NATIONAL UPDATE

Official Newsletter of the Sons of The American Legion

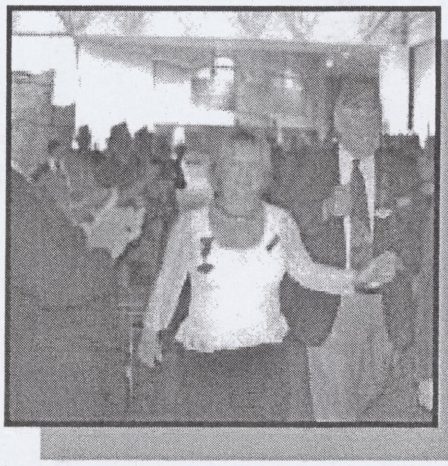
Special Convention Edition - August 27, 2006

Sons make trek into Zion

Just over 150 years ago, a band of weary Mormon settlers made their way down out of the mountains and founded what we know today as Salt Lake City. Members of the Sons of The American Legion have used much more modern modes of transportation this week to arrive here and take part in the 35th annual S.A.L. National Convention.

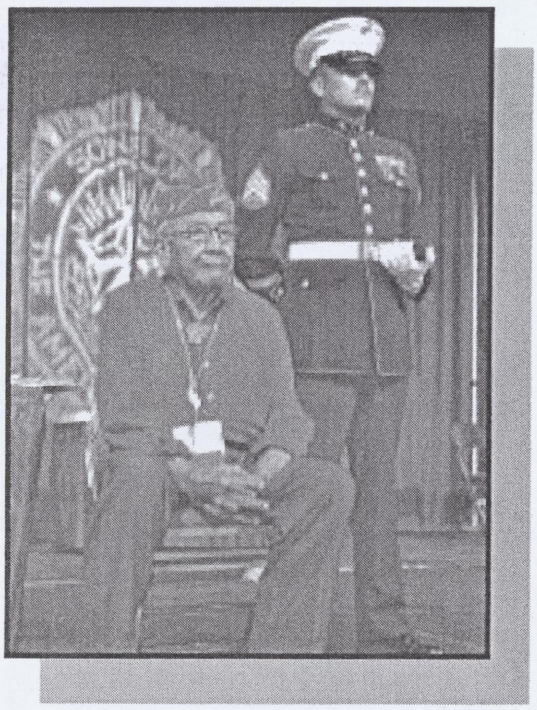
National Commander William Sparwasser gaveled the convention to order early Friday evening and presided over a wagon full of committee reports, special guests, awards and election of new national officers. This is Sparwasser's last weekend at the helm of the S.A.L., a year that has seen record-setting numbers in membership and contributions to American Legion programs *(See Page 2)*. On Saturday alone, more than $58,000 was donated to Child Welfare and the Children's Miracle network.

National Assistant Adjutant Harold Thompson reported 761 delegates representing 44 Detachments registered for this year's convention. "(That's) one of the highest number of states ever," said Thompson. This was the first year Detachments were required to pay for all convention delegates for which they were entitled.



Above - National Legion Commander Tom Bock and wife, Elaine, make their way to the National Convention stage where he praised S.A.L. efforts.

Many Sons joined with Legion Riders who took part in The American Legacy Run, a 1,900 mile motorcade from Indianapolis to Salt Lake City that raised more than $100,000 in scholarship funds for the children of U.S. military personnel killed in the War on Terror and Operation Iraqi Freedom.

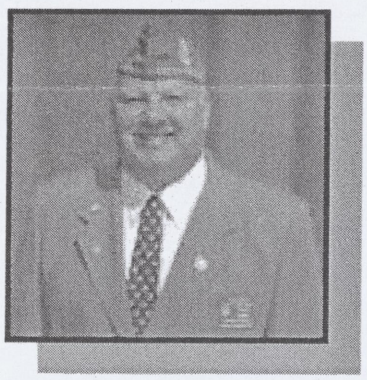


Above - Sgt Allen Dale June, WW II veteran and one of the 29 original Navajo Code Talkers, introduced to delegates Friday evening. His work was so secret during WW II that the military denied his veteran status for many decades afterward and he fell on hard times. In recent years Sgt June has been helped by Legion Family members in Colorado.

