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THE AMERICAN LEGION
Dispatch
July 2017 A National Headquarters Publication

MEMBERSHIP

American Legion Post 973 members achieved over 100 percent membership for the 2016-2017 membership year.

POST 973 IS GROWING, GAINING ATTENTION

The Chicago post has turned things around with membership, increased revenue and has become the community centerpiece once again.

By Steve Brooks

Having served in the Air Force for six years, Brent Webb found himself having trouble getting used to the civilian world. But after visiting American Legion Hollywood Post 43 in Los Angeles, he "felt like I finally found people I could connect with," said Webb, now 28. "I felt like I had an outlet to be able to help support my community and take care of people that were important to me."

Webb ended up moving to Chicago but before he did, he received some advice from fellow Post 43 members. "(They) were like, 'Find a post and get as involved as you can and see if you can make something really positive out of it,'" Webb said.

Webb has done just that. He joined Tattler Post 973 in Chicago and soon became post commander. In that role, he and other Legionnaires have helped turn things around at the 71-year-old post, making it a community centerpiece once again.

Webb said the first time he came to the post he met CJ Seestadt and Ken Madsen. Seestadt and Madsen, already leading a movement to revitalize the post, urged Webb to consider taking the post commander role, which he did a few months later.

Seestadt, 48, knew turning things around required getting the post's older membership to buy into the plan and then find someone willing to lead. Knowing Webb's age might be a concern to some members, Seestadt pulled out a history lesson.

"I told them, 'Hey, how old were these guys when they came back from World War II and were running the place?'" said Seestadt, the post's junior vice commander (entertainment). "There was a transitional period, but it's all

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NEWS ALERT

DSO School date changes

Previously, Department Service Officer (DSO) School was held prior to The American Legion's annual Washington Conference. A new addenda has been signed that now places DSO School during the week of the Washington Conference.

The following are new dates for DSO School:

2018: Feb. 27 to March 2

2019: Feb. 26 to March 1

2020: March 10-13

2021: March 2-5

For more information, visit www.legion.org/washingtonconference.

Legion centennial coin

The American Legion is encouraging Congress to mark its 2019 centennial with a commemorative coin. A bipartisan group in Congress is now gathering support for The American Legion 100th Anniversary Commemorative Coin Act. Legion members are encouraged to contact their representatives and senators to support this important legislation. Enter your ZIP code at http://capwiz.com/legion/dbq/officials/ and the contact information for those who represent you can be obtained.

Legion membership awards manual

Download the 2018 National Membership Points and Awards Manual under Membership at www.legion.org/publications.

COMMANDER'S MESSAGE

A devotion to country

Charles E. Schmidt
National Commander

I recently had the pleasure of presenting a well-deserved award to a longtime, dedicated Legionnaire for his continuous years with Utah Boys State and service to his country.

At the young age of 16 in 1942, Casey Kunimura, his mother and siblings were forced to leave their home in Gilroy, Calif., and relocate to an internment camp after an executive order was issued by President Franklin D. Roosevelt following the attacks on Pearl Harbor. Though a native-born U.S. citizen, he was detained because of his Japanese ancestry.

But Kunimura's story following life in camp is one of forgiveness and love for country. After once carrying around an "enemy alien" draft classification card, Kunimura went on to serve with one of the most highly decorated units of World War II – the 442nd Regimental Combat Team – and served in the Korean and Vietnam Wars. He too has been an active American Legion member for 48 continuous years, serving as Department of Utah commander in 1994, and he's a 30-year staff member of Utah Boys State.

Though he lived at the Poston internment camp in the hot Arizona desert for a year before the Selective Service reclassified and issued him a draft notice, Kunimura has always said, "America is my country. I've always said one thing, 'My country … right or wrong, my country,'" said 92-year-old Kunimura, who resides in North Ogden, Utah, where he's a member and past commander of Post 9.

