

THE AMERICAN LEGION

Dispatch

January 2015

A National Headquarters Publication

MEMBERSHIP & POST ACTIVITIES



Photos by Lucas Carter

NATIONAL GUARD MUSTER PROVIDES LEGION AWARENESS

The Department of Arizona American Legion Family let the Army and airmen know the support the Legion can provide for them and their families.

By The American Legion

The Arizona National Guard honored its nearly 7,500 Army and airmen for their service and sacrifice over the past 13 years that the United States has been at war overseas by having them muster in a mass military formation last month on field at Arizona State University Sun Devil Stadium in Tempe. The Pearl Harbor Day event marked the first time in 100 years that the Arizona National Guard has held a muster, as well as a community expo that involved more than 200 community vendors, including the Department of Arizona American Legion Family.

“When the Arizona National Guard called us to be a part of the muster and expo, I think it was the result of our attempts to stay connected with troops before deployments,” said Angel Juarez, Department of Arizona adjutant. “We came out to the muster as a Legion Family to discuss the VA benefits available to the servicemembers, and to let them know that the Legion Family is here for them and their family.”

The Department of Arizona has built a strong relationship with the National Guard by visiting troops before deployments to inform them of how the Legion can be of assistance to them and their families, and by delivering meals to the troops and their families before and after a deployment.

“We are here to support the Arizona National Guard 100 percent,” said Andy Jaime, Department of Arizona commander. “The expo is allowing us as a Legion Family to let the servicemembers know that if they redeploy, the Legion is here to assist their family. Our presence at the muster and expo allows us to bring awareness to servicemembers and the community that we are here.”

The National Guard’s tradition of conducting a muster dates back to 1636, when America’s first colonial militia assembled in Salem, Mass. Following the muster ceremony, members of the Arizona National Guard and

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NEWS ALERT

Watch the Oak Ridge Boys in concert

New Legion supporters, The Oak Ridge Boys, have updated their tour and performance schedule and Legionnaires are encouraged to attend to show their support. At recent shows, the group has publicly pointed out members of the audience who are part of the Legion Family. So remember to wear your Legion cap or shirt to the concert. View their tour date schedule for 2015: www.oakridgeboys.com/tour

Register now for 2015 Legion Baseball

Team registration for the 2015 Legion Baseball season is now underway. Register online: www.baseball.legion.org

Kiosk displays Legion Family brochures

American Legion Family branded kiosks are available for departments, districts and posts desiring a sturdy, easily portable way to display brochures at events. Each kiosk comes with a starter kit of 100 brochures each of American Legion charities, Legion Family membership applications and the Auxiliary Foundation’s charities. To order, search item No. 735.504 online: www.emblem.legion.org

2015 Eagle Scout application available

The American Legion Eagle Scout of the Year will receive a \$10,000 scholarship and three runner-up scholarship awards will be granted in the amount of \$2,500 each. Applications are due to department headquarters by March 1. Department nominee submissions must be sent to National Headquarters by April 1. Download an application: www.legion.org/scouting

COMMANDER'S MESSAGE

Legion's new career platform



Mike Helm
National Commander

The American Legion continues to assist veterans and their families in their transition to employment through our career fairs that we sponsor throughout the country in partnership with Military.com, along with the Small Business Development Workshops that we hold during our annual Washington Conference and National Convention. The Legion's goal is to ensure that veterans receive ample opportunities for success once they leave the military.

The American Legion and its allies in veteran employment and entrepreneurship recently launched a new web platform to help those who served in uniform translate military skills to job skills, find employment, start businesses and make successful transitions.

Key features of The American Legion's Veteran Employment Center include:

- A Veteran Job Search tool, powered by Military.com, to help veterans find current job listings near them. By entering a ZIP Code, veterans can easily find job listings that fit their skill sets within a chosen distance from home.
- A series of 10 custom-produced videos to help veterans start and succeed in business. The series, "Veteran Video Guide: Starting and Growing a Business," is sponsored by ADP and provides guidance from successful veteran entrepreneurs, including members of the Legion's Business Task Force.
- A listing of American Legion-sponsored or produced veteran career fairs nationwide, with links to registration sites.
- Links to important forms, sites and agency platforms that help veterans in their career search, including USAJobs.gov, the federal government's job-listing site, Department of Labor online tools to understand and calculate Veterans Preference points, and a VA Military Skills Translator.

