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THE AMERICAN LEGION
Dispatch
December 2017 A National Headquarters Publication

HONOR & REMEMBRANCE

Quad County Hospice "No Veteran Will Die Alone" program volunteers

A SALUTE OF HONOR TO HOSPICE VETERANS

American Legion Family members in Illinois volunteer with the No Veteran Will Die Alone program to pay final respects.

By The American Legion

American Legion Family members in Illinois are paying respect to fellow veterans in hospice care during their final days, even hours. The Legion Family members are part of the Quad County Hospice "No Veteran Will Die Alone" program that was initiated less than a year ago to honor a hospice veteran's military service and sacrifice.

Through the program, veterans visit other veterans in hospice care either at home, a nursing facility or hospital and conduct a special pinning and award ceremony. The No Veteran Will Die Alone program serves four counties and consists of 13 volunteers, with six of them from Legion Family Post 168 in Pana, as well as Shelbyville Post 81, Nokomis Post 94 and Oconee Post 317.

"We are there to honor God, country and the warrior for his or her service," said Post 168 Chaplain Jack Moss. "The veterans really get choked up. We always tell them what an honor and privilege it is for us to come and do this pinning ceremony for them."

The ceremony begins with patriotic, gospel or other types of music performed by a volunteer music therapist on guitar or violin. Then the program volunteers march into the patient's room carrying the American flag, as well as the veteran's military branch of service flag. Moss offers a special prayer and then the pin is placed on the veteran. The pin is an American flag with the word "Veteran" and a service branch pin is attached.

"Some of the veterans say, 'I don't really

See A salute of honor to hospice veterans on Page 4

NEWS ALERT

Legion membership promotion has been terminated

The membership recruitment promotion published on the back page of the November 2017 *Dispatch* has been terminated. While certificates of appreciation for those who recruit new members are available, no cash drawing will occur due to variations in law. We apologize for any inconvenience or confusion this may have caused. For more information, contact the Legion's Membership Division by email *membership@legion.org* or call *(317) 630-1327*.

2018 Emblem Sales catalog available

The new 154-page Emblem Sales catalog features more than 40 new items and a special centennial section.

New centennial items include dress shirts, hoodies, flags, decals and accessories. Other new items for members of the American Legion Family include polos, ball caps, do-rags and hoodies.

To search the catalog by page, visit *http://emblem.legion.org/2018-Catalog-by-Page/departments/66/*.

The catalog has been mailed to Emblem Sales customers who have made a purchase in the last three years, as well as to every commander and adjutant at every level.

If you haven't received a catalog, you can request a free one by filling out a brief form at *https:/emblem.legion.org/inforequest.asp* or by calling *(888) 453-4466*.

COMMANDER'S MESSAGE

OCW is a year-round giving program

Denise H. Rohan
National Commander

I had the great honor of helping to present an American Legion Operation Comfort Warriors (OCW) grant to the St. Louis VA Health Care System - Jefferson Barracks Division. The $10,000 grant was presented before Thanksgiving, and it was a reminder that as we prepare for this giving holiday season, OCW takes care of our families all year long.

OCW is fulfilling grant requests monthly to meet the needs of recovering wounded warriors and veterans receiving care at VA hospitals. The program provides various items all depending on the need. The St. Louis VA requested and received 30 health and comfort kits; two 60-inch flat screen televisions; three 32-inch televisions; winter clothing and apparel; and $5,000 in canteen booklets to help VA patients purchase food or other health care items during their stay.

The OCW grant at the St. Louis VA also served as a reminder of the positive difference our Legionnaires make as VA volunteers. During my visit I learned of a story about Harrison Ochs, a World War II veteran, 51-year Legionnaire, and former service officer and volunteer at the VA. Because of a relationship that Ochs formed with a nearby Shoe Carnival, the OCW grant purchased 20 shoe gift cards for $40 apiece but have a value of $55 and up. The gift cards are used by veterans who graduate from the VA's Domiciliary Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Program and need shoes for their new job. Since Ochs has moved out of state, Legion Service Officer Thom White has stepped up to make sure the program continues and that a service officer always takes the veteran shopping. Nearly 2,500 veterans have been a recipient of the shoe program since its inception in the 1990s.