Kunimura joined the U.S. Army 442nd Regimental Combat Team in 1944 as a machine gunner, fighting his way through France while his family and friends remained in Poston, "being held prisoners by the very country I was fighting for," he said. "But my patriotism, devotion to my nation, and love of country could not be denied."

Following the end of World War II, Kunimura served in the Korean and Vietnam Wars, met his wife Dorothy – a Korean War veteran and a member of Post 9 – raised three children, and retired from the military and civil service.

Since his involvement with Utah Boys State began more than 30 years ago, he's been a counselor, assisted with party elections, and now organizes and helps pass out awards. He's remained involved in the program because of his "love of country, of the military, of veterans and of the young men to instill upon them the ideas of democracy," Kunimura said.

Kunimura credits his longstanding involvement with The American Legion as a way to "spend a little of my own time to make this country just a little bit better in the long run." I encourage you to read more of his inspiring story at ***www.legion.org/commander*** and let it be a reminder to all of us of our own service and sacrifice.

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.
www.legion.org/commander/pin

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

Host viewing parties of the 91st ALWS

ESPN coverage of the American Legion World Series has expanded, with Games 7 through 15 televised live.

By Daniel S. Wheeler

American Legion Baseball is one of the Legion's premier youth programs that teaches more than 70,000 athletes a year the importance of sportsmanship, good health and active citizenship. A testament to the program's growth nationwide is the increase of viewership for the American Legion World Series (ALWS) over the past several years.

In 2016, the 90th year of the Legion World Series, the final six games of the 15-game tournament in Shelby, N.C., aired live on ESPNU. More than 300,000 people watched those broadcasts during the Series' final three days, an increase of 28,000 viewers from the previous year.

Starting with the 2017 ALWS tournament, Aug. 10-15, games 7 through 15 – including the semifinals and championship game – will air live on ESPNU. And ESPN's webcasting service (*www.ESPN3.com*) will broadcast the first six games of pool play.

The ESPNU expanded coverage comes on the heels of strong viewership numbers and continued growth in interest regarding American Legion Baseball and its title event.

So as we prepare for the 91st ALWS in Shelby, I encourage posts to host viewing parties – of both the webcast and televised games – for the community to gather at the post and watch eight regional teams compete for the national title. Hosting an ALWS viewership event is a great way to promote American Legion Baseball, and expose youth in the community to the program and its lasting history of turning players into professionals on and off the field.

There are 71 Hall of Famers who are Legion Baseball alumni and today's Major League Baseball players, such as Madison Bumgarner and Justin Verlander, credit Legion Baseball with showing them the right way to compete and present themselves on and off the field.

www.legion.org/baseball/worldseries

2017 American Legion World Series Tournament Schedule

Official Baseball of the 2017 World Series

"Stars"
Mid-Atlantic
Southeast
Mid-South
Northwest

"Stripes"
Northeast
Great Lakes
Central Plains
Western

	Thursday – August 10		
Game 1	Northeast vs. Great Lakes	ESPN3	9:30 a.m.
Game 2	Central Plains vs. Western		1:00 p.m.
Game 3	Mid-South vs. Northwest		4:30 p.m.
Game 4	Southeast vs. Mid-Atlantic		8:00 p.m.
	Friday – August 11		
Game 5	Great Lakes vs. Central Plains	ESPN3	4:00 p.m.
Game 6	Western vs. Northeast		7:30 p.m.
Off Day	Mid-Atlantic, Southeast Mid-South & Northwest		
	Saturday – August 12		
Game 7	Mid-Atlantic vs. Mid-South	ESPNU	11:30 a.m.
Game 8	Northwest vs. Southeast		3:30 p.m.
Game 9	Northeast vs. Central Plains		7:30 p.m.
Off Day	Great Lakes & Western		
	Sunday – August 13		
Game 10	Great Lakes vs. Western	ESPNU	12:00 p.m.
Game 11	Mid-Atlantic vs. Northwest		3:30 p.m.
Game 12	Southeast vs. Mid-South		7:30 p.m.
Off Day	Northeast & Central Plains		
	Monday – August 14		
Game 13	Winner "Stars" vs. Runner-Up "Stripes"	ESPNU	3:00 p.m.
Game 14	Winner "Stripes" vs. Runner-Up "Stars"		7:00 p.m.
	Tuesday – August 15		
Game 15	Winner Game 13 vs. Winner Game 14 "Championship Tuesday"	ESPNU	7:00 p.m.

