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THE AMERICAN LEGION
Dispatch
June 2015 A National Headquarters Publication

TREE TOWN FESTIVAL

Past National Commander David Rehbein, Joe Denim and other Iowa Legionnaires on stage at the Tree Town Music Festival. Photo by Amy C. Elliott

A 'good relationship' that's growing

Legion enjoys higher visibility during 2nd year of country music festival

By Steve B. Brooks

Over the course of Tree Town Music Festival's four days, crowds sometimes exceeding 20,000 saw big-name country music acts such as Blake Shelton, Dierks Bentley and Rascal Flatts perform on the campgrounds of Heritage Park of North Iowa in Forest City, Iowa. Not even a steady rain most of the final day could scare away the crowds.

And in the midst of all of it was The American Legion.

For the second year, the Legion was the official charity of the fledgling but steadily growing country music festival. After having a booth set up at the 2014 festival, the Legion's role grew this year – to the tune of having an American Legion stage located in the food vendor section of the festival. Acts such as 38 Special played the Legion's stage; the structure also served as the place for "after-party" concerts following the end of action on the main stage.

"To have our own American Legion stage, and to have it be last year's main stage … this event is just going to continue to grow," said American Legion Past National Commander Dave Rehbein, a member of the Department of Iowa and a festival attendee this year. "As it continues to grow, the vision of The American Legion out in the community is going to grow right along with it. This is really something."

Additionally, American Legion signs were placed all over the festival grounds.

See Tree Town Festival on Page 4

NEWS ALERT

Submit Consolidated Post Reports

Posts' Consolidated Post Reports – documenting that post's activities during the past year, June 1 to May 31 – are due to National Headquarters by July 1. Just over 65 percent of posts submitted reports last year. The more reports National Headquarters receives, the better picture can be presented to Congress and the United States about all the good The American Legion does. Reports can be submitted online at *mylegion.org*, or printed out and filled in: *www.legion.org/publications*

Share your Fourth of July stories

As your post or department prepares to celebrate the United States' independence, don't forget to submit stories and photos to the Legiontown blog. *www.legiontown.org*

Youth champion events coverage

July is a busy month for American Legion youth programs: Boys Nation will be conducted July 17-25 in Washington, and the Junior 3-Position Air Rifle National Championship will be July 21- 25 in Colorado Springs, Colo. Find daily coverage of both at *www.legion.org.*

Share your story

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

COMMANDER'S MESSAGE

Old Glory needs our support more than ever

Mike Helm
National Commander

Old Glory has taken a beating this year.

You may have seen videos or photos of people standing on our flag in a display of protest. You might recall a California university banned the American flag from campus but later reversed its decision.

These stories enrage American Legion members, our servicemembers, patriotic Americans and others. Often, the national media jump on stories like these at first but then move on to something else.

With Flag Day just around the corner, American Legion departments, posts and members have an opportunity to steer attention back to our beloved Stars and Stripes.

For example, National Headquarters is putting together a flag bookazine. Titled "Indivisible: The Story of Our Flag," this collector's item is an American Legion tribute to our nation's colors, exploring the flag's meaning, the price paid for all it symbolizes, and the special place it occupies in our culture and conscience.

The $9.95 bookazine will be available on newsstands in November 2015, but you can pre-order your copy of the 112-page bookazine today. Posts, Auxiliary units and Sons of The American Legion squadrons may wish to order these in bulk from emblem.legion.org and use them as a fundraiser for programs.

Here are some other ideas:

- **Share your photos.** Join our campaign to promote the flag on social media. Share your favorite flag photos on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram by using the hashtag, #MyUSFlag.
- **Community events.** I encourage you to get out into your communities and generate awareness of Old Glory and what our flag represents. Flag Day is an ideal time for this, but our commitment to her endures each and every day.

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

Turning a negative into a positive

When Post 202 in Fayetteville, N.C., learned a veteran had to call 911 to get groceries, it made sure the 81-year-old got the help he needed.

By Daniel S. Wheeler

It started out as an incredibly sad situation: An 81-year-old veteran, unable to physically get himself to the grocery store, calls 911 and tells the dispatcher he has no way of getting food. But thanks to the actions of Post 202 in Fayetteville, N.C., the story has a happy ending.

Clarence R. Blackmon, Jr., who served in the U.S. Army from 1954 to 1956, called 911 after returning home from being in the hospital for cancer treatments and rehabilitation. According to the Fayetteville Observer, Blackmon told the dispatcher, "I can barely walk without holding on to a chair."

