

VFW Awards 2022 VFW Youth Essay Winners

The Department level *Voice of Democracy* and *Patriot's Pen* award recipients earned \$211,000 in scholarships and prizes for their winning essays in 2022.

All 53 *VOD* winners and the national *Patriot's Pen* winner received recognition for their works during a virtual Parade of Winners in April.

BY JANIE DYHOUSE



VFW Commander-in-Chief Matthew M. "Fritz" Mihelcic and VFW Auxiliary President Jean Hamil present Daniela Mare with the first-place *Voice of Democracy* award on April 7 during the *VOD* Parade of Winners live on Facebook. A high school junior, Mare won the T.C. Selman Memorial Scholarship, a top prize of \$30,000. She represented the Department of New York on behalf of VFW Post 9486 and its Auxiliary in Lake Ronkonkoma, N.Y.



Patriot's Pen winner Syed Ali, an eighth-grader at L.J. Alleman Middle School in Lafayette, La., was awarded the *North End Post 144, Paul A. Spera Past Commander-in-Chief Award*, a top prize of \$5,000. Ali represented the Department of Louisiana on behalf of Post 1982 in New Iberia, La.

PHOTO COURTESY OF SYED ALI

Through its premiere scholarship program, *Voice of Democracy*, VFW presented Daniela Mare with its first-place \$30,000 T.C. Selman Memorial Scholarship during a virtual ceremony on April 7.

Sponsored by VFW Post 9486 and its Auxiliary in Lake Ronkonkoma, N.Y., Mare's winning essay on "America: Where Do We Go From Here?" compared America to a paint pallet.

"Each unique color represents the individuality of every U.S. citizen and every color has an equal opportunity to change the painting in its own distinct way," she wrote.

A junior at Sachem High School North in Lake Ronkonkoma, Mare wrote that America — "a nation so divided on perceptions of right and wrong" — must embrace the notion of unity to move forward.

"In order to thrive, 'to go from here,' we must unify," she concluded. "So where do we go from here? The answer is simple. We must pick up our paint pallets and begin painting our unified picture."

The *Voice of Democracy* audio-essay competition drew nearly 25,000 students for the 2021-2022 year. The contest received support from VFW partner Twisted X, which donated \$130,000.

\$55,000 AWARDED IN PATRIOT'S PEN CONTEST

Syed Ali earned top honors in VFW's 2021-2022 *Patriot's Pen* youth essay contest. His essay on the theme, "How Can I Be a Good American?" earned Ali the \$5,000 *North End Post 144, Paul A. Spera Past Commander-in-Chief Award*.

An eighth-grade student at L.J. Alleman Middle School in Lafayette, La., Ali was one of nearly 69,000 students in grades six through eight to compete in the contest. He was sponsored by VFW Post 1982 and its Auxiliary in New Iberia, La.

The first-place recipients from each Department in the *Patriot's Pen* contest shared the \$55,000 in awards, distributed accordingly to each based on placement.

To learn more about the *Voice of Democracy* and *Patriot's Pen* youth programs, visit www.vfw.org.

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2022 Voice of Democracy Winners

