Vol. 27 No. 5

THE AMERICAN LEGION
Dispatch
January 2017 A National Headquarters Publication

MEMBERSHIP PLAN

Montana Legion members Josh Clement, left, and Merv Gunderson. *Photo by Todd Trigsted*

THE MENTORSHIP OF LEGION LEADERSHIP

Veterans of different war eras find common bonds, share the passion to develop young American Legion leaders.

By The American Legion

An American Legion member since 2003, Josh Clement got to know Vietnam War veteran and American Legion National Executive Committee member Merv Gunderson through a revitalization effort at Post 46 in Boulder, Mont. A change of National Guard duty stations later sent Clement, an Operation Iraqi Freedom veteran, to Gunderson's Post 30 in Belgrade, Mont., where he went on to be elected commander. Clement is now commander of Helena's 700-member Post 2 and serves on the National American Legion Americanism Council. He is also an American Legion Baseball umpire, as Gunderson was.

Their message to Legion leaders at every level, regardless of war era, is that mentorship of young leaders is critical to the future of the organization. It's especially important now, they say, as younger veterans look to The American Legion to find ways to keep serving and leading their communities, states and nation after discharge.

Following are some of their thoughts about mentorship, leadership development, connections between the war eras, and why it all matters:

WHAT MENTORING DID YOU HAVE WHEN YOU FIRST JOINED THE LEGION?

Merv Gunderson: They basically said, 'You're going to become the commander … you're going to become the adjutant … you're going to become the finance officer.' But no

See The mentorship of Legion leadership on Page 4

NEWS ALERT

Legacy Scholarship application online

The American Legion Legacy Scholarship application for 2017 is online for new and returning applicants to fill out. The Legacy Scholarship is available for children whose parents lost their lives while honorably serving on active duty on or after 9/11, as well as for children of post-9/11 veterans with a VA disability rating of 50 percent or higher. The renewable scholarship will award up to $20,000 for the expense of graduate or post-graduate tuition, books, room and board, meal plans, transportation and other supplies needed to achieve a higher education. The application deadline is April 20.
www.legion.org/scholarships/legacy

2017 Legion Baseball registration

Team registration for the 2017 American Legion Baseball season is now underway. Register online: ***www.baseball.legion.org***

Post Honor Ribbon certification forms due Jan. 31

Honor ribbons are awarded to posts whose membership for the current membership year (as of Dec. 31) achieves an advance membership (for the year about to begin) equal to or greater than the final membership for the year ending. Certification forms must be submitted to the National Headquarters Membership Division by Jan. 31. Download the form:
www.legion.org/membership/targetdates

COMMANDER'S MESSAGE

A new year calls for improved American Legion awareness

Charles E. Schmidt
National Commander

The month of January signifies a fresh start to a new year, and it's also a reminder that the 100 percent membership deadline is only a few months away. One great way to kick of the New Year and meet your membership goal is to conduct an awareness Walk for Veterans.

These awareness walks are an opportunity to raise awareness about veterans issues and to highlight the Legion's impact on communities nationwide, and for Legion Family members to tell their story of why they joined this great organization.

The walks can coincide with my visit to your department, but I also encourage departments to conduct them even if I'm not visiting. They can be any distance and should include Legion Family members, Legion youth program participants, Boys Scouts, high school JROTC units, community leaders and anyone else interested in helping bring Legion visibility to communities.

Find a list of upcoming walks online at ***www.legion.org/walkforveterans***. National Headquarters staff can assist in planning and promoting a Walk for Veterans.

For more information, contact Matt Herndon, deputy director of the Legion's Membership Division, by email ***mherndon@legion.org*** or phone ***(317) 630-1406***.

MEMBERSHIP

Recruiters to be awarded with 'Carry the Legacy Forward' pin

American Legion National Commander Charles E. Schmidt will award his national commander pin to any Legion member who obtains three new members into the Legion.

