Victims, heroes of natural disasters

Natural disasters that have occurred throughout the United States this past year have held important implications for members of the Sons of The American Legion.

First, the importance of keeping one’s Sons membership current cannot be understated. In order to be eligible for financial assistance from American Legion programs like the National Emergency Fund (NEF), one’s membership must be in good standing. In addition to the NEF, many detachments have their own emergency funds that also require membership to be current in order to be eligible if assistance is needed during a time of a natural disaster. Not only must membership dues be current, but squadrons and detachments must deliver the paperwork as quickly as possible. Procrastination could jeopardize a member’s ability to apply for, and receive, relief if a disaster hits.

Another important lesson learned is that Sons are an integral contributor to The American Legion’s overall relief efforts. In the wake of the hurricanes, floods, tornadoes and wildfires that have struck over the past year, Sons in every detachment throughout the country have played important roles in providing monetary donations and supplies. They also assisted with transportation needs and delivery of those supplies.

Since August 2017, Sons have been both the victims of and heroes during natural disasters in Texas, Florida, California and Puerto Rico. Many lost homes or belonged to Legion posts that were destroyed. But many more went to work putting together caravans of water, food and clothing that were taken into the disaster areas and distributed, often using Legion post parking lots as staging areas. Still others helped raise the money needed to meet the needs of those...
In February 2016, Sean Ochsenbein and his then fiancé were driving home from a ski vacation when they came upon a two-vehicle accident that had killed one person and trapped another in a burning vehicle. Ochsenbein and another passerby, off-duty North Carolina Deputy Lt. William Buchanan, worked feverishly to free the trapped man, first unsuccessfully by breaking the vehicle’s window glass but then by using a strap hooked to a bumper to pull open the car door. Just as the injured man was pulled free, the vehicle exploded into a ball of fire.

Ochsenbein, a member of Sons of The American Legion Squadron 81 in Gonzales, La., is the son of Mark Ochsenbein, a Legionnaire and volunteer director for Soldier’s Wish.

Ochsenbein’s quick thinking didn’t come by accident. He’s an Eagle Scout, an emergency medical technician and a member of the Putnam County Rescue Squad in Tennessee. At the time of the accident, he was about to graduate from medical school.

Over the past two years since the accident, Ochsenbein has graduated from grad school, married his fiancé and is now completing his residency in emergency medicine at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, N.C.

This past February, Ochsenbein and Buchanan were invited to the White House. President Trump presented them both with the Public Safety Officer Medal of Valor, the highest award given by the United States to a public safety officer.

Recipients of the Medal of Valor must be nominated and undergo a background check by a review board within the U.S. Department of Justice. It is given for an act of valor above and beyond the call of duty and exhibiting exceptional courage, extraordinary decisiveness, and presence of mind and unusual swiftness of action, regardless of his or her personal safety, in an attempt to save or protect human life.

Ochsenbein was nominated for the award by the Putnam County Rescue Squad where he has continued to maintain an affiliation since 2007.

"Sean is one of the most incredible men you will ever meet, and we all know he didn’t think twice about going to work when he saw the crash,” said Putnam County Rescue Squad Assistant Chief David Anderson to Fox 17 News in Nashville, Tenn.

In a ceremony held in the East Room of the White House on Feb. 20, 2018, Ochsenbein was one of 12 individuals presented with the Medal of Valor. Members of Ochsenbein’s family were in attendance.

"God puts people at the right place at the right time,” Dr. Ochsenbein said.
The Sons of The American Legion’s membership theme for the 2017-2018 year is “Pioneering Spirit: Courage, Faith, Teamwork, Perseverance.” The early pioneers faced opposition in many forms, however, these four nouns allowed them to overcome adversity. We will have challenges but how we respond to those challenges is what matters most.

The Sons national membership goals for the year is as follows:

■ Attain 400,000 members
■ Achieve a 95 percent renewal rate
■ Recruit 50,000 new members

These goals can be achieved by filling your tool box with membership tools. Find membership recruiting ideas and more under the headline Membership Committee at [www.legion.org/sons/commissionreports](http://www.legion.org/sons/commissionreports). The tools can be modified to meet your squadron’s needs.

