1992 Chicago National Convention

SPECIAL ISSUE

The American Legion

DISPATCH

Thursday, Aug. 27

AN ILL WIND BLOWS

Legionnaires raise $18,000 in aid for hurricane victims

As Hurricane Andrew began to slam into the Louisiana coastline yesterday morning, National Commander Dominic D. DiFrancesco issued a call to action for Legionnaires to help disaster victims.

As press time Wednesday, delegates and other Legionnaires responded to the commander's call by donating more than $18,000 for relief aid.

"Hundreds of thousands of our fellow citizens -- many of whom are members of The American Legion family -- are homeless, displaced and without even the most basic of necessities," DiFrancesco said.

At least 14 were killed and $20 billion damage was done when the hurricane crashed through South Florida Monday. At press time, the hurricane was slamming into Louisiana.

Disaster officials say Andrew has been one of the most costly natural disasters in U.S. history.

DiFrancesco urged Legion delegates and others in the convention hall to donate to the Legion's National Emergency Fund (NEF).

"I encourage you to search your hearts for ways you can provide assistance and encouragement to our comrades in Florida and Louisiana -- and anywhere else the storm has disrupted lives," DiFrancesco said.

The NEF was reactivated in 1989 in the wake of Hurricane Hugo and the earthquake in San Francisco.

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Proud to be Americans take oath of citizenship

Some stood tall, and others straightened in their wheelchairs as they raised their right hands and pledged their futures to their new country.

Wednesday afternoon, 132 veterans from the Philippines became citizens of the United States in a special swearing-in ceremony coordinated through the Americanism Commission and the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

It was the first time Legion officials had ever coordinated such an event.

"Every time I do this I see my parents sitting down there," said federal Judge Abraham Lincoln Marovitz, whose parents immigrated to the United States in the late 19th century.

Marovitz encouraged the new citizens to take an active part in the political and social arena, especially voting.

"Every day of your lives from now on, do something good for someone else," said Marovitz, a member of Illinois Post 273.

Marovitz told the new Americans the ceremony had particualr meaning to him. He was Marine in World War II who helped fight for the liberation of the Philippines from the Japanese.

Most of the 132 were Philippine Scouts or members of the Philippine Commonwealth Army (PCA), who fought side-by-side with a small contingent of Army troops who remained in the Philippines during Japanese occupation.

It's estimated that as many as 30,000 Philippine Scouts and 27,000 PCA troops were casualties during the war, many of whom died in the infamous Bataan Death March and at the Capas Tarlac prisoner-of-war camp.

The Immigration Act of 1990 provided for the naturalization of Filipino war veterans.

To be eligible they must have served from Sept. 1, 1939 until Dec. 31, 1946, in the United States Armed Forces in the Far East, the PCA, Philippine Scouts or a recognized guerrilla unit.

Most of those taking the oath wore their Legion caps, adorned with campaign medals and ribbons they had earned on battlefields more than a half century ago.

"It's most appropriate that you're wearing Legion caps," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Edward J. Derwinski, one of the several guests who congratulated the new citizens.

"You're well served by the Legion in the Philippines."

Americanism Commission Chairman Gary Sammons praised the veterans for their dedication to American, and he told that with their new-found rights, there are also responsibilities as citizens of the "greatest nation one earth."

"They're proud to be Americans today. They have waited so long," said Gil Aldea, Department of the Philippines Adjutant, adding the group has been in Chicago since last week.

As the ceremony came to a close, tthe new Americans sang the "Star Spangled Banner" and recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

And unlike old soldiers who just fade away, they stood tall Wednesday -- proud to be Americans.

Legion donations help memorials

"We did it!" shouted a happy Diane Carlson Evans in telling Legionnaires the Vietnam Women's Memorial is coming closer to reality.

Evans was one of three speakers at Wednesday's convention updating delegates on progress in completing three memorials honoring America's veterans.

"Your money, your love, and your support in fundraising, in testifying before Congress has brought us this far," said Evans, a member of Post 84, Northfield, Minn. The memorial's design was approved earlier this year.

The former U.S. Army nurse and Vietnam veteran said veterans and other groups have donated $2 million toward completing the memorial, but an additional $2 million is needed to finance the project.

