

The Sons of The American Legion

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NATIONAL UPDATE

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8

Spotlight on Americanism: Field of Flags

As a kindergartner Thomas Landkamer would assist the school custodian raise and lower the American flag, earning him the nickname of "Flag Boy", bestowed upon him by friends and family. Since that early age Thomas has had a special place in his heart for the American flag and those that have served this country in the Armed Forces. Thomas has been a member of *Norfolk, NE Squadron 16* since birth. Now a young man of 20 years, Thomas has turned his love of country and patriotism toward a new project.

In 2011 Thomas felt he needed to do something to remember

the Nebraska service men and women who had been killed in action since 9/11. He set out on his dream to create a memorial for Nebraska service men and women who had been killed since 9/11 using some white crosses that he was given by his father, the remainder he constructed himself using a wood lath. Each cross has a marker which bears the name, rank, branch of military service, date of death and a picture of the deceased. Along with the cross Thomas places a small American Flag, which he has purchased with his own money. Veteran's Day 2011 was the first time Thomas arranged

his memorial. Twice each year he continues to turn his family's yard into a field of flags honoring those that gave the ultimate sacrifice.

The Memorial has touched many lives, especially a family that lives in the neighborhood, whose son is among the 92 memorial crosses on display. The father left in tears, being "moved" by the tribute to his son and the others that had given the ultimate sacrifice. Thomas has pledged to continue the tribute annually on both Veterans Day and Memorial Day well into the future.

Charlotte playing host to 2014 Sons Convention

Charlotte, North Carolina is known as the Queen City, named for a European princess who became the Queen of England one year before the city was founded in 1768.

Hundreds of S.A.L. members from across the country and from a few countries around the world will descend on Charlotte next month to take part in the 43rd National Convention of the Sons of The American Legion. The S.A.L. National Convention will start with committee meetings on the morning of Friday, August 22.. National Commander Joe Gladden will gavel the convention to order at 1pm on Friday afternoon in Hall C2 on the lower level of the Charlotte Convention Center. General sessions will continue throughout the afternoon Friday, then on Saturday and conclude on Sunday afternoon in time for Sons to participate in the annual American Legion Convention Parade that will run through

Continued on Page 6



CWF donations top \$6 million

In late April, almost a full month before the end of the administrative year, a donation sent into the Child Welfare Foundation by a Florida Squadron put the S.A.L. over the \$6 million mark in all-time donations!

MySAL.org can impact membership

Joe Gallagher has worked for The American Legion Headquarters in Indianapolis for the past 20 years. He's a member of the Sons through Avon, IN Squadron 145. As Deputy Director of Information Technology for The Legion, he's one of the biggest cheerleaders for the S.A.L.'s new MySAL.org internet site.

MySAL.org debuted last October. It's a free and secure web portal that allows Squadron Adjutants access to some important and extremely helpful day-to-day membership tools. It links local Squadrons directly with the computers at National Headquarters. Every Squadron in the S.A.L. is eligible to register one individual to access MySAL.org on behalf of that Squadron. Once logged in, the features that can be accessed allow that individual to view and edit Squadron membership data (CSV file format allows users to work with data in other applications such as Microsoft Excel and Access), generate reports, conduct membership database searches and much more.

Continued on Page 7



Joe Gallagher demonstrates features of MySAL.org, a secure and free internet web site intended to support Squadron membership.

On the final approach to landing

By Joe Gladden
National Commander

We are rapidly approaching the end of my administrative year and I'm so proud to have served this year as your National Commander. Words really cannot describe it. The year has been filled with many incredible memories of accomplishment and of loss, but the only losses worth remembering are those of our comrades, friends and family members that have gone on before us.

This year I've had the great honor of traveling across this nation. Since being elected, I have traveled to 24 Detachments and have seen how we're working the programs of The American Legion. We are working for the communities in which we live. Most importantly, we are helping the veterans who have served and the soldiers who are currently protecting us.