You can also make membership a standing agenda item at your squadron meetings. Membership is not just the responsibility of the squadron commander or adjutant, and it is not something we should focus on once a year.

Membership is the lifeblood of our organization and what makes possible all the great programs of the Sons and The American Legion.

During squadron meetings discuss these tools and upcoming events in your area that you can leverage to renew existing members or sign up new members.

In addition to squadron and detachment goals, make sure there is an awareness of national goals and membership target dates.

Finally, it’s important to recognize SAL successes and achievements. Celebrate Sons members who have gone above and beyond and keep a list of your squadron’s activities over the year. Send a thank you letter to members to highlight their longstanding membership and accomplishments.

View membership reports at [www.legion.org/sons/membershipranking](http://www.legion.org/sons/membershipranking).

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**AMERICAN FLAG**

**Sign up for American Legion flag e-newsletter, text alerts**

Did you know that The American Legion has a Flag Alert e-newsletter?

The Flag Alert e-newsletter provides notification when a flag proclamation is issued by the president to display the U.S. flag at half-staff. More than 47,000 people subscribe to the e-newsletter.

Sign up now at [www.legion.org/newsletters](http://www.legion.org/newsletters).

The American Legion also offers text alerts when the flag is to be displayed at half-staff. To receive these text alerts, simply text the word flag to 35893. You will receive a confirmation email within a few minutes. The service is free, but message and data rates may apply.

For further flag information and resources, visit [www.legion.org/flag](http://www.legion.org/flag).

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From Minneapolis on Cover

visit. Shorts, T-shirts and flip flops are discouraged.

Nearly all official convention hotels are located in downtown Minneapolis within a few blocks of the convention center. For family members not attending convention meetings, there are many opportunities to sightsee, shop, dine and much more. For example, the Minnesota Twins baseball game against the Oakland A’s at Target Field on Saturday, Aug. 25, has been designated American Legion Family Night. The game starts at 6:10 p.m. with the first pitch being thrown by American Legion National Commander Denise H. Rohan. A limited number of specially-priced tickets are available to Legion Family members on a first-come, first-served basis. To order tickets, call (800) 338-9467 and hit the number 0 to speak to an attendant. Reference this special American Legion promotion.

The American Legion has arranged for full-day and partial-day sightseeing tours, however the town has many parks and cultural districts that are appropriate for self-guided walking tours. Additionally, restaurants, brew pubs, and specialty shops dot the downtown landscape.

Other tourist attractions include the University of Minnesota, casinos and Mall of America, which is the fifth largest mall in North America.

The National Convention Exhibit Hall inside the convention center is a popular destination and will be open from Friday, Aug. 24 to Tuesday, Aug. 28.

For information about national convention, schedules and more, visit [www.legion.org/convention](http://www.legion.org/convention).
‘A future of continued excellence’

By Danny Smith, SAL National Commander

Summer presents many opportunities for Sons of The American Legion members to serve in their communities and with programs of The American Legion. But before I move forward, I want to reflect on a few accomplishments that you have made possible.

For 2016-2017, you set another all-time high in membership – just shy of 370,000 members. That is 1,913 members above our previous all-time high. You contributed $594,414 to the Child Welfare Foundation to establish a record donation year.

Volunteer service hours and contributions to American Legion programs were up, and we continued with our mission as stated in the Sons Preamble to the National Constitution.

Congratulations and thank you for making this possible.

Spring conferences are behind us and now detachment conventions are underway. Hopefully many of you attended these meetings to learn more about our organization and are now re-energized to make the push needed to complete what has been an outstanding administrative year so far.

This year marks The American Legion’s 99th birthday, something not many organizations can proclaim. And now we will soon be off to Minneapolis for the Sons 47th annual National Convention and the Legion’s 100th National Convention.

Whoa! I need to slow down and look at what the next few months have in store.

Just as in nature, The American Legion will see a rebirth, so to speak, in many of its long-standing programs as several youth programs are now underway for the summer. We’ve reached the time of year when many programs of The American Legion are becoming vibrant and creating many opportunities for us to volunteer and make a difference.

Several of these programs are directed toward the development of youth in our communities that instill the values of Americanism prepares them for the future.