The appreciation for what OCW does for our veterans, and for volunteers like Ochs, was expressed to me by St. Louis VA Public Affairs Manager Marcena Gunter. "Harrison is just one of the examples of your go-getters – the kind of people that you have in your organization that make things happen here at the facility level," she said. "Certainly the heart of our medical center is the caring and sharing that comes from the volunteers that you bring forth to us. Thank you for this wonderful donation and for the things that you do all the time with us."

I want to thank you, the Legion Family, for making a difference in wounded warriors and veterans lives through OCW grants. We are always there ready to help out our veterans who need extra comfort.

Denise H. Rohan

MEMBERSHIP

Legion Family members eligible for 'Family First' incentive pin

American Legion National Commander Denise H. Rohan is extending her "Family First!" membership incentive pin to the entire American Legion Family.

Rohan will award her national commander incentive pin to any American Legion Family member who obtains any combination of three eligible new members into the Legion Family (The American Legion, Sons of The American Legion or American Legion Auxiliary).

A new member is any eligible person joining for the 2018 membership year who was not a member of the American Legion Family during the 2017 membership year.

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. Rohan's incentive program will end June 30, 2018, or when supplies are exhausted.

www.legion.org/commander/pin

MEMBERSHIP

National Commander Honor Ribbon

American Legion National Commander Denise H. Rohan will award her National Commander Honor Ribbon to any American Legion Family that achieves 100 percent membership by May 30, 2018.

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, 2018.

Apply for the award online at *www.legion.org/commander/ribbon*.

NATIONAL ADJUTANT'S MESSAGE

Legion Family delivers the spirit of Christmas to children

The holiday season is an extra special time of giving from the American Legion Family.

By Daniel S. Wheeler

American Legion Department of Kansas' Operation North Pole program at Fort Riley Army Base provides toys to nearly 1,400 military children.

The American Legion Family gives year-round to veterans, their families and their communities. But the holiday season is often a time that the Legion Family goes above and beyond.

This December, Legion Family members across the country are delivering presents to children to ensure they feel the spirit of Christmas during this joyous season.

I know posts, squadrons and units everywhere are participating in the gift-giving season for children and families, but the following are a few stories that came across my desk.

■ The American Legion Department of Kansas' Operation North Pole program at Fort Riley Army Base has been providing toys to thousands of military children since 2010. This year, nearly 1,400 military children will receive an age-appropriate gift and have the opportunity to meet Santa Claus. About 125 Legion Family members will participate in this year's program. They dress as their favorite Christmas character, act as Santa's elves by handing out presents, and serve cookies baked by Auxiliary members. "It's really rewarding," said Past National Commander and Department Adjutant Jimmie Foster. "Everybody enjoys it."

Through donation support, the department spent nearly $18,000 on toys for the children this year, with $10,000 of it coming from the Sons of The American Legion Kansas detachment. The SAL donation "is a huge help," Foster said.

The event also includes door prizes, face painting, games and family-orientated activities.

■ American Legion Post 145 in Avon, Ind., is hosting its fourth annual Indiana Blue Star Spirit of Christmas event for 70 children of military and veterans' families who are in need. The children receive almost everything on their wish list plus clothing and shoes; and the parents are also recipients of gifts. Santa arrives in a Huey to distribute the gifts and visit with the children. "It brings extreme joy to every one of us to put a smile on each and every child," said Indiana Blue Star Chairman and Post 145 member Ralph "Zoc" Zoccolillo.

■ American Legion Post 16 in Lynchburg, Va., presented 120 stuff animals to the local police department. The animals are to be handed out to child victims of domestic violence, vehicle crashes and other similar incidents during the Christmas season, and beyond, to bring comfort.

■ American Legion Robert E. Coulter Jr. Post 1941 in La Grange, Ill., held its first Toys for Tots drive. The post collected 400 toys and $700 in donations for the program. "No child should wake up on Christmas without a toy," Post 1941 member Bill Kiddon told the Chicago Tribune.

■ American Legion Costello-Monahan-Brown Post 964 in Pleasant Mount, Pa., sponsors a Christmas in the Village where children get their picture taken with Santa.

■ American Legion Post 42 in Grand Canyon, Ariz., has hosted a Christmas program for children in pre-school through third grade for the past 20 years. The children receive refreshments, sleds made out of candy canes, and knitted scarfs and hats by Legion Family members.

As your Legion Family celebrates Christmas with children in the community, please share at ***www.legiontown.org***.

Share your post's holiday traditions.

Share: ***www.legiontown.org***

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deserve this medal; I wasn't in action,'" Moss said. "But we tell them, 'If you served one day for your country then you deserve to be honored.' You can really see the emotion in their eyes and in their face. They are touched by that pinning, and we are too."