A new member is any eligible person joining for the 2017 membership year who was not a member of The American Legion during the 2016 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 Schmidt's incentive program will end June 30, 2017, or when supplies are exhausted.
www.legion.org/commander/pin

MEMBERSHIP

National Commander Honor Ribbon

American Legion National Commander Charles E. Schmidt will award his National Commander Honor Ribbon to any American Legion Family that achieves 100 percent membership by May 30, 2017.

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 membership to qualify for the award.

The National Commander Honor Ribbon membership incentive program will end May 30, 2017.

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

FUNDRAISING

Commander's $1 million fundraising goals

American Legion National Commander Charles E. Schmidt's fundraising goal this year is to raise $1 million for the Legion's Temporary Financial Assistance (TFA) program and $1 million for service officer training.

TFA provides cash grants to help eligible veterans with minor children in financial need meet the costs of shelter, utilities, food, clothing and medical expenses. And accredited American Legion service officers are specially trained to provide expert assistance, free of charge, to veterans and their families.

To donate, visit ***www.legion.org/donate***.

NATIONAL ADJUTANT'S MESSAGE

Connecticut flies burial flags of deceased veterans

Post 44 in Bantam has raised and flown the flag of 379 deceased veterans from across the United States.

By Daniel S. Wheeler

January 2017 will mark the 340th consecutive month that American Legion Tyler-Seward-Kubish Post 44 will have honored a deceased veteran for the Department of Connecticut's Veteran of the Month program. The program, initiated by two members of the Bantam, Conn., post in 1989, was formally adopted by the Department of Connecticut and by the National Americanism Commission per Resolution 159 during the 1993 National Convention in Pittsburgh.

"We do not mourn their deaths, we honor their lives" is the slogan carved into the stone wall of the All Wars Memorial, which was created by Post 44 and Bantam community members as an expression to the reason a deceased veteran has been honored on the first Saturday of every month since October 1989.

The Veteran of the Month program is open to deceased veterans who were either honorably discharged, died while serving on active duty, or who are prisoners of war or remain missing in action. It is not mandatory for the honoree to have been a resident of Connecticut or a member of The American Legion.

A family member nominates the deceased veteran to be honored as Veteran of the Month, which entails a ceremony that is open to the public and held outside at the All Wars Memorial or indoors at the Bantam Borough Hall. The ceremony includes a reading of the veteran's personal and military life, a three-volley salute and the raising of the deceased veteran's burial flag, which flies until the following month's honoring. Post 44 provides an American flag to be flown for POW/MIA veterans.

"The burial flag, an endeared remembrance of the veteran, is again a center of respect in a ceremony that when completed is returned (to the family) and gains renewed prestige within the family," said Post 44 Commander John Lilley.

The flying of an American flag is what sparked the Veteran of the Month idea for the late Post 44 members Arthur Shaw and Francis Fabbri. A deceased veterans flag was flown at the entrance of the Bantam Cemetery when the current flag was

unserviceable and shipping for the replacement flag was delayed. Shaw and Fabbri noted how veteran's burial flags usually end up in a closet and forgotten.

"In either case, not the measure of respect for the flag or veteran that served under that flag. Thus, the Veteran of the Month was born," Lilley said.

Jan. 7 marked the 379th veteran honored, as sometimes the honoring includes more than one veteran if siblings all served. For example, Post 44 recently hosted a Veteran of the Month ceremony for three Connecticut brothers who fought in the Civil War and were all killed within two weeks of each other in the spring of 1864.

As the program continues to grow, several Legion post and district leaders throughout the state help Post 44 members conduct the ceremonies for veterans.

"It's great because you have Legion post helping Legion post. There's just a whole lot of good that is happening," said Post 44 Adjutant John Harrison.

Every month in 2017 is reserved for an honoring of a deceased veteran for the Veteran of the Month program, and 2018 is beginning to fill up.

The growth is "a testimonial to the support (the program) has received from the public, the media and the support of Legion membership," Lilley said.