Additional information on the site includes resume-writing advice from top experts, a portal to Military.com's benefits platform and headlines about The American Legion's advocacy on behalf of veterans seeking civilian careers.

I encourage all Legion Family members to visit the career platform and to share it with our returning servicemembers to help in their efforts as they transition back into the workforce. www.legion.org/careers

MEMBERSHIP

National Commander Honor Ribbon

During the 2014-2015 membership year, American Legion National Commander Mike Helm will award his National Commander Honor Ribbon to any American Legion Family that achieves 100 percent membership by June 30, 2015.

For this award, the Legion Family is defined as a post and any combination of an Auxiliary unit, Sons squadron or Legion Riders chapter. Each branch must achieve 100 percent to qualify for the award.

The National Commander Honor Ribbon incentive program will end June 30, 2015, or when supplies are exhausted.

Download the form online:
www.legion.org/commander/ribbon



MEMBERSHIP

Recruiters to be honored with 'Stay On Course' pin

During the 2014-2015 membership year, American Legion National Commander Mike Helm will award his national commander pin to any Legion Family member who obtains three new members or renews five members into the Legion.

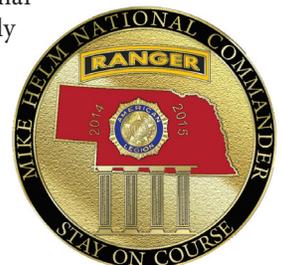
A new member is any eligible person joining for the 2015 membership year who was not a member of The American Legion during the 2014 membership year.

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. Commander Helm's pin incentive program will end June 30, 2015, or when supplies are exhausted.

www.legion.org/commander/pin



NATIONAL ADJUTANT'S MESSAGE

Community support revitalizes Indiana post

Post 145 in Avon was turning in its chapter until it resurrected its Indiana Blue Star program.

By Daniel S. Wheeler

Nearly 16 years ago, American Legion Post 145 in Avon, Ind., had two members and was in the process of turning in its chapter. Now, there are 1,000 members strong among the post, Auxiliary unit and Sons of The American Legion squadron. A big part of the post's revitalization started about 10 years ago when the post resurrected its Indiana Blue Star Salute program.

The post held its first local event to honor families of U.S. servicemembers in the summer of 2006 that drew 55 families from the community. The following year, neighboring posts got involved, and the Indiana Blue Star Salute reached out to a multi-county region. Today, the June event in Indianapolis attracts hundreds of military families from Indiana and beyond.

"It's something we are really proud of," said Ralph "Zoc" Zoccolillo, Indiana Blue Star Salute Committee chairman and member of Post 145. "Once we saw how successful the salute was in one town, we realized how many military families there are around the state. We are a post that does so much for our community."

Six central Indiana American Legion posts and their American Legion Riders chapters work together to raise funds from corporate sponsors to help military families throughout Indiana and nearby states. Members of those posts, their Legion Riders chapters, Auxiliary units and Sons of The American Legion squadrons serve on the Indiana Blue Star Committee and each year the event has generated no less than \$10,000 for the Legion's Legacy Scholarship Fund, which provides college assistance for the children of military personnel who lost their lives on duty since the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

The Indiana Blue Star Salute program also honors military families beyond the month of June. For example, on Dec. 20, the Indiana Blue Star Committee and Post 145 gave 16 Indiana National Guard families a "Spirit of Christmas" event to remember. Nearly 200 Christmas presents wrapped in pink, green and blue camouflage paper filled a stage flanked by lit Christmas trees and wreaths at the Hendricks Country Fairgrounds in Danville, Ind.

