

Chicopee woman honored by veterans

By SANDRA DIAS

CHICOPEE – Patricia Paul, the past president of the Massachusetts Ladies Auxiliary of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, was recently selected as one of 11 outstanding department – or state – presidents during the organization's national convention.

“Mrs. Paul was deemed the best president in her membership group, which includes the states of Massachusetts, Arkansas, Louisiana, Georgia

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Patricia Paul

and Oregon,” said Cara Day, director of communications and publications for the Ladies Auxiliary of the VFW.

The auxiliary is composed of women who are close relatives of military veterans who

have served overseas and can be mothers, wives, daughters, sisters or granddaughters of a veteran who served in World War II, Vietnam or the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In determining the award

winners, national president Cortina Barnes looked for leadership skills, an ability to inspire members, skill in raising money for various causes (including cancer research) and service to military families within their state, according to Day.

Paul, whose term as state president recently ended, said she was honored to receive the top award.

“I was very surprised,” she

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Patricia Paul

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said. "It's a very nice award."

Paul first joined the Ladies Auxiliary of the VFW in 1994 as the daughter of Harry Sicotte, a World War II Army veteran. Her husband, Thomas Paul, also is a veteran and the couple's son recently served in Iraq.

"This is near and dear to my heart," she said. "The VFW does a lot of good for active-

duty and past military families and others. We are not just a bar down the street, but an organization that does a lot of great things for a lot of people."

Paul said in her role as president of the Massachusetts auxiliary, she visited hospitals for veterans across the state and worked to promote various programs run by the VFW, including a competition for high-school students who

create an audio essay about democracy; a youth essay contest on patriotism; a statewide fund-raising initiative to raise money for cancer research and other activities.

She also helped raise money for the unmet needs of military veterans across the state and helped organize a program to send care packages to servicemen and women overseas.

On a local level, the VFW

holds bingo nights for residents of the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke, raises money to buy cemetery wreath stands for veterans and holds "welcome back" parties for soldiers returning from war.

"We raise money through different programs to help vets in any way that we can," Paul said. "We help take care of families of active-duty soldiers while they are out serving. We do whatever we can to help."

Nationally, the Ladies Auxiliary of the VFW has raised \$2.4 million for cancer aid and research, has volunteered 1.2 million hours in the nation's hospitals and has donated \$292,501 to VFW National Military Services, which includes a program to pay for long-distance phone calls for deployed soldiers and hospitalized veterans. The organization has 520,000 members across the country, according to Day.