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THE AMERICAN LEGION
Dispatch
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MEMBERSHIP

Members of Massachusetts Post 114 breathe new life into the post with improvement projects, comedy and more. Photo by Steve Brooks/The American Legion

POST RENOVATION DRIVES MEMBERSHIP

Massachusetts Post 114 was brought back to life by its members, attracting younger veterans and surpassing 130 percent membership.

By Steve Brooks

It wasn't too long ago that the downstairs members' area of Holbrook Post 114 in Massachusetts had standing water. As a result, the post wasn't very active. The members decided to reverse that trend with a makeover.

The renovation effort turned a large upstairs room to a classy dining area, complete with flat-screen TVs, a Touch Tunes juke box and patriotic decorations. A beautiful canvas print of Michael R. Kennedy, a post member and Boston firefighter killed in the line of duty in 2014, hangs on one wall, just above the post's POW-MIA table. The front room of the post was renovated to become a smaller function area that now is rented out by community members for birthday parties and other celebrations/events. The post itself was made handicap-accessible for the first time. Its restaurant now serves a variety of food, and it hosts trivia nights on Tuesdays, bike and car nights on Wednesdays and live entertainment on Fridays.

John Kearney, who has served as post commander multiple times, led a fundraising effort to help with the much-needed renovations. "We didn't get the money we were looking for, but it worked in another way by attracting Paul (Anastasio, Post 114 senior vice commander) and all these other guys that heard the SOS and joined the cause. That's what saved the place."

See Post renovation drives membership on Page 6

NEWS ALERT

Register for Legion conferences

American Legion Family members can now register for the 2015 American Legion National Children & Youth Conference, Sept. 18-20; the Legion's National Junior Shooting Sports Conference, Sept. 18-20; and the Legion's National Americanism Conference, Sept. 25-27. The conferences will be held in downtown Indianapolis at the Sheraton Indianapolis City Centre Hotel. Registration is free and open to all interested American Legion Family members.

Register for Children & Youth: *www.legion.org/cyconference*

Register for Junior Shooting Sports: *www.legion.org/jrshootingconference*

Register for Americanism: *www.legion.org/cacregistration*

Watch 89th Legion World Series

From Aug. 13-16, all eight teams will participate in "pool play" which is streamed live on ESPN3.com - ESPN's Internet streaming channel. On Aug. 17, the two semifinal games will air on the ESPNU channel at 4 p.m. and 7 p.m., respectively. And on Aug. 18, the championship game will also be broadcast on ESPNU.

www.legion.org./baseball

Follow National Convention coverage

Visit *www.legion.org/convention* to read stories related to the 97th National Convention in Baltimore, Md., Aug. 28-Sept. 3.

COMMANDER'S MESSAGE

Mike Helm
National Commander

Your generosity makes an impact

In 1955, The American Legion's Child Welfare Foundation (CWF) made its first three grants, totaling $22,500, to three organizations: the Delinquency Control Institute, the National Association for Retarded Children and the National Society for the Prevention of Blindness. To date, more than $13 million has been awarded to nonprofit youth-oriented organizations, providing them with a means to educate families and communities about the needs of special children across this nation. The success of CWF is a direct result of the combined efforts and generosity of our Legion Family, especially the Sons of The American Legion. And our generosity doesn't go unnoticed.

Recently, the Immune Deficiency Foundation (IDF) of Towson, Md., recognized CWF with its IDF Impact Award for the foundations "many years of commitment and contributions." IDF received its first CWF grant in 1981, which helped the newly formed organization develop the first educational materials in the world for patients with primary immunodeficiency diseases. Since then, additional CWF grants have enabled IDF to produce a video and children's books.

"The grants we have received from the American Legion Child Welfare Foundation were absolutely essential in the formation of IDF. Without their support, I truly don't know whether we could have achieved the structure we needed for a rare disease national patient organization," said Marcia Boyle, IDF president and founder.

IDF is just one of the many success stories we hear from CWF grant recipients. The foundation is truly making a positive impact with our nation's most precious resource – our children.

Members of The American Legion Family are the primary contributors to the success and growth of CWF. Your support allows the foundation to continue funding projects that improve the quality of life for our nation's children.

To donate to CWF, visit ***www.legion.org/donate*** or learn more at ***www.legion.org/childwelfare***.