Now it's Commander Earl

On his very first day as a member of the Sons back in 1983, Earl Ruttkofsky walked into the post and started helping out. He's been working to help veterans ever since and that won't change now that he's been elected National Commander of the Sons of The American Legion.

Ruttkofsky is 55 years old, a Life Member of Tecumseh, MI Squadron 34 and retired from the Ford Motor Company and from farming. Earl and his wife, Beverly, have three children and four grandchildren, all Legion Family members. His eligibility is through his father, a World War II veteran.



"My father gave me the right to be here," says Ruttkofsky. "I'm proud of that and I'm proud of all the veterans that have given me the right to be free."

"My number one goal has always been to work for veterans. We do many things in the Sons that are important, but my heart is in working with the veterans. We need to step up to the plate and do the things that our veterans need."

What will Commander Earl ask of Sons this year?

"Go out and communicate with veterans one-on-one. Talk with vets. Do whatever you can do for them. Stick your hand out. Be personal. We give a lot of money for things, but I want to see that personal touch from our members."

Two who helped start it all

Michael Seaton and Robert Faust began attending Legion National Conventions in the early 1960's as teenagers. Back then, young winners of the Houghton Award were asked to represent all Sons at Legion convention subcommittee meetings.

Robert Faust / Michael Seaton

In 1968, at the age of 19, Seaton was elected Chairman of the first S.A.L. Caucus. It then took five years of work to produce the constitution and by-laws leading to the first S.A.L. National Convention, held in Chicago. Faust, at the age of 21, became the first person elected National Commander by delegates to a Sons National Convention.

"We were a bunch of little bratty kids running around saying we will do this, we are the future," says Faust. "We hear the same issues today; but today, Sons are really supporting The American Legion in so many ways."

"Our experiences as teenagers, going through leadership positions of the S.A.L., contributed to our abilities," adds Seaton. "All of the skills I learned - who I am today - is because of what I did here."

Faust is an attorney and Seaton is the director of a school system training program. Both reside in California.

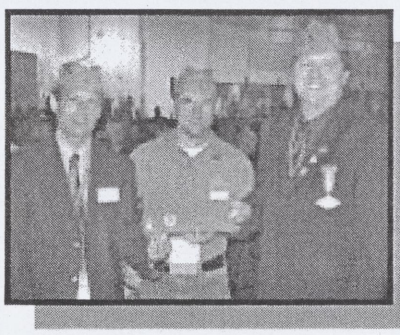
How much did it cost?

Visit any state fair in the country and you're likely to find claims of the world's largest boar or pumpkin or Ferris wheel. This year's Sons National Convention has laid claim to the world's most expensive S.A.L. cover.

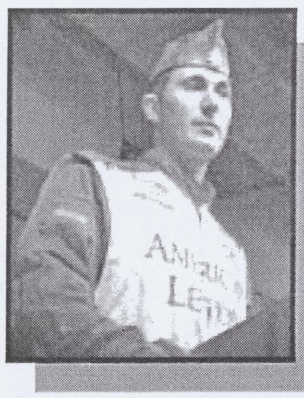
Place an order for a cover from Emblem Sales and you're likely to pay about $40. But carelessly leave your cover lying around a convention hall and you're likely to pay through the nose to get it back.

That was the case Saturday when New Mexico Department Commander and dual member Elizardo Sanchez found the unattended cover of a member from Jonesboro, FL Squadron 258. National Adjutant Brian O'Hearne offered to return the cover to its owner…for a fee. Bidding started at $20 and bounced from side-to-side throughout the hall. National Commander Sparwasser's bid of $100 was topped by Leading Candidate Earl Ruttkofsky's bid of $200. The Detachment of Florida's offer of $400 was topped by a $600 pool of funds from the National Vice Commanders that was trumped and won by a $750 bid from the Detachment of Arizona.