The 45 children of the military families - who were identified



Post 145 celebrates the "Spirit of Christmas" by giving 16 military families gifts. . Photo by Lucas Carter

as in need this holiday season by the Indiana National Guard family assistance program - didn't unwrap their gifts until Santa Claus arrived at the fairgrounds, which he did by way of a Vietnam War Huey helicopter. "This is all about the kids," Zoccolillo said. "These kids wished for certain presents, and they got them."

The Indiana Blue Star Committee and the post raised more than \$8,000 in less than two months to purchase presents and to provide a catered lunch to the families. A local Yamaha store sponsored the Huey, and Marsh grocery store in Avon provided hams for each family to take home. "This is what the Legion is supposed to do. A lot of generous people made this event happen," said Richard Culp, commander of Post 145.

The presents consisted of children's toys and electronics such as televisions, laptops, Xboxs and Playstation 3s. Each family was called individually on stage to take a photo with Santa and to receive their gifts.

The event was such a success that the Indiana Blue Star Committee and Post 145 "will continue to host the 'Spirit of Christmas' for our military families," Zoc said.

See 2015
Legion World
Series pairings

 www.legion.org/baseball

Dispatch

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their families walked through the expo to enjoy food vendors and live entertainment, and to speak with community vendors such as The American Legion.

About 10 members of the Legion, Auxiliary, Sons of The American Legion and Legion Riders handed out American flags and copies of “Join The American Legion Family” brochure to National Guard members, as well as answered questions about the Legion and its membership. The department’s three tables were filled with membership applications, a raffle drawing for a flag set from Emblem Sales, and the new kiosk filled with Legion Family brochures that supports National Commander Michael Helm’s 4x4 goal.

“We are really excited to be one of the first departments to use the new kiosk as a tool to educate servicemembers and veterans about who the Legion Family is and all that we do,” Juarez said.

Army National Guard Sgt. John Hughes approached several of the Arizona Legion Riders at the booth to discuss joining. “Joining the Legion Riders is something that I have been thinking about ever since they escorted us during a Yellow Ribbon event,” Hughes said. “It’s a great excuse to ride, and if I can participate in Legion events that raise money for fallen servicemembers’ kids, than that’s even better.”

Hughes wife, Crystal, likes “the family aspect of the Legion Riders,” she said. “I’m not a rider or a veteran, but it’s something that John and I can do together.”

Army veteran Steve Brauss stopped by the department’s booth to reiterate why he joined Post 53 in Buckeye, Ariz., 14 years ago.

“I knew the Legion did a lot of good things, and so I wanted to join,” he said. “They provide us a voice with legislation, and they are great with helping the community. That’s one of the reasons I’m still involved because they feed soldiers and their families before a deployment. The Legion is a great benefit to the Arizona National Guard.”

Whether or not the Arizona National Guard holds another muster in the future, Juarez said the department will continue to support local troops before and after deployments.

“We are connected by lineage, and we can’t wait until the returning servicemembers wander into a Legion post someday. The Legion has to be at the forefront like we are by being here at the muster and expo.”

ASK A SERVICE OFFICER

Transferring VA education benefits



Cajun Comeau
Department Service
Officer, North Carolina

Q. Can I transfer my VA education benefits to a dependent?

A. With both the Montgomery GI Bill and the Veterans Educational Assistance Program, a veteran may not transfer any benefits to a dependent or spouse. However, education benefits may be transferred with the Post-9/11 GI Bill under certain criteria.

If you have at least 90 days of aggregate active-duty service after Sept. 10, 2001, and are still on active duty, or if you are an honorably discharged veteran or were discharged with a service-connected disability after 30 days, you may be eligible for the Post-9/11 GI Bill. The transferability option under the Post-9/11 GI Bill allows servicemembers to transfer all or some unused benefits to their spouse or dependent children. Once the Department of Defense (DoD) approves benefits for transfer, the new beneficiaries apply for them through the Department of Veterans Affairs. Eligible servicemembers may transfer all 36 months or the portion of unused Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits.