| WINNER | SPONSOR POST | LOCATION | AWARD AMOUNT | NATIONAL SCHOLARSHIP |
|---------------------------|--------------|---------------------|-----------------|--|
| Daniela Mare | 9486 | Lake Ronkonkoma, NY | \$30,000 | T.C. Selman Memorial Scholarship |
| Kinley Bollinger | 2673 | Cody, WY | \$16,000 | Charles Kuralt Memorial Scholarship |
| Crissa Esse | 9283 | Southgate, MI | \$10,000 | VFW Scholarship |
| Ashley Homme | 1215 | Rochester, MN | \$7,000 | LeRoy Moorhead Memorial Scholarship |
| Leo Goldberg | 131 | Lincoln, NE | \$5,000 | Floyd County VFW Post 3281, New Albany Indiana Scholarship |
| Laurel Adams | 8584 | Cashton, WI | \$5,000 | Rehoboth Beach Post 7447 and Auxiliary Dept. of Delaware Scholarship |
| Phebe Ramsdell | 8307 | Layton, UT | \$4,000 | Department of Indiana and Auxiliary Scholarship & Department of New Jersey Howard E. Vander Clute Scholarship (combined) |
| Colin Campbell | 8205 | Parker, FL | \$4,000 | Department of Minnesota William F. Halsey Memorial |
| Daksha Pillai | 680 | Lexington, KY | \$3,500 | Department of New York and Auxiliary, Rev. Albert G. Salmon Memorial Scholarship |
| Vaibhavi Mahajan | 6809 | Madison, MS | \$3,500 | Class 122 VOD and Department of Illinois and Auxiliary Scholarship (Combined) |
| Natalie Sissac | 3579 | Niles, IL | \$3,000 | Joseph and Irene Hansen Memorial Scholarship (MD) |
| Chance Bonfanti | 1524 | Salem, MA | \$2,500 | Daniel Sean Wallace Memorial Scholarships (NJ) |
| Katherine Rosinski | 12164 | Roswell, GA | \$2,500 | Troy and Sandy Rothbart Memorial Scholarship (NY) |
| Alex Carpenter | 4862 | Union City, TN | \$2,000 | Jesse A. Lewis Memorial Scholarship (CA) |
| Elijah Johnson | 1405 | Spencer, IN | \$2,000 | Silver Spring Memorial Post 2562 Scholarship (MD) |
| Emalyn Osborne | 7330 | Oakville, CT | \$2,000 | Department of Arizona and Auxiliary Harry A. Kosht Memorial Scholarship |
| Veronika Sokol | 799 | Keene, NH | \$2,000 | Department of California and Auxiliary Scholarship |
| Natalie Keller | 379 | Yakima, WA | \$2,000 | Department of Illinois VFW – Ray Soden/George Cramer Scholarship |
| Mason Thomas | 12140 | Lake Oswego, OR | \$2,000 | Department of Wisconsin Wally Hogan/Tom Tradewell Commanders-in-Chief Scholarship |
| Sydney Christner | 8896 | East Berlin, PA | \$2,000 | Department of Kentucky and Auxiliary Brian Duffy and Marion Watson Scholarship |
| Mary Copeland | 6561 | Saluda, SC | \$2,000 | Francis J. Tallman Memorial Scholarship & Robert A. Stock Memorial Scholarship (NY) (combined) |
| Rebecca Joseph | 8063 | Lafayette, CA | \$2,000 | Walter and Doris Marshall Memorial Scholarship (MT) & Southern Conference Scholarship (combined) |
| Abigail Marster | 27 | Wiesbaden, Germany | \$2,000 | Mr. and Mrs. James H. Black Scholarship (NC) & Jane Young Memorial Scholarship (OH) (combined) |
| Alexis Jacqueline Reducto | 2906 | Pompton Lakes, NJ | \$2,000 | Department of Alabama Scholarship & Department of Georgia James H. "Sloppy" Floyd Memorial Scholarship (combined) |
| Elise Perry | 8466 | Wake Forest, NC | \$2,000 | Department of Georgia R.D. "Bulldog" Smith, Jr. Scholarship & Department of Ohio Chester J. Koch Memorial Scholarship (combined) |
| Elizabeth Cunningham | 782 | Burlington, VT | \$2,000 | Department of Connecticut and Auxiliary Scholarship & Stephen and Elsie Riordan Memorial Scholarship (NJ) (combined) |