The military branch pins are donated by the local military recruiting offices thanks to Post 168 Senior Vice Commander Mickey Clemons explaining the program and asking for support. "We really go the extra mile for the hospice veterans," Clemons said. "We try to honor them the best we can for what they've done for us."

Veterans also receive other items featuring their branch of service. These include a hand-made red, white and blue tie blanket and pillow made by volunteer Marilyn Ohmes; a custom-made cake by a local bakery; and a laminated certificate. The certificate reads, "We pay special tribute to you, for your military service to America and for advancing the universal hope of freedom and liberty for all."

Sons of The American Legion Squadron 168 member Earl Baker said many times the families never knew how important it was for their loved one to receive this honor because their military service was never shared. Once the program volunteers introduce themselves and their branch of service, the patient will often reminisce about his or her time in service.

"We had one veteran introduce to us his great-grandchildren; he called them up one by one," Baker said. "That was very emotional for me. I don't think there was a dry eye in the room."

The five- to 20-minute ceremony ends with a proper salute. Clemons said oftentimes before he can even call the group to attention to present arms, the patient is saluting. "These ceremonies are very emotional for us as well as for the families," he said.

The No Veteran Will Die Alone program was inspired by a similar program at a VA hospital in Chicago. "We thought this would be a wonderful benefit for our Quad County Hospice program because there are so many veterans in our area," said Carol Chandler, Quad County director with Pana Community Hospital. "This has really brought together kind of a cohesive for our hospice patient that is a veteran and our very veterans that live in the community. It's been the glue, if you will, to bring that together and that honor is happening because our veterans understand that hospice person that served. It's been an amazing privilege for us to have this program in this community."

Quad County Volunteer Coordinator Rachael Flesch-Springate spoke with Post 168 members and the local VFW about the program for their support. She is in contact with the families of the hospice veteran and offers the No Veteran Will Die Alone program to them. If accepted, she contacts Clemons to coordinate the ceremony and number of volunteers in attendance. She hopes other Legion Family members will see the benefits of this program and reach out to their local hospice coordinator to "help veterans that are going through this transition in their life," she said. "To see the connection between veterans to veterans is amazing. It really is. It gives them a bond that they've always had. I believe it's rewarding for everyone."

After the patient passes, Clemons said their services to the family do not end. Post 168's honor guard has provided military services at funerals, and they follow up with bereavement visits. "I just saw the daughter of the very first recipient of our program yesterday at the grocery store and we hugged. Once they pass we don't forget the families," Clemons said.

Baker said overall the program "is an emotional time. When we sit back as a group, we discuss what we saw, what we can do to make things better. It's all about the veteran."

HOLIDAY REMEMBRANCE

Painting gives recognition to the fallen during Christmas

About six years ago Thomas Shively, a U.S. Air Force veteran and a retired computer programmer and artist, painted an image of Santa Claus kneeling beside headstones of those who gave all for their country.

"It was, and is, my hope that those who see this painting think and give pause during their holiday celebrations to remember our fallen brothers and sisters, as well as all their extended family and the loss they have suffered. And those who can no longer find the joy to celebrate," said Shively, a member of South Mountain American Legion Post 674 in Holly Springs, Pa.

"I want the painting to put the image in the far recesses of the viewers mind so that when any questions ever come up as to what the cost of our freedoms we enjoy are, this image arises from memory and shows the utter depth of what the cost has been."

Shively is one of five sons to have served in the military from the 1940s through the 1970s.

"I can't imagine the apprehension my mother must have felt as each one of my brothers and I, in turn, came home from the recruiter's office to tell her that we had enlisted to serve," Shively said. "We know she was always proud and never would a week go by that a letter from home wouldn't arrive. But can you imagine the wait for her to hear from one of us?

"Those who bear one of the greatest burdens to the preservation of our precious freedom are the mothers of our brothers and sisters in arms."

Share your stories of remembrance on the Legion's web page www.legiontown.org.

VETERANS SUPPORT

Wyoming post connects veterans with high school students to help with household needs

American Legion George Monroe Post 3 of Newcastle, Wyo., launched its Students 4 Veterans program on Nov. 14 during its monthly veterans breakfast. The program connects local veterans with high school students that help out with heavy lifting, yard work and other household chores.