The dispatcher and a Fayetteville police officer took Mr. Blackmon to get some food. In the meantime, members of Post 202 had seen the story in the newspaper and sprang into action. Post Commander George C. Cade called an emergency meeting of the post's executive committee, and a fund was immediately established to provide Mr. Blackmon with money for groceries and take him shopping.

That Mr. Blackmon's situation had come to this was difficult for Post 202 Adjutant Crystal Renee Saunders to swallow. "It really hit me hard because it showed that some veterans don't know there are many veterans organizations in Fayetteville that can assist them," Saunders said. "Mr. Blackmon did the best he could by calling 911. But even though this was a very unfortunate story, it did help us get the word out that we're here to help all veterans in this area. So something very positive came out of this."

The story doesn't end there. Saunders also doubles as an assistant department service officer and has traveled across North Carolina on her own dime helping with the department's Veterans Benefits Action Centers this year. But working in her own backyard, she was able to file compensation, pension, and Aid and Attendance paperwork on behalf of Mr. Blackmon so he can start getting help from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Saunders also picked up the tab for Mr. Blackmon's first year of membership in Post 202 and plans on taking him to future

post events. And the post will take him grocery shopping again in the next few weeks."(Blackmon) was ecstatic through all this," Saunders said. "He was very appreciative of everything we were able to do for him."

Cade said that's why the Legion is in Fayetteville. "It makes me feel good we were able to carry out The American Legion's mission by helping this veteran," Cade said. "That's why we're here."

Saunders said that Mr. Blackmon calling 911 to get help is proof that too many veterans needing help are falling through the cracks. Fortunately, American Legion posts like Post 202 in Fayetteville stand ready to assist those veterans. Feeling alone and helpless in May, Mr. Blackmon now knows that The American Legion is there for him.

Convention sergeants-at-arms needed

Department Adjutants are asked to submit their recommendations for National Convention Assistant Sergeants-at-Arms to Jeff Brown, executive director of the Indianapolis Office. It is important that they include the complete mailing address of each recommendation, since a letter of appointment is mailed to each nominee.

Dispatch

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From Tree Town Festival on Page 1

"We were successful with the booth last year in the fact we were able to help veterans with VA claims information and things like that," Department of Iowa Adjutant John Derner said. "That is really what we were looking for. But now, people are coming up to us and asking what The American Legion is because they're seeing our name and our emblem at various places around the venue, and they want to find out what we're doing."

The Legion also had a booth this year, complete with Legion service officers who were able to answer benefits and health-care questions from more than a dozen veterans over the course of the weekend. The Legion reps also worked with Soldier's Wish, whose booth was stationed next to the Legion for part of the weekend. The two entities took the stage on Saturday as Soldier's Wish presented an all-terrain wheelchair to U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Greg Foster, a decorated Green Beret who served three tours in Afghanistan before being seriously injured in a non-military parachuting accident.

"(The new wheelchair) has changed our life dramatically because we are very limited to where we can go right now," said Colleen Foster, Greg's wife. "Now we're going to be able to go to the beach, the woods again, hunting, fishing. It's just changed everything."

A second wish was granted during the festival. Gwendolyn Kennedy, a 90-percent service-connected Gulf War veteran, was able to attend the concert via Soldier's Wish and the Legion. Kennedy has been represented by Department of Iowa Service Officer Gary Carter, who found out she wanted to go to the show and passed on the information to department headquarters.

On the festival's final day, the Legion also worked with Universal Plant Services to sponsor a special session on stage for Songs for Sound, a charity that aims to improve the quality of life for profoundly deaf children worldwide through health care, cochlear implants, hearing aids, prevention and information.

Gary LeVox of Rascal Flatts, and songwriters, Neil Thrasher, Kelley Lovelace and Andrew Pates took the stage together for the Songs for Sound session.

ASK A SERVICE OFFICER

What can you do to help veterans and family members?

Cajun Comeau
Department Service Officer, North Carolina

Many times we think that helping means giving an opinion or trying to find an answer to the respective question. We are The American Legion, and we represent our organization to the best of our ability. That said, we do not have all the answers when it comes to veterans benefits and health care. Even for those of us that practice veteran law advocacy as a profession there is a constant learnin curve, and many changes in regulation and law that make factual answers sometimes hard to give.