| Madison Tryon | 160 | Glen Burnie, MD | \$2,000 | Larry W. Rivers Scholarship (LA) & Department of Illinois Scott Post 4183 Scholarship (combined) |
| Sydney Steadman | 10046 | Soldotna, AK | \$2,000 | All American Post 284 Scholarship (D.C.) & Bernard J. Michels, Post 9610 and Auxiliary Scholarship (combined) |
| Brandon Uzl | 3345 | Strongsville, OH | \$2,000 | Juanita Crowe-Durbino, Department of Tennessee Scholarship & Ervin and Lorraine Rothenbuhler Scholarship (MD) (combined) |
| Anjali Ghafoerkhan | 1503 | Dale City, VA | \$2,000 | Fridley VFW Post 363 and Auxiliary Scholarship (MN) & Department of Michigan and Auxiliary Scholarship (combined) |
| AdyLynn Anderson | 1193 | Lawton, OK | \$1,500 | Department of New Hampshire Scholarship |
| Felicity Roberts | 10454 | Grapevine, TX | \$1,500 | Department of Missouri and Auxiliary Scholarship |
| Galey McKelvain | 3568 | Bay Minette, AL | \$1,500 | Department of New Mexico and Auxiliary Scholarship |
| Kathryn Doom | 7319 | Armour, SD | \$1,500 | Department of Massachusetts Edward A. Nardi Scholarship |
| Zachary Gardner | 2952 | Springdale, AR | \$1,500 | Department of Colorado and Auxiliary Scholarship |
| Mattea Traum | 4331 | Arvada, CO | \$1,500 | Department of Arkansas and Auxiliary Les Thone Memorial Scholarship |
| Emma Kratcha | 9317 | Mantador, ND | \$1,000 | Department of Wyoming and Auxiliary Scholarship |
| Jaylee Ball | 8893 | Terreton, ID | \$1,000 | Roy Chandler VFW Post 762 and Auxiliary Scholarship (ND) |
| Gowri Biju | 8053 | Sun Lakes, AZ | \$1,000 | Arthur W. Jones VFW Post 7564 and Auxiliary Scholarship (ND) |
| Megan Chevalier | 237 | Bristol, RI | \$1,000 | Department of Pennsylvania Joseph L. Vicites Memorial Scholarship |
| Vaishnavi Kumbala | 3750 | Luling, LA | \$1,000 | Department of Maine Scholarship "to Remember the U.S.S. Maine" |
| Cole Taylor | 3107 | Glasgow, MT | \$1,000 | Gilbert N. Nelson - Post 1326 and their Auxiliary - Bismarck, North Dakota Scholarship |
| Madelein Saed | 9389 | Caribou, ME | \$1,000 | Department of Kansas and Auxiliary Robert R. Whipple Memorial Scholarship |
| Korah Lewis | 4484 | Quinwood, WV | \$1,000 | Department of Nevada and Auxiliary Scholarship |
| Samantha Shih | 9957 | Taipei, Taiwan | \$1,000 | Department of Florida John M. "Jack" Carney Scholarship |
| Jorja Harrison | 9638 | Wheatland, MO | \$1,000 | Department of Hawaii and Auxiliary Scholarship |
| Meghna Pramoda | 12064 | Ponce, PR | \$1,000 | Department of Idaho and Auxiliary Scholarship |
| Samuel Winston | 7478 | Greenwood, DE | \$1,000 | Department of Mississippi VFW and Auxiliary Bernard McClelland Memorial Scholarship |
| Aaron Liwanag | 110 | Honolulu, HI | \$1,000 | Ray Sisk Memorial Scholarship (CA) |
| Zoe Miklich | 8660 | Dayton, NV | \$1,000 | Department of Tennessee Cooper T. Holt - John Furgess Scholarship |
| Sandra Adams | 7928 | Lincoln, KS | \$1,000 | Department of Mississippi Toxie K. Stapleton Post 6473 Luther J. Cox Memorial Scholarship |
| Hanna Knoll | 5515 | Garner, IA | \$1,000 | Commander-in-Chief Richard L. Eubank and 2010-2011 Department Commanders Scholarship (CA) |
| Antwone Elliott | 2387 | Belen, NM | \$1,000 | Mr. and Mrs. John Biedrzycki and the 2015 Homecoming Committee Scholarship (PA) |

