‘A GENTLEMAN’S GENTLEMAN’

PNC Carey passes away at 82.

By Steve Brooks

Whenever Past National Commander Thomas P. Cadmus needed advice, Jack Carey was there for him. But the greatest piece of advice Carey gave him, Cadmus recalled, was probably the simplest.

“He told me that you never know when the Legion is going to take you,” said Cadmus, who, like Carey, hailed from the Department of Michigan. “He told me just to take it one job at a time and do each one to the best of my ability. I did that, and I became national commander.”

John M. “Jack” Carey, who served as The American Legion’s national commander from 1978 to 1979, passed away Aug. 4 at age 82. A 58-year Legionnaire, Carey was a member of Post 413 in Grand Blanc, Mich., where he served as adjutant for 27 years. He later moved to Florida but continued as a guiding force for other leaders in the organization.

“As I went from county, district, zone and state commander, he was always at our department conventions and always would have time to talk to me,” Cadmus said. “Later, when I was campaigning for national commander, he and (Carey’s wife) Millie went out of their way to help me campaign. He came up from Florida, where he was living at the time, just to help me. He did that throughout my campaign.

“He was a great guy and always willing to listen. He was truly a gentleman’s gentleman. I miss him already.”

Past National Commander John “Jake” Comer, who often visited Carey in Florida, also had fond memories.

“When Jack went to Plant City ( Fla.), he and Millie lived in an over-55 community,” Comer said. “Jack made sure all of the houses always had U.S. Flags in front of them. If someone didn’t have a flag, Jack would order it for them.”

He served as Michigan’s department commander from 1958 to 1959 and as a member of the National Executive Committee from 1965 to 1967. He later was chairman of the National Internal Affairs Commission before being elected as national commander at the 68th National Convention in New Orleans.

During his tenure as national commander, Carey strongly lobbied for pensions for World War I veterans and was a staunch advocate of veterans-preference hiring laws. The constitutionality of the practice came into question during Carey’s tenure, and when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled 7-2 that veterans preference was constitutional, Carey hailed the decision as “a statement of allegiance to the veteran population by a grateful nation.”

“Everyone seems to have a different problem come up when they’re national commander, and that was the one that came up for Jack,” Past National Commander John H. Geiger said. “You never know in advance what that problem is going to be. Jack handled that well.”

Geiger spoke highly of Carey on a personal level. “He represented Michigan very well, and he was always a very strong part of our Midwest Caucus,” he said. “He was always able to do what needed to be done, and he was able to do it well. He was always a good friend and counselor. We will miss him.”

Then-National Commander John W. “Jack” Carey discusses veterans preference and the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 with Alan K. Campbell, chairman of the Civil Service Commission. A staunch supporter of veterans preference, Carey passed away Aug. 4 at age 82.

On the heels of a recent visit to Iraq, Legionnaire Martin Conatser – the national commander’s representative to the National Legislative Commission – said a premature troop withdrawal would be disastrous for the Iraqis and the United States.

After a three-day visit to Iraq, Conatser – leading candidate for national commander – had a blunt message to Congress:

“The troops are doing their jobs, now do your jobs and support them. I met with Gen. (David) Petraeus. All the troops I talked to respect and believe in him. The Senate confirmed how Gen. Petraeus, and now Congress must allow him to complete his mission – to build a safer, stable Iraq that will not threaten its neighbors or the United States.

“Everytime we lose a soldier there, it is tragic. But the media dwell on the negative and report very little on the considerable successes. Everything I saw points to the fact that the surge is working.”

Religious differences are a major problem in Iraq, but Conatser pointed out that it took centuries for the United States to overcome many of its religious and racial tensions.

“I met an impressive Iraqi general who was Shia and commanding many Sunnis,” Conatser said. “It didn’t seem to be much of an issue to them, but it just demonstrates how terrorists are able to stir things up among the masses. The Iraqi people can succeed, but we must help them stamp out the terrorists.”

Conatser, a retired sergeant major in the Illinois National Guard, said that even though he always had great respect for the U.S. military, he was still surprised at how high morale is among the troops he visited.

“Naturally most would rather be home, and tour extensions...”
Membership: Your job, and mine

Hundreds of Legionnaires came to Indianapolis this month for the annual National Membership Workshop. Some were department commanders and adjutants. Others were district commanders. The primary goal for all attendees was to share membership success stories and learn from them. We had great discussions about multiplying the work that members of The American Legion are doing within our communities and at the state and national levels.

It's critical that we spread the word within our organization about what we, as Legionnaires, are doing to bring in new members while at the same time increasing renewals. If your post, district or department has a successful method for bringing back those members who once joined our ranks but have since left the organization, tell other posts in your area. Bring it up at your district meetings. Ask to make a presentation at your department executive committee meeting. Do the same if you've found a successful way to target National Guard and reserve units in your area. Share your vision for bringing into The American Legion thousands of servicemembers returning home every day from Iraq and Afghanistan. Success stories can become even bigger if we take the time to share them with our fellow Legionnaires.

Membership is everyone's business. It doesn't matter what color of cap you wear, your branch of service or when you served. It doesn't matter if you joined the Legion 30 years ago or more than three months ago. We all have a duty to future generations of veterans to build a healthy, growing membership. Numbers alone strengthen our influence on Capitol Hill when we lobby for mandatory funding for VA health care, better pay for U.S. servicemembers or concurrent receipt for disabled military retirees. When the national commander stands before Congress and says, "I represent the nearly 3 million men and women of The American Legion," his words carry a lot more weight than "I represent the 2-million member American Legion." Our power to lobby is greatly increased by the numbers we stand for when we appear before Congress.