During my travels I have been talking about the programs that I have asked Sons to work on this year, especially my Commander's Project, the Legacy Scholarship Fund. I have shared my vision of the Legacy everywhere I have traveled and have told the story of how a soldier would leave home to protect his country and his family with every intention of coming home. However, that soldier didn't return, answering the final call instead. I would share how that service members' family and children were left to take care of themselves. Long ago, The American Legion realized that we need to help the children of our fallen soldiers

Continued on Page 3



Above: During a visit to Ohio this spring, National Commander Joe Gladden thanked 9-year old Myles Eckert for his "pay it forward" attitude.

Right: Commander Joe has made Children and Youth programs a priority.



Ohio youngster shows meaning of "pay it forward"

On a recent trip to Ohio, National Commander Joe Gladden had an opportunity to congratulate nine year old Myles Eckert. Myles found a \$20 bill one day in a parking lot. He wrapped the bill in a note and handed it to an Air National Guardsman. The note read, "My dad was a soldier. He's in heaven now. We like to pay it forward in my family. It's your lucky day! Thank you for your service."

Myles was just four weeks old when his father was killed in Iraq in 2005. This simple, selfless effort made news across the country and landed him an appearance on a national TV show. The Detachment of Ohio honored him with a lifetime membership in **Toledo, OH Squadron 587**. The Legion Department of Ohio donated \$5,000 in Myles' name to a charity and is sending him to an Auxiliary-sponsored survivors' camp this fall.

Myles also teamed up with a Friendly's restaurant this spring and threw an ice cream party for an elementary school in Toledo. He used the opportunity to talk to the youngsters about paying it forward. While he was signing autographs, one young student handed him a one dollar bill and asked him to give it to a soldier.

MySAL.org from Page 1

At present, fewer than ten percent of all Sons Squadrons in the world have assigned a member to have access to MySAL.org. To-date, about 550 Squadrons are using the service.

"I have a good feeling that this is helping the S.A.L.," says Joe Gallagher. "You don't have to be the Squadron Adjutant to get access to the system. But in many Squadrons, the Adjutant is the guy who does most of the paperwork involving membership, so it just makes sense that he would be the one with access. It's completely up to the Squadron and its Legion Post to choose the one person who is authorized."

Getting signed up for MySAL.org is pretty easy. The first step is to go to the site and print the form on the entry portal. That form must be signed by, both, the S.A.L. Squadron and American Legion Post Adjutants. The form is then faxed, mailed or e-mailed to National Headquarters where it will be checked and processed. It usually takes only two or three days before a temporary sign-in is e-mailed to the person who has been approved. Once a Squadron Adjutant (or whomever) has logged into the system, he can change his password to whatever he wants. For security purposes, passwords must be changed every six months thereafter.

Individuals who are not necessarily computer-savvy can get support for using the system by calling a special toll-free help line. Not only will Legion Headquarters staff be able to talk them through problems, there is even remote assistance available. By activating a series of on-line codes, callers can allow MySAL.org staff to look at the caller's own computer screen to diagnose and fix problems they might be having with using the system.

While MySAL.org is likely to have a huge, positive, impact of membership for many Squadrons, the future looks even brighter.

"We've talked about offering online renewals a lot for a long time. If we can generate enough interest in using this system, it might just be possible to program the computers to handle online registration in the not too distant future," says Gallagher. "We're not there yet, but who knows?"

Anyone interested in learning more about MySAL.org can simply call the help line: 800-433-3318. Also, Libby Vickers, Product Support Specialist for The Legion's IT office will have a booth in the exhibit hall of the Charlotte National Convention next month. Anyone is welcome to stop by and take the first step toward some monumental improvements of handling membership data inside the S.A.L.



Above: Pam, Ilene and Andrea are ready to help with real time support for the MySAL.org system. Callers can get remote assistance, allowing the experts to see what's on your screen and help.

Do you have a story to share?