Catch all of the tournament action on the "American Legion World Series" app

Google Play · App Store

Have a membership success story?

Share: *www.legiontown.org*

Dispatch

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Correspondence and letters to the editor:
The American Legion Dispatch
P.O. Box 1055
Indianapolis, IN 46206

Subscriptions/Customer Service:
(317) 630-1221

Email: dispatch@legion.org

Fax: (317) 630-1280

Online: www.legion.org/dispatch

EDITOR
Cameran Richardson

DESIGNER
Jason Reed

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been positive. We're growing at such a pace now that we've gotten people's attention."

The revitalization effort included revamping the social area of the post to make it friendlier to potential members. New events conducted by the post include a comedy night, a movie night and a jazz night – events "that would attract people … young veterans," Seestadt said. In addition to raising the post's profile, it's also created a larger revenue stream. The post went from making $300 a year to around $3,000 a month.

The post also began establishing relationships with other organizations in Chicago, including fellow veterans organization Chicago Veterans. Kevin Barszcz, one of the founders of Chicago Veterans, now serves as Post 973's senior vice commander (membership).

"I think it's important … for the city of Chicago," Barszcz said of the relationship. "I think that all veterans organizations … should have to come together. At the end of the day we're here for one reason: to support our veterans. I always see it as one team, one fight."

Madsen, Post 973's junior vice commander (house), said the post's upswing is "absolutely fantastic. But the one thing that I've liked is that it hasn't been an exclusion to the people that were here before, nor do we exclude the people that are coming in. It's been a great meld of the old and the new."

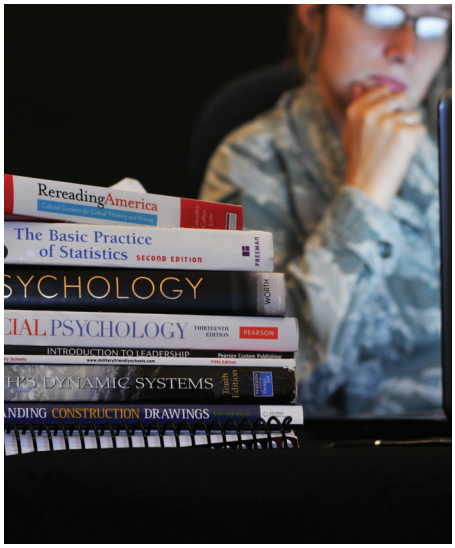
Peter Kukurba, a 21-year member and past post commander, said membership and activity dropped before the recent revival. Through mid-June, the post was at 162 members – three more than this year's goal.

"A lot of the old-timers were passing on, and we needed a tradition for the new guys," Kakurba said. "(Webb) had good ideas. They started drawing the people in, and little by little we started getting members in. New blood and new excitement.

"Whenever people come in, we try to make sure that we're really welcoming, and we do show them that we have our older members here, and you can learn a lot from them. But we are also here with a lot of young people. A lot of people respond to that."

VETERANS EDUCATION

Share how the GI Bill helped you



U.S. Air Force photo by Master Sgt. Bill Wiseman

Generations of veterans have used the GI Bill to further their educations, afford home loans, get proper health care and receive additional benefits earned through military service.

As The American Legion presents a special GI Bill exhibit at the World War II Museum in New Orleans, which started June 20, veterans are encouraged to share their stories of GI Bill influence. Did you use it for college? Vocational training? A business loan? A home loan? What has the GI Bill meant to you?