The idea for the program was initiated by Post 3 Adjutant Barry Peterson after a few high school students helped him with heavy lifting around his house. "Being single and having limitations, I realized that there may be many older veterans out there who do not have the means or resources to do some tasks around their house," Peterson said. "And being a very rural community, with 600 veterans in our county, I believed that there may be a number of veterans out there who are also isolated with no family or support network to help them."

Upon input from his fellow post members, Peterson wrote a letter to the Weston County School District 1 board and superintendent that outlined the Students 4 Veterans program. Not only was The American Legion program supported by the board and superintendent, Newcastle High School Principal Tracy Ragland and several students started attending the monthly veterans breakfast to make connections with veterans.

"There was an immediate and strong response from the high school principal," Peterson said. "He told me that the students and faculty became very excited about helping."

Ragland has spearheaded the working relationship between Post 3's Students 4 Veterans Committee, the school district staff and the students. The program has even caught on in other Weston County school districts.

Peterson said at the veterans breakfast in November, District 7 sent six students to meet veterans and identify their needs.

A phone number was set up specially for the Students 4 Veterans program for veterans, or a widow of a veteran, to call if assistance is needed. The American Legion relays the specific needs of the veteran to the high school principal, who then initiates the support of students. "We are here to help our veterans," Peterson said.

MEMBERSHIP

96-year-old World War II veteran joins the Legion

Photo by Robert Bosworth/The Quincy Sun

James Galvin proved that a veteran is never too old to join The American Legion.

The 96-year-old World War II Army Air Corps veteran is now a member of Jamaica Plain (Mass.) Post 76. His induction ceremony was held a few months ago at Atria Marina Place in Squantum, where he is a resident, in front of those who wanted to honor his service – family, friends, elected officials and members of the Massachusetts American Legion Family.

Past National Commander Jake Comer presented Galvin his new blue cap.

"The American Legion is the largest veterans organization in the world and to be a member of The American Legion you must have served during war time," Comer told The Quincy Sun. "James, we revere you. We are very proud of you."

"I always wanted an American Legion cap and now I have one," Galvin told The Quincy Sun.

Comer played a significant role in making Galvin a Legionnaire and one whose dues will always be paid for by the department. "We wanted Jim to be a member of The American Legion because The American Legion is the organization that wrote the GI Bill back in 1943," Comer told The Quincy Sun. "It was all because the men and women coming back from World War II did not have many benefits. They did not have college educations so The American Legion said, 'We'll make that happen.' And We did."

Galvin served as a B-24 gunner with the Flying Horsemen of the 449th Bomb Group. His squadron flew 50 missions over Germany and France during World War II. Galvin is a recipient of the French Legion of Honor, the highest decoration bestowed in France.

Department of Massachusetts Commander Mike Davis presented Galvin with a certificate of appreciation for his military service, and proclamations were delivered from Quincy Mayor Thomas Koch's office and the Massachusetts House of Representatives, and a citation was offered by Councilor-at-Large and Sons of The American Legion Squadron 294 member Noel DiBona.

DID YOU KNOW?

■ The American Legion national website offers a state-by-state directory of veterans benefits. From health-care services to hunting and fishing license exemptions and free passes to state parks, the online guide details state and federal benefits alike for those who have served the nation in uniform, and their families. In some states, different benefits are available for veterans with service-connected disabilities. Visit the web page at ***www.legion.org/veteransbenefits/state***.

■ The American Legion has a number of discounts offered exclusively to Legionnaires and Sons of The American Legion members. These member discounts are good for auto rentals, moving and relocation, travel and lodging, and more. For more information visit ***www.legion.org/benefits***.

■ The American is looking for volunteers to help with the 2018 National Oratorical Contest in Indianapolis, April 13-15. All expenses related to volunteering with the contest are paid by the volunteer. To volunteer, fill out the form at ***www.legion.org/oratorical/volunteer/form***.

DATELINE: CAPITOL HILL

Legislation proposed, enacted into law that affects veterans

Paul E. Dillard,
Chairman, National Legislative Commission

The House of Representatives approved several bills that affect veterans. These measures now move to the Senate for consideration. A few of the bills include:

H.R. 918: Veteran Urgent Access to Mental Healthcare Act – This bill would require VA to provide an initial mental health assessment and any subsequent mental health services required to meet urgent mental health care needs to former servicemembers who would otherwise be ineligible for such services because they were discharged from military service under other than honorable conditions.