The memorial design by New Mexico sculptor Glenna Goodacre depicts three nurses in jungle fatigues tending to a wounded soldier.

The memorial site is 300 feet southeast of the three-figure statue honoring Vietnam veterans on the Mall in Washington, D.C.

Goodacre will supervise casting the sculpture at a Colorado foundry next year. The finished sculpture will be shipped to Washington aboard a special whistle-stop train that will stop in several major cities en route to the nation's capital.

Retired Air Force Gen. Wilma Vaught spoke to delegates for the fourth time in seeking support for construction of the Women in Military Service Memorial, also planned to be erected in Washington.

Delegates viewed a 16-minute video that profiled the 216-year history of women in military service.

Advocates must raise $16 million to finance the project, which will include a registry containing all available personnel records about the women who have served the past two centuries.

Past National Commander John P. "Jake" Comer reported progress toward the planned July 1994 dedication of the Korean War Memorial, on the Mall in Washington, D.C.

Comer, a member of the memorial's official advisory committee, said Legionnaires comprise the largest single group of contributors to the memorial. To date, $6 million has been donated to build the memorial from sales of the Korean War Memorial coin.

The federal law authorizing a memorial to Korean War veterans prohibited use of public funds for its construction.

"By far, we've sold more coins than any other organization in existence," said Comer.

A resolution authorizing fundraising activities supporting the Korean War Memorial, **Res. 36,** was approved by the National Executive Committee at its Fall 1990 meeting.

Comer said his personal, persistent fund-raising has helped his cause at convention. By mid-afternoon Wednesday, Legionnaires at the 74th National Convention had contributed $12,000 to the memorial fund.

Hiring veterans earn top honors for employers

Making that extra effort to employ veterans deserves recognition. Two firms with solid record in employing veterans were honored at Wednesday's convention session.

National Commander Dominic D. DiFrancesco presented Employer of the Year awards to Marvin Farmer, Phoenix, Ariz.; and Allen Bullis Jr., Newport, N.H.

"From its beginnings, The American Legion has made an effort to recognize the business community for their efforts in hiring veterans. Today, we have two more outstanding examples of companies going that extra mile," DiFrancesco said.

Farmer was honored in the small employer category, for firms with less than 200 employees. He is president of All Veteran's Auto Part, Inc., Phoenix.

Bullis, a Legionnaire, represents Sturm, Ruger & Company, Newport, N.H., where he is manager of rifle barrel manufacturing. Some 339, or 33 percent, of Ruger's 1,032 workers are veterans.

The firm voluntarily extended vacation time for its employees activated for service in Operations Desert Shield/Desert Storm.

All Veteran's Auto Parts has 12 employees, nine of them veterans. Owner James Kulas, a member of Post 75, also a Legionnaire, actively recruits veterans when job openings appear, justifying the company's motto, "Yesterday's Veterans Taking Care of You Today."

Navy band members injured

A bus collision last Sunday injured several sailors on their way to participated in the National Convention parade. Several were hospitalized because of their injuries, report officials with the Naval Recruit Training Command at Great Lakes.

"Fortunately, none of the young sailors was injured seriously and for that, we are grateful," said National Adjutant Robert W. Spanogle. "I think we should show our gratitude to those fine recruits by sending them 'thank-you' cards or greetings of some other kind."

To send cards, write: Navy Recruit Band Members in Bus Accident, c/o Commanding Officer, Naval Recruit Training Command, Public Affairs Office, Great Lakes, IL 60088.

•Aid

Legionnaires donated generously to the fund, contributing more than $250,000 in the first three months.

The fund was established to help Legionnaires and their families affected by disasters. NEF funds also can be used for Posts that are damaged as a result of disasters.

"Material assistance will be needed also -- food, clothing and shelter," DiFrancesco said of victims of Hurricane Andrew.

"The National Internal Affairs Commission staff, which administers the emergency fund, is in contact with the affected departments."

It didn't take Legionnaires long to respond to DiFrancesco's call. Within three hours of his appeal, Legionnaires had raised $18,000. The Department of New York donated $10,000.