Visit our Legiontown website, ***www.legiontown.org***, to submit a story and/or photo. Submissions will be reviewed by an editor before publication online. They also will be considered for publication as part of *The American Legion Magazine*'s special centennial issue in 2018.

Users of Twitter can also share their GI Bill story by using the hashtag #MyGIBill.

CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

Texas issues a centennial challenge coin

The American Legion's 2018 national convention in Minneapolis will kick off the organization's centennial celebration on the national level, which will run for 15 months and finish on Veterans Day 2019. Departments' own celebrations will vary as widely as the departments themselves do, and Texas is already making plans and raising funds.

Department of Texas' Centennial Committee Chairman Ronnie Pietzsch said among the plans for their 2018 convention in San Antonio are the placing of a time capsule and the presentation of two plaques – to the hotel where the first state caucus was held and to the family of its chairman. To pay for these and other projects, the department has introduced an array of centennial merchandise, including a challenge coin.

"This 2017-2018 year has a lot of opportunity for The American Legion," Pietzsch said, "and I will do everything I can to make it a great year."

LEGION AWARENESS

Post 233 conducts second annual Walk for Veterans

American Legion Post 233 in Elk Grove, Calif., held its second annual Walk for Veterans with more than 200 Legion Family and community members in attendance.

The attendees gathered at Elk Grove Cemetery this past Memorial Day for the 1.8-mile walk to raise awareness about those who served their country and paid the ultimate sacrifice.

"For Post 233's American Legion Family, the Walk for Veterans has been an effective vessel for connecting veterans to other veterans and to services and programs offered by The American Legion; and it's created an understanding within the community about our veterans needs and challenges," said Maryanna Rickner, a member of Post 233 and the post's Walk for Veterans committee chairman. "The event has been warmly welcomed and has become a part of maintaining positive rapport with the Elk Grove community."

Elk Grove Mayor Steve Ly presented a resolution of support on behalf of the Elk Grove City Council to Post 233 Commander Larry Sahota during the Elk Grove Cemetery's Memorial Day ceremony, which was held prior to the walk.

Other participants of the walk included Boy Scouts Troop 288, Cosumnes River College President Edward Bush and Post 233 member Ernie Costa, a 91-year-old World War II veteran who was determined to walk part of the route.

Post 233's Walk for Veterans raised nearly $270, which will be divided between the Legion's National Emergency Fund and Temporary Financial Assistance program – National Commander Charles E. Schmidt's fundraising project.

"The American Legion Walk for Veterans means connecting with and honoring all veterans. And by taking to the streets, visibly displaying patriotism and support for veterans in a way unlike any other event experienced throughout the year," Rickner said.

LEGION RIDERS

The fastest growing Legion program

The American Legion Riders (ALR) continue to be the fastest-growing – and one of the most high-profile – programs in the organization. There are more than 2,100 chapters made up of approximately 110,000 members throughout the Legion.

The Department of California alone has added 10 new ALR chapters and 354 new members this year, according to State ALR President Mick Sobczak. But the growth isn't limited to California.

In Angleton, Texas, a Riders chapter was started at Charles Dixon Post 241 earlier this year. The chapter was started, in part, to attract younger members, said Shawn Hogan, a Legion Rider and Post 241's public relations officer.

Hogan, an Operation Iraqi Freedom veteran, said it can be a challenge being a younger member in a post comprised primarily of Vietnam veterans. The Riders help bridge that gap, as well as get younger veterans involved "in what we do, which is God and Country and helping our local small community," Hogan said.

Chapter 241 began doing cooking events at Goe Harley-Davidson in Angleton as a way to raise money. The chapter started off with $36 but has raised more than $1,100 since the events started.

"Our relations with Goe (Harley-Davidson) is great," Hogan said. "They help in ways that would cost us money, such as advertising events. They also let us keep recruitment flyers in their service area, as well as the sales team contacting us when they have a veteran come in."

