

'I Make the Choice to Still Serve'

VFW Life member Lalena Zoe Magnosta is a Post Service Officer, an active member of her community and an advocate for women veterans, particularly those experiencing homelessness

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Lalena Zoe Magnosta is **#StillServing** as a Life member of VFW Post 2245 in Grayslake, Illinois. She's the Post Service Officer, an active member of her community and an advocate for women veterans, particularly those experiencing homelessness, in her local area north of Chicago and across the country.

As a teenager, Magnosta left a traumatic situation at home to make a better path for herself. She was homeless for a time, then lived with her grandmother before joining the U.S. Navy right after 9/11. Magnosta served in the Navy for nearly 12 years. After transitioning out of the military, she established her civilian career and found opportunities to champion causes close to her heart.

"That's what fuels me to help others – seeing or hearing other women veterans in positions, especially with children, where they are afraid to ask for help or simply don't even know where to start," said Magnosta.

"When I encountered my personal hardship, I was so young and had nobody to turn to, and I want others to know they always have someone."

In 2018, Magnosta got involved with Final Salute Inc., a nonprofit that helps women veterans experiencing homelessness and economic hardship. They offer services such as housing, food, clothing, child care, transportation and financial education and assistance. Their signature event, Ms. Veteran America, raises awareness and funds and Magnosta was selected as Second Runner Up in 2019.

"Ms. Veteran America is a nationwide competition, not beauty pageant, that supports Final Salute in their quest to eradicate homelessness among women veterans. We campaign,

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

406 W. 34th Street
Kansas City, MO 64111
Office 816.756.3390
Fax 816.968.1157

WASHINGTON OFFICE

200 Maryland Ave., N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002
Office 202.543.2239
Fax 202.543.6719

info@vfw.org
www.vfw.org

fundraise, bring creative ways to highlight women veteran homelessness and compete against each other to win the title,” Magnetta said.

“This role gives me a platform to highlight women veterans and support them any way I can. I’m still an Illinois Ambassador helping women veterans by connecting them with resources they need.”

In addition, Magnetta works with Illinois Joining Forces as a contact in the Lake County region for women veterans who need resources and support. She’s been able to connect several women with housing and job placements through the program.

Magnetta also has her own efforts to help veterans. She’s engaged in fundraising and educating communities on issues facing women veterans, and she offers service members assistance with resumes and LinkedIn profiles, professional headshots, employment opportunities and business attire.

“I conducted a 25-mile march in combat boots with a 25-pound rucksack on my back called ‘In Her Boots’ that was dedicated to 25 women veterans bringing awareness to homelessness. It raised over \$13,000 to go directly to veterans in need,” recalled Magnetta.

“My annual clothing campaign – Combat Boots to Business Suits – collects lightly used business attire to provide to women veterans who are either transitioning from the service or veterans looking to revamp their wardrobe.”

For Magnetta, who is a Trustee on Grayslake Village Board and board member with a local nonprofit that helps low-income families, everything she does is a continuation of the life of service she committed to in the Navy. She appreciates that service is a part of the VFW and loves being one of the many members and veterans who work to make a positive difference in the world on a day-to-day basis.

"The VFW is our local tribe of servant leaders committed to our community. This is why I am proud to say 'I am the VFW,'" Magnetta stated.

"I am the VFW because I make the choice to continue to still serve."

To find out more about the VFW's #StillServing campaign or to share your story, visit vfw.org/StillServing.