MEMBERSHIP

Support Commander Helm's fundraiser

National Commander Mike Helm set a goal for the Legion Family to raise a combined $4 million for the various American Legion and Auxiliary charities during his year-long tenure as national commander. Donations have far exceeded Helm's goal.

As the July issue of Dispatch was going to print, donations totaled $5,158,924. ***www.legion.org/donate***

The Legion's charitable programs include the Legacy Scholarship Fund, National Emergency Fund, Child Welfare Foundation, Endowment Fund, Operation Comfort Warriors and Soldier's Wish. Auxiliary's charitable programs include the Emergency Fund, Spirit of Youth Scholarship Fund, Children of Warriors National Presidents' Scholarship and American Legion Auxiliary Foundation.

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 when supplies are exhausted.

www.legion.org/commander/pin

NATIONAL ADJUTANT'S MESSAGE

Home Depot grant improves California post

Post 555 in Midway City gets much-needed updates with the help of grants available to Legion posts and members.

By Daniel S. Wheeler

Over the past several years, The American Legion has formed a strong alliance with The Home Depot Foundation to improve the lives of veterans by repairing homes for Legion members in need or by updating fixtures and appliances in posts. Last year during national convention in Charlotte, N.C., The Home Depot Foundation announced that it is dedicating no less than $1 million for American Legion projects throughout the country. Since the generous announcement, several posts have benefited from the grants available.

The list of items that needed repaired or replaced at American Legion Post 555 in Midway City, Calif., exceeded what the post could afford. Then post members recalled the generosity that The Home Depot Foundation dedicated to the Legion last summer at national convention and applied for a grant in March, which was approved.

The grant enabled the post to update its kitchen, replace windows, install air conditioning, and more. Volunteers from the Westminster, Calif., Home Depot and veterans and their families from Post 555 completed the remodel in less than three weeks. A formal dedication was held in April at the post and members presented a "thank you" plaque to volunteers from the Home Depot store in Westminster.

"That fact that Home Depot was willing to step up and help an organization like ours is phenomenal," said Post Commander Jim Sewell. "Financially, there is no way we could do this by ourselves."

With funds available to support our American Legion posts and members, I encourage you to apply. It's not just an opportunity to positively impact a post home or a Legionnaire's life. It's an opportunity to bring together a community for the good of our veterans.

There are two options for applying for the funds:

1. Community Impact Grants provide up to $5,000 in The Home Depot gift cards for any project to be completed by The American Legion and/or community volunteers. Team Depot volunteers are not involved in these projects, but these grants are a great option for engaging your Legionnaires and community.

Post 555 members recognized volunteers from the Home Depot store in Westminster, Calif., who helped them renovate the post.

2. Team Depot Grants fund volunteer projects that utilize Team Depot, The Home Depot's associate-led volunteer force, along with volunteers from your American Legion post.

Legionnaires can apply for both grants offered by The Home Depot Foundation, but only one at a time. It is important to note that applying for a grant does not guarantee approval.

To review guidelines for eligible improvement projects and both application processes, visit ***www.legion.org/documents/legion/pdf/AL_Grant_Clarification_Letter.pdf***. Legionnaires are also encouraged to contact their local Home Depot stores and ask for the Team Depot captains who can assist with grant applications.

For more information, visit: ***www.homedepotfoundation.org/page/grants***

Share your post-related success story

Email: ***dispatch@legion.org***

Dispatch

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Post BE02 Commander Joseph Schram (above) met with National Commander Michael D. Helm and Auxiliary National President Janet Jefford, who led an American Legion delegation through Belgium and France for the 2015 D-Day Anniversary in St. Mere Iglese, France, in June. *Photo by Jeff Stoffer/The American Legion*

POST ACTIVITIES

Flanders Field post continues to blossom

By Jeff Stoffer

Sons of The American Legion member Paul Vande Walle stood, dressed in suit and tie, in the early June sunshine at Flanders Field Cemetery in Waregem, Belgium. He was there to see American Legion National Commander Mike Helm and American Legion Auxiliary National President Janet Jefford place wreaths at the chapel there, surrounded by the graves of 368 American soldiers who gave their lives in uniform nearly a century ago. Once the ceremony was over, Vande Walle showed the commander why he's a member of the SAL.

"My grandfather was a member and a founder of the post," he explained, displaying yellowed photos of a strapping young doughboy from the Great War and other pictures that followed his discharge when U.S. veterans of World War I established what would become Belgium's only Legion post, named for the poem and the poppies that stand to this day as universal symbols of military sacrifice.

In 2013, the number of American Legion posts in Belgium almost reached zero. Vande Walle always believed that his SAL squadron, established in 1973, would not lose its parent post.

"As long as there is one member, there is a post," he said. "It is important to pass the torch to the next generation."

That's exactly what's been happening over the last two years at Post BE02 in the Department of France.

"The enthusiasm has been amazing," Post Commander Joseph Schram explained, adding that the key to membership recovery has been active connection with U.S. military personnel stationed at SHAPE (Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe) and NATO headquarters in Brussels. Today, Post BE02 has more than 80 members from throughout Belgium. It has an American Legion Riders chapter that recently led a trek through the Alps and a new American Legion Auxiliary unit whose 18-year-old president is 2014 Department of France Oratorical Contest winner Ruth Alvarez. The post and unit had their first Boys State and Girls State participants in 2015 (through Maryland) and are launching an American Legion Junior Shooting Sports program, working with Junior ROTC in the SHAPE/NATO community.

The post also sponsors a Boy Scouts of America Venturing Crew chapter to provide positive outdoor experiences to young

above: National Commander Michael D. Helm and Auxiliary National President Janet Jefford lay a wreath on Utah Beach near Saint Marie Du Mont, France. *Photo by Jeff Stoffer/The American Legion*

below: The American Legion delegation visits the World War II Monument in Bastogne, Belgium. *Photo by Jeff Stoffer/The American Legion*

National Commander Michael D. Helm speaks at the dedication of a new plaque at the Iron Mike statue at La Fiere Bridge near St. Mere-Eglise, France. *Photo by Jeff Stoffer/The American Legion*

people and help them mature into responsible adults. On the Fourth of July, the Flanders Field Legion Riders and Auxiliary chapter were serving traditional American fare in Brussels, bringing a taste of home to U.S. military families and civilians living there.

Programs for young people is one attraction to the Legion for the active-duty personnel and veterans of Belgium. Another is expertise navigating the world of VA benefits, which can be especially daunting for veterans living in foreign countries. Schram is a Legion service officer who helps them file for VA benefits and understand how to obtain them overseas.

Somewhere near the center of the post's resurgence – which Schram says he expects will jump from 80 to 120 this membership year – is its dedication to honor and remember those who made the ultimate sacrifice. The post's adopt-a-grave program at Flanders Field American Cemetery has been a major triumph, said Superintendent Chris Arseneault, who manages the American Battle Monuments Commission site in Waregem. More than 400 – primarily Belgians – have adopted graves at the cemetery, researched the name of the man buried there, making regular visits to decorate and honor his memory.

"Within two months, we had 100-percent adoption, even onto the Wall of the Missing," Arseneault said. The program took off because Schram simply asked the superintendent what his post could do for the cemetery, which gets up to 30,000 visitors a year. "The adopters are now connecting with American families and inviting them to come," Arsenault said.

The post also has benefited from a robust communications program that uses Facebook and e-newsletters to keep members informed. The post also has a well-organized website and makes frequent submissions to the national FODPAL (Foreign and Outlying Departments and Posts of The American Legion) website at ***www.legion.org/fodpal***.

"I believe that our growth is due to the amount of visibility that the post has in the communities," Schram said. "During our first year, we conducted an Oratorical Contest, participated in myriad parades and ceremonies, and conducted a number of membership drives throughout military communities. By our second year, the Legion Riders were instrumental in portraying a youthful and energetic post. With the advent of the Auxiliary chapter and the growth of our membership, we now have the ability to expand our projects and programs."

From Post renovation drives membership on Page 1

Post Commander Matt Nelson, a 34-year-old Boston firefighter and Marine Corps veteran, is a childhood friend of Anastasio. Nelson said the renovation was a collaborative effort in every sense of the word. Members donated "a lot of money, a lot of time," he said. "People are down for the cause – especially veterans. They just have an endless supply of patriotism. They fought tooth and nail to get this done."

The post debuted the new look the night before last Thanksgiving. Those who showed up then, and those who have visited Post 114 since, are shocked. "Everyone who comes here (for the first time) since the place opened is amazed," Junior Vice Commander Andy Best said. "They can't believe it's the same place."

Legionnaires outside of the post have noticed the difference. "It was the first post in my district to hit 100 percent (membership), and now they're up over 120, 130 percent," District 6 Commander Fred White said. "Whenever someone comes here (to the restaurant), the hostess always asks if they're a veteran. She tries to sign them up. They're really pushing membership."

