

THE AMERICAN LEGION

Dispatch

May 2014

A National Headquarters Publication

HONOR & REMEMBRANCE



Photo by Bruce Drake

THE EYES OF FREEDOM

Traveling memorial of eight paintings honors 23 fallen men from Lima Company.

By Cameran Richardson

Initially, it was difficult for Cpl. Mike Strahle to stand near the life-sized portraits memorializing 23 men whom he served alongside in Iraq. Ohio-based Lima Company, 3rd Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment — once known as “Lucky Lima” — lost 22 Marines and a Navy corpsman in 2005 to IEDs and enemy fire. But after embracing the “powerful” Lima Company Eyes of Freedom memorial that Ohio artist Anita Miller created for the families of the fallen, Strahle is now exhibiting the memorial around the country, serving alongside his men again.

“Through the Eyes of Freedom memorial, we are educating the public on the good that Lima Company did and that these 23 men weren’t lost for nothing,” said Strahle, who was injured in an IED blast that killed six of the Lima Company men. “The memorial is also carrying on the legacy of the Lima Company men that were lost, as well as all the men and women that we have lost in all conflicts.”

The vision to paint life-sized portraits of the fallen men came to Miller in a dream, and was unveiled on Memorial Day in 2008 at the Ohio Statehouse. The 23 Lima Company men are painted on eight canvases that stand 8.5 feet tall and 6 feet wide. Miller received photos of the men from their families, who Strahle said were distant from the project in the beginning but soon began visiting Miller in her studio, helping her stretch the canvases and sharing stories of their sons.

“When people see the exhibit, it’s sad and it’s going to make people angry,” said Strahle, director of the Eyes of Freedom memorial. “But the main objective is for people to go through all the emotions during the exhibit and come out walking taller and more aware, more proud of what this country has done and what our service men and women have done to protect us. We want people to take away a sense of pride.”

See *The Eyes of Freedom* on Page 4

NEWS ALERT

Share Flag Day events

Flag Day is June 14, and The American Legion *Dispatch* wants to know how your post is celebrating. Email to share your story: ✉ dispatch@legion.org

Download Memorial Day speech

A speech for Memorial Day is available online for American Legion post members to use during their celebratory events. The speech can be altered to taste and audience. Download the speech, located under Media & Communications:

🌐 www.legion.org/publications

Consolidated Post Reports online

The American Legion’s Consolidated Post Report (CPR) assists departments in the documentation of activities that a specific post completed during the 12-month (June 1 through May 31) reporting period. Through July 1, posts can fill out and submit CPR forms online at 🌐 www.mylegion.org; the forms are located under “Post and Department” options. The CPR form can also be filled out manually by downloading it online, located under Membership Services: 🌐 www.legion.org/publications

Vote for your favorite veterans online

During the month of May, visit The American Legion’s website to pick your favorite candidates for America’s Most Beloved Veterans. Veterans receiving the most votes will be featured in the November issue of *The American Legion Magazine*. Cast your vote: 🌐 www.legion.org/belovedveterans

COMMANDER'S MESSAGE

VA leadership changes needed



Dan Dellinger
National Commander

On May 5 during Spring Meetings in Indianapolis, I did one of the hardest things that I have ever had to do as national commander – I called for the resignations of Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki, Under Secretary of Health Robert Petzel and Under Secretary of Benefits Allison Hickey. The American Legion hasn't called for the resignation of a public official in 30 years.

The call for their resignations comes from poor oversight and failed leadership. The American Legion wants answers and solutions to the pattern of scandals that has infected the entire VA system.

CNN reported in late April that the Phoenix VA Medical Center had been keeping a secret waiting list that included veterans waiting more than 200 days for an appointment, which may have resulted in the deaths of 40 veterans. The Legion was also informed that clerks at the VA clinic in Fort Collins, Colo., were instructed last year on how to falsify appointment records so it appeared the small staff of doctors was seeing patients within the agency's goal of 14 days.

VA leadership has demonstrated its incompetence through preventable deaths of veterans, long wait times for medical care, a benefits claims backlog numbering in excess of 596,000, and the awarding of bonuses to senior executives who have overseen such operations. Those problems need addressed at the highest level – starting with new leadership. The American Legion does not see VA enacting the culture change that it so desperately needs with the current leadership in place.

The American Legion is hopeful that our announcement for the resignation of Shinseki, Petzel and Hickey will be acted upon for the betterment of America's veterans. However, if changes in VA leadership are not made, we will continue to make our voice heard. The Legion is committed to ensuring that every VA-eligible veteran receives high-quality health care and preventable deaths at facilities entrusted to provide that care will not be tolerated.

Dan Dellinger

MEMBERSHIP

Recruiters to be honored with 'Building for Tomorrow Today'

During the 2013-2014 membership year, American Legion National Commander Dan Dellinger will award his national commander pin to any Legion Family member who obtains five new members.

A new member is any eligible person joining for the 2014 membership year who was not a member of The American Legion during the 2013 membership year.

Each member listed must be eligible for membership in The American Legion. