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THE AMERICAN LEGION
Dispatch
April 2015 A National Headquarters Publication

FLAG ADVOCACY

Scott LoBaido touches up his flag mural at American Legion Post 202 in Fayetteville, NC. *Photo by Abbi O'Leary*

ARTIST PAINTS OLD GLORY TO THANK VETERANS

Scott LoBaido is painting the American flag on the side of an American Legion or a VFW post in all 50 states.

By Ken Olsen

Scott LoBaido kicked off a 50-state veteran celebration in late February by painting Old Glory on the side of American Legion Post 202 in Fayetteville, N.C.

"I'm just giving veterans a little thank you," LoBaido explains of his tour, which involves painting the American flag on the side of an American Legion or a VFW post in all 50 states during the next six months. "I want to bring attention to this awesome group of people and let the population know they need to support these men and women."

The tour began with Post 202 in Fayetteville on Feb. 21 and ends at American Legion Post 139 in Arlington, Va., in late August. LoBaido will use an estimated 600 gallons of paint – supplied by Home Depot and Behr Paint, two of the tour sponsors.

LoBaido hails from Staten Island, N.Y., where he remembers his grandmother always flying the American flag. Although he has never been in the military, he comes from a

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NEWS ALERT

Find a Legion service officer

The Legion's Claims Coach app, available for both iPhone and Android users, helps veterans and their families connect with a service officer and navigate the VA claims process. The free app features a nationwide directory of accredited American Legion service officers, a built-in organizer for appointments, documents and deadlines, and a wealth of other resources. Download the free app: *www.legion.org/mobileapps*

Apply for CWF grant

The American Legion's Child Welfare Foundation is accepting grant applications starting May 1, and they must be postmarked to National Headquarters by July 15. CWF accepts funding proposals from nonprofit organizations for projects that contribute to the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual welfare of children. For more information on the grant guidelines and to download an application, visit: *www.cwf-inc.org/publications*

Legion Baseball registration deadlines

May 15 is the deadline for American Legion Baseball teams to register online and purchase insurance for the 2015 season. Teams that do not register by May 15 shall pay an additional $200 to their respective American Legion department. And any team that fails to register by June 1 will not be permitted to play during the season. Register online: *www.baseball.legion.org*

Share your story

Have a post-related story that you want to see featured in *Dispatch*? Email: *dispatch@legion.org*

COMMANDER'S MESSAGE

Mike Helm
National Commander

My $4 million goal is within reach

With only five months left as your national commander, I'm proud to say that my goal to raise $4 million for American Legion and Auxiliary charities is right on pace.

As of April 1, more than $3.2 million has been raised for the charities, which include Operation Comfort Warriors, Child Welfare Foundation, National Emergency Fund, Legacy Scholarship Fund, Endowment Fund and Soldier's Wish. Also included are the Auxiliary charities, which include the Emergency Fund, Spirit of Youth Scholarship Fund, Children of Warriors National President's Workshop and American Legion Auxiliary Foundation.

These generous, tax-deductible contributions mean so much to me, as every dollar will go directly toward items to help make a wounded soldier's recuperation more enjoyable, give a much needed boost to a deserving child's education, provide clothing and shelter for a disaster victim and so much more. Our progress so far has been excellent. But we need to finish strong so that our programs can continue to support veterans, active-duty servicemembers and their families who need our assistance.

To make a donation to one or more of the aforementioned programs, visit: ***www.legion.org/donate***

As I meet Legion Family members throughout my travels, I am constantly impressed by their dedication to our core values. These individuals work tirelessly on behalf of veterans, current servicemen and women, and their communities. Everyone must work together at all levels to build membership and raise funds throughout The American Legion Family.

When I announced my fundraising and membership goals, I described them as lofty. Now, thanks to the dedication of numerous American Legion Family members and friends, the goals are well within our reach. But, just like we wouldn't waver in our commitment to country, we cannot waver in our commitment to a bright future for The American Legion.

MEMBERSHIP

National Commander Honor Ribbon

During the 2014-2015 membership year, American Legion National Commander Mike Helm will award his National Commander Honor Ribbon to any American Legion Family that achieves 100 percent membership by June 30, 2015.

For this award, the Legion Family is defined as a post and any combination of an Auxiliary unit, Sons squadron or Legion Riders chapter. Each branch must achieve 100 percent to qualify for the award.

The National Commander Honor Ribbon incentive program will end June 30, 2015, or when supplies are exhausted.

Download the form online: ***www.legion.org/commander/ribbon***

THE AMERICAN LEGION FAMILY

MEMBERSHIP

Recruiters to be honored with 'Stay On Course' pin

During the 2014-2015 membership year, American Legion National Commander Mike Helm will award his national commander pin to any Legion Family member who obtains three new members or renews five members into the Legion.

A new member is any eligible person joining for the 2015 membership year who was not a member of The American Legion during the 2014 membership year.

Each member listed must be eligible for membership in The American Legion. Forward names of SAL 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 incentive program, only one pin will be awarded per individual.

Upon receipt, national membership staff will confirm the names and mail the pin directly to the person who earned it. Commander Helm's pin incentive program will end June 30, 2015, or when supplies are exhausted.

www.legion.org/commander/pin

NATIONAL ADJUTANT'S MESSAGE

Proud to be an American

The Department of Colorado recognizes individuals, schools and cities for patriotism.

By Daniel S. Wheeler

With a membership of military veterans that takes deep pride in the U.S. flag and all it means, The American Legion has always advocated for patriotism, morality and citizenship with its third pillar, Americanism. Americanism is The American Legion's devotion to law and order, the raising of wholesome youth, respectful observance of patriotic holidays and remembrances, education and law-abiding citizenship.

With its "Proud to be an American" award, the Department of Colorado is ensuring Americanism is alive and active by recognizing individuals, schools and towns that "demonstrate patriotism to the principles, rights and privileges that are inherent to all of us as American citizens," said Bill Baldaccini, a member of Post 161 in Littleton, Colo., and a member of the department's Americanism Council. "The award is our way of promoting Americanism, and we want the growing generations to understand that this is an exceptional country, we have a rich heritage to be proud of, and as Americans we should be proud to be an American."

The "Proud to be an American" award was first initiated and given in 2010, when a 17-year-old high school student mounted two American flags on the back of his truck and was told by a school official that the school had a diversity policy and the flags had to be removed. The student's father notified the school principal who advised that no policy was in place. After an investigation, the school official enforcing the diversity policy spoke on her own behalf. The principal wrote an apology to the student and encouraged him to fly the American flag from his truck.

"The award encourages posts to reach out into the community and find people, like this young student, who are living and performing exceptional patriotic activities during a time when anti-American sentiments have crept into our country," Baldaccini said. "It's a way for posts to say, 'We are proud of you, we want to ignite patriotism, and we are encouraging it.'"

The "Proud to be an American" award has been earned 18 times over the past several years by individuals who proudly fly the American flag, and by schools and towns that honor veterans with programs. For example, last year the city of Aurora earned the award due to its "Yearly Salute to Veterans" event; those involved with the event were recognized by the department during a special ceremony.

"This award is good for The American Legion and the community because we are actively promoting Americanism and letting people know we are proud of them," Baldaccini said.

Follow Spring NEC Meetings online

www.legion.org

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family of veterans. LoBaido's grandfather served in the Navy during World War II. Two uncles served in Vietnam.

About 25 years ago, LoBaido had a revelation that put him on the path to becoming one of the nation's most celebrated flag artists. "It hit me that these guys sacrificed their lives for me to be as free as I can as an artist," he says. "And the American flag is the greatest, most beautiful, most powerful work of art."