Healthy membership numbers also make a financial impact. A growing membership means more member dues, which means more money going into our programs. Our global war on terrorism," he said. "I always believed that, but after seeing it firsthand, I am more convinced than ever."

Neither should we." As an Illinois Army National Guard veteran who served during the Vietnam War era, Conatser said he understands the importance of people supporting both the war and the warrior. "I am proud that The American Legion passed Resolution 169, which reminds Americans that supporting U.S. troops also means supporting their mission. Iraq is part of the
Helping take the pain away

Gunner Shultz never had a chance to get a driver’s license and take off on a motorcycle of his own. But some American Legion Riders in the Department of Kansas made sure that Gunner knew what it was like to be one of them before the young boy passed away.

On May 9, Gunner died of a brain tumor at age 6. In the final year of his life, he struck up a special relationship with American Legion Riders from Post 18 in Arkansas City, Kan., even becoming an honorary member. Post 18’s Riders helped raise money to offset the costs of Gunner’s medical expenses, but the bond went far beyond fundraising.

“Gunner’s bicycle was entered into one of the contests during the show, and the Post 18 Riders made sure it won the contest,” said Charlie Bean, Post 18’s Legion Riders director. “We all loved having him around.”

Mark Shultz, Gunner’s father, said the Riders lifted his son’s spirits like no one else.

“Gunner always smiled when he was around these guys, no matter how he was feeling,” Mark said. “That was great for me and my wife (Kelly). It made us feel wonderful seeing him so happy.”

The Riders conducted a poker run and show-and-shine at Island Park in Gunner’s hometown of Winfield, with the participation of local car clubs. They sponsored raffles, and in the end, they raised more than $1,700 for the Shultz family. But that wasn’t the high point for Mark.

Gunner’s bicycle was entered into one of the contests during the show, and the Post 18 Riders made sure it won first place, earning Gunner a trophy.

“When they presented Gunner with the trophy, it was one of the greatest things ever for him,” Mark said. “He literally slept with the trophy for days.”

Post 18’s Riders kept in constant contact with Gunner until he passed away, taking him for rides on their motorcycles. They even made him an honorary Legion Rider.

“When Danny presented him with his vest, Gunner wouldn’t take it off. He even challenged me, asking me when I was going to get a vest,” Mark said. “He was literally a Rider in his own eyes. The Riders really helped take his pain away.”

Another fundraiser brought in $1,000, and a similar event is planned for next year, complete with live music. Thanks to the efforts of Kansas American Legion Riders Department Chairman Gregg Hansen, Bean said, Gunner’s cemetery monument has Post 18’s Riders’ symbol etched on it. His family donated Gunner’s patches, vest and trophy to Post 18, and the items are in a display case honoring the young boy. And Mark, already a Post 18 Legionnaire, became a Legion Rider earlier this month. His bike is the same one on which Bustamonte took Gunner for his final ride.

Not every story has a happy ending. In a perfect world, Gunner grows to the age that some of us are right now. He experiences a full life and eventually has a family of his own. But we don’t live in a perfect world, and we play with the hand we’re dealt. Gunner did so without complaint, and while Bean, Bustamonte and the other Legion Riders made sure the little boy experienced plenty of joy in his final year of life, Gunner easily repaid the favor to the Legion Riders.

“He was a strong little boy,” Bean said. “I still get emotional when I talk about him. He really made an impact on all of us.”

Thanks to the efforts of Kansas American Legion Riders, the family at 182 Old Mill Drive, Plant City, Fl 33565-8794.

Marcia. Condolences can be sent to 182 Old Mill Drive, Plant City, Fl 33565-8794.

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### 2007 NEF CHALLENGE

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<th>Contributions starting National Convention</th>
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### 2007 CFWF CHALLENGE

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### 2007 CAF CHALLENGE

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Vietnam War veteran Bill Beck is the millionth veteran to be honored by the U.S. Army's Freedom Team Salute program, in which The American Legion is a partner. Beck is a member of Post 109 in Mechanicsburg, Pa., and now serves as a Freedom Team Salute spokesman. He fought in the la Drang battle in Southeast Asia.

"I was back from the war early on because I was in the first division sent over," said Beck, 64, a member of American Legion Post 109 in Mechanicsburg, Pa. "I didn't share a lot with my family and friends when I came back. I just didn't feel comfortable sharing either the good times or the bad times. As veterans began to filter back from the war, I found people I could share my feelings with. It takes awhile to be able to do that."

Beck struggled to describe his feelings about receiving a Freedom Team Salute. "It's hard to put into words," he says. "It's just a great honor, and I'm very proud. I have my certificate of appreciation hanging in my office. It's just a good feeling."

Following the presentation — which was co-hosted by Philadelphia's Walter L. Mason Federal Post 152 — Beck received similar Freedom Team Salutes to honor veterans from World War II, the Korean War, Operation Desert Shield and Operation Iraqi Freedom. Nearly 40,000 Pennsylvania veterans have been honored through the program.

"I was in awe when I was first contacted about this, but what really got my attention was that I was told I could present these certificates to other veterans," Beck said. "It was a great honor for me. That was actually the highlight of my trip."

Beck is visiting American Legion posts to spread the word about the Freedom Team Salute program.

"I want to tell people what this program is about, what it meant to me, and let them know that they can be included in this," he said. "It's a bond of brothers. It's people helping people. It's veterans helping veterans."

Army Col. Scott Lloyd, director of Freedom Team Salute, said having The American Legion as a partner in the program is critical for its success.