In order to truly assist veterans, it is important that you become familiar with the accredited veterans service officers in your area. Commanders, vice commanders, adjutants and post service officers should be familiar with the location and capabilities of individuals and office policy regarding the provision of veterans services. These key personnel within the post, district and division level should know the capabilities and special programs of other service organizations, government organizations, and community organizations that may offer programs of benefit to all veterans or certain sectors of the veteran population.

The challenge we face today is reaching those in need. If you truly want to help your fellow veterans, learn where and who the subject matter experts are. Make sure your brothers- and sisters-in-arms actually go see the veterans service officer and ask the questions they need answered. You might even go along with them and facilitate any points you think are important. We can all be advocates, but it is important to leave the planning, recommending and advocating to those who are trained and accredited and practice professional veteran's advocacy.

I challenge all of you to make a difference in the lives of those many that are out there – many who may never be reached except for through you caring enough to extend your hand. Several tools exist that can help those seeking assistance. The American Legion Claims Coach app (*www.legion.org/mobileapps/claimscoach*) can assist veterans in finding a service officer and filing claims, and with many other claims and appeals related tasks. The "Locate a Service Officer" portion of Legion.org (*www.legion.org/serviceofficers*) can assist veterans in finding a professional, accredited service officer to address all VA-related issues.

CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION SPOTLIGHT

Post 32, Longmont, Colo.

The post home of John Harold Buckley Post 32 of Longmont, Colo. – which, chartered in September 1919, is almost as old as The American Legion itself – is a treasure trove of historical items, many donated by post members past and present. Among them is a miniature replica UH-1 helicopter donated by Past Post Commander Greg McMahon, who flew a Huey in Vietnam. Willis Corcoran, a past historian for Post 32 and Vietnam-era veteran, created and maintains display cases for the pieces.

SHARE YOUR POST'S LEGACY

Upload photos, print materials and videos of your post's history on the Legion's Centennial Celebration website: *www.legion.org/centennial*

LEGION RIDERS

Register now for 2015 Legacy Run

On Aug. 23, The American Legion's 10th annual Legacy Run – sponsored by USAA – will take off from Kenneth N. Dowden Wayne Post 64 on the west side of Indianapolis and head for the 97th National Convention in Baltimore. The marquee national event in the Legion Riders' year, the run will take hundreds of participants through Indiana, Ohio and Pennsylvania before concluding at Post 22 in Towson, Md., on Aug. 26.

This year, the run will include daily stops at military memorials along the route for wreath-laying ceremonies, as well as visits to the Flight 93 Memorial and Gettysburg.

Legion Riders take a short rest in Abbeville, S.C. during the final leg of the 2014 Legacy Run. Photo by Tom Strattman

The run raises funds for The American Legion Legacy Scholarship Fund, which provides college scholarships for the children of U.S. servicemembers killed on active duty since 9/11.

In 2014, donations made on the floor of the 96th National Convention in Charlotte raised the Legacy Run total past $1 million for the first time; more than $435,000 was raised during the ride itself. Together, the nine Legacy Runs have raised more than $5 million for the fund, with each surpassing the previous year's total:

Register online through Aug. 1 at ***www.legion.org/riders/registration***. This year, non-riders may also register in support of the Legacy Run. Non-riding supporters provide much of the resources needed to conduct the run; supporting registrations of $25 or greater will receive a full map book and 2015 American Legion Legacy Run patch.

Passengers must register separately from the rider/operator. All map books, patches, and other registration material will be mailed to all pre-registered riders, passengers, and supporters on or before Aug. 12. Please note that there is no guarantee that those who register after Aug. 1 will receive their t-shirts, map books and patches in time for the Run.

THE 2015 LEGACY RUN SCHEDULE:

Day 1

Indianapolis – Riders begin their journey at Post 64.
Georgetown, Ohio – Lunch stop at Post 180.
Portsmouth, Ohio – Day 1 concludes with a stop at the Scioto County KIA/MIA Memorial and dinner at Post 23.

Day 2

Beverly, Ohio – Lunch stop at Post 389.
Clinton, Ohio – Wreath-laying at Ohio Veterans Memorial Park.
Kent, Ohio – Day 2 concludes with dinner at Post 496.

Day 3

Dubois, Pa. – Lunch stop at Post 17.
Stoystown, Pa. – Day 3 concludes with dinner at Post 257.

Day 4

Shanksville, Pa. – Stop at the Flight 93 Memorial.
Northern Cambria, Pa. – Wreath-laying at Veterans of All Wars Memorial.
Gettysburg, Pa. – Lunch stop at Post 202.

