

# ‘Cornhole Brings That Passion Together for a Great Cause’

## VFW debuted its first-ever VFW Cornhole Tournament Series at the 124th National Convention in Phoenix, welcoming hundreds of participants

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Hordes of VFW members flocked to an open area filled with wooden cornhole boards and grain-filled bags during the 124th VFW National Convention in July in Phoenix.

From veteran fathers and sons to veteran mothers and daughters or simply comrades gathering for the first time in months or years, the VFW Cornhole Tournament Series proved a success at its convention debut.

Spearheaded by VFW Director of Programs Lynn Rolf, the tournament blended the proper amount of competitive spirit and advocacy as it helped raise more than \$32,000 for VFW’s National Veterans Service.

“This is first and foremost to help continue to educate our VFW members, Auxiliary and our public on the success of our efforts on the PACT Act legislation,” Rolf said of the new law that expands VA health care and benefits for veterans exposed to burn pits and other toxic substances. “But it is also to show our gratitude to our VFW service officers and give them some more funding to do more outreach.”

The tournament, which ran from July 22-24, operated between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. each day in the food court area, welcoming a slew of veterans and Auxiliary members from around the world.

Among the many veterans who participated on opening day were VFW Post 12209 Commander Willie Keller Jr. and his partner, VFW National Legislative Committee and VFW Post 2681 member Sherrod Conyers, who jumped at the opportunity to support the cause.

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“It lives up to the VFW motto,” said Keller, from Fort Hood, Texas. “The funds go toward and promote the PACT Act, helping spread the gospel and make veterans aware of their benefits.”

Conyers added that the new legislation also has “helped open windows” for Vietnam veterans to file claims. “It was a no-brainer — I mean, you know how it has helped change lives,” he said.

The friends and comrades, both combat veterans of the War on Terrorism, added that this cornhole tournament was long overdue, a testament to the evolution of VFW membership numbers and the times.

“We should’ve been doing this because this isn’t your grandfather’s VFW,” Keller said. “This promotes our convention to younger veterans and inspires fitness among the older ones.”

Conyers said it is a very popular game with appeal.

“We see it on ESPN all the time,” he added. “We’re young veterans and great friends, and this is the kind of event that showcases to potential members that this organization has a lot of us. It’s a great promotional tool for veterans with families looking to have a good, healthy time.”

### **‘THIS IS JUST THE START’**

To help him run the tournament, Rolf sought out and partnered with the largest adult sports league in Kansas City, Missouri, the veteran-owned KC Crew, to make the vision a reality.

“The founder-owner is a VFW member, so who better to help us put on a world-class tournament at convention than Luke and his team,” Rolf said of Luke Wade, a member of VFW Post 7397 in Lenexa, Kansas, about 15 miles south of Kansas City.

The three-day series presented a different tournament that guaranteed players four games followed by a single-elimination playoff, as well as different themes to include each military faction per day. Teams on the first two days had to include at least one veteran, whereas the final day only catered to veterans and Auxiliary members. Registration was \$100 per team.

In continuing to help celebrate veterans and raise awareness and funds to support VFW service officers around the world, Rolf hopes this cornhole tournament series will be the first of many new additions to the VFW National Convention for years to come.

“This is just the start to our plan,” Rolf said. “We know VFW Posts and Departments do their own cornhole events, so we envision in the coming years to host a championship, where Posts and Departments could send their best teams.”

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