

From: [March, Joseph H.](#)
To: [Public Relations Division](#)
Subject: Release: The American Legion Honors Armed Forces Servicemembers for Volunteer Efforts
Date: Tuesday, August 31, 2010 4:33:14 PM
Attachments: [Spirit of Service Awards.jpg](#)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The American Legion Honors Armed Forces Servicemembers for Volunteer Efforts

MILWAUKEE (Aug. 31, 2010) -- Representatives from the five armed services were honored today by the nation's largest wartime veterans' organization.

The American Legion presented the Spirit of Service award to U.S. Army Sergeant Chelsey D. Billing, Fort Belvoir, Va.; U.S. Navy Petty Officer Third Class Thomas M. Lothridge, USS Maryland (SSBN 738), Kings Bay, Ga.; U.S. Marine Corps Sergeant Avery Washington II, Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, N.C.; U.S. Air Force Staff Sergeant Edward L. Perez, Keesler Air Force Base, Miss.; and U.S. Coast Guard Petty Officer Second Class David L. Downham, Coast Guard Air Station Atlantic City, N.J., during the organization's 92nd National Convention, being held here August 31- Sept. 2.

The award was presented for each of the recipient's volunteer service in their local communities.

This is the eleventh annual presentation of the award, which includes shaped, etched glass mounted on a marble base, as well as a one-year membership in The American Legion.

National Commander Clarence E. Hill, who presented the awards to the service members along with Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates explained the purpose of the award.

"As an organization of wartime veterans we understand and embrace the concept of service to community, state and nation," Hill said. "These outstanding military members represent the true spirit of service – a steadfast commitment to serve their country and their fellow Americans."

To receive this recognition the individual must be an outstanding military professional – and be actively involved in volunteer projects in the community during off-duty hours.

"We know about service to others. We also know that those in uniform today – from all branches of military service – active duty, reserves and National Guard members – often go out of their way to make a difference in the lives of so many others in the communities in which they live," Hill said. "Today, The American Legion honors these outstanding Americans who reflect the great spirit of service to others that the founders of our

organization considered essential.”

Cmdr. Hill said that these military men and women being honored fit the bill and are representative of thousands of their peers who make up the finest fighting force in the world.

“Each of them has demonstrated a strong commitment to serving others, a spirit of service that deserves the highest recognition The American Legion can provide.”

Each of the members was selected by their individual services. The American Legion provided for accommodations, meals and travel during their time in Milwaukee. They participated in the ceremonial opening of the convention hosted by actor-comedian Ben Stein and were featured in The American Legion convention parade as the newest members of The American Legion interacted with their fellow veterans of several generations.

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Photo: Army Sgt. Billing, Nat. Commander Hill, Navy Petty Officer Lothridge, Marine Sgt. Washington II, Coast Guard Petty Officer Downham, Air Force Staff Sgt. Perez, Defense Sec. Gates and actor-comedian Ben Stein. (Photo by Tom Strattman)