VFW Announces Top Teachers in National Contest

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

Mar 25, 2024

KANSAS CITY, Mo. – The Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) is proud to announce the selection of the national top three teachers in its annual 2024 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 from the elementary (K-5), middle (6-8) and high school (9-12) levels to receive a $1,000 award for professional development, and $1,000 for their school.

Eugene V. Struzik III, an Air Force veteran and fifth grade teacher at Northwest Elementary School in Dodge City, Kansas, was named the elementary school winner for his passion and work to instill a sense of appreciation and patriotism amongst his students and community. From coordinating a Veterans Day commemoration to his work establishing Project Mail Call: Honoring Our Veterans which allowed his students the opportunity to write several cards to veterans embarking on a Kansas Honor Flight. Struzik was sponsored by Howard Gotschall VFW Post 1714 in Dodge City.

Selected to represent the middle school level, Monica Galloway, an Army veteran and sixth grade math teacher at Dwight D. Eisenhower Middle School in Laurel, Maryland, was chosen for her dedication to increasing participation in her county's Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps (JROTC) and her implementation of "Immigrant Experiences," and instructional program to help promote diversity and build stronger, culturally responsive

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and supportive classrooms. Galloway was sponsored by J. Paul Duke Jr. Memorial VFW Post 9376 in Clinton, Maryland.

Selected to represent the high school level, Edward M. Graf, an Army veteran and high school social studies teacher at Somerset County Vocational & Technical High School in Bridgewater, New Jersey, was chosen for the continued passion and energy he brings to his classroom, and for his dedication to honoring America's service members, veterans and Gold Star families through multiple student-led events and his establishment of "Proud to be an American Day" which honors the service and ultimate sacrifice paid by our nation's armed forces. Graf was sponsored by Bernardsville Memorial VFW Post 7858 in Bernardsville, New Jersey.

"Teachers play a vital role in shaping the world leaders of tomorrow, and veteran teachers like Eugene, Monica and Edward aren't just encouraging strong leaders, they're nurturing civically minded, passionate Americans who will fight for justice and a strong nation," said VFW National Commander Duane Sarmiento. "The VFW is honored to recognize these teachers, and those like them across our nation who help promote the importance of patriotism and civic responsibility."

Each of the three national recipients will be presented with a $1,000 award for professional development and $1,000 for their school during the 125th VFW National Convention in Louisville, Kentucky, July 27-Aug. 1, 2024.

Find out more information on the Smart/Maher VFW National Citizenship Education Teacher Award.