Send ideas and pictures to:

National Update
c/o Mike Pipher, Editor
612 S. State Road 446 - #35C
Bloomington, IN 47401
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mpipher@iu.edu

Next deadline is October 1, 2014

K9TAL from Page 3

of your Legion post who already holds an FCC amateur radio license. Although there is a minimum age for obtaining an FCC license, experience has shown this kind of program is very interesting to younger members, those who tend to take an interest in various technologies.

"Membership in TALARC is free to all Legion Family members and those with lifetime memberships in their branch of the family can also receive a lifetime membership in the club," says Joe March (call sign KJ9M), National Director of Public Relations for The American Legion and also serves as TALARC's resident engineer because of his First Class FCC license.

Those with an interest in joining TALARC can do so at www.legion.org/hamradio. You'll have to supply your Legion Family membership card number as well as your FCC license number. Members of TALARC receive a certificate and are encouraged to join in.

"When one person or group talks it up, others will respond," says Justis.



Above: When a member of *Oak Harbor, OH Squadron 114* went to visit his father in a nearby nursing home, he saw that the TV that his father and other veterans had depended on was broken and beyond repair. The Squadron took matters into their own hands. Using money made from a series of fund raisers, they purchased and donated a 46" flat screen to the nursing home and the vets are once again enjoying their favorite programs.

Below: No event is too big or too small when it comes to veterans out on the eastern end of Pennsylvania. Just call on the guys from *Allentown, PA Squadron 9* and they'll rustle up plenty of help for



plenty of events. They take the position that men and women in our military have made sacrifices and dedicated their lives in protecting our country and our freedoms. They're only too happy to be able to give something back.

Right: Guys from *Limerick, PA Squadron 626* think everyone should adopt a highway somewhere. Four times each year, they head out into Berks County to perform clean-up and beautification operations on their road.

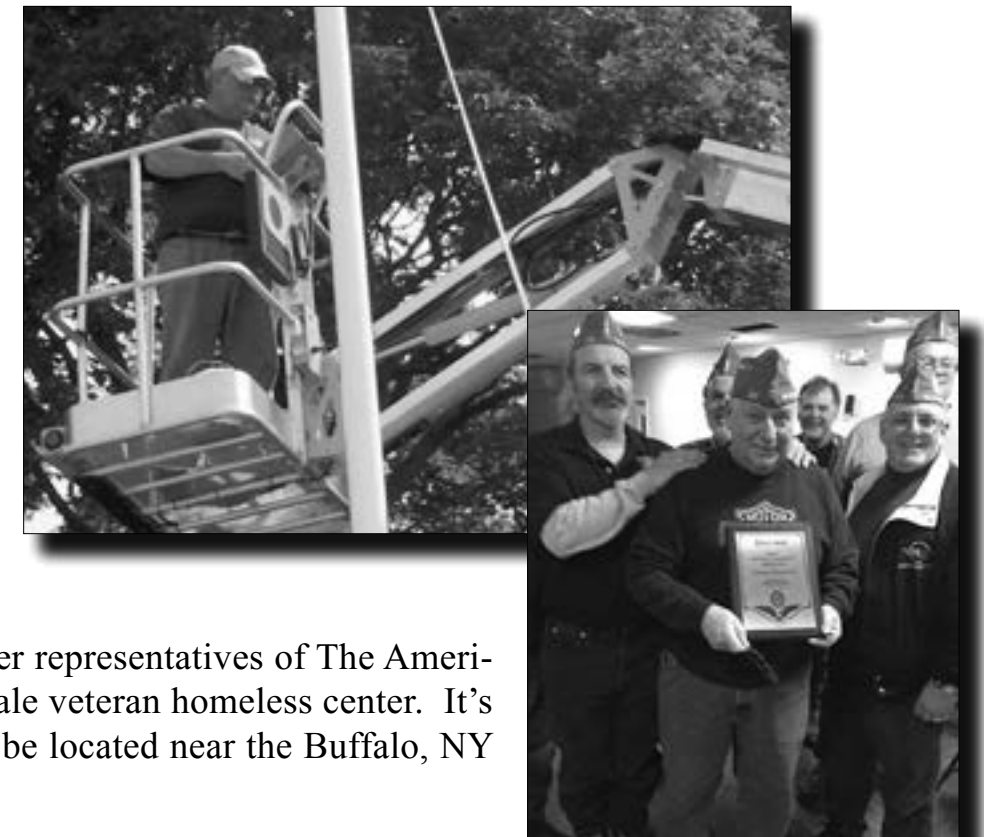
For nine years, Sons from *Adena, OH Squadron 525* have been awarding scholarships to deserving high school students who are headed to college. This year, the Squadron handed out \$500 to each of four deserving students. One of the recipients was the great-great grandson of one of the original Legionnaires who first chartered Post 525. Sounds like a good example of karma coming back around. Squadron 525 raises all of their scholarship money through an annual golf scramble.