White praised Post 114's younger membership for saving the post. Anastasio, 37, said part of the reason for the renovation was to attract additional younger veterans. "We had to make it appealing to get the next generations of veterans in here."

The changes haven't just been cosmetic. The post had been hosting Halloween and Christmas parties, but now it also has a kids' night once a month that features karaoke. The post also sponsors two American Legion Baseball teams, it sponsored three participants to attend the Massachusetts State Police Junior Trooper Program, and it hosts a PTSD clinic once a month. And in January, Post 114 member Bill Farrell started a comedy night that takes place on Saturday each month. "What's better than laughter? There's healing in laughter," Farrell said.

Nelson said that work remains to be done on the post, but the future looks bright. "There are a lot of functions going on (at the post)," he said. "If we can get some steam behind it, I think it could really be the heartbeat of that area – not just the town, but the South Shore in general."

ASK A SERVICE OFFICER

VA benefits for Camp Lejeune water contamination

Cajun Comeau
Department Service Officer, North Carolina

Q. ***Does my family qualify for VA benefits due to water contamination at Camp Lejeune?***

A. From the 1950s through the 1980s, people living or working at the U.S. Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune in Jacksonville, N.C., were potentially exposed to drinking water contaminated with industrial solvents, benzene and other chemicals. Veterans who served on active duty or family members who resided at Camp Lejeune for 30 days or more between Aug. 1, 1953, and Dec. 31, 1987, may be eligible for VA health benefits for 15 conditions: esophageal cancer, breast cancer, kidney cancer, multiple myeloma, renal toxicity, female infertility, scleroderma, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, lung cancer, bladder cancer, leukemia, myelodysplastic syndromes, hepatic steatosis, miscarriage and neurobehavioral effects.

Under the Camp Lejeune Family Member Program, VA is reimbursing family members for eligible out-of-pocket medical expenses related to the 15 covered conditions. VA will only pay for treatment after you have received payment from all other health plans.

To apply for reimbursement you must show:

- Your relationship to a veteran who served at Camp Lejeune with a marriage license or birth certificate;
- You lived on the base for 30 days or more between Aug. 1, 1953, and Dec. 31, 1987, with copies of orders or base housing; and
- You paid health-care expenses for a covered condition on or after March 26, 2013 (the date Congress began to cover the Camp Lejeune Family Member Program), such as receipts.

This program only covers the 15 health conditions listed above; it doesn't meet the minimum standard for health coverage under the Affordable Care Act.

If you meet the qualifications, apply online at ***www.clfamilymembers.fsc.va.gov/***.

Contact a Legion service officer by visiting ***www.legion.org/serviceofficers***.

CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION SPOTLIGHT

Post 64 in Middleborough, Mass.

Over the course of four days in January 1921, American Legion Post 64 in Middleborough, Mass., held a fundraiser to raise $20,000 for a new post headquarters. The post created posters announcing its fundraising efforts, which current member Don Triner is holding in the photo.

The post raised the $20,000 and established a permanent headquarters a 11 South Main St., in Middleborough.

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

DATELINE: CAPITOL HILL

Brett P. Reistad,
Chairman, National Legislative Commission

Agent Orange VA benefits expanded

The Department of Veterans Affairs recently published a new regulation that expands eligibility for some VA benefits for Air Force veterans and Air Force reserve veterans who were exposed to the herbicide Agent Orange through regular and repeated contact with contaminated C-123 aircraft that had been used in Vietnam as part of Operation Ranch Hand (ORH). VA published this regulation as an interim final rule so it could immediately begin providing benefits to eligible personnel who submit a disability compensation claim for any of the 14 medical conditions that have been determined by VA to be related to exposure to Agent Orange.

Under this rule, eligible Air Force veterans who served on the contaminated ORH C-123s are presumed to have been exposed to herbicides during their service, thus making it easier to establish entitlement for VA benefits if they develop an Agent Orange-related presumptive condition. In addition, for affected Air Force reserve veterans, VA will presume their Agent Orange-related condition had its onset during their reserve training. This change ensures these reservists are eligible for VA disability compensation and medical care for any Agent Orange-related presumptive condition, and their surviving dependents are eligible for dependency and indemnity compensation and burial benefits.

Individuals with specific benefit questions related to herbicide exposure on C-123s may call VA's special C-123 hotline at *(800) 749-8387* or email *VSCC123.VAVBASP@va.gov*.

