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THE AMERICAN LEGION
Dispatch
July 2018 A National Headquarters Publication

MEMBERSHIP

Photo by Chet Strange/The American Legion

MEMBERSHIP GROWTH THROUGH COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

American Legion posts nationwide re-engage with the community to boost membership numbers and support.

By The American Legion

Membership is the heart of The American Legion. And as the organization prepares to celebrate its 100th birthday, posts strive to increase membership to lead The American Legion into its second century of service. Many are doing so by reinventing themselves to stay relevant in their communities and to draw in new, active members.

Membership at Ray Dozier Post 8 in Crawfordville, Ga., had dwindled to two members. Instead of turning in its nearly 100-year-old charter, the post adjutant and commander revitalized the post by "recommitting to the community that they loved. And the community responded," said Georgia's 11th District Junior Vice Commander Michael Gallucci, who recently visited the post to present a 100 percent membership banner for the second consecutive year. "If membership is the lifeblood of The American Legion, then I would suggest that community is the oxygen to that lifeblood."

Post 8 achieved 108 percent membership for 2017-2018. Membership grew through the hosting of community cookouts, breakfasts and open houses, and by visiting schools and businesses. "They inculcated their community and reinvigorated the brotherhood of veterans to the purpose of why they had become an American Legion post," Gallucci said. "As we search for the reasons why we, as an organization, continue to not attract new members and retain members, perhaps we need to understand how these small communities keep their

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NEWS ALERT

National Membership Workshop date correction

In the June issue of American Legion Dispatch, the dates for the Legion's National Membership Workshop in Indianapolis were incorrect. The workshop date is Aug. 9-11.

Watch American Legion World Series

The American Legion's 92nd World Series is in Shelby, N.C., Aug. 16-21. The first six games of pool play (on Aug. 16 and 17) will be live streamed on *www.ESPN3.com*. Games 7 through 15 — including the semifinals (Aug. 20) and championship game (Aug. 21) — will be televised live on ESPNU.

Register for Children & Youth Conference

The 12th annual American Legion Children & Youth Conference is Sept. 21-23 at the Sheraton Indianapolis City Centre Hotel. Department Children & Youth chairman are official call-ins, however, all Legion Family members are invited and encouraged to attend. Register online at *www.legion.org/cyconference* by Aug. 10.

Legacy Run registration deadline

Aug. 11 is the deadline to register for the 13th annual Legacy Run. The ride will leave Hutchinson, Kan., Aug. 19 and arrive in Minneapolis for National Convention on Aug. 23. Register at *www.legion.org/riders/registration*.

COMMANDER'S MESSAGE

American Legion's foundation of service

Denise H. Rohan
National Commander

During my travels to The American Legion Department of France in early June, I had the opportunity to provide an Operation Comfort Warriors (OCW) grant of $20,000 to Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany. I presented this grant alongside Sons of The American Legion National Commander Danny Smith, Auxiliary National President Diane Duscheck and Department of France leadership. It truly was a gift from our Legion Family.

OCW is an American Legion program, but so many of our donations are raised and given by the American Legion Auxiliary, the Sons of The American Legion and our Legion Riders that I really believe it is a gift from all of us. It is our special way of thanking heroes and families that have sacrificed on our behalf.

The same goes for the National Emergency Fund (NEF). Since September 2017, during the height of hurricane season, NEF has surpassed $1 million in donations. That's because of the Legion Family working together. And since January of this year, we have provided nearly $161,000 in NEF grants.

Legion Family support doesn't just come through monetary donations but volunteerism as well. July is a busy month for Americanism programs – Boys Nation and Girls Nation, Legion Baseball and the Junior 3-Position Air Rifle Championships – and they don't happen without your volunteer efforts. And we are hearing about the impact of your volunteer efforts.

Jamie (Beyerle) Corkish, American Legion's 2002 Junior 3-Position Air Rifle National Precision champion and a 2012 Olympic gold medalist in air rifle, shared that "veterans were a part of those hundreds of people on the (Olympic) podium in London that I thought about that helped me win that medal. Every person that I ever came across had some type of influence on me. With The American Legion (air rifle) program, those veterans had a huge influence on me. I wouldn't have gotten that college scholarship if it weren't for those veterans willing to give their time back to the community."

The testimonial of Corkish is only one of thousands by those who have been positively impacted and influenced by the Legion Family through monetary donations and volunteerism.

Download The American Legion's "Why You Should Belong" brochure at ***www.legion.org/publications*** to learn about and share with others all the ways Legion Family members are improving the lives of veterans, military personnel, their families, communities and youth through resources, volunteerism, financial assistance, advocacy and more.