Earlier this year, Sons from around the *Detachment of New York* participated in the Center for Disabilities Telethon at Albany. About 15 Sons manned the telephones and took donations from callers. They plan to make it an annual event and might even increase the \$500 contribution the Detachment made that day.

Right: It's not unusual for Squadrons to present awards to their members and others who have rendered outstanding service to The Legion Family and/or to their community. That was the case this spring when *Whitman, MA Squadron 22* recognized their Sgt. at Arms, Joseph Marzilli. "Jay" used his own cherry picker to paint the post flag pole a few years ago. He put together a tribute to veterans along his own street. He installed stepping stones in front of the post. He serves on the Honor Guard. And much more.

Sons in the Erie County, NY area have gotten together with other representatives of The American Legion Family and are working to build the state's largest female veteran homeless center. It's been two years in the undertaking. When finished, the center will be located near the Buffalo, NY VA Hospital.

The town of Quincy, MA is looking a lot nicer this summer thanks to the efforts of some community-minded Sons. Members of *Quincy, MA Squadron 294* teamed up with local high school students, Junior ROTC students and some other members of The Legion Family during the community's Cleaner, Greener Cleanup back in early May. The group planted flowers and decorated a large traffic island, known as Veterans Island that the Sons created just about a year ago. It's also the site of Memorial Day ceremonies, complete with hundreds of U.S. Flags.



Convention from Page 1

downtown Charlotte.

Delegates and guests to the convention are registered in advance through their respective Detachments. Representatives of each Detachment can pick up credentials in the S.A.L. Convention Office located in Ballrooms A and B of the Convention Center.

While there is no specific dress code during the convention, there are some guidelines. Delegates who expect to be on stage to receive awards are expected to wear a coat and tie. Otherwise, trousers, shirts and shoes always look nice when dignitaries and special guests pay a visit. Shorts, tank top shirts and flip-flops are discouraged.

All of the official convention hotels are located in downtown Charlotte and shuttle busses will move delegates between their hotels and the Convention Center. On Friday, the shuttles will run until 8:30pm, until 5:30pm on Saturday and until 2:30pm on Sunday.

Delegates and their families will have much to see and do while attending the convention. Golf enthusiasts will be glad to hear the Detachment of North Carolina will be sponsoring a golf tournament on Thursday, August 21. Proceeds from the outing will benefit the Child Welfare Foundation. Located close to the downtown, Renaissance Park Golf Course is one of the best public courses in the Charlotte Metro Area.

Interested players should download the entry form from www.legion.org/sons.

NASCAR enthusiasts will be in heaven while attending the convention. Concord, NC is just a few miles from Charlotte and is home base for many of the biggest NASCAR racing teams. Even closer, the NASCAR Hall of Fame is located just across the street from the Convention Center and is offering discount ticket prices to American Legion Family members.

Charlotte has a thriving arts community. The city boasts a museum of modern art and many artisans have concentrated their street side galleries into the popular NoDa District, located just northeast of the downtown. Nearby wineries, breweries, BBQ restaurants and bakeries dot the map. Those with a penchant for shopping can walk 'till they drop at unlimited stores and malls in the area, including the famous Concord Mills Mall, one of the state's most visited attractions featuring more than 200 outlets, restaurants, retail shops and North Carolina's only Bass Pro Shop.