Work to continue at Colorado VA medical center

On June 11, the U.S. Senate passed another short-term funding bill that would keep work ongoing at the new VA hospital in Aurora, Colo., until at least October. The $150 million measure was passed just days before the troubled Colorado project was set to shut down because of a lack of money. The bill was approved by the House by a voice vote and the measure was enacted by President Barack Obama on June 15 as **Public Law 114-24**.

This is the latest chapter in a legislative drama that has consumed the Colorado delegation since March when VA revealed the cost of the Aurora hospital had ballooned to $1.73 billion. Because the project had a budget of roughly half that amount, Colorado lawmakers have spent the past few months trying to keep money flowing so the prime contractor, Kiewit-Turner, doesn't suspend work at the medical campus. These actions mark the second time in a month that Congress has bailed out the project.

At the end of May, lawmakers agreed to allow VA and Kiewit-Turner to spend an additional $20 million on the hospital, which bought the project another three weeks by enactment of **P.L. 114-19**. But neither that law nor the one signed by the president on June 15 provides a long-term funding solution.

MEMBERSHIP INCENTIVES AND AWARDS

Race to the Top winners

The American Legion Race to the Top award is given to district commanders who attain at least 100 percent of the district's assigned membership objective by March 31. The winners and a guest will receive an all-expense paid trip to National Convention in Baltimore, Md. They will receive the Race to the Top award on stage at national convention, along with a new Legion cap that signifies their award status.

The winners in their respective district categories are:

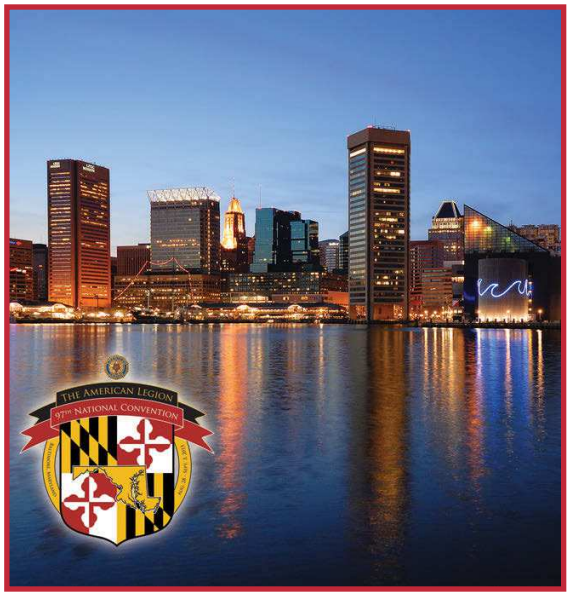
Category I (15 - 1,499 members): John W. Crutchfield of Alabama

Category II (1,500 - 2,999 members): Jack A. Youngs of Idaho

Category III (3,000 - 4,999 members): Robert M. Shreve of Georgia

Category IV (5,000 - 7,499 members): David K. Harris of Illinois

Category V (7,500 and above members): Andrew F. Burkett of Florida



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LEGION HISTORY

Legionnaire searches for drum, bugle corps memorabilia

American Legion posts with memorabilia of past or present drum and bugle corps – especially those that may have competed at a national convention – are encouraged to contact Bob Zinko of Summerville, S.C. The Legionnaire and corps aficionado has been custodian of the drum and bugle archives at American Legion National Headquarters since 1990, and has made it his mission to preserve as much as he can of the rich local history of these groups. He currently has files on more than 6,000 posts.

Zinko visits posts across the country to chronicle their drum and bugle corps history and believes many posts "are not even aware of what they have." If a post doesn't have specific plans for Auxiliary scrapbooks, personalized instruments, trophies, photos, etc., Zinko would like to add them to his collection. He would also like to visit any drum and bugle corps memorabilia being retained at the post.

Contact Bob Zinko by phone *(843) 291-2812* or email ***zinkor@yahoo.com***.

PLANNER

August

1	Samsung American Legion Scholarship applications due to National Headquarters
4-9	American Legion Baseball regional tournaments
5	American Legion Baseball scholarship department applications due to National Headquarters
6-8	National Membership Workshop and Department Service Officer School, Indianapolis
13-18	89th American Legion Baseball World Series, Shelby, N .C.
23-27	American Legion Legacy Run
28-Sept. 3	97th National Convention, Baltimore, Md.