H.R. 1066: VA Management Alignment Act of 2017 – This bill would require VA to submit a report regarding the roles, responsibility and accountability of elements and individuals of VA.

H.R. 1133: Veterans Transplant Coverage Act – This bill would authorize VA to provide all care and services needed for a veteran to receive an organ transplant from a live donor, regardless of whether the donor is eligible for VA health care or whether the health care facility is part of VA.

H.R. 3122: Veterans Care Financial Protection Act of 2017 – This bill would direct VA to work with federal agencies and states to develop and implement standards that protect individuals who are eligible for this increased pension from dishonest, predatory or otherwise unlawful practices.

H.R. 3562: Amend title 38, United States Code, to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to furnish assistance for adaptations of residences of veterans in rehabilitation programs – The bill would give VA-designated appraisers the ability to rely solely on information from approved third parties, such as a desktop appraisal, when determining a home's value for a VA home loan.

H.R. 3705: Veterans Fair Debt Notice Act – This bill would instruct VA to use plain language in its debt notices to provide a clear explanation of why VA is alleging that the veteran owes such a debt.

H.R. 4173: Veterans Crisis Line Study Act of 2017 – This bill would require VA to conduct a study on the outcomes and efficacy of the Veterans Crisis Line based on an analysis of national suicide data and data collected from the VCL.

Legislation recently signed by President Trump

P.L. 115-75, the Veterans Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2017. This bill directs VA to increase – as of Dec. 1, 2017 – the rates of veterans' wartime disability compensation, additional compensation for dependents, the clothing allowance for certain disabled veterans, and dependency and indemnity compensation for surviving spouses and children.

P.L. 115-86, the VA Prescription Drug Accountability Act of 2017. This legislation compels VA to share all controlled substance prescribing information with state-run databases.

MEMBERSHIP INCENTIVES AND AWARDS

Randy Goodman,
Membership Chairman
Department of Georgia

ENGAGE FIRST-YEAR MEMBERS

Mentorship is the key to engaging first-year members in The American Legion. Help them to understand The American Legion as you do, with passion. You are part of an organization that you really like. At some point, you want to see them understand The American Legion as you do. Help them understand the four pillars of service of The American Legion. Have a goal, choose a pillar, focus on a program, and help them to make that program be the best it can be.

HOLIDAY GIFT

Legionnaire bears available for gift-giving this holiday season

The nation's top producer of handcrafted teddy bears is showing its patriotic colors this holiday season with limited-edition bears for Legionnaires. The bears feature caps that can be customized for any American Legion post, district or county in any department.

Vermont Teddy Bear also carries a collection of bears honoring all branches of military service.

Twenty percent of proceeds from sales of the bears will be donated to The American Legion to help fulfill its commitment to assist those who have served and are currently serving in the U.S. armed forces, and to promote patriotic values in communities everywhere.

These specially designed bears are only available through Dec. 24, 2017. They can be ordered online by visiting *www.vermontteddybear.com/legion* or by calling toll-free at *(800) 829-BEAR (2327)*.

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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HONOR & REMEMBRANCE

Help build the Legion's database of veterans memorials, monuments

The American Legion's Veterans Memorial identification Project is an opportunity for the Legion Family to build a database of memorials and monuments that honor U.S. military service and sacrifice. The online database, at *www.legion.org/memorials*, was launched November 2016 and has since reached 1,500 entries from around the country and world.

The Legion's memorial database project was set in motion last October during Fall Meetings when the National Executive Committee passed Resolution No. 10, which calls on Legion Family members to locate, document, photograph and upload onto the database information about veterans memorials and monuments in their local area. It's not focused on any one war era as Legion Family members care for memorials from the Revolution to the Global War on Terrorism.

Once a memorial or monument has been identified, whether it's a plaque in the park listing a country's war dead or a well-known community statue or plaza, go to *www.legion.org/memorials* and click on "Add a memorial." This page will ask for information about its installation and condition, an address if possible, who maintains it, a photo (or multiple photos) to upload, and contact information for the submitter. Uploading photos of the memorial and posting them on the database is recommended. The web page is designed to easily upload photos and information via smartphones, even while at the site. Be sure to look up the memorials already listed in your state before you start.

PLANNER

January

12-13	Membership and Post Activities Meeting, Indianapolis
18	80 percent Legion membership target date

February

1	Department submissions due for National Law Enforcement Officer of the Year and National Firefighter of the Year
4	Four Chaplains Sunday