CONNECTIONS

THE AMERICAN LEGION

Post-9/11 Veterans

THE MISSION CONTINUES

TEAM RUBICON
BRIDGE THE GAP

AMERICAN LEGION

TEAM RWB

SVA
IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN VETERANS OF AMERICA

"I feel the post-9/11 generation certainly has an identity. We responded to a national tragedy. We all volunteered. We volunteered for a decade of war. We had options, and we chose this. Our vision is to show the world what we can do. We can kick ass. We can face anything. That's our vision going forward."

Chris Wilkens, *a U.S. Marine Corps veteran who fought in the Battle of Fallujah during Operation Iraqi Freedom who now leads a 1919-chartered American Legion post in the New York Athletic Club overlooking Central Park in Manhattan*

The American Legion is nearing the dawn of its second century.

As the nation's largest veterans service organization reflects on a legacy of countless historic achievements and millions of lives positively influenced, it is also time to envision a future of vibrant connection between the Legion's time-honored values and the evolving interests of 21st century veterans, their families and communities.

Approximately 1.5 million members of the U.S. Armed Forces are expected to separate from service in the coming years, joining 2.5 million other veterans of the post-9/11 generation. The future of support for these veterans, and those yet to serve, depends on the collective strength of voices unified, regardless of war era.

The American Legion, with nearly 13,500 local posts worldwide and membership network of nearly 4 million, envisions a collaboration of selected, values-driven organizations whose first mission is to identify opportunities to help each other fulfill shared missions.

Since the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, hundreds of associations and programs have sprung up to support U.S. troops, wounded warriors, newly minted veterans and their families. Some have distinguished themselves as truly values-driven, including: Team Red, White and Blue; Team Rubicon; The Mission Continues; and Student Veterans of America. The spirit behind these associations and programs is the same that brought The American Legion to life in 1919 and helped it flourish over the last nine and a half decades.

War eras may differ, but the common bond of military service is a timeless value.

In many states and communities, American Legion posts are already supporting efforts of values-driven post-9/11 groups. Fundraisers, special

events and service projects are commonly undertaken jointly by The American Legion and other groups largely consisting of veterans from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Legion helped bring to life Student Veterans of America, having provided Washington office space to the organization in its formative years, and making connections between SVA chapters and newly chartered American Legion posts on college campuses. The SVA and The American Legion have testified together on Capitol Hill to improve the Post-9/11 GI Bill and to address other education issues faced by today's veterans.

Student veterans often find support and mentorship from local American Legion posts in college towns. On over two-dozen campuses in recent years,

"The GI Bill is representative of what this country has always stood for: Opportunity through hard work, dedication, and education – both for veterans, and its citizens. While there are many things we could do better; investing in our nation's veterans through education is one of the things that we got right and is directly attributable to us maintaining our position as world leaders."

***D. Wayne Robinson**, President and CEO of Student Veterans of America*

“Don’t ask me what you can do for me. Let me tell you what I can do for you.”

*Operation Iraqi Freedom veteran **Josh Eckhoff**, recipient of the Bronze Star and Purple Heart, and alumnus of The Mission Continues*

new American Legion posts have been chartered to meet the needs of young veterans adjusting to student life.

In some places, however, American Legion posts are unsure which post-9/11 generation groups are a good match. So many small associations and initiatives have sprung into existence, it’s difficult for Legionnaires to determine which ones are truly effective.

Collaborations between The American Legion and Post-9/11 veteran groups:

- Provide better understanding of each organization’s mission, priorities, assets, practices, needs and expectations
- Give American Legion posts opportunities to increase the number of healthy, family-oriented activities
- Offer a stronger collective voice in Washington and throughout America in support of the veterans all groups strive to serve and engage.
- Expand promotional opportunities among all associated groups through print, digital and social media channels
- Connect Post-9/11 veterans with the many services of The American Legion, including benefits and health-care advocacy and opportunities to volunteer in healthy, educational youth programs

Many post-9/11 generation groups have misperceptions about The American Legion and its identity. In Alexandria, Va., that is changing as post-9/11 veterans now make up nearly half of Post 24's 750 members. There, veterans of various war eras – from World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Desert Storm, Iraq and Afghanistan – serve together and learn from one another, sharing the common bond. One Afghanistan veteran at the post has created a website to record on video the remarkable stories of wartime service of his fellow members, whether they fought in France or Fallujah.

"The American Legion family is a 4 million-person network. Think of those connections and think of that kind of clout. That's a lot of people with a lot of the same values. That's people in all walks of life and in every kind of business. And they're also plugged into their local communities. That is one of the best job networks out there."

Jesse Stevens, *25-year-old Marine Corps veteran and member of the executive committee of American Legion Post 24 in Alexandria, Va.*

The American Legion has numerous assets that can benefit Post 9/11 generation groups. One in particular is the organization's more than 10,000 brick-and-mortar post homes around the world. Other assets include nationally recognized expertise in veterans benefits and VA health care. The Legion's Temporary Financial Assistance program and Family Support Network offer cash grants and volunteer assistance to veteran and military families with children at home. The Legion is involved with no fewer than 1,200 veteran job and business-development events every year. Millions of dollars in scholarships are also awarded by The American Legion each year.

Meanwhile, Team Red, White and Blue has more than 50,000 members in chapters nationwide who are devoted to fitness activities that promote healthy lifestyles for American Legion members and their communties. Involvement, such as helping stage events with Team RWB, can help The American Legion draw attention to its own healthy athletic activities – soccer programs, high-school rodeo, Scouting, shooting sports and, of course, American Legion Baseball. Noteworthy, too, is that Team Red, White and Blue welcomes members from the pre-9/11 generation, many of whom are finding vigorous athletic activity to be effective therapy for service-related health-care conditions.

