

‘We All Had This Desire to Come Together’

Members at a VFW Post in New York created an event to celebrate and help women veterans find resources

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The second annual *Remembering Women Veterans* event at VFW Post 1790 in Valley Stream, New York, celebrated more than 30 attendees for their military service on May 15.

Founded by VFW Life members Sheila Irby and Sharran Chambers-Murphy in 2023, the event was created as a safe space for women veterans to share their stories. It also offered help from VFW and other organizations that provide services to navigate civilian life.

“We simply wanted to ensure all women veterans who attended would have an opportunity to build camaraderie and have the necessary resources upon their completion of their military service,” said Irby, who served in the Air Force from 2001-2014, deploying to both Kuwait and Iraq. “This consisted of help with jobs, housing, benefits and any kind of medical assistance they could possibly need, including mental health.”

Irby and Chambers-Murphy introduced attendees to VFW veterans service officers for help in filing VA benefits, as well as mental health providers from the Northport VA Medical Center in New York. They also offered legal consultation from a local estate attorney and had representatives from the Long Island National Cemetery provide burial information for veterans. Other local representatives present included members from Hofstra University’s Veterans Legal Assistance Project and the Katz Institute for Women’s Health.

Irby said she was compelled to offer these resources based on her own transitional experience following her time in the military, which served as a focal point when planning with Chambers-Murphy. Irby said the two women shared similar views on the limited services available to female veterans.

“Being a woman veteran, and from attending VA hospital appointments, one of the things I

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noticed missing were more resources for women veterans,” Irby said. “I myself remember attending a workshop at the VA and being the only woman in the group. From that was born our desire to help fellow women veterans find the resources they need.”

After its inaugural *Remembering Women Veterans* event last year, which welcomed 15 veterans and a special appearance by Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.), this year’s event saw those numbers grow by more than half.

Irby and Chambers-Murphy once again created a safe space for those in attendance to share their stories, creating a circle of metal chairs and passing around a microphone, as if around a campfire.

This year’s event had eight speakers from different military services. They each navigated their personal histories laden with stress, anxiety and trauma during their military service.

“The atmosphere was great,” Irby said. “We all had this desire to come together and share our military stories with one another, and everyone could basically relate to one or more of the stories that were being told. There was a real camaraderie, like the kind you have when you serve alongside like-minded individuals.”

Expected to be held every May around Mother’s Day, Irby said the upcoming Remembering Women Veterans event in May 2025 will add another element.

“Along with continuous new resources and opportunities to share their stories,” Irby said, “we will be adding a fashion show, where we dress up the veterans to allow them to once again bask in the beauty of being a woman veteran.”

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