LoBaido painted his first flag mural on the now-defunct Victory Diner in Staten Island in the early 1980s. His giant flag artwork was a little controversial at the time. "People said it was pro-war," LoBaido says. "I said, 'Whoa – I'm trying to educate people, to bring people to fall back in love with that flag and what it represents.'"

He set out on his first cross-county tour in 2006, painting the American flag on the roof of a building in each of the 50 states. He selected buildings with slanted roofs so the American flag could be seen from the road or from the air, a way of saying "Godspeed" to servicemembers who were headed for the Global War on Terror, and "welcome home" to those returning from battle.

In 2010, he painted the world's largest American flag on the roof of the Lamons Gasket Co. warehouse, near Hobby Airport in Houston, Texas. The 300-foot by 500-foot rendition of Old Glory was completed between June 14 – Flag Day – and the Fourth of July and required 900 gallons of paint.

LoBaido logged another 25,000 miles on a 2011 expedition to retouch the flags he painted five years earlier. Now Legion and VFW posts are his canvas because "they house the most important people in the world," he says. LoBaido selected the location for his painting in each state based on their street visibility and the availability of a nice flat wall suitable for a painting of Old Glory.

"To us, it's a reward," says George C. Cade, commander of American Legion Post 202. "Not only to the post – but to the entire veterans community."

Follow LoBaido's 50-state tour: ***www.scottlobaido.com*** and ***https://twitter.com/ScottLoBaido***

ASK A SERVICE OFFICER

The Choice Act and emergency care outside the VA

Cajun Comeau
Department Service Officer, North Carolina

VA's Veterans Choice Program covers hospital care and medical services under the Medical Benefits Package, including pharmacy and other benefits, such as beneficiary travel. All care under the Choice Program must be pre-authorized.

To be eligible, a veteran must meet either of the following criteria. Criteria 1: be enrolled in the VA health-care system as of Aug. 1, 2014, or be a combat veteran who served on active duty in a combat theater during a war period after the Persian Gulf War, or in combat against a hostile force, and also be within five years of separation.

Criteria 2: Have an appointment greater than 30 days from the desired appointment date (i.e. The primary care provider asks to see you again in two weeks and your appointment is scheduled within 30 days after the two-week mark), or reside more than 40 miles from a VA facility, measured in shortest driving distance, regardless of services offered. Distance is calculated by address on record.

The Choice Program does not include nursing home care or unscheduled (emergency) non-VA care. In the event that non-VA care is sought for emergency, all of the following criteria must be met in order to claim VA reimbursement: (1) You were provided emergency care in a hospital emergency department or similar facility. (2) You are enrolled in the VA health-care system. (3) You have been provided care by a VA health-care provider within the last 24 months. (4) You are financially liable to the care provider for the emergency treatment. (5) You have no other health insurance. (6) You do not have Medicare, Medicaid or a state care program. (7) You do not have coverage under any other VA programs. (8) You have no contractual or legal right to reimbursement from a third party for the bill. (9) VA or other federal facilities were not feasibly available at time of the emergency. (10) The care must have been rendered in a medical emergency in which a prudent layperson would have reasonably expected that delay in seeking immediate medical attention would have been hazardous to life or health. (11) VA must be notified of the care within 72 hours.

For further assistance, consult a Legion-accredited service officer.

www.legion.org/serviceofficers

CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION SPOTLIGHT

Post 11 in Wagner, S.D.

American Legion Post 11 in Wagner, S.D., was chartered in 1919, and members built a post in 1929 by buying bonds. The basement was dug by hand; the building was built by volunteers. The members that purchased bonds got together and burned their bonds in the Legion fireplace so "no member of their families could demand payment on the bonds."

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.centennial.legion.org***

POST ACTIVITIES

Celebrating 96 years of Legion service, pride

Every year, the U.S. Navy has a birthday ball, and every year during his 20 years serving in the Navy, Leroy Davis looked forward to it. That experience made Davis want to make The American Legion's birthday an event to look forward to.