Family members must be enrolled in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System and be eligible for benefits at the time of transfer to receive the education benefits. The option to transfer is open to military servicemembers who are eligible for the Post-9/11 GI Bill and meet the following criteria:

- Has at least six years of service in the armed forces on the date of approval and agrees to serve four additional years in the armed forces from the date of election; or has at least 10 years of service in the armed forces on the date of approval; or is precluded by either standard policy or statute from committing to four additional years and agrees to serve for the maximum amount of time allowed by such policy or statute.
- Is or becomes retirement-eligible and agrees to serve an additional four years of service on or after Aug. 1, 2012. A servicemember is considered to be retirement-eligible if he or she has completed 20 years of active federal service or 20 qualifying years as computed.

Transfer requests are submitted and approved while the member is in the armed forces. Family members may apply to use transferred benefits with VA form 22-1990e. The form should only be completed and submitted to VA by the family member after DoD has approved the request for transfer of education benefits.

Find a Legion service officer: www.legion.org/serviceofficers

CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION SPOTLIGHT

Post 396 in Geneva, N.Y.

Members of Winnek American Legion Post 396 in Geneva, N.Y., asked the Buffalo Bills football team if they would be interested in having the post’s color guard — dressed in World War I uniforms — present the flag before a football game. The post presented colors on Sept. 21, 1997, when the Bills played the Indianapolis Colts.



Share Your Post’s Legacy

Upload photos, print material and videos related to your post’s history on the Legion’s Centennial Celebration web page: www.centennial.legion.org

HONOR & REMEMBRANCE

Legionnaire memorializes World War II women

Eileen Merullo, a World War II veteran and member of Post 61 in Revere, Mass., was reading a plaque at her post that listed the names of deceased World War II veterans when she realized women veterans from the war were missing.

“I was thinking to myself that there’s no recognition for women at all in Revere. None,” Merullo said. “There is no signpost, nothing to honor the women, and so many women did (serve) from Revere.” The missing names of 150 Revere women who served during World War II sparked a project for Merullo – to build a monument memorializing the women.

After receiving approval from the post commander and the mayor of Revere, Merullo began fundraising for the memorial by sending out letters to everyone she knew all over the country. Her dedication and vision came to fruition on Sept. 7, 2013, when “Revere’s Women Veterans World War II Memorial” was dedicated on the front lawn of Post 61.

“(Women) had served and at that time did what they had to do, came home, took off their uniforms, and went back to their daily chores. No fuss, no honor, no parade, nothing like that,” Merullo said. “They went in to back the men up. They didn’t want honor and glory for what they did.”

After finishing college, Merullo enlisted as a physical therapist with the Army and was stationed at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C. “There were about 15 boys in my neighborhood that we played hockey with, went to the beach with, and they all were called in (to serve),” she said. “So I figured the war’s going on, it’s my duty to (serve), and I did.”



After the war, she helped polio patients in Illinois and worked four years at Chelsea (Mass.) Naval Hospital.

“Without Merullo’s work and the resulting monument, it’s possible these women would have been left out of history’s footnotes,” said William J. Chisholm, commander of Post 61. “Now, their names are kept in the heart of Revere.”

Share your Honor & Remembrance story:

www.legiontown.org

MEETINGS

Discount airfare for 2015 Legion meetings

The American Legion has obtained discounts with Delta Airlines and United Airlines for those traveling to its 2015 meetings. Legionnaires who want National Headquarters to obtain their airline tickets can contact Marti Wooden at (317) 630-1232 or mwooden@legion.org. Individuals can also contact the airlines directly to obtain the discounts. It is recommended that tickets be purchased at least 30 days prior to travel.

Discounts vary, and the airlines will charge a service fee to make the reservation. No discounts apply with Amtrak or Greyhound, but reservations can be made online: www.amtrak.com and www.greyhound.com Or by phone: (800) 231-2222 for Greyhound.