The Legacy Run concludes at Post 22 in Towson, Md. For information on activities and events in the area, go to
www.2015legacyrunbaltimore.org
www.legion.org/riders

Did you know?

■ The American Legion Digital Archive – a research tool allowing access to a host of Legion materials and publications from National Headquarters – was recently optimized for use on smartphones and tablets. Since its release in January 2012, the archive has been adding full-text access to everything from resolutions to brochures, congressional testimony to speeches, and all the different historical versions of the national magazine, stretching back to the organization's founding in 1919. ***www.legion.org/archive***

■ In 2014, The American Legion hosted or co-sponsored about 150 veterans job fairs across the country.

MEMBERSHIP

'An evolution for The American Legion'

By Andy Romey

The American Legion's age-old mantra of veterans helping veterans has found a fitting home at the University of Akron, a modern-day college campus complete with football games, Greek houses and sprawling concourses.

At the school, located in Akron, Ohio, a group of dedicated student veterans have founded University of Akron Post 808, one of the fastest-growing posts in Ohio. The post has thrived thanks to the passion of its 20-something founders and the important niche the post has filled at the school.

Post 808, which started in July of last year, has blossomed to include around 140 members - 110 of whom are student veterans. The remaining members are veterans from the university's alumni and faculty ranks.

Members say they have been able to mold the Legion's founding principles, and its time-honored model of a local post that reaches out to veterans and the community, to help them meet these goals at their school.

"This post is an evolution for The American Legion," says Post 808 Commander Steven Downey, an Army veteran and senior at the school. "The American Legion started by filling a need that was perfect at the time for World War I veterans coming home. These new veterans need something different: We want mentorship, entrepreneurship, job placement and college degrees. This post is the perfect atmosphere for providing that."

Chief to meeting those needs is the post's mentorship program, which pairs its student members with veterans from the school's faculty and alumni bases to serve as mentors. A student member fills out a questionnaire when he or she joins the post, listing major, branch of service and career interests. The post then works with the university to find a veteran alumnus or faculty member to mentor that veteran.

"We're able to take a veteran who wants help and connect them with someone who can provide the help that is needed," Downey says.

Post 808 is the brainchild of its adjutant, Jay Musson, who is a Vietnam veteran and fixture on the University of Akron's campus. Musson was a member of a traditional Legion post off the shores of Lake Erie in northern Ohio. It struck him one day that a Legion post would fit well on the campus of his alma mater, which boasts around 1,200 student veterans.

Musson remembered how difficult his transition was back into society after he came home from Vietnam. Those experiences were his impetus for starting Post 808. His family foundation - the Musson Foundation - had already donated $220,000 to build a 21st century veterans lounge inside the school's new football stadium that gives student veterans a place to socialize, study, watch television, access the Internet and even meet with VA health professionals through an online video chat via VA's "Telehealth" program.

The post, Musson says, can address the needs and obstacles that modern-day student veterans face.

"Being a veteran and coming back from Vietnam to here and really being on my own, I remember that vividly. I don't want those kids to go through anything like that," Musson says. "(Vietnam) was a whole different war. There are just a lot of administrative hassles that these kids are dealing with now. If I were a student coming back now, I would feel lost among all the benefits: Title this or Title that, or timing issues with receiving money. Those are the things we are trying to overcome."

(From left to right) **D.J. Douglass, Steven Downey and Tony Stevens are members of the University of Akron Post 808, which provides fellowship and transition assistance to student veterans at the school.** *Photo by Alex Slitz*

Musson has enlisted the help of a Legion service officer who is an alumnus of the school. With an eye toward easing transition burdens, post members have also lobbied the university to create a special veterans-only English and composition class, received a spot on the school's Military Veterans Steering Committee, and facilitated a more welcoming environment for student veterans by starting an annual tailgate before a football game that recognizes the post and veterans at the school.

"This is the Legion's mission at work: veterans helping veterans," says D.J. Douglass, a junior at the school and second vice commander. "When you are active-duty military, that's all you do. That's what your life is. You learn to love your brothers and sisters and look after them. And now that's afforded to us again."

Tony Stevens, a sociology major and Post 808 member, joined the post in hopes of finding some of the camaraderie he enjoyed in the military, and also just to be among other students who are near his age and have had similar life experiences.