April brought the National Oratorical Contest finals in Indianapolis. This event featured the top contestants from each department and spotlighted some of the best high school orators in the country. If you have never attended an American Legion Oratorical Contest you are missing out on a showcase of some very talented high school students.

Programs of The American Legion that are now underway are Boys State, Youth Cadet Law Enforcement, American Legion Baseball and the Junior Shooting Sports championship. If you’re not already a volunteer for any of these programs, contact your local American Legion post, district or department youth program chairmen to learn more.

Summer is also a busy time for patriotic holidays and community events, such Fourth of July. This is a fantastic time to get out and be seen in your hometown. Community parades and celebrations make perfect opportunities to get out and make an impact.

No matter what events you take part in, wear your Sons emblem with pride, be proud of your heritage and represent the Sons of The American Legion.

Squadrons and detachments will be electing, if it hasn’t already been done, new officers to lead them into the next administrative year. As we wind down the 2017-2018 year, take time to review your contributions to our organization, your community and state, then transfer this information to the Consolidated Squadron Report Form. This is not a contest, it is a reconciliation of all of the services and investments you have made this past year.

Information from the report is compiled with reports from across the country, submitted to The American Legion, and used in conjunction with their totals that are presented to Congress when the national commander testifies during the annual Washington Conference.
National awards are available that recognize those who do outstanding work in the various service areas listed on the report form. Awards are presented annually during our national convention.

We know that everyone does a massive amount of work promoting and supporting the programs of The American Legion. Let’s make sure that it all gets reported.

Before this membership year comes to an end, please remember our premier programs: the Endowment Fund, the National Emergency Fund and the Child Welfare Foundation. We are asking for donations of 50 cents, 50 cents and $1, respectively, for these American Legion charities. As stated previously, “Think of this: For less than the cost of a designer cup of coffee or bottle of soda from a vending machine, you can make a difference in someone’s life.”

Thank you to all who have supported these programs! To those who have yet to make a donation, there is still time to make a difference and create a smile. Continue with your commitment to making the Sons of The American Legion a vital part of the American Legion Family.

Together we can, and together we will, make a difference!

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VETERAN SUPPORT

When U.S. Army veteran Brandi Christie and her children were invited to a family-friendly event last November at Cottrel-Warner American Legion Post 942 in Webster, N.Y., she thought she was just going to watch her favorite band perform. Sons of The American Legion Squadron 942 had more planned for her and her family.

Christie was handed the keys to a refurbished 2008 Nissan Quest minivan. The donation was made possible through a relationship between Squadron 942 and Operation Build Up – a nonprofit based in Conesus, N.Y., that is dedicated to preventing veteran homelessness and suicides by providing veterans in the state with basic needs.

“We want to help veterans in their darkest moments,” said Justin Cogswell, founder and CEO of Operation Build Up. “When they trip and fall, we as a country should work to help them up.”

One of the main ways Operation Build Up supports veterans in need is by purchasing (or receiving in donations) used cars. They fix them up, make them road-worthy, then give them to veterans in need. They typically rebuild three to four vehicles a month, spending upward of $800 and hundreds of volunteer hours on each one. Their mission over the next year is to provide 150 veterans in New York with vehicles and home furnishings.

The Sons began working with Operation Build Up when Squadron 942 member Bill VerHagen invited Cogswell to a squadron meeting to talk about the organization. Squadron 942 Commander Nate Burdick said, “We wrote a $1,000 check right there. Then everyone went home and donated more.”

Auxiliary Unit 942 also donated $1,000 to Operation Build Up.

Burdick said working hand-in-hand with Operation Build Up fits perfectly with the mission of the Sons of The American Legion.

“The Sons are directly trying to touch any veteran in any way we can to support them,” he said. “It’s veterans doing work for veterans. It was a perfect storm for what we are trying to do.”

The vehicle presentation was especially timely for Christie, who is in the Army reserves. She had been missing the required Army drills due to her family being without a vehicle.

In addition to the minivan, the squadron handed Christie a check for $500 to pay for registration and insurance fees.

Christie’s four young children weren’t forgotten, either. As they scrambled into the back seats of their “new” minivan, her daughter and three sons each discovered a stuffed dog and other presents awaiting them.

