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THE AMERICAN LEGION
Dispatch
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LEGION RIDERS

Photo by Steve Brooks

LEGION RIDERS BATTLE HOMELESSNESS

An Indiana chapter sponsors an apartment in new homeless veterans facility.

By Steve Brooks

Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki has set a goal of completely eradicating veteran homelessness. That isn't going to happen overnight, but projects like the Jackson Street Commons – a Kokomo, Ind.-based 27-room long-term or permanent home for homeless veterans – is a step in the right direction.

And thanks to American Legion Riders Chapter 60 in nearby Logansport, that process is getting some help. The chapter recently made a donation of $3,000 to sponsor an apartment at the facility, meaning that when the $3.3 million facility opens in May, that room will be completely furnished and ready to house a veteran.

"Unfortunately, there's a need for this," said Mark Harmon, Chapter 60's director. "We're just here to try to help veterans. I don't think people sometimes realize what it costs to be free in this country. For those of us who do recognize that, it's nice to be able to give back to those veterans that maintain our freedom."

The Jackson Street Commons is open to honorably discharged disabled, homeless veterans from four counties – Howard, Miami, Cass and Tipton. In addition to 27 individual apartments – each with a bedroom separate from a living area – the facility will include a community kitchen, laundry room, coffee bar, communal living areas, supportive service suites, a food pantry, reception area, a library with computers and books, a laundry room and an outdoor social area.

The project uses a "Housing First" model, which provides a home first and then provides residents with services that will help them recover and become self sufficient. Those services will include substance-abuse help, vocational rehab and disability assistance.

Rick Baker, Chapter 60's ride coordinator and a 35-year Legionnaire, first heard of the project through fellow Legion Riders in Kokomo and brought it to Chapter 60's attention. "We'd been looking since we

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NEWS ALERT

America's most beloved veterans

From every generation of Americans that has gone to war, the names of a few veterans are added to our nation's collective memory – some for selflessness and courage under fire, some for national leadership in tough times, some for their celebrity.

During the month of May, visit The American Legion's website to pick your favorite candidates for America's most beloved veterans. Veterans receiving the most votes will be featured in the November issue of *The American Legion Magazine*.

Cast your vote starting in May:
www.legion.org/belovedveterans

Legion Baseball deadlines are near

Any American Legion Baseball team that fails to register by May 15 shall pay an additional $200 to its respective American Legion department. Any team that fails to register by June 1 will not be permitted to play during the season.

Register online:
www.baseball.legion.org

Michigan seeks new department adjutant

The American Legion Department of Michigan is accepting applications for the compensated position of department adjutant. Interested and eligible applicants can learn more about the position and how to apply online:

www.legion.org/documents/legion/word/michigan.doc

COMMANDER'S MESSAGE

Our voice outside the U.S.

Dan Dellinger
National Commander

You may be aware that there are nearly 14,000 American Legion posts that are actively involved with veterans, youth and their community. Did you know that outside of the United States there are 250 posts that are also actively promoting the good of the organization?

More than 15,000 Legionnaires belong to the Foreign and Outlying Departments and Posts of The American Legion (FODPAL). FODPAL posts can be found in Canada, Ireland, Greece, Germany, Costa Rica, Panama, China and beyond.

Recently, China Post 1 helped raise nearly $4,000 to purchase Job Access With Speech (JAWS) for children attending the Northern Luzon Association for the Blind (NLAB) school in the Philippines. JAWS is a computer screen reader program that allows blind and visually impaired users to read the screen by text-to-speech or by Braille. The screen reading software was added to the NLAB's five computers, which China Post 1 also helped purchase through fundraising efforts.

John Keller, commander of China Post 1, said the JAWS software "will allow NLAB children an opportunity to merge into the digital age of communication, education and socialization. I believe that the simple keystroke action of asking another human being thousands of miles away a question of science, culture or friendship can put these children on a track that will rival Helen Keller in her accomplishments in life."

Meanwhile, in honor of the Legion's 95th birthday last month, Paris Post 1 Commander Carl W. Hale led a ceremony celebrating the birth of The American Legion from where it all began at 14 Rue Ernest Psichari.

I encourage you to visit the FODPAL web page to read more about the Legion's voice, place and influence in Alaska, Hawaii and outside of the continental United States.

www.legion.org/fodpal

FUNDRAISING PROGRAM

NEF goal: $1 million

The American Legion's National Emergency Fund (NEF) program is National Commander Dan Dellinger's primary fundraiser this year.