"If we're having trouble keeping in touch with our military soldiers throughout the country, think about 10 years from now, 20 years from now, 30 years from now," Lloyd said. "It's through such great organizations as The American Legion and other veterans service organizations that we can maintain this connectivity."

For more information on the U.S. Army's Freedom Team Salute program or to submit the name of someone you would like to see honored, go online to www.freedomteamsalute.com. The program is free.

NATIONAL CONVENTION

Coins commemorating 89th National Convention to be available

In honor of The American Legion's 89th National Convention and those who served in the U.S. military, a .999 pure silver collector's medallion is available for purchase. The medallions have been struck at the Nevada State Museum in Carson City on Historic Coin Press No. 1, which was put into service Feb. 11, 1870, at the U.S. mint in Carson City. Coins with the CC mint mark are highly sought and prized by collectors. In addition to the CC mint mark, the medallion will commemorate the rich history and contributions of The American Legion and Nevada to a strong America.

Across the top of the medallion are the words "American Legion." Underneath is a banner from Nevada's flag, depicting its introduction to statehood during the Civil War: "Battle Born." The date 1879 shows the state's tie to Honorary Past National Commander Thomas Miller, an adopted Nevada son with a history in Ely, Nev., and the mines there. Miller always carried an 1879 silver dollar as a gavel, reminding a brigadier general that there is no rank among Legionnaires when he said, "You, sir, are out of line. If you do not take your seat you will be removed from this hall."

The host city of the 89th National Convention is recognized with the words "Reno, Nevada," and the dates of the convention. The mountains symbolize the rugged beauty of Nevada, which has more mountain ranges than any other state. The miner gazing into the distance links the state's history of mining and its hope for the future. The mushroom cloud depicts Nevada's contributions to the Cold War and the testing of nuclear weapons. All figure into the state motto, "All for our country."

Hoover Dam, one of the seven wonders of the modern world, also is pictured on the medallion. Love of nature is reflected in a depiction of Nevada's state mammal, the bighorn sheep. The Great Seal of the State of Nevada appears on the reverse side.

Orders placed prior to the 89th National Convention will be priced at $50. After the convention, the price will go up to $60. Some medallions will be available for purchase at a booth in the vendor's hall during the convention, where orders can be placed. For more information about the medallion or to place an order, e-mail conventionmedallion@gmail.com.
During the 2007 National Membership Workshop in Indianapolis, National Legislative Commission consultant Dave Rehbein of Iowa urges Legionnaires to use face-to-face contact not only when recruiting new members for the organization, but when dealing with posts in their respective districts.

Membership will continue to grow if Legionnaires are vocal about all the good the organization does.

By Steve Brooks

Heading into the 89th National Convention in Reno, Nev., later this month, The American Legion is ahead of where it was at the end of 2006 in membership numbers. One way to continue that growth is to tell prospective and former members about the good the organization is doing.

That message dominated the National Membership Workshop in Indianapolis Aug. 2-4. Key membership officials from across the country met to discuss strategies and listen to Legion leaders offer advice about growing the organization.

National Commander Paul A. Morin—who flew in from Australia to speak at the workshop—told attendees how a single press release issued in July quickly raised more than $25,000 to buy phone cards for patients recovering at Landstuhl Military Hospital in Germany. The project, Operation Landstuhl, is also having a positive effect on membership.

"We're going to ride into Reno with 10,000-plus members more than we closed the books with on Dec. 31, 2006. We can say to those naysayers that The American Legion is not a dying organization. All we have to do is work together to work the programs of The American Legion, and people will join our organization."

Morin urged Legionnaires to seek out ways to promote their local posts and departments, such as taking advantage of free space on advertising billboards and working with community newspapers and public-access television stations.

"There are ways we can market without the cost," he said. "We work the programs, and we stop keeping it a secret within ourselves and tell America what we're doing. Then membership will come."

Morin said former members are most likely to renew after they hear about new and interesting programs launched by the organization.

"We need to make those membership rosters, and we need to divide them among those active members, and we need to make those phone calls or knock on those doors and do the simplest thing. Say, 'Thank you for paying your dues and supporting The American Legion,' and then give them something. Tell them what you are doing locally and what's happening in your department or nationally. If they haven't renewed, ask them why not."

During the three-day workshop in Indianapolis, attendees broke into small groups and learned about American Legion public relations, Reconnect programs, post development and mentoring. District commanders attended special sessions on successful district team building and communication.
Martin "Marty" Conatser, leading candidate for national commander and the national commander’s representative on the National Legislative Commission, was visiting U.S. troops in Iraq during the workshop but spoke to the group via a remote video presentation.

"I want to talk about the value of membership, not just the cost of membership — the good things being a member of The American Legion does for you," Conatser said. "We all like to belong to organizations that are winners, and that’s what The American Legion is. This year shows it. We’re going to show growth again this year for the first time in a couple years, and we have a lot to be proud of in our programs and ideals. But it’s our job, as leaders, to tell the positives, to tell the success stories. And it’s our job and our attitude that will make a difference in The American Legion. We need to make sure that we understand the good things The American Legion is doing. Many of our members don’t know. You’re going to hear a lot today about the good things happening around The American Legion, throughout different departments and in different programs. Listen to the good ideas. Tell each other what’s going well in your department. When you hear a problem, talk about what you’re doing to solve that problem."

Conatser offered district commanders advice on visiting local posts.