Share your post-related success story

Email: *dispatch@legion.org*

Dispatch

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From The mentorship of Legion leadership on Page 1

one tells you what's involved. So, you start researching on your own what you need to do. A lot of it is by trial and error, and a lot of mistakes are made. It would be so much simpler if someone was training them, working with them, giving them a starting point. If you don't do that in our organization, then you're doing a disservice to The American Legion.

Josh Clement: I had the opportunity to help out in Boulder with Post 46. And I'm like, okay, I'm a soldier and can go do stuff, but what is the substance I need behind it? I wanted to help, but I didn't know where to start. That's where it takes a good mentor. If you are revitalizing, you need to know the history. Thirteen years ago, that was my drive – to know the background. You can have all the knowledge, but I didn't have the wisdom. It takes someone else to bring that all together. At Post 46, I didn't know what was going on, or what I should be doing as a leader. Working with Merv … I felt like I grew as a leader.

IS THERE A BALANCING ACT BETWEEN THE HISTORICAL TRADITIONS OF THE AMERICAN LEGION AND THE NEED TO CHANGE TO MATCH THE INTERESTS OF NEW GENERATIONS?

MG: When we see new veterans coming in, we need to take the time to ask them what they want. What do they want to do? What do they want to see this post do? We've made changes at our post in Belgrade because of what the younger generation has told us – more related to families, so they can bring their kids in. They want to do projects within the organization; they want to be there to help.

JC: It was the history that really tied me to The American Legion. It really drives you. That's where the preamble concept comes in. It tells our history; it gives our mission statement. As a soldier, I like having that mission statement.

IS THE BEST RESOURCE FOR A NEXT-GENERATION LEGION LEADER A MENTOR?

MG: You can learn it on your own, but as you go through, you're always watching how other people are doing things, how other posts work, how the national organization works, how the state organization works. You see the little nuances and you build those things into how you want to see The American Legion grow.

When Josh came onboard, Post 30 was an opportunity for me to say, 'Here is a young veteran who is active duty right now, who is going to be around for a long period of time, and if we take our time, and teach him about the history of The American Legion and where we came from – and why that history is so important – then we can move forward into a new generation.'

JC: We all served. We're all part of the military organization that has done our part, was asked by the president to support and defend our Constitution. It's nice that the Vietnam-era veterans realize there was a gap. Same thing the World War I veterans had to do to welcome the World War II veterans. Mentoring – that's what the Vietnam era did. The legacy of The American Legion is making sure that we are mentoring from the previous generation to the next generation.

WHAT ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF MENTORING AT THE LOCAL POST?

MG: This is a blue cap organization. We work from the bottom up, unlike some organizations that work from the top down. We shouldn't be expecting the national organization, or the state organization, to do everything. We've got to get that mentoring attitude into the post level; get it into the leadership at the post level so that our post members know how mentoring works, and then as they move forward through the organization, carry that with them and bring some other people along and mentor them.

WHAT ADVICE CAN A MENTOR PROVIDE TO A YOUNG MEMBER?

JC: One of the most important pieces of advice that I remember is to care for the veteran, care for the servicemember, and be engaged in your community.

If you say you're going to do it, do it. You don't want to be that Legionnaire who promises to do a lot of stuff and then doesn't execute. Our communities look for The American Legion to be a pillar, whether it's children and youth activities, whether it's our Constitution, or how to help a veteran, we have to be approachable.

HOW CAN THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN MENTORED SERVE AS LEGION MENTORS THEMSELVES?

JC: What I do is bring on a young veteran after they have completed training or come back from deployment – their Title 10 time – and I invite them to be a part of The American Legion to see all aspects. Post 2 here in Helena is a very diverse post. It is active in every aspect of The American Legion and its programs. I ask the young veterans to stay with me the full year, travel with me to district meetings and department conventions, attend meetings, see the programs, attend the baseball conference, see what we have. And after a year, they have been informed and educated.

HOW DO YOU GET THE AMERICAN LEGION MESSAGE OUT OF THE POST AND TO POTENTIAL YOUNG LEADERS?