Sunday's American Legion Parade will begin at 4pm. Information about the parade route and Department line-up schedules and much more information can be found at www.legion.org/convention.

New cell phone app is ready for Sons

Sons continue to embrace new technologies to enhance communications. The S.A.L.'s updated Apple and Google apps are now available for download.

I-phone users will find the app at: <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/sons-of-the-american-legion/id497089776?mt=8>.

Android users will find it at: <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=org.legion.p2172cc>.

Legacy Run

S.A.L. National Commander Joseph Gladden has made The American Legion's Legacy Scholarship one of his primary projects this year. The scholarship fund was established to ensure college education is a possibility for children whose parents have been killed while serving our country's military since 9/11.

One of the most successful ways of raising funds for the scholarship in recent years has been the now-annual Legacy Run. Hundreds of Legion Family motorcyclists ride from Indianapolis to the site of the National Convention and raise hundreds of thousands of dollars.



Commander from Page 2 K9TAL is looking for members

and established the Legacy Scholarship Fund. It's there to help these children when they're ready to go to college. So as I traveled, I've encouraged everyone I've come into contact with to help by making a donation. In exchange, I would give them one of my Commander's Challenge Coins, or one of my T-shirts or one of my patches. To-date, we've raised over \$15,000 for this cause. If each member would just donate \$20 then we could raise \$7 million.

Other great accomplishments have happened this year. One in particular occurred because of many years of dedicated work and service. At the end of May we surpassed the \$6 million mark in all-time donations to the Child Welfare Foundation. Even with fewer dollars donated this year, we were still the largest group to donate to CWF. This occurred because of dedicated Blue Cap members like you. We have also done another great job of recruiting new members this year - nearly 45,000 new members have been signed up. Unfortunately, we failed to renew almost as many members. There's still time to contact members who have not yet renewed for 2015 and let them know what we know about being members of the Sons of The American Legion. We must make them see that they are honoring their ancestors' service to our country by belonging and being involved. We must help them understand the great work that we do to serve veterans, children and our communities as an organization. We should help them see how they are a part of something great - The American Legion Family.

The idea of an amateur radio club is not new inside The American Legion. As early as the 1930's - long before the development of today's various worldwide communications technologies -- Legion posts were encouraged to form amateur radio groups in support of civil defense. Today the buzz phrase is Homeland Security, but the mission remains largely the same: serving the needs of the community.

The American Legion Amateur Radio Club was formed in 2011, thanks in large part to some S.A.L. members in Southern Maryland who donated the first Ham radio equipment to organizers at the National Headquarters in Indianapolis. With equipment in hand, an antenna was installed on the roof and a room in the basement was fixed up to serve as the club's official headquarters.

The call sign for TALARC is K9TAL. It has the ability to operate in the HF, VHF and UHF frequency ranges. Monthly "nets" (on air get-togethers) are held in the afternoon of the second Saturday every month. There are now just over 1,900 members of the club.

Marty Justis, recently retired Executive Director of The American Legion, is a Ham operator (call sign W9WMJ) and has served as president of the club since its formation. He's also a member of Little River, SC Squadron 186.

"There are many radio clubs out there but very few of them are nationwide. Ours is the largest amateur radio club in the country," says Justis. "This club is yet another opportunity we have to serve our communities, states and the nation. We have great potential to assist in times of disaster. Getting active can also pay dividends within your own Legion post or Squadron. This can be a tool for generating membership, building youth programs, practicing disaster preparedness training and other forms of public service to the community like serving as trained weather watchers. And it's fun."

Justis believes the easiest way to bring TALARC into your community is to find a member

Continued on Page 7



Above: A plaque on the wall of the "Radio Shack" thanks members of the S.A.L.

Left: Sitting at the controls, Joe March can connect with Ham operators across town or across the globe.