A natural disaster can strike at any time, devastating the lives of men and women who honorably served their country. While we can't prevent a natural disaster, the Legion does provide relief to veterans and their families affected by devastation.

Since 1989, the NEF program has provided more than $8 million in direct financial assistance to posts, Legionnaires and their families. The program helps with out-of-pocket expenses, including but not limited to food, temporary housing and clothing. All donations made to NEF go directly toward the program.

To donate: *www.legion.org/nef*

NEF Commander's Challenge

American Legion department commanders are challenged to assist in fundraising efforts for the Legion's National Emergency Fund. The departments currently in first place for their respective membership category include:

- Category 1 (100,000+): New York
- Category 2 (65,000+): Illinois
- Category 3 (40,000+): Maryland
- Category 4 (25,000+): Nebraska
- Category 5 (10,000+): New Mexico
- Category 6 (9,999-): Hawaii

www.legion.org/emergency/challenge

MEMBERSHIP

Recruiters to be honored with 'Building for Tomorrow Today'

During the 2013-2014 membership year, American Legion National Commander Dan Dellinger will award his national commander pin to any Legion Family member who obtains five new members.

A new member is any eligible person joining for the 2014 membership year who was not a member of The American Legion during the 2013 membership year.

Each member listed must be eligible for membership in The American Legion. Forward names of Sons of the American Legion members or Auxiliary members to your detachment or unit for use in their respective incentive programs.

To maintain the integrity of the national commander's pin program, only one pin will be awarded per individual.

Upon receipt of the certification form, national membership staff will confirm the names and mail the pin directly to the person who earned it. Commander Dellinger's "Building for Tomorrow Today" pin incentive program will end June 30, 2014, or when supplies are exhausted.

Also, National Commander Dellinger will award his "Building for Tomorrow Today" coin to any Legion Family member who recruits 15 new members.

www.legion.org/commanderpin

NATIONAL ADJUTANT'S MESSAGE

A devotion to veterans in need

Legion members give hope to a blind retired Marine and a suicidal veteran.

By Daniel S. Wheeler

Judi Beischel, Department of Arizona commander and member of Post 58 in Fountain Hills, Ariz., assisted John Shelton, a blind retired Marine, in his time of need. *Photo by Lucas Carter*

For nearly 100 years, members of The American Legion have upheld the organization's devotion to its fellow servicemembers and veterans. Stories come across my desk daily about the ways a Legionnaire or a post has helped a veteran in need, and they are a good reminder of the positive impact The American Legion can have on a veteran and a community.

Larry Molitor of Cordova, Ill., was walking by the local post office when he saw a man in front of him who looked dejected. "I just walked up to him and asked how he was," said Molitor, a Vietnam War veteran and a member of Post 33. "I sensed a problem from the moment I saw (Vietnam War Navy veteran John Bosten). Essentially, he was starving to death and was contemplating suicide."

Molitor and other community members rallied around Bosten and watched him change from "being a recluse to being one of the most beautiful people you would know," Molitor said.

Molitor worked with the local food pantry to provide Bosten daily meals. He helped him receive 100 percent VA disability. He paid his membership dues at Post 33, and he encouraged him to join a church. Bosten became an active and valuable member of Post 33, helping with homeless veteran standdown events and serving on the honor guard and as the adjutant officer and finance officer.

Bosten passed away a few years ago. In his memory, Post 33 donated a flag pole and plaque that's placed at River's Edge Park in Cordova. "He told me that the day I approached him was the best day of his life," Molitor said. "I think of him every day."

John Shelton, a legally blind retired Marine, experienced severe flood damage to his Phoenix-area condo in December 2012 when rainwater flowed in from his neighbors' roofs. Shelton was too proud to ask for help. Instead, he kept himself under blankets as the winter air turned his living room into 40-degree misery. American Legion Post 58 in Fountain Hills, Ariz., stepped in, fixing Shelton's roof and floor in his main living area. Legion Family members also started checking in on him regularly, helping him with his VA benefits and buying him a small indoor grill to cook his meals.

"If there is any veteran that is out there, like John, we need to help," said Judi Beischel, Department of Arizona commander and Post 58 member. "It's a Legion Family thing. It's what we're supposed to be doing."