Even when my time as your national commander comes to an end, I will always look forward to hearing about the great things that Legion Family members are doing to promote the good of The American Legion and its foundation of service.

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 when supplies are exhausted.

www.legion.org/commander/pin

NATIONAL ADJUTANT'S MESSAGE

American Legion members exemplify 'devotion to mutual helpfulness'

Through service to veterans, their families and communities, Legionnaires are giving back.

By Daniel S. Wheeler

Every day American Legion members live by the words "devotion to mutual helpfulness" as stated in the organization's preamble. They do so by showing their support to veterans, servicemembers, their families and communities. There are many reasons to be a proud member of The American Legion. I want to share a few examples of how our Legionnaires are showing by example of why they are proud to be a part of this nearly 100-year-old organization.

American Legion Jim Nelson Post 58 in Smithville, Mo. Post 58 recently hosted a fundraising event for the Veterans Community Project, a nonprofit that is creating a village filled with 50 tiny houses for homeless veterans in Kansas City. Post 58 raised nearly $14,500 toward the construction of a tiny house.

"Smithville area residents showed Post 58 once again how the community rallies around our veterans who need a boost to get their lives back on track," said retired Air Force Lt. Col. Dewayne Knott, a past commander of Post 58.

During the fundraising event, a tiny house was onsite at the post for people to tour and a representative from the Veterans Community Project gave an overview of the tiny house village that will serve local homeless veterans. The tiny houses will provide homeless veterans working to get back on their feet with 850 square feet of living space that's equipped with a bed, small dining table and two chairs, a recliner, stove, refrigerator, microwave, bath, a small TV and cooking utensils.

The post event was attended by 158 people who enjoyed dinner, a live auction and performances, including one by The Voice television show contestant Casi Joy. Soldiers appeared dressed in period uniforms from the Revolutionary War to the present War on Terrorism and each soldier read a letter written during the period they represented.

Knott said the Smithville and surrounding community response was overwhelming – businesses provided over $8,000 in donations toward Post 58's goal. "Smithville has always supported our veterans living the Smithville American Legion motto of 'No Veteran Left Behind,'" Knott said.

Vietnam veteran Frank Smith, a member of Post 56 in Idaho Falls, Idaho. Smith has been dedicated for over two years to making sure that veterans, their spouses and children get their mobility back. He does so by receiving and refurbishing used power wheelchairs and distributing them at no charge to veterans and their families who have a need for one.

Smith received a donated power wheelchair in 2015, following the death of a fellow veteran who wanted another veteran to receive his wheelchair. After having the wheelchair refurbished and donating it to a veteran he knew, Smith recognized the need to continue providing wheelchairs. He worked with his Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 972 to create a Veterans Mobility Corporation. Now, 208 used power wheelchairs have been rebuilt and donated to veterans and their families all over the country.

"One physical therapist told me, 'You are not only giving them mobility, you are giving them back their lives.' Seeing the gratitude and joy when we deliver makes all the time and effort worthwhile," Smith said.

The American Legion wants to hear from you on how you and your post are serving veterans, their families and community. Share at ***www.legiontown.org***.

Have a membership success story?

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

Dispatch

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posts. Post 8 is a snapshot of so many small posts that dot this nation. Faced with an aging membership and the need to engage the younger generation of veterans and their families required re-evaluation."

Matheny & Henderson American Legion Post 131 in Leslie, Ark., had dropped to single digits in membership about 11 years ago. Post 131 Chaplain Steve Stephenson had an idea to reach out to local youth and show the community that the post could make a positive impact on those around it.

Stephenson accomplished both, and in doing so also boosted the post's membership.

Post 131's Veterans in the Schools Program has helped grow post membership to more than 100.

The program connects veterans with students in the Searcy County School District, which consists of four schools. It involves an essay and poster contest, certificates and cash prizes – roughly $600 per year – are given out to creators of the top posters and essays grouped by grades: grades 1-3, grades 4-6, grades 7-9, grades 10-12 and a composite from the alternative education center. Recent essay contest subjects have included "Veterans In My School," "What I Will Do To Help My Neighbors" and "What Does Personal Responsibility Mean."

The topics are shared with the schools via visits to every classroom from post members. There are more than 100 essays submitted annually to the post, which chooses winners in each category.

Besides membership growth, the post also moved from an old log hut that the original World War I members of Post 131 had built to a new, 9,000-square-foot log building that includes a large hall and kitchen. The new post home features a wall covered with almost 800 pictures of veterans from the community.

