

'Sam Was Very Impactful'

A Post in Wisconsin annually hosts a 10K run in memory of a former Post commander, with proceeds funding a scholarship in his honor

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When you read about the life of Sam Hennessee, former commander of VFW Post 10452 in Princeton, Wisconsin, he sounds like the kind of man you'd want on your side.

He was active in his church and provided frequent buddy checks on older vets. The Vietnam War vet also would read to incarcerated persons at an area prison.

For fellow Post member Alecia Gende, Hennessee was a welcoming soul when she returned from Iraq and joined the VFW.

"Sam was very impactful to me," said Gende, a former Navy nurse. "He said, 'This is your Post, and I want you to feel comfortable.' As one of only a few females and few vets under 50, he made me feel so at home."

Gende recalled Hennessee taking her along on a visit to a WWII vet. When they arrived, they discovered the vet had accidentally cut his finger and was having problems getting it bandaged. To the vet's surprise, Hennessee was at his door with a combat nurse in tow.

"That's just the kind of guy Sam was," Gende said. "Always looking after others."

In his later years, Hennessee began experiencing extreme head pain. He discovered he had brain cancer in 2010 and died six months later.

'A KIND AND GIVING MAN'

Gende said there was a hole in the community Hennessee left behind.

"He was taken from us too abruptly," Gende said. "I decided we needed to do something to keep the spirit of Sam alive."

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That decision led to the Run for Sam 10K and 1-mile walk, an event that just had its 11th annual run/walk. Proceeds from the run benefit the VFW Post 10452 Sam Hennessee Scholarship.

The scholarship is awarded annually to residents of the Wisconsin counties of Green Lake, Marquette and Waushara pursuing an education in health care. Gende said that applicants must be admitted into their respective programs and earn credits toward their degree, as well as meet a host of other requirements.

“Whether it’s the day you were born or the day you die, we are all impacted by someone in health care,” said Gende, who used the Post-9/11 GI Bill to earn her medical degree. “Since Sam had such a big influence on so many, that’s why we decided to do this.”

The scholarship has been awarded to 11 students. Each scholarship is at least \$1,000.

Gende said the first year of the race, a nearby Army Reserve unit participated as part of its drill. There were 130 runners. Since then, there are usually about 100 participants in this town of 1,200.

“I’m a runner myself, so I set it up as something I would find fun,” she said. “We have a lot of repeat runners, and many are veterans.”

The run, held each July, is a community effort, Gende said. Businesses donate coupons or offer up volunteers to help. The Princeton Fire Department sets up a water arch and also does the 1-mile walk in full gear.

The local police and EMS personnel also are on hand for the event.

Participants get “Made in the USA” race shirts, which are printed in Wisconsin. Local bratwursts are served along with free tap beer for those 21 and over.

Gende, who served in Iraq in 2006 with Charlie Surgical Company, 1st Medical Logistics Group, said she and her dad are co-directors of the race, and her brother, a Marine and VFW member, also is actively involved.

“Sam would do anything for anyone,” Gende said. “He was a kind and giving man. So it feels great doing this.”

This article is featured in the 2022 January issue of [VFW magazine](#), and was written by [Janie Dyhouse](#), senior editor of VFW magazine.