After the surprise of receiving the minivan and finally accepting that she wasn’t dreaming, Christie had a question. True to the selfless nature of all veterans, she asked through happy tears, “Is there something we can do to pay you back?”

“No, you don’t need to do anything,” Cogswell said. “This is America right here.”

Learn more about Operation Build Up at www.operationbuildup.com.
SERVICE

**SAL members at work in their community**

**Squadron 327 in Tidewater, Va.** Sons of The American Legion members from Squadron 327 and Auxiliary Unit 327 served a lasagna luncheon for a group of veterans participating in the Welcome Home Initiative program. The program provides combat veterans and their spouses with a retreat and opportunities to deal with post-traumatic stress disorder, societal acceptance, marital problems, and drug or alcohol abuse issues.

Squadron 327 members met with the veterans after the luncheon to share about the Legion’s Operation Comfort Warriors (OCW) program and to hand out OCW commemorative coins. Virginia’s 2nd District honor guard joined the Fourth Degree Knights of Columbus in a closing ceremony for the retreat.

**Squadron 1175 in Windsor Terrace, N.Y.**

The New York Harbor VA Healthcare System was the beneficiary of an OCW grant through the efforts of Squadron 1175. The idea to provide the grant came from Past Detachment Commander Joe SantaCroce and his wife obtained a wish list from New York Harbor VA staff. The $9,000 OCW grant provided rehabilitation equipment, clothing, televisions, DVD players, ping pong tables and a foosball table. It also provide shoes, socks, T-shirts, sweatpants, belts and undergarments for men and women who arrive to the hospital with only the clothes on their backs.

**Squadron 145 in Poland, Ohio.**

Kenneth Vrable of Squadron 145 participated in a Wreaths Across America ceremony at Green Lawn Cemetery in Columbus, Ohio. The mission on National Wreaths Across America Day, observed annually on the third Saturday in December, is to place a holiday wreath on veterans graves across the country to remember, honor and teach.

**Squadron 52 in Kearney, Neb.**

Sons members from across the country sponsor golf tournaments to raise money for programs that support children and youth, veterans, and their families. Squadron 52 held its second annual Veterans Memorial Golf Tournament that attracted 31 teams and 124 golfers from all over central Nebraska. It was a patriotic day highlighted with the Post 52 color guard presenting the colors while the golfers and volunteers recited the Pledge of Allegiance. The tournament raised $18,000, which was donated toward the construction efforts of a veterans memorial on the property of the newly constructed Central Nebraska Veterans Home in Kearney.

In just two years, the squadron’s golf tournament has raised $36,750.

**Squadron 113 in Napa, Calif.**

Donations from the squadron’s fifth annual Mike Tami Memorial Golf Tournament allowed for the present of a $2,000 check to both The Pathway Home in Yountville, Calif., and American Legion Post 113 in Napa.

The Pathway Home is a nonprofit recovery program located at the Yountville Veterans Home. Desert Storm and Desert Shield veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder or a traumatic brain injury are provided with the tools they need to manage mental health issues. The center provides veterans with educational programs and the tools to gain employment, maintain healthy relationships, and successfully reintegrate into society.

**Squadron 88 in Hamden, Conn.**

The Boy Scouts have found good friends in at Squadron 88. For that past 12 years the
Squadron has presented a check to Troop 610. This year’s check was for $500.

Squadron 88 runs various fundraisers during the year with proceeds going toward maintenance and upgrades to the Legion post, as well as to Troop 610. On top of their own initiatives, squadron members are quick to volunteer for many of the post’s functions. These include cookouts, holiday parties, dinners, yardwork like landscaping and mowing, and maintenance of the post home.

**Squadron 205 in Saegertown, Pa.**
Squadron 205 is very committed to supporting veterans and members of their community. Everybody pitches in for fundraising activities which results in success. For example, Squadron 205 presented a $1,000 check to the Pennsylvania Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Home to benefit its activities fund.

**Squadron 781 in Mountain Top, Pa.**
The squadron held a Christmas raffle last December and donated proceeds to two local food banks – $1,000 was shared between the Mountain Top Community Food Bank and the Emmanuel United Christ Methodist Church Food Bank. Over the past year, Squadron 781 has raised and donated over $7,000 to local, state and national programs that help veterans, their families, children and community members.