The Alabama Legionnaire came up with the idea to have Fletcher-McCollister Post 135 in Phenix City put on a birthday ball last year. And that's why Davis will continue to lead the celebration efforts, much like he did March 21 for the Legion's 96th birthday.

"We were glad to have (the Navy ball) and glad to go to it," said Davis, a 23-year member of the Legion and Post 135's commander since 2013. "(It was) a sense of pride, and I felt that's what we need to do: Make the people proud to be in The American Legion and proud to help other veterans.

"I felt that by starting a birthday ball – which is something I haven't really seen a lot of throughout the country – that that will bring attention to The American Legion. The community needs to know that we are here and what we do. So that's why I started the birthday ball."

Dale Barnett hands out pins to Central High School JROTC.

Photo by Bartram Nason/The American Legion

Nearly 100 people attended the ball, which took place at Marriott's Courtyard Hotel in Phenix City and featured a buffet dinner, an American Legion birthday cake, music and dancing. During the ball, Post 135 also honored two longtime members: World War II veterans Carson D. Mitchell and Daniel M. Parish, who have been a part of the Legion for 70 years.

Central High School's Navy Junior ROTC presented the colors to an audience that included various city and municipal government officials. Phenix City Mayor Eddie Lowe was one of those individuals; his attendance was evidence of the strong ties between Post 135 and its community.

"The common denominator, and the reason why (the relationship) is so strong, is because of the veterans," Lowe said. "If it had not been for people giving up themselves, (paying) the ultimate price, we could not be able to have this event here."

HONOR & REMEMBRANCE

Unknown plaque becomes a post attraction

Located three miles off historic Route 66, American Legion Post 147 in Miami, Okla., received a bronze plaque inscribed with words that "denotes patriotism and a call for brotherhood" but has an unknown history.

After providing honor guard funeral services for a local veteran, the post received the plaque from the veteran's son who found it collecting dust in his father's garage. The son donated the 850-pound plaque to the post, and post members built a monument to house it on the post's front lawn.

"The words are touching; it's meaningful," said Roy Woods, a member of Post 147.

The plaque reads, "In response to the promise of liberty, justice and freedom of religion, we left our native lands which we loved so dearly and, coming from the farthest corners of the world, we arrived in America. We fished in her waters, farmed her fields, worked in her factories, sold her products and realized that here in this beautiful land we had fulfilled our hopes and dreams for ourselves and our children. Now united as one people, we work toward our goal of living as equal Americans. God bless America and the good people who made her strong."

Post members have not been able to track down the history of the plaque or who authored it.

"This is a relic that was completely lost, and I wish I knew more about it," Woods said.

The monument has become a post attraction. People visit and take pictures, and more than 200 people attended the dedication ceremony for the monument last year.

Did you know?

■ No one sells more U.S.-made American flags than The American Legion. American Legion Emblem Sales sells more than 1 million U.S. flags every year. Order yours now: ***www.emblem.legion.org***

■ American Legion membership dues can be renewed on an annual, automatic basis. Visit ***www.legion.org/renew*** and click "Renew Now" or call American Legion customer service toll-free at ***(800) 433-3318.*** Members can cancel participation in the Automatic Renewal Program any time.

VETERAN SUPPORT

Monthly donation helps support America's heroes

The American Legion has launched a new national awareness campaign on television to raise funds that the organization will use to assist more veterans and their families. The two spots feature Army veterans who have received continued support from The American Legion.

Photo by Tracy Trost/The American Legion

Joel Travera, retired Army staff sergeant pictured above, survived a rocket attack while on deployment to Iraq that destroyed his right leg, caused brain trauma, burned more than 60 percent of his body and left him blind. In spite of these hardships, he says he feels blessed and has The American Legion to thank. "The American Legion gives veterans like me a place to belong," Travera said. "They help us veterans in all aspects of life: medical, financial and even emotional."