Shelton is grateful for the Legion's unwavering support. "There's good in the world," he said. "You just have to run into it once in awhile, and sometimes it takes adversity to find it. Without it, I never would have met (Beischel) and the guys at the Legion that showed genuine concern about my situation. That was very humbling since I didn't want help from anybody in my life."

The housing care that Shelton received from the Legion enabled him to take another step forward – securing a seeing-eye dog named Yolo from another nonprofit agency.

"Without (The American Legion's) help, absolutely none of this would have happened – getting my home back to a living condition and this beautiful creature (Yolo). I am truly blessed."

Read coverage on Spring Meetings, May 5-8

www.legion.org

Dispatch

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Correspondence and letters to the editor:
The American Legion Dispatch
P.O. Box 1055
Indianapolis, IN 46206

Subscriptions/Customer Service:
(317) 630-1221

Email: **dispatch@legion.org**

Fax: **(317) 630-1280**

Online: **www.legion.org/dispatch**

EDITOR
Cameran Richardson

DESIGNER
Jason Reed

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established this chapter (in 2011) for something to spend our money on," Baker said.

The post did a series of fundraisers for the project, including an annual ride reminiscent of a mini-Legacy Run, solicited items from local merchants to be raffled off, and conducted monthly cash drawings.

Judy Dennis, executive director of Family Service Association of Kokomo – one of the government agencies overseeing the facility – said donations such as Chapter 60's are vital to the project.

"The help like that of The American Legion … keeps us able to focus on raising funds for other construction concerns and staff needs that we would have to revert those funds to if we didn't have other organizations donating it," she said. "Once the construction is done, we can open those doors and residents will be able to have a completely furnished apartment they can walk into. Obviously these homeless veterans don't have furniture … and so when an organization like the Legion donates that, it takes a load off our shoulders to be able to focus our attention on finding those residents, being able to help them in other ways – social needs and support needs – and being able to know that they're going to get the help they need."

Angela Harmon, Mark's wife and the communications director for Chapter 60, said the donation – and publicity surrounding it – has a ripple effect for the chapter. "I think it makes more people more inclined to get involved," she said. "They can help and contribute, and that just blossoms out."

Chapter 60's involvement with Jackson Street Commons will be ongoing. The Riders plan on occasionally stopping by the facility, perhaps bringing coffee and donuts with them "just to let them know they're not forgotten and that there are people out there that care about them," Harmon said.

A plaque listing Chapter 60 as the sponsor will be mounted on the door of the apartment, and the chapter's donation keeps the apartment furnished for the lifetime of the facility.

"That was one of the things that we really thought was kind of nice about this: that we were able to contribute to something that will be there long after we're gone," Mark Harmon said. "It provides lasting assistance to someone. We've been able to do some pretty good things, but this is the topper."

Cajun Comeau
Department Service Officer, North Carolina

ASK A SERVICE OFFICER

Beware of VA pension scams

Q. Are there scams that I should watch out for with VA pensions?

A. As a veteran, beware of pension advance products that offer to pay military retirees a lump-sum payout in return for their monthly retirement payments. The products may amount to payment of only pennies on the dollar and the advances are reported to carry interest rates from 27 percent to 106 percent, which can threaten a safe retirement. There are many pension advance companies on the Internet, often with patriotic-sounding names and logos. If you're offered a pension advance, stay away from arrangements that allow a creditor to access the account where you get your benefits. Instead, get trusted financial expert advice if you need emergency funds.

Additionally, some individuals and companies use VA's Aid & Attendance pension benefit as a hook to sell services. The Aid & Attendance benefit is for eligible disabled veterans who require the aid and attendance of another person, or who are housebound. Individuals or companies looking to sell their services may offer to help veterans obtain Aid & Attendance benefits, but they often require customers to sign up for financial services first, then they move assets into irrevocable trusts for qualification. When being solicited, watch out for:

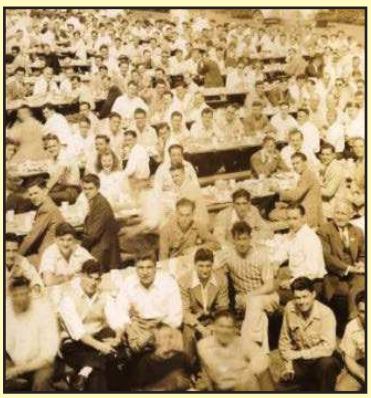
- A lawyer or veteran adviser who offers to get the Aid & Attendance benefit for a fee. Federal law prohibits VA-accredited advisers from charging to assist with VA claims. However, at times a "consultation fee" is charged up front.
- A claim from a paid adviser stating that he or she can get the benefit for you more quickly than anyone else. All VA claims must go through the standard evaluation process, which no one can bypass to get it done faster.
- An offer to help financially secured veterans qualify for Aid & Attendance by taking control of their finances and moving assets into inaccessible trusts. This may disqualify a veteran from other benefits.
- Retirement homes using the lure of Aid & Attendance to get veterans to move in on the implied promise that they will get the benefit. If the claim is denied, the veteran may not be able to afford to remain in the facility.

