

Washington State Posts Offer Beautiful Sights and Community Service

Located in the quaint Pacific Northwest island of Whidbey, VFW Post 7392 offers something for all travelers and veterans

Oct 11, 2024

VFW magazine continues its “Destination Post Series” this month. The series will feature 125 VFW Posts located in sought-after tourist destinations. Featured VFW Posts are those that make a real difference in the communities in which the Posts are located. This month’s article takes VFW magazine to Whidbey Island, Washington.

Sprawled along the blueness of Puget Sound, Whidbey Island is a gangly island about 30 miles north of Seattle and nestled between the Olympic Peninsula and the I-5 corridor of western Washington, commonly known as the Purple Heart Trail. Known for its own trails, historic military forts and picturesque water views with orca sightings, the island also is home to Naval Air Station Whidbey Island, making it a small but vibrant veterans community.

POST HOSTS A CAMPGROUND

At the heart of this veterans community is VFW Post 7392, chartered on May 12, 1946, and currently the fifth largest VFW Post in the state. Located on the northern part of the island in Oak Harbor, about a half-mile away from the naval air station grounds, the Post is home to more than 1,000 veterans, of which 870 are life members.

Serving as a hub for the island’s veterans population, the Post offers one of the largest canteens in the area, a full-time restaurant and bar, as well as weekly events, such as bingo and poker nights. But it is the Post’s 5-acre campgrounds that brings in the most amount of veterans each year, a luxury only one other VFW Post in the state shares.

For Post 7392 Commander Julie Doran, it was the Post’s campgrounds that initially drew her into the embrace of the VFW family on the island seven years ago, when her family was forced out by their landlord after a decade of renting from them.

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

“As a mother of four, we were on the verge of being homeless,” said Doran, a Navy veteran who joined VFW in 2005 at Post 1473 in Spirit Lake, Idaho. “We owned a large trailer, so I asked around, and a veteran from Post 7392 told me about the campgrounds.”

Doran, who still lives on the campgrounds with her family, which includes her husband, a Navy veteran and Auxiliary member himself, has since become camp host, helping veterans like herself find a place to stay as they transition from the military or navigate hardships.

“It is my way to pay it forward,” said Doran, who alongside her husband, also serves as caretaker of the campgrounds, which includes a veterans memorial garden, showers and a V-dome picnic area.

“When I first got to Post 7392, I realized how active and amazing these people were. I had not seen what a real VFW Post was until I came over to this Post. I used to think it was just a hangout for older veterans. But they opened my eyes, and I saw all the work they were doing in the community.”

‘ENGAGING’ THE COMMUNITY

A fixture in and around Whidbey Island, Post 7392 members remain active in the community by conducting service projects that include monthly Adopt-a-Road cleanups, as well as involvement with local schools and their JROTC programs. They also host Memorial and Veterans Day ceremonies, and participate in all annual parades in the island, oftentimes fostering relationships with local businesses and organizations by setting up booths at local events to better help engage with the public.

Past Post 7392 Commander and retired Navy veteran Bill Thiel, an NJROTC high school instructor since 2000, believes being active in and around the community dispels the notion that a VFW Post is just about old veterans sitting around doing nothing.

“Engaging in the community enhances getting people involved with our Post, and that is why we also invite non-members to the Post for lunch, dinner or some of the other activities we host every week,” said Thiel, a 2024 VFW Department of Washington Teacher of the Year recipient at Oak Park High School on Whidbey Island.

“Being well-known in the community, not just at the school or other businesses we deal with, also allows our retired military who work on base at NAS Whidbey Island to find a place for great camaraderie and one they can call their own.”

**WASHINGTON
POSTS MAKING
COMMUNITIES BETTER**

The state of Washington has 100 VFW Posts, many of which make a difference in the communities in which the Posts are located. Below is just a sampling of those Posts.

VFW Post 969
3510 McKinley Ave.
Tacoma, WA 98404
(253) 272-1405
Commander Gary Nisker

VFW Post 2100
2711 Oakes Ave.
Everett, WA 98201
(425) 252-2100
Commander David Eckroth

VFW Post 8870
66 Hall 117 Sixth Ave. S.
Edmonds, WA 98020
(425) 245-8545
Commander Duane Bowman

VFW Post 1585
625 N. State St.
Bellingham, WA 98225
(360) 734-5520
Commander Jesse Atkins

VFW Post 7511
125 E. Main St. #101
Monroe, WA 98272
(425) 922-4222
Commander Brendan McClurg

This very exposure, and the ripples it stirs among younger veterans around the island

considering joining the VFW, is what allows Post 7392 to continue to build and grow its veterans community, according to Post Sr. Vice Commander Bob Mador.

“By being active in the community, we are visible to the veterans that might need our help, in one way or another,” Mador said. “Our exposure will help get our programs, such as service officer support, hospital support and veteran relief support, the recognition that will help veterans know where to go.”

MOTORCYCLES AND GUITARS

Post 7392 also offers engaging, unique ways for its membership to connect and build camaraderie, having both an active chapter of the VFW Riders, as well as a new chapter of the nationally renowned Guitars for Vets.

Since its recent inception in April 2022, the Guitars for Vets chapter at Post 7392, one of more than 110 chapters across the country, has welcomed several veterans who have turned to music as a means to cope with their PTSD while learning to play music. The program gives participating veterans a guitar to practice for a minimum of 10 lessons, before gifting them a brand new guitar and accessories once the lessons are completed.

Alongside the VFW Riders group, which promotes the public visibility of the VFW, its programs, and the VFW National Home in Eaton Rapids, Michigan, through community service and participation in veterans service events, these groups afford members of Post 7392 unique ways to stay active and serve their community. They also cater to the diverse needs of the Post’s members, according to Post Adjutant Everett Wardlaw.

“No two veterans have had the same experiences, nor do they have the same outlets,” Warsaw said. “Having multiple alternative programs provides many opportunities for veterans to support one another and build camaraderie. There are many ways one can lose their thoughts. Guitars for Vets provides a musical forum, and the Riders go out and ride. It is connecting veterans to veterans for peer support, and that is the goal.”

For more information, be sure to follow VFW Post 7392 on Facebook at [VFW Post 7392 Oak Harbor, Washington](#). And if you find yourself in Whidbey Island, stop in at Post 7392 located at 3037 Goldie Rd.

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