In Bisbee, Ariz., Chapter 16 chartered in August of 2016. The creation of the chapter has been part of a post revitalization effort; Chapter 16 Director Paul "Doc" Dougherty said the Riders are among the most active members of the post.

"I think one of the key factors in our ability to prosper is our shared approach to making things happen," Dougherty said. "Everyone has a voice. Everyone has ideas. When faced with challenges, we come up with solutions using a group-based approach. We put family first and are committed to one another through mutual helpfulness."

And at Post 661 in Washburn, Ill., a Riders chapter was chartered in February of this year. The seven-person chapter already has a monthly bike night from April to October, featuring live food and music. Last month's bike night raised $675.

For information on starting an American Legion Riders chapter at your post, visit ***www.legion.org/riders/participate***.

DID YOU KNOW?

- The American Legion's Child Welfare Foundation ended its fundraising year last month with more than $886,637 in donations. The Sons of The American Legion contributed nearly $600,000 of that amount with the Detachments of Arizona and Indiana both raising and donating $110,000.

- Two American Legion youth program alumni produced a film that captures the affects war has on troops returning home, and it is available as of July 14 for posts to screen.

  "Battle Scars," which is a recipient of the GI Film Festival's Founder's Choice Award, is a drama and thriller about a young Marine who is suffering from both post-traumatic stress disorder and other wounds unseen after returning home from Afghanistan. He in turn crosses paths with a woman "who leads him into a violent world every bit as dangerous and isolating as the brutality that (he) so desperately left behind in Afghanistan."

  Danny Buday, writer and director of "Battle Scars" and a California Boys State alum, and producer Lane Carlson, who played American Legion Baseball for Post 491 in Bayport, Minn., spoke with The American Legion about the inspiration for the film. Read the story online at ***www.legion.org/troops***.

  View a trailer of "Battle Scars" at ***www.www.battlescarsmovie.com***. American Legion posts that wish to screen the film can contact Lane Carlson at ***lane@souline.org***. The 94-minute film is not rated but does contain strong language and scenes of nudity.

DATELINE: CAPITOL HILL

Legion helps stave off elimination of the Individual Unemployability program

James W. Oxford,
Chairman, National Legislative Commission

In testimony before the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee on June 14, VA Secretary David Shulkin announced that the proposed elimination of the program benefitting 100 percent disabled individually unemployable (IU) veterans has been removed from VA's fiscal year 2018 budget. After the hearing, Shulkin termed the IU elimination proposal dead.

Previously, Shulkin vigorously defended the proposal which had been part of President Trump's FY 2018 VA budget. However, a number of veterans service organizations – including The American Legion – had expressed opposition to the plan. Elimination of the IU would have affected an estimated 225,000 veterans, 7,000 of them 80 years of age or older, with up to $22,000 disappearing from their VA disability compensation payments.

VA accountability legislation now law

On June 23, Trump signed into law **Public Law (P.L.) 115-41**, the VA Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act of 2017. This legislation will:

- Create a new streamlined and efficient process to remove, demote or suspend (for longer than 14 days) any VA employee for poor performance or misconduct with a concrete shortened timeline, while still protecting employees' due process rights, and would provide them with the right to appeal the action;
- Provide expanded protections for whistleblowers and specifically bar VA from using this removal authority if the employee has an open whistleblower complaint/case with the Office of Special Counsel;
- Provide the VA Secretary with the authority to: (1) reduce an employee's federal pension if they are convicted of a felony that influenced their job at VA; (2) recoup a bonus provided to an employee who engaged in misconduct or poor performance prior to receiving the bonus; and (3) allow the Secretary to recoup any relocation expenses that were authorized for a VA employee only through the employee's ill means, such as fraud, waste or malfeasance; and,
- Authorize the Secretary to directly appoint individuals to the positions of Medical Center Director and Director of Veterans Integrated Service Network if they have a demonstrated ability in the medical profession, health care administration or health care fiscal management. T

VA opens emergency rooms to OTH vets

On June 27, VA officials announced that veterans with other-than-honorable discharges will be able to access VA emergency rooms for urgent mental health care as of July 5. The new initiative mandates that the estimated 300,000 veterans with other-than-honorable paperwork may receive care for "a mental health emergency" for up to 90 days. That may include inpatient services, residential care or outpatient options.