Email claims questions to: ✉ *askso@legion.org*
Find a Legion service officer: *www.legion.org/serviceofficers*

CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION SPOTLIGHT

Post 70 in Nutley, N.J.

Chartered in 1919, Post 70 in Nutley, N.J., shared a piece of its history on The American Legion's Centennial Celebration website. On June 15, 1946, the post hosted a welcome home celebration for local World War II servicemen and women. According to the Nutley Historical Society, nearly 3,000 local men and women served in World War II and 92 were killed or reported missing in action. A memorial at the Nutley Public Library lists the names of the town's World War II veterans.



Share Your Post's Legacy

Upload photos, print material and videos related to your post's history on the Legion's Centennial Celebration web page: *www.legion.org/centennial*

AMERICANISM

Missouri youth wins Oratorical Contest

For the second year in a row, a youth from Missouri claimed the championship title for The American Legion's National High School Oratorical Program: "A Constitutional Speech Contest."

On April 6 in Indianapolis, Ashwath Kumar of Columbia, Mo., won the Legion's 77th National Oratorical Contest and an $18,000 college scholarship for his winning oration titled, "This Great House." American Legion Post 202 sponsored Kumar, a senior at David H. Hickman High School.

"The biggest goal I had for the (American Legion's) National (Oratorical) Contest was to speak from the heart and not speak from the page," Kumar said. "When I'm talking to a large audience, the emotions, you don't script them, they just come."

American Legion's 77th National Oratorical Contest runner-up Brandon Posner (left), winner Ashwath Kumar and third-place finisher Ellen Densmore. *Photo by Lucas Carter*

Second place and a $16,000 college scholarship was awarded to high school senior Brandon Posner of Doylestown, Penn., for his oration titled, "A Document of Unification." Legion Post 210 sponsored Posner. Third place and a $14,000 college scholarship was awarded to high school senior Ellen Densmore of Denver, for her oration titled, "The Land of the Free." Legion Post 23 in Aurora, Colo., sponsored Densmore.

It took about two hours for Kumar to write his winning prepared oration, which derived from the analogy of the Constitution being compared to a house and the unmoving foundation it rests on during conflict. In his speech, Kumar refereed to the strong foundation when he said, "Conflict is the fuel of change, and change is the engine of the Constitution. Conflict led to the formation of this country, conflict drives us every year to select representatives in government, and conflict underlies every policy, every court case, every decision that determines the course of our future. The right amount of tension holds together the foundation of our great house.

"As citizens of the United States, as the proud owners and builders of this great house, it is our responsibility to protect and maintain the Constitution: for ourselves, for each other and for all of posterity."

For Kumar, who started the weekend out as one of 53 contestants and advanced through three rounds of intense competition to become crowned the 2014 Oratorical champion, he "feels very fortunate to have the opportunity to give my speech in front of an elite audience," Kumar said. "For the effort I put it, I did my speech justice."

The American Legion has awarded more than $3 million in scholarships since the Oratorical Contest began in 1937.

LEGION BASEBALL

World Series headed to TV

Together, The American Legion and the Shelby (N.C.) Baseball World Series Committee have inked a five-year contract that will expand viewership of the American Legion World Series (ALWS) to nearly 80 million viewers.

Starting with the 2014 ALWS, Aug. 14-19, the championship game will be televised live by ESPNU. The last time an ALWS championship game was live on TV was 35 years ago in Greenville, Miss.

To accommodate the championship game TV coverage, the ALWS tournament schedule is changing from a double-elimination format to pool play.

With the pool play format, each team is guaranteed to play up to three games. There will be two pools (A and B) of four teams each; the teams will play each other in their respective pools for the first three days of the ALWS, Aug. 14-17. The semifinals will be Aug. 18, where the winner of Pool A will play the runner-up of Pool B and the winner of Pool B will play the runner-up of Pool A. The two overall winners will play in the Legion World Series championship game, Aug. 19.