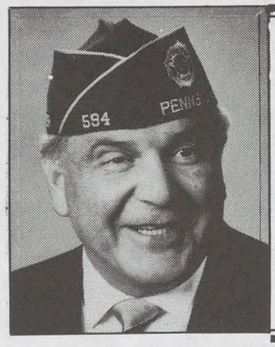
Among the Department donors and the amounts they raised:

- Wisconsin-$150
- Indiana-$246
- Pennsylvania-$1,100
- Connecticut-$250
- New Jersey-$250
- Michigan-$410
- Missouri-$225
- Ohio-$1,200
- Florida-$2,000
- Hawaii-$100
- New Hampshire-$150
- Mexico-$100
- Iowa-$362
- France-$147
- North Dakota-$50
- Oregon-$130
- Delaware-$100
- Washington-$130

The Departments of Illinois and the Philippines, along with the national sergeants-at-arms donated $600.

DiFrancesco urged Legionnaires to meet a $25,000 goal by the close of National Convention business today.

"The American Legion has always been, and will continue to be, at the forefront of service to our communities. Even as Hurricane Andrew rages, relief from the National Emergency Fund is already in the pipeline."



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National Commander DiFrancesco

Membership soars because of solid team effort

Legionnaires celebrated a successful year of promoting growth at the recent 1992 National Membership Awards Banquet.

"Only twice before in the history of The American Legion has our membership been higher and that was in 1946 and 1947," said Tony Jordan, chairman of the National Membership & Post Activities Committee.

The breakfast was held at the Chicago Sheraton Hotel & Towers Tuesday.

Jordan praised Departments for contributing to the third-highest total in Legion history. The all-time high was achieved in 1946, when membership totaled 3,326,556. The 1993 membership year goal is 3,225,000.

Jordan introduced National Commander Dominic D. DiFrancesco, who proceeded with the awards presentation.

1992 Recruiter of the Year Joe Chilelli, Department of California, was singled out by DiFrancesco for his outstanding effort in attracting new members.

"Joe signed up a mere 1,011 members this year," deadpanned the commander as Legionnaires applauded the top recruiter.

The National Commander also honored Departments who excelled in the "Breakthrough '92" membership promotion. Top Departments were honored at a "Pizza da' Pie" Party Monday night.

The Department of South Dakota won the delegate strength drawing, which put $165 in the pockets of each Department delegate. A check for $5,940 was presented to Department officials Wednesday.

The Department of Delaware attained the highest percentage above the "Breakthrough '92" goal, and for its effort won a new Oldsmobile Silhouette.

The Department of Kansas won a new Ford Crown Victoria for gaining the most members above its "Breakthrough" goal.

At Tuesday's award breakfast, 30 Department commanders were honored for meeting or exceeding his or her 100 percent goal by April 7, 1992.

The Departments of France and Hawaii were honored for achieving at least 110 percent of their goal.

The commander honored 14 Departments who achieved an all-time high in 1992: Alaska, Arizona, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Indiana, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Nevada, Ohio and Vermont.

Each Department commander winner receives a 10-karat gold "All-Time High" ring to commemorate their accomplishment.

DiFrancesco said he would not make the mistake of excluding Department adjutants in giving credit for a successful year.

This is the last daily issue of The Dispatch at convention. You can get it year-round if you purchase an annual subscription. Come see us near the exhibit hall on Level 1.

Four-war Hoosier vet chalks up 72nd Legion national convention

Col. Frank Kossa has missed just one of the eight American Legion conventions held in Chicago.

The 94-year-old retired Army colonel has, in fact, attended *every* convention but two since the Legion was founded in 1919.

"I had 14 feet of water in my basement and no money to go (to the convention) to Chicago in 1939," Kossa told *The Dispatch* just prior to Wednesday's session. The only other convention Kossa missed was the 1991 Legion gathering in Phoenix, when he was in the hospital.

Kossa, a member of Post 35, Jeffersonville, Ind., has served his nation on active duty through four wars this century -- World War I, World War II, Korea and Vietnam.

Woodrow Wilson was in the White House when Kossa entered service. On his own since age 11, the Schulenburg, Texas native found a home in the Army and his calling at the headquarters garage detachment at Fort Sam Houston.