"You go to class with these kids who are 18 or 19... it is stressful," Stevens says. "When I was their age, I was in Iraq. By my 22nd birthday I was in Afghanistan – quite a different experience than them."

Stevens, an active participant in veterans initiatives, has become the post's sergeant-at-arms. He says the campus post model is something that student veterans at other schools are well-positioned to replicate.

"Hopefully, people around the country can use our post as a model and do what we are doing," he says. "Veterans have a lot of experience, a lot of stuff to share, and a lot of good to do for people."

DATELINE: CAPITOL HILL

Eleventh hour actions keep Denver VA hospital afloat

Brett P. Reistad,
Chairman, National Legislative Commission

As a looming May 24 deadline threatened to cap funds for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) replacement hospital project outside of Denver, Colo., negotiations between Congress and VA on an extension nearly collapsed on multiple occasions. The beleaguered hospital project has seen costs spiral out of control, and a project initially expected to come in under $600 million has now seen estimates hit over $1.7 billion due to gross mismanagement. With VA projected to hit the cap of $880 million in spending (10 percent over its appropriated $800 million), the cap needed to be raised, and VA needed to find additional funding to prevent another work stoppage. Work had previously shut down last December due to a lawsuit between VA and the prime contractor on the project, Kiewit-Turner.

The American Legion had been aggressively working to ensure the project continued, noting in a press release from National Commander Mike Helm on May 15 that, "We cannot in good conscience link VA mismanagement to the well being of veterans in Colorado. The Denver hospital project may be the worst federal construction disaster in recent memory, but that fault lies with VA, not the veterans who still need care."

VA Secretary Bob McDonald came through with an offer to move the project forward with a $200 million dollar extension using $150 million in recently discovered "unobligated funds," but that was rejected by House Speaker John Boehner for not covering the complete scope of the project, not containing sufficient accountability measures, and failing to document transparently both the full scope of what remains to be done and from where the "unobligated funds" were being obtained. House members from both the sides of the aisle expressed concerns that VA was "robbing Peter to pay Paul" by taking funds away from other projects in other areas to pay for the problem in Colorado.

On May 19, the Legion issued an action alert urging veterans to contact their lawmakers and come through with a compromise to keep the construction project going. On May 20, the Legion signed a letter with four other veterans' service organizations urging swift action even as talks appeared to be breaking down.

Finally, on the afternoon of May 21, Rep. Mike Coffman of Colorado was able to put forth a bill (H.R. 2496) to raise the cap to $900 million and give VA a few more weeks of breathing room. The House passed the measure by unanimous consent the same day, and the Senate – already considering many "must pass" measures heading into Memorial Day weekend – passed the bill by a voice vote the next day before members left town for the district work period.

The measure was immediately sent to the White House; President Barack Obama signed the measure into law as P.L. 114-19.

The beleaguered hospital is not out of the woods yet, as the additional cap and funding will likely only extend the project another three or four weeks. However, intense negotiations continue, and with the Army Corps of Engineers taking over as the project management for VA, there is some hope the way forward will be clearer.

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

Dispatch

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HONOR & REMEMBRANCE

Legion Rider's nostalgic journey one for the history books

By Andrea C. Dickerson

For Dr. E. Bruce Heilman, his 6,000-mile motorcycle trek began at Marine Corps Base Quantico in Virginia and ended in Washington, D.C., just in time to observe Memorial Day. His 34-day trip spanned 20 states across the United States and was meant to raise awareness about the 70th anniversary of World War II's end.

"The world needs to take note that these are the people that have made our democracy what it is," said Heilman, a World War II Marine Corps veteran. "Democracy does not sustain itself ... it is because of the veterans that signed on the dotted line and were willing to die for our country. Freedom isn't free – it's worth dying for."

During his journey, the Marine found solace and comfort in American Legion Riders from posts across the county who jumped on their bikes, riding along as far as they could with him and providing assistance during less-than-desirable riding conditions.

Read more about Heilman's cross-country journey online: ***www.legion.org/honor/227963/legion-riders-nostalgic-journey-one-history-books***

PLANNER

June

14 Flag Day

July

1 Department Children & Youth reports due to National Headquarters

1 Consolidated Post Reports due to National Headquarters

15 Child Welfare Foundation grant applications postmarked to National Headquarters

15 American Legion Baseball Scholarship applications due to National Headquarters

17-25 Boys Nation, Washington, D.C.

21-25 Junior Shooting Sports National Championship, Colorado Springs, Colo.