. Col James Harvey. One of my favorite memories from the evening was seeing Millicent and James share a laugh with Ty.

Staff Sergeant Carter, after a photo shoot that appeared on the front page of the Denver Post the following morning, gave a from-the-heart address about Post-Traumatic Stress (PTS); how he faces it, and how we could address PTS with the same sensitivity and respect that we treat other combat injuries.



James Harvey and Millicent Young

Christian Anschutz was recognized as the Post 1 Citizen of the Year for his tireless work to the benefit of the Veteran and active service member community.

Jacob Wood flew in from the Philippines and came straight from the airport to accept our recognition on behalf of Team Rubicon, our Veteran Organization of the Year.

This year's inaugural Ray Starkey Award, Post 1 Member of the Year went to Dana Niemela for her amazing work with the Veteran homeless community.

Several attendees remarked to me how young the room was and I replied that this is the membership of the best VFW Post in the world. While all Veteran eras were well represented, one could feel the energy in the room from the new generation.

We successfully promoted the small fundraiser for Operation Holiday Heroes and collected over \$1700 that evening - 50% of our goal - that went directly to help Vets and their families enjoy a bountiful Christmas. We ultimately exceeded our goal by 10%.

I would like to thank our title sponsor DaVita both for its support of VFW Post 1 and for veterans in Denver and across the United States, Union Pacific for its generous support, as well as USAA, RTL Network, NCM Media Networks, Ball Aerospace, and Raymond P. Smith and Associates. These sponsors made the event possible and allowed Post 1 to gift 10 tickets to the KWVA.

WWII Veterans received gifted tickets and no Veteran was turned away because they could not afford to attend.

Further thanks to Frontier Airlines for flying our guests to Denver, Henry Jones of the Denver Police Department who helped with logistics at the airport, Enterprise Rent-a-Car for donating a vehicle for SSG Carter's use, Brenda Smull for another great job as the Master of Ceremonies, and to all the members who helped with the planning and execution of the event.



Post 1 Air Force vets show their pride during the service call-out

## **Post 1 Member Down Range Gets Care Packages**

Active duty Post 1 member Sgt. Justin Gonzales and his unit deployed to Afghanistan for the second time on August 15th for a 9-month combat tour.

Pete Aragon organized the deployed member committee that consists of several members from the Post and members of our Ladies Auxiliary.



The committee received monies from the Post Relief Fund and personal monetary and goodies donations. Post 1 Commander Michael Mitchel contacted Dazbog coffee of Denver, who made a large donation of coffee. Total contributions came to \$500.

Great job, team! Eleven large flat-rate postal boxes were packed on October 26th and were received by our brave warriors in Afghanistan on November 14th. The care packages contained candies, Christmas cards from 3rd graders, beef jerky, playing cards, lip balm, flags, small stuffed Christmas stockings, and a letter from the Commander, just to name a few items.

We love our troops and want them to know that we care. Here is Sgt. Gonzales' address:

Sgt. Justin Gonzales  
HHT 3/2 CAV Recon  
FOB PA SOB  
APO AE 09370

-VFW Post 1 Deployed Member Committee

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**2nd Annual Post 1 Poppy Queen Contest a Success**

By Brenda Smull

Four brave, young contestants vied for the Crown of Post 1 Buddy Poppy Queen on Saturday, January 25, 2014.

This 2nd annual event was held at Post 2461 in Denver and had over 20 people in attendance.

The participants ranged in age from 8- 11 years old and were well-prepared for their interviews with a four member judging committee. Two of the judges were Post 1 Auxiliary members and two were Post 1 members. The contestants were ranked in a secret ballot on knowledge of Poppies, enthusiasm, and creativity.

Congratulations to our new Poppy Princess, Cierra Marie Aragon, daughter of Dyanna and Pete Aragon, Post 1 Ladies Auxiliary and Post Member, respectively.

The Poppy Queen crown and wand was awarded to Mia Sedona Keene, daughter of John Keene, Post 1 member. Well done!

During the one year term, the girls will be ambassadors of the VFW Buddy Poppy program and participate in our Memorial Day services, Poppy campaign drives and ride in a cool vehicle with Post 1 during the Veterans Day Parade in November.

A special thanks to the Post 1 Ladies Auxiliary and especially Marsha Harrison and Jean Jaffe for their help and support with design and creation of the sashes, wand, basket and poppy tiara.





## ***Member Profile***

### **Elvis Leon, Veteran Leader on MSU Campus**

By Jonathan Raab

"I was looking for a grand adventure, and I definitely got it," Elvis Leon said with a bemused smile, thinking back to when he enlisted in the United States Army after high school. "School wasn't for me at the time."

He attended MSU Denver for a semester before dropping out.

"I was in one of those situations where my buddy convinced me to



Elvis and a group of Iraqi children

join the [Army] buddy program with him, and I ended up going and he did not. He backed out at the last second."

Elvis never planned on joining the Army. He described his decision as "on-the-fly," and figured he'd find some adventure. Then he was headed to Iraq.