MG: That's the hardest thing. We keep everything a secret in The American Legion. We do so much, but we never tell people our story. We make sure that the news media comes out with cameras if we are going to do a flag retirement ceremony, or when we do a major parade like on Memorial Day. Public relations is a huge concept, one we sometimes forget. Every time we do something with the news media, we have younger veterans available and put them in front of the camera. It's important to let them know that they are a part, and they are recognized for what they do. That's an important concept.

IS IT DIFFICULT TO MOTIVATE BUSY, YOUNG VETERANS TO GET INVOLVED IN THE LEGION?

JC: I am a full-time guardsman, a father (to four small children) and husband. I am giving six to eight hours extra a month to The American Legion because I want to, because I feel it's so important.

Being a member of The American Legion takes effort. But you know when you are done with your meeting or activity, you have done something for your community. Seventy U.S. flags go up in Helena, and it may take an hour in the morning before work and an hour after work, but you look and see those stars and stripes waving in the wind, it's just a reminder of how proud we are as a country. We are reminding people how important it is to be American.

Read the full interview on ***www.legion.org/dispatch****.*

HONOR AND REMEMBRANCE

Legionnaire's traveling memorial ignites patriotism

Through a pictorial timeline, Legionnaire Ron Smith is documenting and preserving the sacrifices America's men and women have made for more than 240 years to protect our nation's freedom.

"The Spirit of America's Story – The Wall" is a 70-foot traveling exhibit that commemorates through images a timeline of the Revolutionary War to the Persian Gulf War. The three final panels, which are in the process of completion, will feature images from 9/11 to the War on Terrorism.

Once completed, the memorial will be comprised of 10 connected pieces of artwork that stand 92 inches tall and 100-feet long.

Native Americans, military men and women, law enforcement and fire fighters are scattered throughout the images to "keep America's sense of patriotism ignited and a continued respect for those who wear uniforms and bring us together as a country," said Smith, a member of American Legion Post 83 in Sandusky, Ohio. "This memorial is a lesson on freedom. We wish to educate and inspire our future generations to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of America's sacrifices for freedom – on the battlefield and on the homefront."

Smith created the wall with Patricia Sexton whose husband, Army Sgt. David Sexton, lost his life while serving in the Vietnam War and his remains have yet to come home. The two wanted to create a traveling exhibit that, unlike other memorials, commemorated through images and not just words a visual timeline of different periods in America's history that captured the struggle for freedom and stressed to future generations the importance of protecting "the liberty and freedom we as Americans enjoy today," Smith said.

Smith and Sexton show the memorial to audiences in Ohio and beyond. The custom-built panels are mobile and can accommodate any size indoor or outdoor space. During the presentation of their memorial, Smith and Sexton show a video that highlights the inspiration for the memorial, and they talk about each image captured in the panels. For more information on The Spirit of America's Story – The Wall, or to display the traveling memorial at a Legion post, visit ***www.spiritofamericasstory.com***.

MEMBERSHIP PLAN

Indiana post experiences 132 percent membership growth in one year

By Peter Welling, Post 510 adjutant

In every direction of the Historic Fort Benjamin Post 510 in Indianapolis live hundreds of members of National Headquarters Post 777. It is the duty of each of us to reach out to these comrades and invite them to join Post 510. That was the directive from our executive committee and the membership committee responded by obtaining a phone list of those unattached Legionnaires and started calling. Invitations were made and accepted and attendance at meetings started to increase.

At general meetings, new members are welcomed to the post and asked to introduce themselves and to share their experiences. Each new Post 510 member is personally greeted by the commander and vice commander, and presented with a token of welcome, such as a Legion pin. They are encouraged to become active participants in the Legion's mission.

To obtain new members, we also started a door hanger campaign. Legion volunteers walked around neighborhoods and any home they saw flying a U.S. flag or a vehicle with a veteran sticker or plate, we knocked on the door. If no one answered, we left a door hanger that provided instructions on how to join Post 510.