2015 AMERICAN LEGION CALENDAR

| EVENT DATE | EVENT | EVENT CITY | AVAILABLE AIRPORTS |
|-----------------|---|----------------------------|---|
| Jan. 9-11 | Membership Planning Meeting | Indianapolis | IND |
| Feb. 20-25 | Washington Conference | Washington | DCA |
| April 10-12 | Oratorical Scholarship Finals | Indianapolis | IND |
| May 1-7 | NEC Spring Meetings | Indianapolis | IND |
| July 16-25 | Boys Nation | Washington | DCA |
| July 21-26 | Junior Shooting Sports 3-Position Air Rifle National Championship | Colorado Springs, Colo. | COS |
| Aug. 6-9 | Department Service Officer School/Membership Workshop | Indianapolis | IND |
| Aug. 7-11 | American Legion Baseball Regional Tournaments | Various locations | CHY, BIS, BDL, GSO, STL, DCA/ BWI, LIT, DEN |
| Aug. 13-19 | Legion Baseball World Series | Shelby, N.C. | CLT |
| Aug. 27-Sept. 4 | 97th National Convention | Baltimore | BWI |
| Sept. 18-20 | Children & Youth Conference | Indianapolis | IND |
| Sept. 25-27 | Americanism Conference | Indianapolis | IND |
| Oct. 9-15 | NEC Fall Meetings | Indianapolis | IND |
| Oct. 24-30 | Legion College | Indianapolis | IND |

Did you know?

■ A new dog tag honoring women veterans is available through Emblem Sales. The dog tag is inscribed with “Women Proudly Served.” To order the dog tag for \$3.95, search for item No. 815.702: www.emblem.legion.org



■ The American Legion hit 40,000 followers on Twitter. Are you one of them? www.twitter.com/AmericanLegion
In addition to getting breaking news about the Legion, the Legion tweets links to other media sources reporting on issues important to membership, valuable information on gaining employment through Legion career fairs, and photos/coverage of American Legion national and local events from across the country.

■ In December, The American Legion Department of Iowa accepted a \$31,626 donation toward Operation Comfort Warriors from Dr Pepper Snapple Group. From July to August last summer, Dr Pepper Snapple Group donated 25 cents for each case of Dr Pepper, 7Up or Snapple products sold. The promotion ran in Fareway, Dahl’s and Hy-Vee food stores in Iowa. www.twitter.com/AmericanLegion

■ In 2014, The American Legion’s Temporary Financial Assistance program disbursed grants totaling \$655,361, benefiting 642 families and 1,452 children. www.legion.org/financialassistance



DATELINE: CAPITOL HILL

New legislation provides VA accountability



Brett P. Reistad,
Chairman, National
Legislative Commission

On Dec. 16, President Barack Obama signed into law **H.R. 83**, the fiscal year (FY) 2015 Omnibus Appropriations bill. The bill includes funding for key military infrastructure projects to support troops and their families at home and abroad. It also includes increased funding to meet obligations to our nation’s veterans.

Additionally, the bill will help address issue related to last year’s VA wait list scandal thanks to funding for the VA Office of Inspector General being increased by \$5 million over the FY 2014 level. It will provide the

resources necessary to continue audits of hospital appointment scheduling and lapses in patient care. The legislation also includes language directing the VA Office of Inspector General to report on problems or deficiencies in the implementation of its recommendations, and on any violations of law by VA employees. The bill also provides:

- \$1.2 billion to fund construction, operation and maintenance of military family housing for more than 1.9 million military families.
- \$416 million for construction and alterations of new or existing military medical facilities. These facilities support and care for 9.8 million eligible beneficiaries, including wounded troops abroad.
- \$394.5 million for essential safety improvements and infrastructure work at seven DoD education activities facilities located within the U.S. and overseas. The funding will help address health, safety, and efficiency problems at these facilities for military children and families.
- \$427 million for construction or alteration of National Guard and reserve facilities in 18 states.
- \$45.2 billion in VA medical services. This includes \$7.2 billion in mental health care services; \$133 million in suicide prevention activities; \$229 million for traumatic brain injury treatment; \$7.4 billion in homeless veterans treatment, services, housing and job training; and \$250 million in rural health initiatives.
- \$209 million to help address new costs related to the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014, such as hiring medical staff, expanding facility capacity and implementing the Caregivers Act, which provides stipends and other assistance to families of seriously wounded veterans.
- \$344 million to help DoD and VA develop electronic health records that will seamlessly transfer medical information.
- \$2.5 billion for the cost of processing disability claims.
- \$562 million in VA construction. Funds will be used for correcting critical seismic deficiencies and repairing crumbling infrastructure.
- \$58.7 billion in advance FY 2016 funding for the VA to provide medical services, medical support and compliance, and to ensure that our veterans have continued access to their medical care.

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



DISTRICT COMMANDER RACE-TO-THE-TOP

The District Commander Race-to-the-Top award is given to district commanders who attain at least 100 percent of the district's assigned membership objective by March 31, 2015. Competition is divided into five categories:

- Category I – districts of 15-1,499 members
- Category II – districts of 1,500-2,999 members
- Category III – districts of 3,000-4,999 members
- Category IV – districts of 5,000-7,499 members
- Category V – districts of 7,500 or more members

First Place Award is a trip to the 97th National Convention in Baltimore, Aug. 28 to Sept. 3. The award will be presented to the top district commander and guest in each category whose district membership on March 31 represents the greatest percentage over the final previous year membership of that district. Cannot be less than 100 percent to qualify. This entitles each winner and guest to a trip to attend the national convention as a distinguished guest of the national commander, including round-trip airfare, tickets to the National Commander's Banquet, and hotel accommodations for six days/five nights. These district commanders will also be awarded a Legion cap that signifies they are a Race-to-the-Top winner and ribbons will be awarded for each of the district's posts.

Second Place Award is presented to the district commander in each category whose district membership on March 31 represents the second highest percentage over the final previous year membership of that district. Cannot be less than 100 percent to qualify. A \$500 check will be awarded.

Third Place Award is presented to the district commander in each category whose district membership on March 31 represents the third highest percentage over the final previous year membership of that district. Cannot be less than 100 percent to qualify. A \$375 check will be awarded.



Kenneth Orrock
National
Membership & Post
Activities Committee
Chairman

A MESSAGE FROM MEMBERSHIP

There's a big difference between being a member of The American Legion and being an engaged member. Engaged members are the members who stay with the organization and go on to do great things. After the Legion becomes a part of your life and you see the results of your involvement, and you see the good that your post has done in your community, you are more likely to stay with the Legion.

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POST ACTIVITIES

Colorado post receives a \$91,000 donation

Honor guard members from the John Harold Buckley Post 32 of Longmont, Colo., recently received an unexpected \$91,000 donation from an anonymous donor – a 2015 Chevrolet 15 passenger bus that's wheelchair accessible.

The anonymous donor was aware of Post 32's honor guard services, and he asked a few members what the post was in need of. The honor guard members "jokingly said that our 20-year-old bus was in need of replacement," said Dennis Sindelir, Post 32's honor guard captain and senior vice commander. The new bus was delivered six months after the conversation took place.

Sindelir said the bus will be used to transport the 30 honor guard post members to several annual events. The members conduct services at military funerals, post colors at local events, educate youth at schools about Americanism and flag etiquette, participate in Memorial Day and Veterans Day services, drive veterans to VA clinics when medical services are needed, visit with veterans at assisted living facilities, and more. Sindelir said the honor guard members volunteer more than 3,500 hours annually.

"The new bus is a welcome sight," Sindelir said.



PLANNER

February

- 1 Four Chaplains Sunday
- 1 Department submissions due for National Law Enforcement Officer of the Year Award and National Firefighter of the Year Award
- 11 85 percent membership target date

22-25 Washington Conference

March

- 1 Eagle Scout of the Year applications due to department headquarters
- 11 90 percent membership target date
- 15 American Legion's birthday