2022 Patriot's Pen Winners

| WINNER | SPONSOR POST | LOCATION | AWARD AMOUNT | NATIONAL SCHOLARSHIP |
|------------------------|--------------|-------------------------|--------------|---|
| Syed Ali | 1982 | New Iberia, LA | \$5,000 | North End Post 144, Paul A. Spera Past Commander-in-Chief Award |
| Josephine Althoff | 5331 | Cedar Hill, MO | \$4,000 | VFW Award |
| Eva Kolomyski | 9024 | Woodbury, MN | \$3,500 | VFW Award |
| Annalise May | 6054 | Aberdeen, MD | \$2,750 | Alaine Benson Memorial Award |
| Samantha Sandivik | 2898 | Toledo, OH | \$2,500 | Rehoboth Beach Post 7447 and Auxiliary (Dept. of Delaware) Award |
| Anna Bardeau | 7945 | Denver, CO | \$2,000 | Clyde A. Lewis Department of New York and Auxiliary Award |
| Millie Boock-Bittner | 4655 | Casselton, ND | \$1,750 | Dept. of New Hampshire George J. Maxfield Post 1772 and Auxiliary John A. Knapper Memorial Award |
| Aubree Bronkema | 9455 | Owosso, MI | \$1,500 | John F. Gwizdak Award |
| Evie Gray | 6904 | Fortville, IN | \$1,500 | VFW and James R. and Pat Mueller Award |
| Matthew Gradwell | 5990 | Marawa, AZ | \$1,500 | VFW Award |
| Ava Bedard | 1418 | Champlain, NY | \$1,250 | VFW Award |
| Regina Stoesser | 3164 | Canton, SD | \$1,250 | Grace Minnix Memorial Award |
| Isabella Kocak | 9437 | Washington, ME | \$1,000 | Golden Valley VFW Post 7051 (Golden Valley, Minnesota) Award |
| Cristina Robinson | 1002 | Fallon, NV | \$1,000 | Louis W. Oppenheim VFW Post #1019 Award |
| Nissi Wadieh | 475 | Newark, DE | \$1,000 | Veterans of Foreign Wars, Department of Colorado Award |
| Karlie Barnes | 12176 | Whitney, TX | \$1,000 | John V. Daniel's Jr. Post 2813 and Auxiliary (Dept. of New York) Award & John E. (Jack) Bales Post 10581 (Dept. of Colorado) Award (combined) |
| Lizzie Mills | 379 | Yakima, WA | \$1,000 | Silver Spring Memorial Post 2562 (Dept. of Maryland) Award & Department of Utah Award (combined) |
| Ryker Shankles | 3128 | Fort Payne, AL | \$1,000 | Department of Michigan Award & Warren A. Tressler Memorial (Dept. of Minnesota) Award (combined) |
| Roy Jones | 922 | Pendleton, OR | \$1,000 | Department of Nevada Award & Chaplain Lyman Rollins Post 2005, Marblehead, Massachusetts Award (combined) |
| Jayma Schnoor | 3115 | Wichita, KS | \$1,000 | Charlie H. Adamson, Jr. Memorial Award & Joseph A. Scerra Memorial (Dept. of Massachusetts) Award (combined) |
| Ella McFillin | 3258 | Chalfont, PA | \$1,000 | James L. Keeley Award & Department of Ohio Award (combined) |
| Alli Smith | 1893 | Winchester, TN | \$1,000 | Department of South Dakota VFW and Auxiliary Award & Department of Idaho and Auxiliary Award (combined) |
| Samantha Wiebelhaus | 7221 | Mukwonago, WI | \$1,000 | Department of Georgia and Auxiliary Award |
| Blythe Dudley | 7858 | Bernardsville, NJ | \$750 | Department of Kansas VFW and Auxiliary Award and Department of Iowa Award (combined) |