All ALWS games leading up to the championship event will be live streamed online on ESPN3.

www.legion.org/baseball

Did you know?

The American Legion Department of California can claim the most National Oratorical Contest champions – eight – since the program began in 1938. The Department of Maryland has had six winners, and the departments of Illinois, New York and Texas have had five winners each. ***www.legion.org/oratorical***

Last year during celebration of April is Children & Youth Month, Sons of The American Legion Squadron 331 in Omaha, Neb., donated 186 GI Josh Dog gift sets to patients at the local Children's Hospital & Medical Center. Squadron 331 raised nearly $7,000 to purchase the GI Josh Dog gift sets, and Legion Family members delivered the dogs to every child at the hospital to bring them comfort, security and companionship during their road to recovery.

TROOP SUPPORT

OCW keeps donating

The American Legion's Operation Comfort Warriors program continues to provide comfort items and sponsor events for servicemen and women recovering in warrior transition units across the nation. Recent OCW stops and donations include:

- **Balboa Naval Medical Center in San Diego.** A dozen wounded servicemembers received new sets of golf clubs.
- **Six Flags in San Antonio.** Nearly 1,000 wounded servicemembers (from Brooke Army Medical Center) and their families enjoyed a day at the park.
- **Naval Health Clinic in Groton, Conn.** The medical center received fishing gear and Frisbees.
- **Naval Medical Center in San Diego.** Servicemembers from the warrior transition battalion (WTB) and their caregivers received a cook-out. Two Playstation Vita gaming systems along with games were also donated.
- **Aleethia Foundation in Washington, D.C.** OCW helped sponsor two dinners, hosted by the Aleethia Foundation, for several hundred wounded warriors (from Walter Reed National Military Medical Center) and their families. OCW raffled off two iPads and Amazon gift cards.
- **Raymond G. Murphy VA Medical Center in Albuquerque, N.M.** Aquatic therapy equipment, televisions, DVDs and video game consoles were donated.
- **Fort Bragg, N.C.** The redeployment barracks received 36 sets of sheets.
- **Fort Knox, Ky.** Candy was provided for the WTB's "Trunk or Treat" event.
- **Marine Corps Trials in Camp Pendleton, Calif.** OCW backpacks, water bottles and hats were handed out.
- **Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Fort Lewis, Wash.** WTB received dinnerware and kitchen electronics.

To donate: www.legion.org/ocw

DATELINE: CAPITOL HILL

Highlights of VA's 2015 budget

Brett P. Reistad, *Chairman, National Legislative Commission*

On March 4, President Barack Obama released a federal budget proposal for the Department of Veterans Affairs fiscal year 2015. As part of the proposal, VA would receive nearly $164 billion in funding. Below are highlights of the budget proposal.

Medical care funding:

- $7.2 billion to expand inpatient, residential and outpatient mental health care.
- $7 billion to expand institutional/non-institutional long-term health care.
- $4.2 billion to meet the needs of more than 757,000 veterans returning from U.S. operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.
- $589 million for medical and prosthetics research.
- $567 million for VA telehealth programs to help improve access to VA health care.
- $403 million for VA services addressing the specific health-care needs of women veterans.

Other funding:

- $3.9 billion for information technology, which directly impacts direct delivery of medical care benefits.
- $2.5 billion for more efficient benefits claims processing through technological enhancements, improved business processes and staff training.
- $1.6 billion for VA's integrated plan to end veteran homelessness in 2015, including $500 million for the Supportive Services for Veterans Families program.
- $1.2 billion for VA construction, as well as construction grants for state cemeteries and state veterans homes.
- $1 billion over the next five years to fund a veterans job corps program that would put thousands of veterans back to work.
- $257 million for national cemetery administration operations and maintenance.
- $106 million to help servicemembers transition to civilian life.

Once both the House and Senate pass the spending measures, the budget will be signed into law by President Obama. VA's new fiscal year begins Oct. 1, 2014.

Legion-supported bills

The following are five pending bills that The American Legion supports:

H.R. 2119: Veterans Access to Speedy Review Act would improve opportunities for veterans to use video conferencing for hearings before the Board of Veterans' Appeals.

H.R. 4191: Quicker Veterans Benefits Delivery Act would improve the way in which private-sector medical evidence submitted by veterans is handled within the VA claims system.