**Squadron 24 in Canton, Mass.** The squadron held a successful raffle that raised $1,800. The Sons donated the money to the community’s efforts to help save the Canton Legion Baseball program for the 2018 season. That single SAL contribution gave more than 20 young players the ability to play ball and participate in the league this summer.

**Squadron 503 in Calabash, N.C.** The squadron sponsored its semi-annual “Joe Roundy Memorial Backpack Bowling Benefit” in March where dozens of bowlers and volunteers gathered at the Brunswick County Bowling Center in Shallotte, N.C. They raised $1,200 for the Jesse Mae Monroe Elementary School’s “Book Bag Buddies” program. The squadron’s contributions to this program now stands at $2,400.

**Squadron 135 in Perryville, Md.**
Squadron 135 and the Auxiliary unit presented seven GI Josh Dogs to the Nemours Alfred I. duPont Hospital for Children in Wilmington, Del.

**Squadron 254 in North Port, Fla.** In February, the squadron held its second annual Harvestfest, which has been renamed to Country Meets Rock. The event was originally scheduled for November 2017 but was postponed due to Hurricane Irma. Squadron 254 gives a lot of credit to the Auxiliary for all of the hours, blood, sweat and tears that were required to make the event possible.

This year’s attendance doubled in size as nearly 1,100 people showed up to rock. And more than $12,000 was raised.

The evening started off with performances from bands, including Florida bands Maiden Cane and the Jack Michael Band, who were on stage together dueling country and rock.

Visitors were treated to shopping, food, and beverages, and according to City Councilor Jill Luke, “One of the biggest events to hit North Port!”

A motorcycle was given away, $6,500 in cash, Mega 50/50, and one awesome concert.

**SHARE YOUR SAL STORY**
Sons of The American Legion members are conducting year-round membership drives, community events and other activities that benefit veterans, their families, and children and youth. Share these stories by:

- Going to www.legiontown.org and submitting under the category “SAL Success Stories.”
- Sending an email to sons@legion.org by September 1 for possible publication in the next issue of National Update.
**Honor & Remembrance**

**Sons marker dedicated at New Hampshire Veterans Cemetery**

A memorial walkway in the New Hampshire State Veterans Cemetery was lined with monuments dedicated to various branches of service and veterans service organizations, including The American Legion and the Legion Family.

But there was no memorial from the Sons of The American Legion — until now.

On June 9, a three-year project to erect a marker for the Sons came to fruition with a ceremony to dedicate the six-foot-tall, 3,500-pound monument at the veterans cemetery in Boscawen, N.H.

Gary DesRosiers, the finance committee chairman for the New Hampshire detachment of the Sons, said the project stemmed from a budget meeting with the state department three years ago.

“They asked, ‘Have you guys ever been up to the cemetery in Boscawen?’ Of course, I’ve been there for services. ‘Well, you know they have a memorial walkway up there. There’s an area up there in the back corner where it’s pretty much just American Legion.’”

But there was no memorial from the Sons. “All of the other organizations of the American Legion Family in New Hampshire, everybody had something up there in Boscawen except us,” DesRosiers said. “It was extremely important to us to have the respect and dignity of our forefathers who fought in the great wars, which is in our preamble.”

So DesRosiers sought and received permission to have a monument made. Phil Davidson, a detachment vice commander who works for a granite monument company, helped get the marker made.

“There can never be an exact duplicate of that stone because it was hand-chipped out of granite,” DesRosiers said.

Saturday’s dedication ceremony included past SAL National Commander Dave Stephens, current SAL National Commander Danny Smith and leading candidate for SAL national commander Greg Gibbs, as well as State Sen. Jeb Bradley.

Stephens said during the dedication, “The monument is more than a piece of granite. It serves as a reminder that the Sons of The American Legion are serving the veterans, widowers and their families.”

DesRosiers extended his thanks to the color guard from Woodsville Detachment 20; Legionnaire Patrick Boyle, who played the bagpipes at the ceremony; visitors from the Vermont SAL detachment and past and present leadership of the entire Legion Family who attended the ceremony.