"My first day in they asked me what I wanted to do and I said I wanted to drive trucks. I didn't know how, but I figured out the gears," recalls Kossa.

His first truck was a one-ton Packard with no windshield and a 25 mph top-end speed. He learned all facets of transport maintenance and supply and earned a commission in the reserves after World War I.

In 1919, Kossa still was on active duty when he became a charter member of Alamo Post 2 in San Antonio, Texas.

"We all joined the Legion down there to get the pension we never got," he said, referring to the separation bonus promised to veterans for their service during the war.

After working in the oil and lumber businesses during the inter-war period, Kossa was recalled to active duty for World War II to work supplying fuel for allied forces in Burma and India.

He was appointed to the Indiana Selective Service in August 1948, becoming director in 1963.

Kossa, who will be 95 on Nov. 1, has witnessed many changes in America during the 20th century. He said, however, that The American Legion has not changed its basic principles during his 74 years of membership.

"We're still working for veterans, I'll tell you that," he said. The session was about to begin and Kossa got up to leave.

"I'll see you in Pittsburgh next year," he said.

Polish patriot finally finds rest in homeland

Ignace Jan Paderewski is now at a rest in his native Poland, thanks to The American Legion.

The Polish statesman's remains were repatriated last June and Past National Commander Michael J. Kogutek participated in ceremonies.

"He was a friend of veterans and an ardent patriot," said Kogutek in a special address before convention delegates Wednesday afternoon.

Paderewski holds a special place in Legionnaires' hearts. In 1925 on a concert tour across the United States, the musician donated all of his proceeds -- $28,000 -- to the then-newly created American Legion Endowment Fund for veterans' rehabilitation and care of their orphans.

When Nazi Germany occupied Poland in 1939, Paderewski headed his nation's government-in-exile When he died, his remains were interred at Arlington.

In 1981, Kogutek placed an American Legion plaque at the burial site honoring Paderewski. Last June 26, Kogutek participated in ceremonies that returned the remains to Warsaw.

Paderewski was awarded the Legion's prestigious Distinguished Service Medal in 1926.

"Millions of Americans have since benefited from the Endowment Fund which was helped greatly by his generous contribution," Kogutek said.

Thornburgh awarded distinguished service medal

The 1992 American Legion Distinguished Service Award was presented to former U.S. Attorney General Richard Thornburgh Wednesday for his career-long dedication to upholding the rule of law.

National Commander Dominic D. DiFrancesco presented Thornburgh with the medallion and plaque after asking Legionnaires to give a rousing welcome to his fellow Pennsylvanian.

DiFrancesco praised Thornburgh for his devotion to veterans' issues during his two terms as Pennsylvania governor. Thornburgh also served as U.S. Attorney General under presidents Reagan and Bush. He currently serves as undersecretary general for administration and management for the United Nations.

Echoing sentiments expressed by previous speakers, Thornburgh pointed to the contest between freedom and totalitarianism, most recently highlighted by the demise of the former Soviet Union.

"The walls of godless communism have indeed tumbled down and the forces of freedom and democracy are on the march," Thornburgh told Legionnaires at the Chicago Sheraton Hotel & Towers ballroom.

Two weeks ago, Thornburgh was in Somalia to assist starving refugees displaced by civil war and a brutal, dictatorial government.

"These Somalian refugees have been driven from a homeland where there is no rule of law," he said.

In contrast, Thornburgh said, respect for law and order is firmly imbedded in the American system of jurisprudence.

Quoting a a fair country lawyer in his own right, Abraham Lincoln, Thornburgh repeated Lincoln's sentiment that the rule of law be "the political religion of the nation."

He praised Legionnaires for supporting law enforcement efforts through the years. The Legion's Law & Order Committee promotes programs educating youth on the issue, and Legion Americanism programs like Boys State, Oratorical Contest and school award programs emphasize love of country and respect for its laws.

Following the presentation, Thornburgh posed for photographs with DiFrancesco, National Adjutant Robert W. Spanogle, and Department of Pennsylvania Adjutant Stan Reinhard.