

# TWIN MISSIONS

## Sisters Support Veterans Together

Yes, you are seeing double. Double the commitment to serving veterans and soldiers, their families and communities.

Lupita M. Perez and Juanita M. Collins are sisters – twin sisters – and they share a passion for supporting men and women who served our country. Perez is the first-ever female Commander at VFW Post 7473. She is also a member of VFW Auxiliary 7473, where her sister is President.

“Juanita knows me well,” Perez said, “and she understands the unique needs of veterans – especially those who have gone to war. We can support each other (with the Post and Auxiliary) and are able to get the job done.”

Perez served more than 14 years in the U.S. Army, joining the military right out of high school. She took a 12-year break to raise her children, then became a reservist after 9/11 compelled her to return to service. She was activated and sent to Kuwait and



then Iraq. Now Perez is back home in Elsa, Texas, working closely with her sister and Auxiliary.

For them, teaming up to improve the lives of veterans is a unique partnership.

“The bond between a sister or brother is strong and even more so for us being twins,” Collins said. “We truly have that special connection.

We complement each other. Our mutual love of country and the fact that we both have sons serving (in the military) at this time make us even more driven and essentially unwavering in our desire to keep our Post and our community involved to better the lives of veterans and their families.”

After a more than 10-year hiatus, Post 7473 has an Auxiliary once again. It was reestablished in March of 2015. Together, the two groups have worked on an important renovation project – their new Post/Auxiliary home, a historic theater donated by the city. Before that, Post 7473 was a nomadic

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**— Juanita M. Collins**



group, meeting wherever people would open their doors to them, usually in restaurants.

The Post and Auxiliary are there for veterans, Elsa residents and surrounding communities.

When they heard about a veteran and his wife who lost everything to a fire, including family pets, they rallied to get the couple settled into another two-bedroom mobile home by raising funds to purchase and furnish it. They also helped clean up the site of the fire.

Post and Auxiliary members volunteer every month at the local food bank, host “Buddy” Poppy drives and are a part of any event in their community that supports patriotism and Americanism, including participating in town parades, recognition of patriotic holidays and more.

At the time this article was written, a 5K Freedom Run in conjunction with the city was in the works.

“We visit veterans in nursing homes and hospitals and have rallies to name new schools after veterans who have given their lives to defend our country,” Perez said. “We adopt families in need during Christmas and distribute turkeys over Thanksgiving. We have a very active Honor Guard, we cover military funerals, serving four counties and further if requested. We also help veterans in need fund medicines not covered through the VA or insurance, and we help pay utilities for those going through a hard time.”

The women and men of Post and Auxiliary 7473 are also active with three different school districts to promote Voice of Democracy and Patriot’s Pen scholarship contests.

“The Auxiliary gives me a connection to my sister at a level I could not have otherwise,” Collins said. “Even though we were born together and shared

almost everything, the military is the only thing we did not have in common. Although my son served and I am very patriotic, I did not have that connection until I joined the Auxiliary. I have met amazing men and women who give unselfishly of themselves, and I have made these friends for life.”

For Perez, the VFW and Auxiliary have been invaluable resources. After returning from serving overseas with service-related injury and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, the Post became a safe haven.

“When I left the military after serving in a war, it was very hard to reconnect,” she said. “I had trouble adjusting to home life and I never talked to anyone about my experiences. To me, it was something my family and friends wouldn’t

understand. I decided to see if (the Post) was a place for me. It was a place where I could talk to others who had gone through similar things. I could feel comfortable. I could get answers and learn how veterans before me dealt with their issues.”

Dedicating herself to the mission of the Post and Auxiliary is what Perez does full-time.

“I enjoy helping other veterans, especially those who are looking for help,” she said. “It makes me feel better about myself – I don’t feel disabled. I can

make a difference! It means the world to me to see where the fruits of our labor get us.” ★ AC



**Opposite page:** Twin sisters Lupita M. Perez (left) and Juanita M. Collins (right) work together to help veterans.

**Above:** Perez helped a mother outside Baghdad, Iraq, by holding her child while she picked up school supplies (provided by the U.S. military) for her older son.