Andrew Larocca's story touches the entire family. A combat medic in the Army, Andrew lost the ability to speak as a result of a traumatic brain injury that also left him paralyzed. "I'll never forget the day that The American Legion stepped in," said Cody Truman, Andrew's brother. "I saw this big weight lifted off both my parents' shoulders."

Andrew's father continues, "The American Legion has stepped up to the plate to ensure not only my son, but other veterans, get what they're entitled."

These two veterans lend their names and experiences in hopes of creating more awareness and generating support so The American Legion can continue providing aid to veterans and their families in times of need.

To see the ads and to learn how your monthly donation can help the Legion continue support veterans in need, visit:
www.supportlegion.org

DATELINE: CAPITOL HILL

Homeland Security Funding for Current Year Finalized

Brett P. Reistad,
Chairman, National Legislative Commission

Fiscal 2015 funding for the Department of Homeland Security was contained in P.L. 114-4, signed by President Obama on March 4. A total of $39.7 billion was appropriated, an increase of $400 million compared to fiscal 2014. Some of the major accounts which interest The American Legion are:

- Customs & Border Protection: The law contains $9.9 billion for this agency, about $700 million below last year's amount.
- Coast Guard: A total of $9.86 billion was approved, which was nearly $600 million below the previous fiscal year's funding.
- Disaster Relief: Funding for the Federal Emergency Management Agency totals $7 billion. This includes $2.5 billion for first responder grants; and $1.5 billion for state and local grants, amount equal to the previous year's amounts.
- Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE): The law provides $5.9 billion for ICE, $600 million above fiscal 2014 levels. Among ICE's areas of responsibility are human trafficking, child exploitation, cyber-crime and drug smuggling. The bill also fully funds E-Verify, a program that helps companies check if their employees may legally work in this country.
- Transportation Security Agency (TSA): Funding for TSA totals $4.8 billion. This includes funding for security enforcement, cargo inspections, intelligence functions, and increases for canine detention teams and privatized screening operations.
- Secret Service: The law includes $1.7 billion for the U.S. Secret Service. The bill increases funding for cybersecurity investigations, rejects the president's proposed cuts to critical Secret Service staffing, and continues funding for the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children that the president proposed to zero out.

The measure also includes a prohibition on the transfer or release of detainees from Guantanamo Bay.

Senate, House take different paths to boost Defense spending

The House and Senate unveiled their fiscal 2016 budget resolutions in mid-March. A budget resolution is a nonbinding measure. It sets out, in broad strokes, goals for spending, tax revenues, and changes to crucial programs like Medicare, Medicaid, food stamps and student loans, as well as the health-care law. Lawmakers in the House and Senate vote on the resolution, but it stays in Congress, never reaching the president's desk. Instead, it requires follow-up legislation to implement any changes proposed by the resolution, and that's often a major challenge.

The two budget resolutions are basically on the same page for military spending next year, although they get to that point in very different ways. The plans are only $1 billion apart after the Senate Budget Committee added $38 billion in war funds to its plan. Both stick with a $523 billion limit on base discretionary defense spending, reflecting the statutory post-sequester cap for fiscal 2016.

MEMBERSHIP INCENTIVES AND AWARDS

POST EXCELLENCE AWARD CONTINUES

The Post Excellence Award program honors posts that show excellence in membership participation, youth activities, community service, and support to veterans and U.S. troops.

Criteria

- **Membership.** Post membership must be at least one member more than the previous year. A post officer must attend district meetings.
- **Youth activities.** The post must sponsor and actively participate in at least one primary youth program: Boys State, Legion Baseball, Oratorical Contest, Boy Scouts of America or Junior Shooting Sports.
- **Community service.** The post must organize a community service project that involves members of the Legion, Auxiliary or Sons of The American Legion. A monetary donation may only be one part of a project.
- **Service to troops or veterans.** The post must organize a project supporting troops or veterans (for example, Family Support Network or Operation Comfort Warriors) that involves members of the Legion, Auxiliary or SAL outside the post. A monetary donation may only be one part of a project.

