

VFW Names 2025 Top National Teachers

Each teacher will be awarded \$1,000 for professional development and \$1,000 for their school

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KANSAS CITY, Mo. – The Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) is proud to announce the selection of the national top three teachers in its annual 2025 Smart/Maher VFW National Citizenship Education Teacher Award contest.

Established in 1999 and named after former VFW National Commander John Smart and retired VFW Quartermaster General Larry Maher, the award recognizes our nation's top teachers for their exceptional commitment to teaching Americanism and patriotism to their students by promoting civic responsibility, flag etiquette and patriotism in the classroom.

Awarded annually, the VFW selects one teacher to represent the elementary (K-5), middle (6-8) and high school (9-12) levels to recognize their dedication and work in their classrooms. Each teacher will receive a \$1,000 award for professional development and \$1,000 for their school.

Tim Smiddy, a fifth grade teacher at Staunton Elementary School in Staunton, Illinois, was chosen as the elementary school winner for his passion and work promoting patriotism and a respect for our nation's veterans and military service shown through his annual hourly program, the Patriot Club. He spends months organizing the program, training his students to aptly perform the responsibilities of a color guard, every year growing and expanding the program to ensure the service and sacrifice of all local military members and veterans are remembered and honored. Smiddy was sponsored by VFW Post 1241 in Staunton, Illinois.

Selected to represent the middle school level, Christie Wingo, a middle school teacher at Colorado Springs Christian School in Colorado Springs, Colorado, was chosen for her continued efforts to prepare responsible citizens while encouraging a strong passion for STEM and fostering an atmosphere that values hard work, collaboration and bettering their

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community. Wingo was sponsored by VFW Post 7829 in Monument, Colorado.

Selected to represent the high school level, Nicole Petrosillo, a high school teacher at West Milford Township High School in West Milford, New Jersey, was chosen for the energy and dedication she brings to her classroom, along with the many veteran-centered projects she oversees throughout the year. From her work as the War and Remembrance Ceremony Committee leader and coordinating care packages for deployed K-9s and military members, to ensuring her annual curriculum has connections to World War II, PTSD and the effects of war, her dedication to honoring America's service members, veterans and instilling civic-mindedness is a proven facet of her teaching method. Petrosillo was sponsored by VFW Post 7198 in Hewitt, New Jersey.

"The VFW is proud to recognize outstanding educators like Tim, Christie and Nicole who inspire civic responsibility and patriotism in our youth, ensuring the pillars of our democracy are not forgotten," said VFW National Commander Al Lipphardt. "Beyond academics, they inspire critical thinking, a deep respect for democracy and help foster curiosity. Their influence extends far beyond the classroom, helping to cultivate a generation that values integrity, civic duty, and the power of informed decision-making — essential qualities for those who will guide our nation forward."

Each of the three national recipients will be presented with their award during the 126th VFW National Convention in Columbus, Ohio, Aug. 9-13, 2025.

Find out more information on the [Smart/Maher VFW National Citizenship Education Teacher Award](#).