Because all of those who offered bids went ahead and contributed their money and the Detachment of Georgia agreed to match the winning bid, the total cost of this hapless cover totaled more than $3,300. All of the funds will benefit the Child Welfare Foundation.



Why we go racing



S.A.L. member and driver Jerick Johnson knows many of the 75 million NASCAR fans in this country will support our military, our veterans and even join The American Legion Family.

But our messages won't reach that ready-made audience if we don't put the The American Legion #76 Freedom Car on the track. That takes money and is totally dependent upon contributions and merchandise purchases made by Legion Family members. It's a win-win situation when squadrons purchase racing merchandise from Team Johnson Motorsports then turn around and auction it off. If at least $100,000 can be raised in time, Jerick will try to race next week at the "Relocate Here 200" at Fontana, CA.

Sons by the numbers this year

- 177,251 VAVS volunteer hours recorded and 12,700 visits with $3,147,033 in cash and gifts
- Child Welfare Foundation - $220,939 with 44,920 hours of service (single largest contributor)
- Special Olympics - $87,078 in cash and 15,186 hours
- Children's Miracle Network - $79,013 in donations with 14,178 hours
- Total C&Y donations - $2,455,210 and 249,213 hours
- $1,119,361 in scholarships with 7,122 hours for educational programs
- 222 Five Star / Ten Ideals programs at a cost of $4,910
- Various community service projects costing $6,964,941 and offering 274,354 hours
- $108,006 in donations to the National Emergency Fund
- Total Americanism donations - $8,606,163 and 284,835 service hours
- 307,263 members in 5,553 squadrons in 52 Detachments
- 24 consecutive years of new all-time high membership totals

And the winners are....

Membership

Hartline Award (Detach w/ most squadrons) - Pennsylvania
Houghton Award (greatest % increase in membership) -
Category 1 - Oklahoma
Category 2 - Connecticut
Category 3 - Massachusetts
Category 4 - New Jersey
Category 5 - Pennsylvania
Highest Renewal Percentage by Region
East - France (93.43%)
South - Georgia (84.50%)
Central - Iowa (90.84%)
Midwest - North Dakota (92.74%)
West - Washington (81.34%)
Largest Squadron - York, PA Squadron 791 (1,261)

Americanism

Atwood/Beyea/York Memorial Award
Detachment - New York
District - Fourth District, Georgia
Squadron - Havre De Grace, MD Squadron 47

National Emergency Fund

Largest Donations Per Capita in nation - Alaska
East - France
South - Virginia
Central - Missouri
Midwest - Texas

Child Welfare Foundation

Excellence Award - New Jersey
Meritorious Achievement Award - New Jersey
Legacy Award (highest in Legion Family) - Ohio
Nation's Largest Per Capita - Colorado
East - France
South - Virginia
Central - Ohio
West - Washington
Garland Murphy Award (largest donation) - Ohio
East - Pennsylvania
South - Florida
Midwest - Colorado
West - Arizona

Children and Youth

East - Mount Airy, MD Squadron 191
South - Duluth, GA Squadron 251
Central - North Webster, IN Squadron 253
Midwest - Dallas, TX Squadron 453
West - Newport Beach, CA Squadron 108
Detachment - Maryland
District - North Central, Maryland
Squadron - Jacksonville, FL Squadron 283

Community Service

Scrapbook Winners
Squadron - Amagnamsett, NY Squadron 419
Detachment - Ohio

Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation

Kirby Kepler Award (best squadron rehab report)
LaCrosse, WI Squadron 52
Allen I. O'Brian (best District rehab report)
Second District, Indiana
Earl Webster Award (best Detach rehab report)
Wisconsin
Charles B. Rigsby Award (Volunteer of the Year)
William P. O'Connell, New York (posthumously)
Commander's Award
California

Historian

History Book Award
Squadron - Eastpoint, GA Squadron 51
Detachment - Delaware