Stephenson said the relationship with the school district has been "very successful. We've gone way up in our membership. And we are a presence in the community."

Carroll Post 31 in Westminster, Md., recently held a veterans benefits fair and open house that included staff from the Department of Veterans Affairs and Veterans Services Bureau, and Legion service officers. About 130 area veterans attended the event to receive assistance with VA benefits. And the post signed up seven new members.

"In the preamble we recite, 'To inculcate a sense of individual obligation to the community, state and nation,'" Gallucci said. "Always interested in building a better nation, the founders of The American Legion believed that such building must start first with the individual in his or her own community."

AMERICAN LEGION CHARITIES

Soldier's Wish grants improve lives of America's heroes

Leonard Atchley of Colorado at the dentist.

Leonard Atchley of Longmont, Colo., is looking forward to the day he can chew food again and not hide his mouth with a mustache. He only has 11 teeth.

The 85-year-old U.S. Army veteran of the Korean War is on a fixed income and does not qualify for VA dental care. The total dental work he needs costs about $4,500.

Just when Atchely thought new teeth were never in his future, he is scheduled in early July for the fitting of new dentures thanks to a grant by Soldier's Wish.

"It's fantastic. Absolutely fantastic," Atchley said about the grant. "I grew my mustache long so I didn't have to show people I only had two teeth in my mouth. So it's embarrassing for me. When I get my new teeth I'm going to shave everything off so I look good."

Soldier's Wish is an American Legion-supported nonprofit organization that raises funds to honor and support members of the U.S. military personnel, veterans and their families by granting wishes to improve their lives. "We make wishes come true by meeting unmet needs," said Mark Ochsenbein, a Legionnaire and volunteer director for Soldier's Wish.

Recently, Soldier's Wish provided a grant to Marine veteran Cody Nichols who owns and operates Our Troops Services, a landscaping, fencing and construction business in Tulsa, Okla., that hires veterans. His business was recently robbed, resulting in a loss of expensive landscaping equipment. Soldier's Wish donated $15,000 worth of new equipment so Our Troops Services could continue to support veterans and its community. "(Soldier's Wish) really saved us," Nichols told the Tulsa World.

Another grant supported a husband and wife in Little Rock, Ark., both veterans with an 11-month-old son and a baby on the way, who fell on hard times and became homeless. Soldier's Wish helped them find a house, paid for five months' rent, and provided a $1,000 Walmart gift card to purchase household items.

Soldier's Wish and the American Legion Family often work together to provide grants. Last December, 12 American Legion departments and Soldier's Wish gave holiday gifts and gift cards to military personal, veterans and their families with Operation Christmas Wish.

Grants oftentimes not only benefit the veteran, but also their spouse. Soldier's Wish helped remodel the bathroom of an 87-year-old veteran and his wife in Staten Island, N.Y. The veteran slipped trying to climb into his bathtub. He was transported to the hospital where he received 23 stitches in his head and is fighting vertigo as a result of the fall. Ochsenbein said the veteran and his wife are "very thankful for the work Soldier's Wish was able to do to remodel their bathroom to make it safe, for not only the veteran but his wife too."

For more information about Soldier's Wish go to www.soldierswish.org. Donations to Soldier's Wish can be made online at www.legion.org/donate.

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DID YOU KNOW?

- The American Legion's weekly Online Update e-newsletter surged past the 1 million subscriber mark to 1,018,701. The free newsletter, which is delivered to email inboxes every Thursday, contains links to timely stories, videos, resources and other American Legion website content generated by staff members.

  The Online Update launched in March 2008 with fewer than 90,000 subscribers at the time. Subscribe at ***www.legion.org/newsletters***.

- The American Legion's website won the Bronze Award for Website Editorial Excellence in the Association of Media and Publishing's annual Excel Award contest for association publishers. ***www.legion.org***

- The website for the American Legion's Child Welfare Foundation has been updated to meet the needs of grant applicants and donations. ***www.cwf-inc.org***

- The American Legion sends out the Centennial Celebration e-newsletter to an audience of over 610,000 subscribers. Each edition includes stories on events, initiatives and individual stories of how posts, departments and the national organization are preparing for the kickoff of the 15-month observance of the Legion's 100th anniversary. Subscribe at ***www.legion.org/newsletters***.