"I realized how young and naïve I was," he said.

"Obviously, I watched the news all the time, and everyone counseled me on how there's a war going on, you're going straight there. And that was something that never bothered me. Once I signed up I was willing to do it all and it never bothered me. I didn't even think twice about it."

As a 92F fueler in a support platoon, Elvis was assigned to the 1st Infantry Division's 2nd Brigade Combat Team (BCT), 1-77 Armor Battalion. The 2nd BCT deployed to Ramadi, Iraq from August 2006 to November 2007. His job was to support combat operations among U.S. and Iraqi units alike.

In addition to their combat support missions, Elvis' platoon also assisted with building police stations and government buildings, meeting with local leaders, and being a presence in the neighborhoods within his sector.

His platoon ran over 500 missions during the fifteen-month deployment. The chaos and bloodshed of "the surge" was a day-to-day reality.

"We had a rough deployment," Elvis said. "Our brigade took the most casualties since Vietnam."

2nd BCT would suffer 93 casualties before the deployment was over.

"Four of those guys that we lost were friends of mine," Elvis said. "That made things weird - going to the chow hall one day and not seeing your buddy there. Or talking to a few of them the day or hour before they died. That was rough."

Elvis also repeatedly witnessed the bloody aftermath of IED strikes.

A turning point in his perspective was the re-opening of Al Anbar University. His platoon provided security for the first day of classes since the University shut its doors.

"We got there about an hour or so before any of the students arrived. Next thing you know, lo and behold, several hundred Iraqis who had been waiting a year or two to go back to school show up. That was kind of one of those light bulb moments, because I had dropped out of college, and I realized that people don't have the

opportunities that we have."

Elvis described his deployment experience as surreal - a common response among combat veterans.

"We did our job every single day. We definitely did see some questionable things, I would say. I think all of this combined made me want to pursue a civilian career. Not to say I didn't enjoy the military. I don't regret it, ever."

He returned to Denver, and spent a year dealing with - or avoiding - the memories of his combat service. Elvis admits he started abusing alcohol. The lack of perspective among his civilian peers intensified his sense of isolation.

"Everyone was having ridiculous conversations complaining about the mundane details of life," he said.

Elvis decided that going back to school would be his next mission. He credits his focus on getting his education - paid for by his G.I. Bill - as the key to his re-integration. He earned his bachelor's degree in film production and screen writing within four years at Regis University.

"Maybe I needed an outlet or something," he said. "I have to keep busy, whether that's working on film projects or at the time doing school work. The busier I was, that just kind of kept all the bad memories away."

A friend told him about an AmeriCorps position at MSU. The position was designed to help student veterans transition into the work force. While it's a full-time job consisting of student-veteran outreach, it's practically a volunteer position, with little pay and benefits. Elvis sees the job as a way to help other vets - and himself - connect with one other, and to fill the void of camaraderie many transitioning veterans experience.

Elvis continues to put his film degree to good use. He's produced several short film projects over the last few years, including "South Platte," which played in several film festivals, foreign countries, and, most recently, at the Starz film festival here in Denver. You can see a trailer for ["South Platte" here](#).

He has five more film projects coming out in 2014.

Like many veterans of our most recent conflicts, Elvis sees a positive contribution to his community as a way to help others - and himself.

"I think about Iraq every single day," he said. "Keeping busy kind of controls everything and keeps balance in my life."



## ***In the Community***

### **Upcoming MSU Denver Events for Veterans**

By Trevor Crandall

9-11 veterans everywhere are quickly transitioning to college grads. The Metropolitan State University (MSU) of Denver boasts 1,500 current students receiving 9-11 G.I. Bill benefits.

Until recently, student services at MSU were insufficient for its veteran students. Americorps has charged Elvis Leon - a veteran and Post 1 member featured in this issue of the Founder - with assisting these veterans' educational and career services needs to ensure seamless transitions after graduation.

Elvis runs the Veteran Leader Corps (VLC) Program at MSU which focuses mainly on 1) job readiness training and 2) community involvement to serve its veterans. This bilateral approach enables veterans to capitalize on gainful employment opportunities and continue to serve communities as they did while in the military.

In February, events completed and scheduled include hiring student veterans in the VLC office, holding open table discussions regarding any issues these student veterans encounter, joint career days with the Auraria Campus, seeking various creative efforts among student veterans, and much more.

The VLC is springing up on more and more campuses as well, and promises to help our heroes make the most of their educational opportunities.

The February calendar of events at MSU Denver [can be found here.](#)

## **Honorary Membership Awarded to Military Working Dog**



In November, Members of Post 1 presented an honorary VFW membership to Buddy the military working dog at his retirement ceremony. Buddy served on multiple deployments to Iraq.