"Think back to your own post and the last time any level commander outside your post came to your post," he said. "What did they tell you? What did you gain from their visit? Were they just there asking for more membership? I challenge the leaders of this organization to take a minute and think about post visits. On a post visit, the leader’s job is to be positive, to tell the positive stories, to go forward and give the post ideas. Posts want to be successful. It’s your job as a leader to talk about the good things The American Legion is doing. As leaders, we must be the positive influence in our organization. We must tell the positive stories." Dave Rehbein, National Legislative Commission consultant, agreed.

"Why should (members) care enough to go out there and do that face-to-face work if we as the leadership don’t care enough to go visit them?" he asked. "Post visitations are the most important thing you can do this year. Get out amongst your people. Go visit them. Let them know you care. If you try to communicate with them by telephone and letter, they will communicate with their members by telephone and letter, because you will have set the example."

Membership Through Service. National Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Division staff attended the workshop and reiterating the theme of membership through service. Rehbein referenced the department service officers school happening the same week as the membership workshop.

"Our service officers are meeting and being trained," Rehbein said. "You’ve heard people talk about the purposes of the organization. That is the purpose of our organization. That’s why we still exist. Think about those young men and women in Iraq. Think about them going into battle today without the benefit of any intelligence. That’s what it’s for — our comrades trying to deal with VA. Without a service officer by their side, without that expert, their lives get a lot harder."

In order to build membership numbers, Legionnaires need to establish an early relationship with U.S. servicemembers both serving in and returning from tours in Iraq and Afghanistan, National Membership & Post Activities Committee Chairman Linda Perham said.

"The young men and women and their families serving today need our support," she said. "We’re here to be there for them. That’s all we ask of you. We know how important it is knowing there is an extended family out there that will support them. If we fail to take care of their needs now, I know no reason why they would look favorably on us in the future."

Reconnect. Nebraska Legionnaire Roy Vap explained how a partnership with Army recruiters in his state is benefiting both his state’s youth and Legion membership numbers. For 63 years, the Department of Nebraska has sponsored County Government Day program, which is a partnership with Army Recruiting Command to expose high school students to potential careers in the military. The program has had the positive effect of bringing new members into The American Legion.

Below: Department of Montana Commander Dave McCranie asks a question during a presentation by the National Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Division. Workshop participants heard how current American Legion programs can lead to increased membership through service.

As sponsors, American Legion posts provide a venue for a luncheon for participating students. Under the new partnership, the Army offers a speaker and foots the bill for the meals. Army recruiters give brief presentations about military careers and scholarship opportunities, followed by a question-and-answer session between students and the main speaker before they return to the county courthouse.

"This partnership between the recruiting command and us has put The American Legion in front of 4,000 potential active-duty members," Vap said. "Within Nebraska and Iowa there’s about 150 to 170 recruiters, and we’ve gotten a chance to do a presentation and teach Legion history to that entire group. We’ve gleaned quite a number of members. In addition, this gives us an opportunity, when new enlistees are going in, to make presentations in front of them and their parents. We’ve got about 2,000 reserve soldiers, and we get a chance to speak to them. Nebraska has approximately 160,000 eligible veterans.

We have about 47,000 who belong to this organization. For every 3.4 eligible veterans we get a Legion member. So just by the luck of the draw, if you put us in front of 4,000 people, we’re at (more than 1,000) new members."

Photos by James Y. Carroll
American Legion Department of Oklahoma Commander Michael Taylor grew up in rural southeastern Iowa and vividly remembers a certain family expectation. “I knew that at the end of my enlistment, I would go down to The American Legion post and sign up,” the Air Force veteran says. “That’s what was expected of me, of anyone in our family. As long as we could remember, when we were kids at the Fourth of July, during parades, Memorial Day, distributing poppies with our grandmother... The Legion was a part of our lives.”

But that was his grandmother’s American Legion.

Today, the 38-year-old commander and two other veterans of the Desert Storm-Somalia era – Department Adjutant David Kellerman and Department Service Officer Chris Harding, both 36 – are building on familiar traditions in Oklahoma while at the same time refreshing the organization’s image among younger veterans.

The department recently completed a 1,000-member increase for the year, thanks in a big way to a 750-member reconnection program there. These people are looking for Legion programs and activities that involve their whole families. “You have to be able to leapfrog from the era of the Saturday night dance at the post to the era of e-mails, iPods and text messages,” Harding adds.

“We’ve tried to restructure the Legion schedule for the working veteran, where someone can get off work and make it to the post and participate in activities that meet their schedules,” Kellerman says.

All three connect well with veterans on either side of their own military stints. “Our ages are right in the middle,” Harding says. “I can communicate and identify with Vietnam, Korea and World War II veterans, and with new veterans who are returning right now. We identify with their experiences.”

Kellerman says younger veterans are paying close attention to American Legion advocacy and accomplishments at the statehouse, which fuels membership. “We are showing them that we can make a difference in terms of veteran benefits, working with the legislature,” he says.

The American Legion is actively involved with active-duty installations, participating in welcome-home activities at Fort Sill and Tinker, Altus and Vance Air Force bases, including coordination of an annual Easter egg hunt at Altus. The department offers membership dues discounts to active-duty personnel.

The three Legion leaders are also pleased with recent growth in the state Oratorical competition, along with Boys State – which last year involved approximately 700 high-school juniors – and an American Legion Baseball program whose team count more than doubled last year, from 28 to 65.

“We are definitely reaching this new generation, this new era,” says Harding, who introduces hundreds of young veterans every year to The American Legion by assisting them with their benefits claims, disability ratings, VA paperwork, employment opportunities and other concerns. “We have to keep showing them what The American Legion can do for them and for their families,” Kellerman says. “That’s how I recruit. I just walk up to them and tell what we can and what we can do for them. When they see how it pays off, they want to give something back to the Legion, and they join.”

