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

“The Auxiliary gives me a connection to my sister at a level I could not have otherwise.”
— 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.”

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.