| Parker Tade | 2791 | Tinley Park, IL | \$750 | VFW Department of Washington and Auxiliary Eric G. Sandstrom Memorial Award |
| Jackson Mann | 3205 | Alexandria, KY | \$500 | Glenn D. Raney Memorial (Louisiana) Award |
| Benjamin Dirks | 10614 | Kaiserslautern, Germany | \$500 | Mary Margaret Romano Memorial (Dept. of Connecticut) Award |
| Anna Pope | 1631 | Concord, NH | \$500 | VFW Southern Conference Award |
| Harrison Fallon | 152 | North Kingstown, RI | \$500 | Edward S. Banas, Sr. Award |
| Quincey Poe | 9439 | Casper, WY | \$500 | Deering Memorial Post 6859, Portland Maine Award |
| James Bowen | 12136 | Indian Land, SC | \$500 | Department of Tennessee John Furgess Award |
| Cade Nail | 4976 | Fulton, MS | \$500 | Department of Missouri VFW and Auxiliary Award |
| Noah Avery | 2216 | Staunton, VA | \$500 | The Robin V. Fell Memorial Award |
| Emma Cotnoir | 8349 | Methuen, MA | \$500 | Deering Memorial Post 6859, Auxiliary Portland Maine Award |
| Sawyer Stelzig | 12074 | Chiang Mai, Thailand | \$500. | Department of South Carolina and Auxiliary Award |
| Reagan Engelauf | 10178 | Englewood, FL | \$500 | Sanford-Springvale Memorial VFW Post 9935 Award |
| Rayna Cabuslay | 1572 | Aiea, HI | \$500 | Department of California Award |
| Brindle Beckner | 10300 | Potlatch, ID | \$500 | Department of Arkansas, "Dewayne Fletcher Memorial" Award |
| Brooke Johnson | 759 | Kearney, NE | \$500 | Frederick H. Smalley Department of New Mexico Award |
| Luke Baker | 5408 | Acworth, GA | \$500 | VFW Department of Pacific Areas Award |
| Wali Omer | 9959 | Mt. Olive, NC | \$500 | VFW Department of New Jersey Award |
| Nataniah Lewis | 4326 | Midway, WV | \$500 | Veterans of Foreign Wars of Ohio Charities Award |
| Raley McBroom | 9515 | Portales, NM | \$500 | Department of Wyoming and Auxiliary Award |
| Connor Machado | 9499 | Springville, CA | \$500 | The Veterans of Foreign Wars, Department of Mississippi and Auxiliary Award |
| Siona Pramoda | 12046 | Ponce, PR | \$500 | Department of Connecticut and Auxiliary Award |
| Tristan Savant | 8876 | Montezuma, IA | \$500 | Commander-in-Chief John Biedrzycki and 2015-2016 Department Commanders Award |
| Akon Atem | 7442 | West Valley City, UT | \$500 | National President Francisca Guilford and 2015-2016 Auxiliaries Award |
| Gabrielle Elmore-Brown | 1034 | Brattleboro, VT | \$500 | Department of New Mexico and Auxiliary Award |
| Ezekiel Leonard | 2283 | Russellville, AR | \$500 | Department of Nevada Award |
| Natalie Hinsberger | 10221 | Anchor Point, AK | \$500 | Department of Pennsylvania 2015-16 "LDRSHIP" Award |
| Jaesun Yirsa | 4047 | Ft. Benton, MT | \$500 | Peter J. Mascetti Jr. & Department of Europe Award |
| Andrea Robles | 4574 | Ardmore, OK | \$500 | VFW and Auxiliary members of Southern Charles County Memorial Post 10081, Dept. of Maryland Award |
| Nicola Gugliotti | 5157 | Watertown, CT | \$500 | Gilbert N. Nelson Post 1326 and their Auxiliary, Bismarck, ND Award |