In that sense, the old-fashioned idea of generating membership simply by getting out, promoting the organization face to face and asking veterans to join is one time-proven tradition this generation of Legion leaders hopes will continue in the decades to come.

“We see our growth continuing in the next 20 years,” Harding says. “But I do think it will be baby steps until this generation of veterans hits retirement age. Then I think we will see huge growth again.”

“It comes one veteran at a time,” Taylor says. “When I am driving a vehicle with The American Legion emblem on it, a lot of times people pull up to me – sometimes Vietnam veterans who never joined and say they were never asked – and they ask me why they should belong. And so I hand them one of our brochures, the ‘Why I Should Belong’ brochure, which I carry with me all the time. And they see what we can do. That’s where it all starts.”

### Delaware teen elected Boys Nation president

A Delaware high-school student was elected president and an Indiana teen vice president of The American Legion’s 61st Boys Nation at Marymount University in Virginia in July.

Benjamin Wallace of Hockessin, Del., was elected to serve as president. The 17-year-old son of Paul and Lisa Wallace, he is a three-sport athlete in high school and finished second in a national mock trial competition. He plans to study law in college but has yet to choose a school. “I am honored to be elected and am looking forward to serving this fine group of gentleman at Boys Nation,” said Wallace, who was sponsored by R.C. DuPont Post 18 in Claymont, Del.

He was sponsored by Lowell Beaver Post 470 in Fishers. “It’s incredible to see what potential we have in this room,” said Kingsolver, who plans to attend Notre Dame University to study public service. “My goal is to utilize our resources to best reflect the ideas of our generation.”

Both Wallace and Kingsolver were sworn in by American Legion Past National Commander H.F. “Sparky” Gierke.

Each Boys Nation delegate represents his home state as a senator. The senators caucus at the beginning of the session, organize into committees and conduct hearings on bills, allowing delegates to learn the proper legislative procedures according to the U.S. Senate. During the weeklong program, participants visited with several prominent politicians, including President George W. Bush and U.S. senators.

They also participated in a wreath-laying at the Tomb of the Unknowns at Arlington National Cemetery, visited the U.S. Supreme Court and U.S. State Department, and attended an event at Greenbelt, Md., Post 136, where American Legion National Commander Paul A. Morin was the guest speaker.
The American Legion Family

MEMBERSHIP CHALLENGE

I, National Commander Earl Ruttkowski, do accept the membership challenge put before me:
I accept the challenge of obtaining 100% of The Sons of The American Legion Membership by July 31, 2007.

If I fail to obtain this goal by the established deadline, I graciously and respectfully submit myself to spend a little quality time “perched” on a bench above a huge container filled with cool refreshing water at the 89th National Convention in Reno, Nevada.

I promise not to come alone and will have my National Adjutant and Membership Committee Chairman by my side to share in this auspicious occasion.

Also, if my National Vice-Commanders fail to obtain this same goal within their regions, based on the same criteria, they, too, will be given the opportunity to excel – possibly downward into the abyss that awaits them.

Signed and attested this day
October 15, 2006
During the Annual Fall Meeting
Held in Indianapolis, Indiana

[Signatures of National Commander, National Adjutant, Membership Committee Chairman, etc.]

The American Legion Family

MEMBERSHIP CHALLENGE

I, National President JoAnn Cronin, do accept the membership challenge put before me:
I accept the challenge of obtaining 100%, minus DMS totals, of The American Legion Membership by July 31, 2007.

If I fail to obtain this goal by the established deadline, I graciously and respectfully submit myself to spend a little quality time “perched” on a bench above a huge container filled with cool refreshing water at the 89th National Convention in Reno, Nevada.

I promise not to come alone and will have my National Adjutant and Membership Committee Chairman by my side to share in this auspicious occasion.

Also, if my National Vice-Commanders fail to obtain this same goal within their regions, based on the same criteria, they, too, will be given the opportunity to excel – possibly downward into the abyss that awaits them.

Signed and attested this day
October 16, 2006
During the Annual Fall Meeting
Held in Indianapolis, Indiana

[Signatures of National President, National Adjutant, Membership Committee Chairman, etc.]

The American Legion Family

MEMBERSHIP CHALLENGE

I, National Membership Committee Chairman Paul Morin, do accept the membership challenge put before me:
I accept the challenge of obtaining 100%, minus DMS totals, of The American Legion Auxiliary Membership by July 31, 2007.

If I fail to obtain this goal by the established deadline, I graciously and respectfully submit myself to spend a little quality time “perched” on a bench above a huge container filled with cool refreshing water at the 89th National Convention in Reno, Nevada.

I promise not to come alone and will have my National Adjutant and Membership Committee Chairman by my side to share in this auspicious occasion.

Also, if my National Vice-Commanders fail to obtain this same goal within their regions, based on the same criteria, they, too, will be given the opportunity to excel – possibly downward into the abyss that awaits them.

Signed and attested this day
October 16, 2006
During the Annual Fall Meeting
Held in Indianapolis, Indiana

[Signatures of National Membership Committee Chairman, National Adjutant, Membership Committee Chairman, etc.]

Legion family leaders to get dunked in Reno

During the 2006 Fall Meetings in Indianapolis, the leadership of The American Legion family agreed to participate in a series of membership challenges. Details of the challenges are in the certificates to the left.

Only the Sons of The American Legion met the 100-percent challenge, so National Commander Paul A. Morin and Auxiliary National President JoAnn Cronin will have their shifts in a dunk tank during the 87th National Convention in Reno, Nev. National Commander Earl Ruttkowski also has agreed to participate.