New members make the programs of Post 510 more viable and visible, and thus attract other Legionnaires. With the recent influx of new members, the post was able to launch an Auxiliary unit in 2015, the color guard was able to accept more invitations, including participating in last year's historic 100th running of the Indy 500 Festival Parade. And Post 510 Legion Riders received their charter in 2016.

And new members attract more new members; here is one example of how that domino theory worked for Post 510. Ann Adcook signed up and volunteered for the position of service officer. She then joined our Legion Riders chapter. She brought in local police officer Matt Hickey, a Sons of The American Legion member, who then joined the Riders and he brought Axel, a former war dog, who is now Post 510's mascot. Axel and Matt work together with the Lawrence Police Department.

The post keeps all members in the loop. Emails containing the minutes of the general meeting or news of open positions where they might wish to participate are sent on a regular basis. Post 510's Facebook page is very active and informative, and we will soon launch a website.

Post 510's membership committee is a dedicated group that meets at least once a month to handle administrative demands and to plan for the future. Recently they approved a Five Year Growth and Sustainability Plan while their current efforts have already produced impressive results.

The commitment and determination to become more visible and to adapt the growth plan will keep Post 510 on pace to reach its goal of 1,600 members by 2020.

DID YOU KNOW?

- In 2016, The American Legion's Temporary Financial Assistance (TFA) awarded $830,151 in cash grants, benefitting 600 veterans and 1,396 children. The grants help eligible veterans, with minor children, in financial need meet the cost of shelter, utilities, food, clothing and medical expenses. During his tenure as American Legion national commander, Charles E. Schmidt's fundraising goal for TFA is $1 million. For more information or to make a donation to TFA, visit *www.legion.org/financialassistance*.

- In 2016, The American Legion's Operation Comfort Warriors program provided 34 grants totaling $187,000. OCW provides wounded warriors with comfort items and assistance. For more information or to make a donation, visit *www.legion.org/ocw*.

- Legionnaire Gary Crowden is a Nobel Peace Prize recipient. A member of Post 543 in St. James, N.C., Crowden received the award for his assignment to the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization headquartered in Jerusalem in the 1970s. Read more about his story online at *www.legion.org/membership*.

DATELINE: CAPITOL HILL

NDAA for fiscal year 2017 signed into law

James W. Oxford, *Chairman, National Legislative Commission*

On Dec. 2, the House voted 375-34 to approve the conference report to **S. 2943**, the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for fiscal year 2017. The Senate followed suit on Dec. 8, approving the measure by a recorded vote of 92-7. It was signed into law by President Barack Obama on Dec. 23, and is now **P.L. 114-328**.

This measure sets the spending parameters and policy statements for America's military forces for this fiscal year, which began Oct. 1, 2016. This legislation sets Department of Defense (DoD) spending for the upcoming year at $619 billion for base national defense. This includes the administration's base request of $610 billion; $5.8 billion supplemental request for operations in Iraq, Afghanistan and Europe; and a further $3.2 billion for Readiness Stabilization Funding to stop the drawdown of the military, which is fueling the readiness crisis.

Other highlights of the measure include:

- A 2.1 percent pay raise for troops;
- A stop to the drawdown and an increase to the end strength of America's armed forces;
- A solution to getting better technology into the hands of warfighters more quickly;
- An increase of funding for depot maintenance facilities, sustainment and modernization, and ship maintenance; and
- An increase of ship procurement, especially for submarines and amphibious ships.

The NDAA improves access to quality care for warfighters, military retirees and their families, while enhancing medical readiness. The measure also makes no changes to the Basic Allowance for Housing. Further, it makes reforms to ensure the military commissary benefit will be preserved. However, once again, Congress failed to repeal the Disabled Veterans Tax or to provide mandatory end-of-service physical examination to reserve component troops.

Other reforms contained in the NDAA include updating the Uniform Code of Military Justice, DoD organizational reform, and limiting the staff size of the National Security Council.

