

By Jan Schultz

The Imperial Republican

A group of local veterans and friends are planning to join a national road rally next week that is celebrating the 110th anniversary of the VFW organization.

P.J. Pajerski, commander of Imperial VFW Post 4688, said the local group will be meeting the road rally in McCook early Tuesday morning, then travel with them as it heads to North Platte for a ceremony there at the 20th Century Veterans Memorial.

The road rally has developed into a national event, and is traveling the entire north/south U.S. length of Highway 83, which is known as Veterans Memorial Highway.

A southern group in the road rally will be leaving Brownville, Texas, on Sept. 26, while another on the north takes off at the Canadian border north of Westhope, ND, on Sept. 27.

The two groups will meet in North Platte Sept. 29, where the celebration will take place starting at 11:30 a.m. CT at the Veterans Memorial, just south of I-80 on Highway 83.

A reception, speakers and lunch will take place at the memorial site.

National VFW Commander-in-Chief Tommy Tradewell of Wisconsin will be among the dignitaries in the road rally.

Tradewell will meet the road rally in Stapleton, Neb., next Tuesday and will reportedly ride a Harley-Davidson motorcycle from there to the ceremonies in North Platte.

He will also be one of the special guests at a 3:30 p.m. CT reception at the VFW Post in North Platte, also on Tuesday, which is open to the public.

The VFW traces its roots back to 1899 when veterans of the Spanish-American War (1898) and the Philippine Insurrection (1899-1902) founded local organizations to secure rights and benefits for their service.

Many of them arrived home wounded or sick. There was no medical care or veterans' pension for them at the time, and they were left to care for themselves.

Some of these veterans banded together and formed organizations that later would become known as the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) of the United States. After chapters were formed in Ohio, Colorado and Pennsylvania, the movement quickly gained momentum. By 1915, membership grew to 5,000; by 1936, membership was almost 200,000.

Today, the VFW with its auxiliaries includes 2.2 million members in approximately 8,100 Posts worldwide.