Certification. District commanders must certify posts as having fulfilled the four specified criteria, and submit a list of the post's name, number, address and commander's name to department headquarters. If possible, accompany with copies of press releases submitted to local media that raise awareness for the projects and enhance the Legion's public image.

Awards. Each qualifying post, as well as district commanders whose districts have at least 50 percent of posts reach certification, will receive a certificate of recognition.

www.legion.org/commander/postexcellence

GOLD BRIGADE AWARD

Legionnaires who recruit 50 or more new members (transfers do not count as new members) into The American Legion by the May target date will qualify for enrollment in The American Legion's elite Gold Brigade. These Legionnaires will be awarded unique gifts that designate affiliation with the Gold Brigade of The American Legion. The gifts awarded to a Gold Brigader will depend on the number of times he/she has qualified for this award.

First time Gold Brigade members receive a Gold Brigade patch, a special Gold Brigade cap pin, a Gold Brigade certificate, and a designer jacket or polo shirt or sweater with a Gold Brigade logo.

Second time (or more) Gold Brigade members receive a Gold Brigade patch and certificate, a hash mark for a jacket sleeve, and a designer jacket or polo shirt or sweater with a Gold Brigade logo.

A Gold Brigader who has won the award for five consecutive years is eligible for a distinctive Gold Brigade blazer. A Legionnaire may only qualify once every five years.

A Gold Brigader who has earned the award for at least six consecutive years or more is eligible for a $150 check and a Legion cap with the inscription "Master Recruiter."

Legionnaires who recruit 25-49 new members into the Legion by the May target date will qualify for the Silver Brigade Award. A silver pin and certificate will be awarded. The certification form is on page 23.

Silver Brigade and Gold Brigade awards cannot both be awarded to a recruiter during the same membership year.

Note: Department adjutants must submit all Gold Brigade certification forms on pages 20-22 to National Headquarters by the last day of May.

A MESSAGE FROM MEMBERSHIP

Kenneth Orrock
National Membership & Post Activities Committee Chairman

"The American Legion's Centennial Celebration isn't a 100-year celebration at the national level; it's a 100-year celebration of posts that were founded in 1919, 1920 and even today. Over 5,000 posts that were chartered between 1919 and 1920 exist today. I'm always happy to see when people find out something interesting about the history of their post and how The American Legion filled a gap in that community at some point in time."

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

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POST ACTIVITIES

New Jersey Legionnaires donate two buses to veterans home

American Legion posts of Bergen County in New Jersey kicked off a fundraising effort in October 2013 to purchase a new bus for the 300 residents at Paramus (N.J.) Veterans Memorial Home. Their successful fundraising efforts, with the help of the community, resulted in the Legion raising more than $165,700. The ample funds allowed them to purchase two buses for the home, with money left for a third.

"We want to improve the quality of life for our vets and their families," said Bob Salvini, commander of Bergen County and Post 170 in Rochelle Park. "Our vets will now be able to get out of the home and go on picnics, go to the movies and mingle with the community."

Salvini said the buses the veterans home had continually broke down, which kept the veterans from enjoying recreational activities and engaging with the community. The first 16-passenger, handicap accessible bus was donated last April and the second 18-passenger bus in early March. Salvini hopes the third will be donated early next year.

"I was raised to pay it forward, and it feels good to give to those who have given so much for our freedom and our way of life," Salvini said.

PLANNER

May

1 Child Welfare Foundation grant applications available

4-7 NEC Spring Meetings, Indianapolis

13 100 percent membership target date

June

14 Flag Day

July

1 Department Children & Youth reports due to National Headquarters

1 Consolidated Post Reports due to National Headquarters