H.R. 2018: Honor Those Who Served Act identifies people who are eligible to request headstones or markers furnished by VA.

H.R. 3876: Burial with Dignity for Heroes Act directs VA to carry out a grant program to provide burials for homeless veterans.

H.R. 4095: Veterans Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act increases rates of compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities, and rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for the survivors of certain disabled veterans.

MEMBERSHIP INCENTIVES AND AWARDS

EAGLE INCENTIVE

Six American Legion departments showing the highest percentage of membership gain in their respective size categories between Oct. 9 and May 8 of this year will receive eagle statues (pictured below).

The Commander Dellinger Eagle Award will be awarded to the top department in each Big Twelve category showing the largest percentage of membership growth between the 55 and 100 percent target dates. A seventh eagle will be presented to the national vice commander whose region displayed the highest percentage of membership gain during the same period.

The Big Twelve categories are:

- Category I – departments of 100,000 or more members
- Category II – departments of 65,000 - 99,999 members
- Category III – departments of 40,0000 - 64,999 members
- Category IV – departments of 25,000 - 39,999 members
- Category V – departments of 10,000 - 24,999 members
- Category VI – departments of 9,999 or less members

DISTRICT LEADERS REWARDED FOR POST VISITS

The District Commander Post Visitation Award is an incentive for personal visits to posts by district commanders and vice commanders. Personal contact at this level sets the example for post membership workers to make the personal contacts necessary for a successful membership program.

Criteria. The district commander and/or vice commanders must visit each post in the district during their year. For districts with more than 30 posts, the district vice commanders can assist in making visits, but the district commander must visit at least 30 of the posts personally.

Certification. A list of posts in each district can be obtained with the assistance of department headquarters. At the completion of the 100 percent visit requirement, the district commander will send the completed spreadsheet to the department, which will forward it to National Headquarters by Aug. 1, 2014.

Awards.

- Category 1 (up to 20 posts), $100
- Category 2 (21 to 35 posts), $200
- Category 3 (36 to 50 posts), $300
- Category 4 (51 to 65 posts), $400
- Category 5 (65 or more posts), $500

www.legion.org/commander/districtpost

A MESSAGE FROM MEMBERSHIP

Kenneth Orrock
National Membership & Post Activities Committee Chairman

"When I first became vice commander of my post, I asked a past national commander, 'How do I get young veterans to join The American Legion? What can I do to get them involved in post life and post activities?' The commander told me that it's the same question that every vice commander has asked since 1946.

When I speak to a younger veteran and ask them to join The American Legion, they say, 'I don't have time to participate.' I always tell them that we are not asking for their participation in the post right now, but their membership is important because it gives The American Legion the voice to speak to the president of the United States and to Congress about its ongoing veterans advocacy efforts. Legion leadership gets to stand in front of Congress and say, 'We represent the 2.4 million veterans of The American Legion.'

Let young veterans know that if they are not at a point in their life where they can participate in post meetings and events, that their membership is still important and that their service and participation with the organization will come along as life changes."

Learn more about membership messages from watching American Legion videos online: *www.legion.org/recruiting*

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MEMBERSHIP

Arkansas honors blue cap Legionnaires

The American Legion Department of Arkansas recognizes Legionnaires with the Blue Cap of the Year award for exemplifying the "goals and objectives set forth by The American Legion." The honorable award is not open to every Legionnaire in the Department of Arkansas – eligibility for the award requires that the candidate cannot have held, at any time, an elected position within The American Legion.

"We are looking for a true blue cap who has committed himself or herself to their post, department or community," said Doyle Batey, adjutant for the Department of Arkansas. "We desire someone who has made a difference in the lives of the people they live near. Anytime a Legionnaire makes a difference in the community as a Legionnaire, they have furthered the cause and reputation of The American Legion."

Any post, district or county may nominate a blue cap Legionnaire for the award and submit supporting documentation that attests to the individual's qualifications, character and dedication. The award recipient is selected by the department commander and adjutant and honored with a certificate during the Department of Arkansas' convention.

"The Blue Cap of the Year award is a meaningful achievement," said Batey.

www.arlegion.org

PLANNER

May

5-8 2014 Spring Meetings, Indianapolis

14 100 percent membership target date

JUNE

14 Flag Day (Pause for the pledge at 7 p.m. Eastern Time)

JULY

1 Department Children & Youth reports due to National Headquarters

www.legion.org/dispatch