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

160 LEGIONNAIRES AWARDED FOR RECRUITING 9,601 NEW MEMBERS

For the 2016-2017 American Legion membership year, 107 Legionnaires earned the Gold Brigade award and 54 earned the Silver Brigade award for their exceptional recruiting efforts. Together, the Legionnaires recuited 9,601 new members into The American Legion.

To see a list of the Gold Brigade recipients, visit *www.legion.org/documents/legion/pdf/2017_goldbrigade.pdf*. To see a list of the Silver Brigade recipients, visit *www.legion.org/documents/legion/pdf/2017_silverbrigade2.pdf*.

Patricia Liddell of Post 333 in Columbus, Ga., earned her second consecutive National Recruiter of the Year award for recruiting 841 new members. This is Liddell's 14th Gold Brigade award; over the last two years she has brought 1,659 new members into the The American Legion. As the 2017 National Recruiter of the Year, Liddell will receive an all-expense paid trip to the 99th National Convention in Reno, Nev., and tickets to the National Commander's Banquet for Distinguished Guests.

Legionnaires who recruit 50 or more new members (transfers do not count as new members) into The American Legion by the May target date qualify for enrollment in The American Legion's elite Gold Brigade. And a Legionnaire who recruits 25-49 new members (transfers do not count) into the Legion by the May target date qualifies for the Silver Brigade award.

The Gold Brigade recipients will be awarded unique gifts that designate affiliation with the Gold Brigade of The American Legion. First-time members will receive a Gold Brigade patch, a special Gold Brigade cap pin, a Gold Brigade certificate, and a designer jacket, polo shirt or sweater with a Gold Brigade logo. Second time/repeat Gold Brigaders will receive a Gold Brigade patch and certificate, a hash mark for a jacket sleeve, and a designer jacket, polo shirt or sweater with a Gold Brigade logo. A Gold Brigader who has won the award for five consecutive years is eligible for a distinctive Gold Brigade blazer. A Legionnaire may only qualify once every five years. And a Gold Brigader who has earned the award for six consecutive years or more is eligible for a $150 check and a Legion cap with the inscription "Master Recruiter."

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MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

Easily renew your Legion membership online

For the 2016-2017 American Legion membership year, more than 245,370 members renewed online through the Legion's Automatic Annual Renewal Program.

Members can simply go to ***www.legion.org/renew*** and click "Renew Now" to safely and conveniently pay their post dues on an annual, automatic basis. Automatic renewal can also be set up by calling the toll-free American Legion customer service line at ***(800) 433-3318***.

Following all industry standards to protect the personal financial safety of members, the Legion will maintain a record of those participating in the program and, at the beginning of each new membership year, will automatically process the renewal, charging it to the credit or debit card of the member's choice. The transaction would occur about July 15 of each year.

It is, therefore, important that The American Legion has updated email addresses for participating members. To report a change of email address, phone number or other contact information, members can call customer service, send an email to ***cs@legion.org***, or go online at ***www.legion.org/membershipmanagement*** and use the "Change Address" option.

Members can cancel participation in the automatic renewal program at any time. Cancellation requests must be received by June 30 each year in order to ensure cancellation prior to the mid-July automatic renewal time.

PLANNER

July

27-29 National Membership Workshop and DSO School, Indianapolis

August

1 Samsung American Legion Scholarship applications due to National Headquarters

10-15 Legion World Series, Shelby, N.C.

12-17 American Legion Legacy Run

18-24 99th American Legion national convention, Reno, Nev.