DATELINE: CAPITOL HILL

House bill expands benefits to Blue Water Navy veterans

Paul E. Dillard,
Chairman, National Legislative Commission

On June 25, the House of Representatives voted 382-0 to expand benefits to Blue Water Navy veterans from the Vietnam War, with **H.R. 299**, The Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act. Veterans who served in Vietnam between 1962 and 1975 are presumed to have been exposed to Agent Orange if diagnosed with a medical condition associated with the herbicide, according to the Agent Orange Act of 1991. However, this act applied only to veterans who served on land and in Vietnam's inland waterways, excluding those who served on ships off the coast of Vietnam known as "Blue Water" Navy veterans. H.R. 299 will extend these benefits to Blue Water Navy veterans.

The American Legion in 2016 passed Resolution No. 246, supporting "legislation to amend title 38, United States Code, to presume exposure to Agent Orange for any military personnel who served during the Vietnam War on any vessel that came within 12 nautical miles of the coastlines of Vietnam."

If the Senate approves the bill – and the president signs it – this will mark the end of a decades-long effort for these veterans to receive recognition of their exposure to Agent Orange in the course of their military service.

Senate approves fiscal year 2019 MilCon/VA funding measure

On June 25, the U.S. Senate approved **H.R. 5895**, a mini-omnibus measure containing three FY 2019 funding bills: the Energy Department-Water Development measure, the Legislative Branch spending bill, and the Military Construction/Department of Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies legislation. VA would receive $85.3 billion in discretionary funding for FY 2019. A few VA accounts to make note of include:

- VA medical services – $78.3 billion for homeless veterans treatment, services, housing and job training; the VA Caregivers program; opioid abuse prevention; rural health initiatives; and suicide prevention activities.
- Advance appropriations for veterans programs, FY 2020 – $196.8 billion.
- National Cemetery Administration –$316 million.
- Information Technology – $4.1 billion.
- Disability claims processing – $2.9 billion.
- Construction – Major construction funds ($1.13 billion) will be used for correcting critical seismic deficiencies, new hospital and clinic construction, and repairing crumbling infrastructure. Minor construction is $606 million.
- Construction grants – The state veterans homes account received $150 million, and the state cemetery programs received $45 million. The American Legion continues to urge Congress to make substantial increases in both grant accounts to allow states to construct state cemeteries and state veterans homes.

The measure now goes to a conference committee to reconcile differences in the House and Senate-passed versions, before it can be signed by the president.

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

TEXAS LEGIONNAIRE NAMED NATIONAL RECRUITER OF THE YEAR

Nearly 9,800 veterans from across the nation are now members of The American Legion thanks to the recruiting efforts of 178 Legionnaires.

For the 2017-2018 American Legion membership year, 107 Legionnaires earned the Gold Brigade award and 71 earned the Silver Brigade award. View the Gold Brigade recipients at *www.legion.org/documents/legion/pdf/goldbrigade_2018.pdf.* View the Silver Brigade recipients at *www.legion.org/documents/legion/pdf/silverbrigade_2018*.

The 2018 National Recruiter of the Year is David Witucki of Post 490 in Houston; he recruited 578 new members. A Legionnaire for only three years, this is Witucki's second consecutive Gold Brigade award. Last year he recruited 70 new members by asking Post 490 visitors from Ellington Field Joint Reserve Base to join. Witucki's recruiting success for the 2017-2018 membership year was mostly due to acquiring a permanent pass onto Ellington base.

"When I became first vice commander last year, I told post members that I'll make sure everybody in the country knows who Post 490 is. And it turned out to be true," Witucki said. "I never thought that I would make National Recuiter of the Year, just maybe in the top five. It's outstanding. I was excited when (National Headquarters) told me I won the award."

As the National Recruiter of the Year, Witucki will receive an all-expense paid trip to the 100th National Convention in Minneapolis in August, 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.

Learn more about membership awards online at *www.legion.org/membership*.

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LEGION FAMILY

Share your family's story of American Legion leadership

As The American Legion readies to kick off its 15-month Centennial Celebration starting with the 100th National Convention in Minneapolis, it is looking for stories of extraordinary Legion service by generations of families.

For example, we are looking for stories of multiple generations of family members who have served as commanders at the same post. Or spouses who are currently serving in post leadership roles. Perhaps a current member is serving in a post leadership role that was held earlier by other family members.

To share your family's story of American Legion service and leadership, please visit ***www.legiontown.org*** and select "Family History." Please also upload a photo.

Submissions will be reviewed by an editor and considered for publication on the national website, ***www.legion.org***, and in *The American Legion Magazine*.

PLANNER

August

8-12	Legion Baseball regional tournaments
9-11	National Membership Workshop
16-21	92nd American Legion Baseball World Series, Shelby, N.C.
19-23	13th annual American Legion Legacy Run
24-30	100th American Legion National Convention