

‘I Am Living My American Dream Because of Them’

Country music star John Rich and his brand, Redneck Riviera, partner with VFW to launch the Return the Favor campaign to raise funds for VFW’s National Veterans Service program

Aug 19, 2024

When John Rich first heard of VFW’s *Return the Favor* campaign relaunching this year, the heartland poet and country music icon was adamant about getting involved.

Rich, whose Redneck Riviera brand has donated nearly \$2 million to veterans causes since its inception in 2014, reached out to VFW and asked what he and his brand could do to help raise funds on behalf of the campaign.

The multi-platinum artist and music industry leader was told that for every dollar his millions of followers donated, an exact amount of \$1,585 would in turn go toward a veteran through VFW’s National Veterans Service (NVS) program.

“That was the greatest multiplication of a donation I have ever heard,” said Rich, a former member of Lonestar and co-founder of Nashville, Tenn.-based duo Big & Rich. “To me, it was a no-brainer hearing that. It is a nightmare to try and get these veterans the money and services they are owed, so to help VFW do that for veterans at no charge is one of the greatest things you can do to say thank you for your service.”

VFW OFFERS FREE CLAIMS HELP

Long before becoming the face of VFW’s *Return the Favor* campaign, Rich was just another patriotic American celebrity trying to align a mutual partnership that could help benefit veterans.

“I reached out to the VFW blindly,” Rich said. “I didn’t know anybody there. This was about

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three years ago when I started calling people hoping we could do something together to help impact veterans.”

Since then, the partnership between VFW and Rich’s Redneck Riviera brand has been helping raise funds on behalf of veterans in myriad ways. On May 6, 2022, the partnership went public when Rich joined then-VFW Commander-in-Chief Matthew “Fritz” Mihelcic at VFW Post 1970 in Nashville for a live concert dubbed “Salute to our Heroes,” which aired on Rich’s Redneck Riviera YouTube channel.

Now, Rich is again helping raise funds through the VFW’s *Return the Favor* campaign for VFW’s NVS program, a network of more than 2,300 VA-accredited representatives operating on every U.S. military installation throughout the world.

Among the many at VFW who recognize the impact this partnership will have on the organization is NVS Director Michael Figlioli, who believes a country star such as Rich at the helm of the campaign bolsters the authenticity and credibility of VFW’s efforts to reach as many veterans as possible with free VA disability claims.

“Mr. Rich’s partnership demonstrates one man’s commitment to recognizing the service and sacrifice of those who are on duty today, as well as their families and those who went before with the hope that others will ‘Return the Favor,’” Figlioli said. “Our National Veterans Service, which provides assistance down to the grassroots level in every community, is a cornerstone of our great organization and carries out a mission that will continue for another 125 years.”

Figlioli says VFW service officers routinely undergo training to meet the highest moral and ethical standards needed to receive accreditation by the VA, which allows them to legally assist veterans in filing claims.

“Through their rigorous training, they are experts in reviewing and applying current law, pertinent legislation, regulations and medical histories, assisting in filing for disability compensation, rehabilitation and education programs, pension and death benefits, as well as employment and training programs,” Figlioli said.

VETS ‘KEEP THE AMERICAN DREAM INTACT’

With a large demographic of veterans and those who support veterans, Rich has already begun spreading the gospel of VFW’s *Return the Favor* campaign through his Redneck Riviera brand, as well as social medial channels and while on tour, where Big & Rich is famous for inviting veterans onto the stage to recognize them for their service.

The duo even has, on occasion, pulled their tour bus beside local VFW Posts in the towns and cities where they are performing to play songs, share drinks and listen to veterans tell their stories.

“I realized early on in my career that the only reason I do what I get to do is because of them, the veterans,” Rich said. “I am living my American dream because of them, because they keep the American dream intact.”

HONORING GRANDFATHERS’ WWII SERVICE

This epiphany sprouted from a seed planted long ago, when Rich was but a youth growing up in a double-wide mobile home along the panhandle in Amarillo, Texas.

Raised by a preacher and music teacher in his father, Rich also spent a great deal of time around his two grandfathers, both World War II veterans having served in the Pacific and European Theaters.

“I got to see up close what they had sacrificed and what they went through,” Rich said. “I had a great deal of respect for them. So as I started my singing career, I always made sure to pay tribute to veterans as a way to honor my grandfathers.”

The two patriarchs have always been an undercurrent in Rich’s songwriting, which, aside from popular party anthems, includes sober reflections on his life and the state of his beloved country.

With the release of his solo album “The Country Truth” in August 2023, Rich directly honored the memory of his late grandfathers, as well as all WWII veterans, with a single dubbed, “The Man.”

The song, an ode to the sacrifices made by members of the “Greatest Generation,” was akin to another song, “The Good Lord and The Man,” which Rich released as a single on his 2009 album “Son of a Preacher Man.”

A more candid and lyrically-driven song, “The Man” came with a music video that allowed Rich to further honor the memory of all veterans. In it, Rich made a point to feature veterans from all major conflicts since the 1940s.

“I wrote this song about my grandfathers’ service in WWII, but also for all our veterans who have served over the decades on behalf of our nation,” Rich said. “I hope this song reminds every one of their family heroes who served and brings a sense of American pride and honor to their hearts.”

VFW PROVIDES FREE HELP

From honoring veterans through his music to advocating for and helping raise funds for veterans services and programs, it was this philanthropic pursuit that led him three years ago to strike a friendship with the country’s oldest combat veterans organization.

The money Rich helps raise will support NVS and its network of accredited service officers.

The VFW provides these services free of charge to all veterans, dependents and survivors, whether said parties have a VFW membership or not.

“Neither one of my grandfathers died with much money in the bank, and I am sure they were owed more money than they had,” Rich said. “When I learned thousands of veterans are owed money and services due to paperwork and red tape, and that all this could be fixed, I had to get involved. This is my way of serving the people who serve us.”

Rich invites all veterans to attend his shows, as he will be touring with Big & Rich in August and September.

This article is featured in the 2024 August issue of [VFW magazine](#), and was written by [Ismael Rodriguez Jr.](#), senior writer for VFW magazine.