**Marketing**

**Tips and guidelines to social media postings**

By Brandon S. Roberts, Detachment of Georgia

It’s important to conduct ourselves in a positive manner whether we are wearing the Sons of The American Legion cover or the emblem on our apparel. We should also conduct ourselves in a certain manner while promoting our organization through online and social media platforms.

Social media is a wonderful tool that we can use to promote and market ourselves and the programs we support. Unfortunately, one inappropriate post may undo all the hard work that you and other members have done to further our goals.

The following are etiquette tips and guidelines to help you determine the difference between appropriate and inappropriate posts.

**Do’s**

- Create a website, Facebook page and other social media platforms for your squadron.
- Post frequently and be as consistent as possible.
- Promote the Sons of The American Legion and entire Legion Family, along with programs and charities support by the organization.
- Post pictures when possible.
- Post events to let the public know how they may show their support.
- Create posts to let people know how to join the American Legion Family.
- Highlight accomplishments of the Sons at the national, detachment and squadron level.
- Share other detachment or squadron social media posts when appropriate.
- Promote all patriotic holidays and activities, Legion Family milestones, and significant dates related to the military or American history.
- Inform national and detachment headquarters of your website and social media presence so they can follow you.

**Don’ts**

- Over post which in turn may cause your audience to unfollow you.
- Post, share or tweet any content that does not meet the mission of the Sons of The American Legion, or The American Legion or American Legion Auxiliary.
- Post or share content that portrays the Sons of The American Legion or the American Legion Family in a negative light.
- Post or share any political advertisements, statements, jokes or overtly political photos. The American Legion is non-partisan.
- Link to any site or page that does not share the same goals or mission as the Sons, or The American Legion.
- Smear, besmirch or otherwise impugn the character or reputation of any individuals, public figures or other organizations.
requesting assistance through NEF the Legion’s Temporary Financial Assistance program.

Who could have imagined that the damage in Texas by Hurricane Harvey could be matched or exceeded by Hurricanes Irma and Maria, and then by the wildfires throughout California and other western states? In spite of unimaginable damage and suffering, the American Legion Family stepped up time and again. The line separating victims from heroes can be a thin one. The following are just a couple of stories about Sons from both sides of that line.

**Hurricane Harvey - Texas**

Forecasters knew Hurricane Harvey would pack a punch. But when it turned into a 100-year storm, relief efforts by Legion Family members was abound. While massive amounts of aid flowed in to the state, some of Texas’ own Legion Family members were there in a big way. During their midwinter conference, two squadrons from the Detachment of Texas contributed $20,000 each to two Legion posts who needed to rebuild after Hurricane Harvey.

**Hurricane Maria - Puerto Rico**

Many miles have kept both Henry Hasselhan and Tom Marsden away from their homes and loved ones as they provide recovery assistance in American disaster zones.

Since August 2017, they have traveled to Montana, Texas, Florida, South Carolina, St. Croix and Puerto Rico. Their disaster relief efforts are not easy. Puerto Rico remains in crisis. It is an island where virtually everything must be shipped in. Its power grid, crippled by Hurricane Maria, has been running at only about one third of its capacity and has failed several times since the storm, leaving islanders in the dark each time. Communications are poor with cell service and internet available only sporadically. Transportation is difficult because roads are damaged or missing altogether. Health and safety issues include the presence of the Zika virus and desperate residents, many of whom are existing in poverty conditions. Puerto Rico has twice the poverty of Mississippi, the poorest state in the United States. Living accommodations are beyond imagination — trees on roofs, disgusting sanitation, limited and contaminated water. Food and supplies are highly priced and limited. Roaming packs of dogs scavenge in the streets. It’s estimated that 200,000 residents have fled to Florida since the storm. Hasselhan, a member of Squadron 311 in Atco, N.J., is a Detachment of New Jersey vice commander who spent 31 years working in environmental protection. After retiring in 2007, he has chosen to remain on call to support emergency incident operations.

“Devastating wildfires, tornadoes and hurricanes have taken its toll on our great country,” Hasselhan said. “I have seen firsthand the destructive wildfires in Montana killing livestock and destroying homes. I have seen the devastation of Hurricanes Irma and Maria. Homes may have survived but the need for basic utilities has overwhelmed the island. As we sit down to delicious meals here on the mainland, I am very grateful that we can just flip a switch and the lights come on, turn on the faucet and have running water, flush the toilet and not have raw sewage running down the street. The need is great but it takes time and money to repair and rebuild after such destruction.”