## **District 1 Ladies Auxiliary 4th Annual Baked Potato Fundraiser**

**11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.  
VFW POST 5061  
5220 W. Warren Avenue  
Denver 80227**

Loaded baked potatoes, soups, and delicious chilies!  
Adults \$5.00 - Children \$3.00

Please support the Ladies Auxiliaries of District 1, including:

VFW Post Auxiliaries  
1, 501, 2461, 2797, 3971 & 5061

They're doing great things for our our veterans. Please come and have a good meal  
to support a great cause!

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## **Ladies Auxiliary Update**

Greetings to all Auxiliary Sisters!

I hope all of you had a wonderful holiday season and are ready for the new year. A new year brings with it many things; a time to reflect on the year that has just passed, and a time to strive to reach new goals.

The months of December and January were very rewarding for our Auxiliary. The 2nd annual Operation Holiday Heroes event was again a success from start to finish. The Auxiliary adopted a family of seven. All shopping, wrapping, and delivery of gifts was taken care of by Dyanna Aragon.

We joined forces with the Post on December 19th, serving a holiday dinner to our adopted families. The annual Christmas party at the Denver VA Medical Center was held on the 21st . A visit to all of the hospitalized veterans on the assigned ward was most rewarding. The treats were provided by co-sponsor Auxiliary 501.

The month of December is always special because of the Founders' Banquet. We were honored to have Ty Carter, Medal of Honor recipient, and William Thien, VFW National Commander in Chief as keynote speakers. What a magical setting it was at the Brown Palace Hotel. THANK YOU Post #1 for putting this event together!

The Scholarship programs had been in full swing since early fall. The chairperson for our Auxiliary, Jean Jaffe, did an outstanding job in completing all of the programs. The contact with Horizon Middle School that Jean has given us is, as they say, priceless!

Jean and Horizon brought us 13 Patriot's Pen entries and a Teacher of the Year nominee. As we were putting the finishing touches on the Patriot's Pen and Teacher programs, a phone call received the week prior to the October 31st deadline brought

us our Voice of Democracy participant. The successful journey began on a damp October night in a McDonald's parking lot when the entry was passed off to Alan and Jean Jaffe.

The judging at the Post and District level was completed and all winners were recognized at the January 9th awards program. The Department Voice of Democracy chairman then advised us that our Aux 1/ Post 1 /District 1 winner, Sarah Haynes, was one of the top 5 finalists at the State level. On January 25th, Sarah was announced as the State of Colorado Voice of Democracy 1st place winner. We all can be very proud of this as she will now be Colorado's representative at the National level. Sarah will head to Washington, D.C. in early March where the 1st place National winner will be announced. Pete Aragon for the Post and Jean Jaffe for the Auxiliary - our hats are off to you, and thank you for making these programs a huge success.

The District 1 4th Annual Potato Bake fundraising event will be held on February 22 at VFW Post 5061. See the article above for all of the details. I have tickets for sale. Remember, all District 1 auxiliaries receive a portion of the profits from this event. Make your plans now!

Our February meeting has been changed to Saturday, February 15th, 10:00 AM, VFW Post #2461. Did you know that Gina makes a killer cheese soup?! The Auxiliary 100th birthday will be observed with many of our historical items on display! Thanks to the District for throwing the party for us!

Last but not least, our Treasurer and myself were able to attend the Kick Up Your Heels party hosted by the Department President. To qualify for this event our membership needed to be above 91% prior to December 31, 2013. We thank all of you that made this possible by paying your dues promptly. As the General Orders in the National magazine stated, "On January 1, 2014, a member who has not paid her annual dues is not a member in good standing, and as such may not attend a meeting, hold an office or chairmanship nor receive an Cancer Grant until such time as her 2014 dues are paid."

The 2nd annual Poppy Queen contest was a great success. Congrats to Queen Mia and Princess Cierra, we look forward to seeing you both at the upcoming events. I also hear that Pete the Poppy King is working on Poppy drive dates for 2014 - remember, events such as some of the ones listed above are totally funded from proceeds of Poppy drives. These events are fun. When the call comes out, feel free to step up and volunteer!

May our work with our veterans continue to warm our hearts...

Loyally,  
Marsha A. Harrison, President

Visit our website [here](#), or:

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Like us on **Facebook** 

### Post 1 Officers

Commander - Michael Mitchel    Sr. Vice Commander - John Keene

Jr. Vice Commander & PAO - Brenda Smull

Quartermaster - Mort Anderson    Chaplain - Ray Starkey    Surgeon - Norm Frickey

Service Officer - Mort Anderson    Judge Advocate - John Holland    Adjutant - Philipp Theune

### Committee Chairs

Women Veterans - Kathryn Wirkus    Current Conflict - Patrick Browne

Suicide Prevention - Rebecca Nordin    Military Liaison - Eryth Zecher

Homeless Veterans - Dana Niemela    Camaraderie Committee- Justin Cook, Brittany Bartges

Buddy Poppy and Deployed Members Committee - Pete Aragon

Youth Activities - David Perez    Volunteer Coordinator - Ashley Metcalf    Managing Editor - Jonathan Raab

### Trustees

Izzy Abbass (1 year),  
Kristen Luevanos (2 year), George Caulkins (3 year)