The cost to throw at the dunking booth is $2 per ball or three balls for $5. All funds raised at the booth will be divided between the American Legacy Scholarship Fund, National Emergency Fund, National Veterans Creative Arts Festival and The American Legion Endowment Fund.

The schedule for the dunking booth is:
- Aug. 24, 1 p.m. - 2 p.m. - Cronin, Auxiliary National Secretary Pamela Gilley, Auxiliary National Membership Director Sharon Conatser
- Aug. 24, 2 p.m. - 3 p.m. - American Legion National Membership & Post Activities Committee Chairman Linda Perham, National Membership Director Billy Johnson
- Aug. 25, 11 a.m. - 1:15 p.m. - American Legion National Vice Commanders Lloyd H. Woods, Byron W. White, Robert C. Lahiere, Elgin L. Wahlborg, Allan Settberger
- Aug. 25, 2:30 p.m. - 3 p.m. - Commander Morin, National Adjutant Robert W. Sperangle
- Aug. 25, 3 p.m. - 4:15 p.m. - Ruttkowski, SAL National Adjutant Brian O’Hearne, SAL National Membership Committee Chairman Thomas W. Wigmore.

The dunking booth will be next to Emblem Sales in the Exhibit Hall.

ECONOMICS

Small business workshop set for national convention

The American Legion’s Economics Division will conduct a small-business workshop during the 89th National Convention in Reno, Nev. The workshop will run from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. Aug. 27-28 in Room A12 of the Reno-Sparks Convention Center.

The first session will target younger businesses that have never contracted with their states or the federal government, or have limited contract experience. The second day will focus on businesses with experience contracting with their states or the federal government and are looking to expand.

For more information about the workshop, go to www.nevbrc.com/legion_conference_training_schedule_reno.pdf. To register online, go to guest.cvent.com/events/default.aspx. Use event code 6UN39M3QVWF.

Also, The American Legion, the U.S. Department of Labor and RecruitMilitary, LLC, will conduct a career fair in Reno during the convention. The fair is scheduled for 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Aug. 28 in rooms A1, A2, A5 and A6 of the Reno-Sparks Convention Center.

The free event is open to U.S. veterans, men and women transitioning from active duty, members of the National Guard and reserves, and military spouses. Attendees should bring at least a dozen copies of their resumes.

To register as a job seeker, go online to www.recruitmilitary.com.
House passes fiscal 2008 defense spending bill of $460 billion

By Jimmie Foster

On Aug. 5, the House of Representatives passed H.R. 3222, the fiscal 2008 Defense appropriation bill. The final vote for passage was 395-133.

The measure would provide $459.6 billion for DoD programs for the upcoming fiscal year - $39.7 billion more than was enacted for the current year but $3.5 billion less than requested by the president. The measure does not include funding for military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, which will be considered a separate bill after Congress returns from its summer recess.

Some of the major accounts funded by the House bill include:
- $8.5 billion for ballistic missile defense
- $6.6 billion for continued research and development and procurement of 12 F-35s, the Joint Strike Fighter
- $3.1 billion for 20 F-22 fighter planes
- $3.09 billion for the purchase of one Virginia-class submarine
- $2.8 billion for construction and advanced procurement of two DD-1000 next-generation destroyers
- $1.4 billion for the Army’s program to destroy chemical agents and munitions
- $946 million for DoD counter-drug activities and to fight narco-terrorism
- $558 million for chemical and biological defense programs; and,
- $398 million for DoD’s former Soviet Union Threat Reduction account.

The House also added funding to various programs necessary to meet the immediate needs of U.S. forces fighting the war on terrorism, including:
- $23 billion for the Defense Health Program
- $76 billion in increased funds to ensure proper training for U.S. troops before deployment;
- $6 billion to cover the equipment costs of Army and Marine Corps personnel increases; and,
- $3.2 billion for continued research and development of the Army’s Future Combat System.

The Senate Appropriations Committee will take up DoD funding after the August recess. Fiscal 2008 begins Oct. 1, 2007.

Senate VA panel conducts mandatory funding hearing

On July 25, the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee conducted a hearing on the funding process for the Department of Veterans Affairs. The Partnership for Veterans Health Care Budget Reform testified on behalf of the American Legion and its other members, challenging the committee "to identify an American business that could operate successfully and remain viable, if in 12 of 13 consecutive years, it had no advance confidence about the level of its projected revenues or the resources it needed to bring a product or service to market, no ability to plan beyond the immediate needs of the institution day to day, and no freedom to operate on the basis of known or expected need in the future." This has been the situation with VA.

Maintaining a stable and viable health-care system to meet the medical needs of the nation’s newest veterans is also a concern: “The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are producing a new generation of wounded, sick and disabled veterans, and some severe types at a polycrural level never seen before in warfare... The goal of the partnership is to see a long-term solution formed for funding VA health care to guarantee these veterans will have a dependable system for the foreseeable future, not simply next year.”

A recent Harvard University report predicts that federal outlays for veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars will total between $350 million and $700 million during their lifetimes after military service. This funding is in addition to what the nation already spends on previous generations of veterans.

"We believe," the partnership’s representative told the Senate committee, "funding VA health care is a cost of defense and war no less important than the weapons systems Congress authorizes in direct prosecution of the nation’s defense." Legislation addressing assured or mandatory funding for VA health-care programs - H.R. 2514, the “Assured Funding for Veterans Health Care Act” - is currently pending in the House. The measure was introduced by Rep. Phil Hare, D-Ill., and currently has 77 cosponsors. The partnership recommended that “the (Veterans Affairs) Committee, in your fiscal year 2009 Views and Estimates to the Budget Committee, that you inform them of your intention to report legislation creating a mandatory and guaranteed funding system for VA health care in 2009, and that you recommend that they reserve sufficient funds to make that seminal change.”