"Veterans want to be a part of something bigger than themselves. It takes a certain person to sign up to be in the military. You don't stop being that person when you get out."

*U.S. Army veteran and West Point graduate **Chris Widell**, who served two tours in Iraq and now leads the Houston chapter of Team Red, White and Blue*

“Veterans need challenges and opportunities. It’s foolish not to tap them for disaster response.”

*Former U.S. Marine scout **Jake Wood**, co-founder of Team Rubicon*

The American Legion’s National Emergency Fund has issued millions of dollars in grants and produced incalculable volunteer hours in times of natural disaster since 1969. The program was nationally recognized for quick and effective response during Hurricane Katrina, when over $1.5 million in cash aid was urgently delivered to displaced veterans and their families immediately after the 2005 storm and floods. NEF funds and volunteers poured into Moore, Okla., during tornadoes, New York and New Jersey after Superstorm Sandy, to Colorado in the aftermath of devastating floods, and many other locations where disaster has struck.

The National Emergency Fund is a natural match for Team Rubicon, which has gained worldwide respect for relief efforts in times of catastrophe, from Haiti to Alabama to Missouri to New Jersey. In addition to the direct benefits such programs provide to communities they serve, Team Rubicon and the Legion’s NEF offer meaningful opportunities for veterans to continue serving after discharge.

Another nationally recognized organization that supports Post 9/11 veterans is The Mission Continues, with its network of platoons across the country that provide job skills, community service, camaraderie and support for veterans in transition. As The American Legion has done for decades, The Mission Continues delivers important community services and projects. The program has flourished in recent years, providing more than $10 million in volunteer help through more than 30 local platoons.

“The biggest thing was, it instilled a lot of hope. People had been telling me all the things I couldn’t do. But with volunteering, I found out I could. It sounds weird, but it was the first time I realized I was a veteran.”

Lloyd Duran, *former Operation Iraqi Freedom Marine corporal, who now works with The Mission Continues in Orlando, Fla.*

In communities large and small, The American Legion, Team Red White and Blue, The Mission Continues, Student Veterans of America and Team Rubicon are already collaborating to help veterans and communities, working as strategic allies, guided by the common bond of service, regardless of war era.

NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE AMERICAN LEGION
INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA, MAY 6 - 7, 2015

Resolution No. 20: Encourage Collaboration with Selected Post-9/11 Generation Veterans Groups

WHEREAS, The American Legion 100th Anniversary Observance Committee and 100th Anniversary Honorary Committee have developed and reported to the National Executive Committee a centennial commemoration strategy to share the organization's legacy of accomplishments and vision for a second century of service; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion has worked closely in numerous local capacities with Team Red White and Blue, The Mission Continues and Team Rubicon, which are three effective and innovative post-9/11 veterans groups that share values similar to those of The American Legion and can play an important part in defining a second-century vision for the organization; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion has established a relationship of collaboration with Student Veterans of America, providing office space for several months as the group was forming, and uniting to help student veterans through relationships at a growing number of American Legion campus posts; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion National Headquarters is frequently asked to provide media support or other forms of recognition from numerous post-9/11 generation veterans groups among the 45,000 the George W. Bush Institute has identified; and

WHEREAS, Team Red White and Blue's mission is to enrich the lives of America's veterans by connecting them to their communities through physical and social activity and local volunteerism; and

WHEREAS, Team Red White and Blue and The American Legion are finding healthy camaraderie and volunteer opportunities in numerous communities nationwide, to the mutual benefit of each other and the veterans they support; and

WHEREAS, The Mission Continues empowers veterans in readjustment transitions by deploying them in platoons to fulfill community service projects, often with support or involvement from The American Legion, nationwide; and

WHEREAS, The Mission Continues and The American Legion have mutually beneficial opportunities to help veterans through the readjustment process while at the same time fulfilling community service needs, which are core values of both organizations; and

WHEREAS, Team Rubicon combines the skills and experiences of military veterans with first responders and emergency workers to rapidly deploy well-trained disaster-relief teams worldwide; and

WHEREAS, Team Rubicon and The American Legion have worked together during a variety of natural disasters, including floods in Colorado, Superstorm Sandy along the northeastern U.S. coast, and tornadoes in Oklahoma, connecting victims and relief workers with the Legion's National Emergency Fund, post homes as command centers, volunteers and other assets; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion Membership & Post Activities Committee's five-year plan strongly urges engagement and collaboration with post-9/11 generation veterans in order to improve awareness about The American Legion among eligible members from that war era; and

WHEREAS, This resolution originating in The American Legion 100th Anniversary Observance Committee has the concurrence of your Internal Affairs Commission and the Subcommittee on Resolutions; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By the National Executive Committee of The American Legion in regular meeting assembled in Indianapolis, Indiana, on May 6-7, 2015, That the National Executive Committee does affirm The American Legion's commitment at the national, department and post levels to seek active coordination wherever feasible with The Mission Continues, Team Red White and Blue, Team Rubicon and Student Veterans of America on initiatives that support veterans, their families, communities and camaraderie; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That American Legion posts and departments are encouraged to build and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with these post-9/11 veterans groups, and that The American Legion Marketing, Media & Communications Division highlight such relationships in print, digital and social media campaigns and seek reciprocal or similar treatment about The American Legion in the print, digital and social media of those groups.

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