Marsden, a member of Squadron 348 in Brick, N.J., has served in many SAL leadership roles, including detachment commander, National Executive Committeeeman, national vice commander, and national historian. The impact of 2012’s Hurricane Sandy involved him in emergency response, and he remains in the field to this day, traveling most recently to Puerto Rico to assist in cleanup and repair efforts.

One does not necessarily have to undertake big efforts like on-the-ground emergency support in the wake of major natural disasters. A donation to the Legion’s National Emergency Fund, or donations of water, food or clothing for local emergency relief efforts are other ways people can show their support. Efforts like those of Hasselhan and Marsden represent the heart of our organization.

As part of the military and civilian efforts that are giving aid to fellow Americans, Hasselhan and Marsden have given of themselves selflessly to victims of natural disasters.

Now it’s our turn.

**California Wildfires - Tubbs Fire**

At approximately 3:15 a.m. on Oct. 9, I was shaken awake by my wife because she smelled smoke. I told her it was the Napa fire and to go back to sleep. She then noticed that my cell phone on the night stand was lit up from a text message from my son in New York. It said, “The Redwood Valley house has burned down and I understand there’s a fire where you are. How are you doing?” We immediately got up and realized the smell of smoke was very strong.

We went downstairs, opened the front door and saw red embers blowing side-ways across the yard because of strong winds. We had no power and were in total darkness. We then started to discuss what to do when a neighbor bunched on the front door screaming, “The fire is here!” Seeing that the neighbor’s fence across the street was on fire and the smoke was getting thicker, we got into our car and drove out of the neighborhood with just the clothes we were wearing. There was fire on both sides of the road as we drove out of the neighborhood.

Several nearby hotels were completely engulfed in flames. It sounded like bombs going off as transformers and propane tanks exploded. Fire was on both sides of the freeway. It was surreal.

We ended up at a relative’s house where we could see from their kitchen window the fire burning in Santa Rosa. Nobody could sleep for several days as we were concerned the fire would continue to burn to the west and we would have to evacuate again.

**California Wildfires - Pocket Fire**

On Oct. 9 at 4:30 a.m., I was awakened by Cloverdale police ringing my doorbell. They asked if I could open the Cloverdale Veterans Memorial Building and use it as an evacuation center. I was told about the fires and that we may be getting evacuees from Palomino Lakes and possibly from Santa Rosa and Mendocino County. I contacted two other members of our squadron and 30 minutes later we had the building open. There were just six

See Victims, heroes of natural disasters on Page 10
evacuees at our building that morning – most evacuees were going to the Cloverdale fairgrounds next door – so we transferred our evacuees to the fairgrounds and closed the shelter. Some squadron members went to the fairgrounds to assist in feeding and gathering supplies for the 100 to 120 evacuees there, many still in their night clothes. The evacuation center remained open for one week.

The fire reached the southern border of our community. Most of our local firefighters were fighting fire in the Santa Rosa area. Local citizens, including one member of our post, organized a citizen fire brigade and were fighting fires on the southern edge of the Palomino Lakes neighborhood. No homes were lost and there were no injuries. Squadron 293 donated $500 to the American Legion National Emergency Fund. Money was collected during our annual car and motorcycle show to help victims of the fires and hurricanes that struck our country this past year.

California Wildfires - Atlas Peak Fire

A charter member of Napa, Calif., Squadron 113, Richard Dahlgren lost his entire collection of antique and classic Harley Davidson and Indian motorcycles in the Atlas Peak fire. He had stored them all at his family’s home.

His parent’s home of more than 50 years burned to the ground, but no one was injured.

(Editor’s Note: Many thanks to those who contributed to this article including Dustin Moore, Pat Marsden, Steve Brown, Al Delsid and Greg Anderson.
PATRIOTISM

A flag of honor and respect

By Ernie Laberge, National Americanism Commission

Nolan Foley has always had great respect and love for the American flag. It all began on July 24, 2015, when Nolan’s uncle, Justin Foley, took him to see the homecoming of U.S. Marine Gunner Sgt. Thomas Sullivan, who was killed in a terrorist attack on July 16 while stationed at a Naval Reserve Center in Chattanooga, Tenn.