Veterans legislation passes

The House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees compiled an omnibus bill consisting of VA-related provisions. **HR 6416**, the Jeff Miller and Richard Blumenthal Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2016, passed the Senate without amendment by voice vote on Dec. 10, after it passed the House on Dec. 6. The measure was signed by Obama on Dec. 16, and is now **P.L. 114-315**.

This bill is named after Jeff Miller, chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, and Richard Blumenthal, ranking member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee. This omnibus bill drew together a number of pending non-controversial veterans' bills that were bipartisan and voted out of committee months ago.

MEMBERSHIP INCENTIVES AND AWARDS

Big Twelve Competition award incentive

The Big Twelve Competition recognizes departments that meet or exceed their pledged membership goal percentage by the March target date. The percentage does not include members gained through DMS.

The competition is broken into six categories. The winner in each category will be reimbursed for computer equipment purchases of up to $2,000, while the runners-up in each category will be reimbursed for computer equipment purchases of up to $1,000.

The six categories in the competition are:

- Category I: Departments of 100,000 or more members
- Category II: Departments of 70,000 to 99,999 members
- Category III: Departments of 40,000 to 69,999 members
- Category IV: Departments of 25,000 to 39,999 members
- Category V: Departments of 10,000 to 24,999 members
- Category VI: Departments of 9,999 or fewer members

Read more about the Big Twelve Competition by downloading the online National Membership Points Award Manual at *www.legion.org/publications*.

Goal for 2016-2017: 100,000 new American Legion members

American Legion National Commander Charles E. Schmidt's membership goal is 100,000 new members.

Legionnaires are encouraged to share how they are helping the membership thermometer rise by posting stories and photos on *www.legiontown.org* under the membership success story category.

The national commander will award his "Carry the Legacy Forward" pin to any Legionnaire who recruits three new members; and the Honor Ribbon will be awarded to any Legion Family that achieves 100 percent membership by May 30, 2017.

www.legion.org/commander

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

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WHAT'S INSIDE

FEATURE STORY: THE MENTORSHIP OF LEGION LEADERSHIP
Page 1

Commander's Message: A new year calls for improved American Legion awareness
Page 2

Adjutant's Message: Connecticut flies burial flags of deceased veterans
Page 3

Honor & Remembrance: Legionnaire's traveling memorial ignites patriotism
Page 5

Membership: Indiana post experiences 132 percent membership growth in one year
Page 5

Did you know?: TFA awarded $830,000 in cash grants
Page 6

VETERANS CAREER CENTER

American Legion cited as a top resource for jobseekers

An annual survey of veterans and employers shows that The American Legion is one of the top resources for veterans looking for work or resources in their job search.

The annual Veteran Talent Index (VTI) was established in 2011 by Monster and Military.com to help transitioning servicemembers get a better grasp of the employment landscape.

As noted in this year's VTI, "In 2011, the unemployment rate for post-9/11 veterans was 12.1 percent, much higher than the 8.7 percent of non-veterans. Companies wanted to hire veterans but didn't know where to find them and many veterans expressed frustration at the difficulty in finding veteran-friendly employers. The result was a concerted effort and partnership among the public, private and non-profit sectors to work together to help lower the unemployment rate and connect job seekers with employers eager to hire them."

This year's survey asked job seekers and employers about their use or partnerships with nonprofits and veterans service organizations. Twenty-one percent of veterans responding to the survey said they use The American Legion for resources in their job search, compared to 26 percent using the Department of Veterans Affairs and 21 percent using the Department of Labor.

A listing of career fairs can be found on the Legion website at *www.legion.org/careers/jobfairs* and job search advice and other career information can be found at *www.legion.org/careers*.

PLANNER

February

Americanism Month

5 Four Chaplains Sunday

8 85 percent membership target date

21-24 Department Service Officer school, Washington, D.C.

26-March 1 Washington Conference, Washington, D.C.