House approves veterans bills

On July 30, the House passed three measures that seek to fill gaps in veterans benefits programs. These bills now go to the Senate for further action.

By a voice vote, the House approved H.R. 2874, the Veterans Health Care Improvement Act of 2007. One of its provisions would authorize a new grant program for therapeutic readjustment counseling for veterans of wars and conflicts after the 1991 Persian Gulf War. It would also authorize financial assistance for low-income veterans’ families living in permanent housing. Another provision would authorize a grants program to provide innovative transportation options to veterans in rural areas. The measure would authorize a total of $3 million per year from 2008 through 2012 for these grants. The H.R. 2874 would also shorten from 60 days to 30 days the time that homeless veterans must be enrolled in VA’s medical-care program before they are eligible for dental care.

A second measure approved by a voice vote was H.R. 2623, a bill that would waive a co-payment requirement for veterans receiving hospice care at home or at acute or palliative care facilities, rather than from a VA hospital. The final bill – H.R. 1315, the Veterans Benefits Improvement Act of 2007, also passed by a voice vote – would make adaptive housing assistance available to disabled U.S. servicemembers temporarily staying in a house owned by a family member.

The legislation would extend the benefit to servicemembers before their discharge, changing current law that allows adaptive housing assistance only after discharge. Eligible veterans could receive up to $14,000 to make modification to their families’ homes. The measure also includes provisions that would create a scholarship program for students pursuing careers in rehabilitation of the blind.

Troop Support

Operation Landstuhl begins phone card purchases

National Commander Paul A. Morin has authorized the immediate purchase of $25,000 worth of telephone calling cards to be given to U.S. troops recovering at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany.

The gift of phone cards is part of Operation Landstuhl, an new American Legion initiative prompted by Morin’s recent visit to the center.

“The staff at Landstuhl does an outstanding job, but the patients don’t have all of the personal comfort items that they need,” Morin said.

“Many of the troops could use some civilian clothes; others might want DVDs, CDs or magazines. We owe it to them. These phone cards are just the starting.”

Landstuhl Regional Medical Center is a stopping point on the journey home for many wounded U.S. servicemembers fighting the war on terrorism in Iraq and Afghanistan.

During peak fighting periods, the hospital can admit more than 900 new patients per month. Morin, American Legion Auxiliary President JoAnn Cronin and Sons of the American Legion Commander Earl Ruttkofsky have together set a goal of $6 billion for U.S. troops at Landstuhl by the close of this month’s 89th National Convention of The American Legion in Reno, Nev., scheduled for Aug. 24-30.

“Operation Landstuhl is only one month old, and we are already on our way to achieving our goal,” Morin said. “The generosity of The American Legion has been overwhelming. I am confident that we will meet our goal by the close of our 89th National Convention on Aug. 30.”

American Legion departments will be able to present checks at the convention floor in Reno. In the exhibit hall, a donation booth will be available for individuals to contribute.

Credit-card donations are accepted on site, and checks can be mailed to Operation Landstuhl, c/o The American Legion, P.O. Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206-1055.
News from and about the Department of Veterans Affairs

A prosthetic ankle-foot is now available to veterans who have had lower-leg amputations, one that matches their natural ease of motion. Through VA-funded research, the Center for Restorative and Regenerative Medicine – a partnership between the Providence VA Medical Center in Rhode Island, Brown University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology – developed the new prosthesis.

Researchers say the new ankle-foot prosthetic is the first in a new family of artificial limbs. It will replicate natural motion by propelling people forward using tendon-like springs powered by an electric motor.

VA expects to spend more than $1.2 billion this year on prosthetics and sensory aids, including glasses and hearing aids.

VA office opens at Fort Bragg

VA and the U.S. Army base at Fort Bragg, N.C., have opened a newly expanded facility at the post’s Soldier Support Center to provide easier access to VA benefits for soldiers stationed at Fort Bragg, particularly programs for those transitioning to civilian life.

In addition to the Fort Bragg location, VA operates benefits offices at Camp Lejeune Marine Corps Base and New River Marine Corps Air Station in North Carolina, with services provided at Cherry Point Marine Corps Air Station and Seymour Johnson Air Force Base. VA operates 140 offices on military installations as part of its Benefits Delivery at Discharge program.

At the Fort Bragg facility:

- VA benefits counselors will coordinate with the Warrior Transition Battalion at Womack Medical Center and the VA medical center in Fayetteville to ensure that the most severely injured soldiers continue to receive the highest level of medical care as they leave active duty.
- VA staff will explain to separating soldiers the full range of health care, disability, home loan, vocational and educational benefits offered by VA.
- VA already provides assistance with briefings conducted by the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) and Army Career Alumni Program (ACAP).
- VA will help file claims for benefits and provide medical examinations to record any disabilities for those soldiers within six months of separation. For those eligible for rehabilitation assistance, VA counselors can help plan a program of education and training that will help separating soldiers find productive employment after discharge.

The Benefits Delivery Office is open from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. weekdays. For more information on VA benefits, call (800) 827-1000 or visit www.va.gov online.

Tampa Fisher House opens

Families of injured U.S. military members recuperating at the James A. Haley Veterans Hospital in Tampa now have the benefit of a Fisher House, which provides them free lodging as they participate in the care and recovery of their loved ones.