When Sullivan’s body was transported from Bradley International Airport in Windsor Locks, Conn., to his hometown of Springfield, Mass., thousands of people lined the streets to show their respect. Nolan was in the crowd when a military officer handed a flag to him and his uncle. They were asked to “hold this flag with honor because when Sgt. Sullivan comes by, he should receive the respect due to him for devoting his life to our great nation. He was a true hero.”

About a year later, Virginia police officer Ashley Guindon was killed in the line of duty and was laid to rest in West Springfield. Nolan asked his grandmother to grab the flag that he received from Sullivan’s homecoming so he could go honor another fallen hero and give her the homecoming she deserved as well.

Later that year, a severe thunderstorm was approaching Nolan’s home. He became upset that the American flag flying in his front yard was left out in the storm. Nolan asked his grandmother to please get the flag, but she suggested they wait for the wind and rain to calm down. However, Nolan would not take no for an answer. He ran out into the yard, grabbed the flag, came back inside and said, “Okay grandma, now the flag is safe.”

Nolan’s grandfather is a retired firefighter for the West Springfield Fire Department. When given the chance to participate in a parade and ride in a fire truck, he would bring Nolan with him. Nolan would be there with his American flag sticking out of the window of the fire truck for everyone to see.

“His love for his country is like no other love I have ever seen,” Justin said. “If he could collect every torn flag and bring it to an American Legion for retirement, he would.”

This past March, Nolan was recognized by District 3 of The American Legion Department of Massachusetts during a banquet at Post 275 in Chicopee. His respect and passion for the American flag was relayed to the group, and he was presented with another American flag. This one had flown over the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C.

Nolan was also presented with a new Sons of The American Legion membership to Squadron 185 in Agawam, Mass., where his uncle is the squadron commander.

Nolan was so happy about the new flag and his SAL membership card that he cried tears of joy on his ride home that evening.

SAL PHOTOGRAPHY

Snapshots of Service

The Snapshots of Service photo contest was created to help promote the principles and programs of the Sons of The American Legion. Photos submitted are required to represent one of the four pillars of The American Legion: Americanism, Children & Youth, National Security, Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation.

Entries for the 2018 Snapshots of Service photo awards will be reviewed and selected for awards by a committee during the Sons national convention in Minneapolis in August.

Plaques will be awarded to first and second place winners of each category. Additional photos may be recognized as runners-up.

Photos must be submitted in either jpg or tiff digital format. Once submitted, they become the property of the SAL. Photos need to show SAL members wearing their SAL cap or branded apparel. Squadrons may submit up to three photos per category.

Entry forms are available at www.legion.org/sons/publications.
LEGION MEETINGS

Washington Conference was a success

Hundreds of Sons of The American Legion members joined other American Legion Family members for the organization’s annual Washington Conference in late February. The conference highlighted the Legion’s national legislative priorities and provided opportunities for Legion Family members to talk about issues important to The American Legion in person with their elected representatives on Capitol Hill.

The number of Sons attending the Washington Conference has grown steadily in recent years.

During the conference, SAL National Commander Danny Smith along with two busloads of Sons members laid wreaths at various war memorials in Washington, D.C. Smith and his wife, Donna, placed a Sons wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery.

Several detachment commanders and officers placed their own wreaths at the Korean, Vietnam and World War II memorials.

On the final day of the conference, SAL members witnessed American Legion National Commander Denise H. Rohan testify before a joint session of the House and Senate Committees on Veterans’ Affairs.

One highlight of this year’s Washington Conference was a training session for individuals interested in using video to promote Legion Family activities. It was sponsored by the National American Legion Press Association (NALPA) and featured Ken Kraetzer, a member of Squadron 50 in Pelham, N.Y.

For the past 10 years, Kraetzer has been producing “The SAL Radio Report” every Monday afternoon on WVOX in New Rochelle, N.Y. The show is streamed online and has picked up an international following. Listen at http://wvox.com.

Posts and squadrons around the country can try this same approach to get your story out to the public.

For more information about NALPA, visit www.legion.org/nalpa.