This is the 38th home built by the Fisher House Foundation and the ninth operated by VA. With 16,000 square feet, the Tampa Fisher House is among the largest of these comfort homes and can accommodate up to 21 families.

Many families travel long distances to Tampa’s Polytrauma Center – one of four unique VA polytrauma facilities in the United States where the most severely injured and disabled veterans are treated – to be close to their loved ones.

Nursing partnership formed

VA is launching a new initiative that partners its health-care system with four of the nation’s finest nursing schools. VA selected nursing schools in Florida, California, Utah and Connecticut for special partnerships with local VA health-care facilities to be part of a new VA Nursing Academy.

The first four nursing schools selected to participate in the program are the University of Florida in Gainesville, San Diego State University, the University of Utah in Salt Lake City, and Fairfield University in Connecticut. The four VA-nursing partnerships were selected from among 42 applications.

Additional VA-nursing school partnerships will be selected in 2008 and 2009, bringing the total to 12 partnerships in the five-year pilot program.

The American Association of Colleges of Nursing reports that more than 42,000 qualified applicants were turned away from nursing schools in 2006 because of insufficient numbers of faculty, clinical sites, classroom space and clinical mentors. VA currently provides clinical education for approximately 100,000 health professional trainees annually, including students from more than 600 schools of nursing.

Get more information about the pilot program from VA’s Office of Academic Affiliations online at www.va.gov/oaa.

New Guam clinic planned

VA has announced plans to construct a 6,600-square-foot, $5.4-million clinic alongside the island’s naval hospital. Patients will not have to pass through Navy security to get to the facility, which will have its own parking area. The new clinic is scheduled to open in summer 2009.

The new outpatient clinic replaces the existing 2,700-square-foot VA clinic at the naval hospital. VA will still partner with the naval facility for emergency and after-hours health care, acute inpatient care and some specialty services.

About 9,000 U.S. veterans live on Guam.
FORT BEN PX, COMMISSARY OPEN

By James V. Carroll

Sixteen years after the Army shut down Fort Benjamin Harrison on the northeast side of Indianapolis, the famed military facility is once again making history. In June, a $12 million state-of-the-art commissary and PX complex opened for business to serve thousands of military men and women, retired veterans and their families. The Fort Harrison commissary and PX is the first commissary built at a reserve center, the first built at a closed military facility, and the first to be substantially financed by civilian agencies.

The City of Lawrence, the Fort Harrison Reuse Authority and the federal government worked together to bring the 10-year project to fruition. Property taxes collected by the Reuse Authority largely financed the commissary and PX. In turn, the Fort Harrison Reuse Authority gets the land occupied by the old commissary. The city expects to eventually develop Lawrence Village, a multimillion-dollar retail, residential and office complex.

"It's a win-win-win deal," said retired Army Brig. Gen. Ronald Brooks, executive director of The American Legion Marketing Services Group, which has offices on the grounds of the former fort. "The military gets a new commissary. The Fort Harrison Reuse Authority gets the old commissary and the land that goes with it. And most importantly, Indiana's military men and women can shop at a modern grocery store and PX and save up to 40 percent. What better way to support our troops?" Brooks was Fort Harrison's commander when the base was deactivated in 1991 under the Department of Defense's Base Realignment and Closure program.

He was an active player in efforts to keep the old commissary open, and a tireless and passionate advocate of building a new commissary and PX.

"A commissary and PX are some of the most important benefits to our servicemembers," Brooks said. "They list it second to medical care. There are approximately 40,000 eligible beneficiaries in central Indiana. Thousands of them have already served in Iraq and Afghanistan, and thousands more are on their way to the battlefield. This commissary and PX serve to show the community's support and commitment to these courageous military men and women and their families."

After learning that Fort Harrison would close, Brooks said his main goal was to keep the old commissary open for military personnel and veterans. DoD rebuffed him more than once.

"When the fort closes, the commissary and PX will close," Brooks repeatedly heard from DoD officials. "We stopped asking for awhile. But when administrations changed in Washington, we again sought to keep the commissary and PX operating – and DoD changed its mind."

Emboldened by their success, Brooks and other officials started thinking about constructing a new commissary and PX. They encountered many roadblocks; some appeared to kill their plan altogether. In 2004, Lawrence Mayor Deborah Cantwell and newly appointed Fort Harrison Reuse Authority Executive Director Ehren Bingaman entered the fray. Cantwell, Bingaman and other local officials traveled to Washington a number of times to drum up support for the project. Their efforts resulted in $2 million toward it.

"This eventually ended up being an old-fashioned swap: I'll give you a new building for your old buildings and land. And the Army said, 'Deal'" Bingaman explained. "To be able to provide for our troops and retirees, and at the same time continue to inspire the redevelopment of Fort Harrison, is a great story for all of us."

Tremendous teamwork and the commitment of dozens of people brought the commissary and PX project to completion. But Bingaman, Cantwell, military leadership, and local, state and national officials agree it is Brooks who never lost sight of the goal.

"When people said it couldn't be done, Ron remained steadfast in his belief that it could be done," National Adjutant Robert W. Spanogle said during grand-opening ceremonies. "He is the heart and soul of this commissary and PX. He forged bonds across different lines – different political lines. I was impressed when Ron was in uniform. I'm impressed now that he is out of uniform. I'm impressed with his dedication, his love of country, his dignity and respect."

Brooks said the credit belongs to many. "I am no more responsible for making it happen than are dozens of other committed individuals, past and present. It took years of tireless work among local, state and national partners. No single person could have accomplished this. I'm honored to have been a part of it, but it's not about who got it done. It's about doing the right thing for our military members, retired veterans, and their families."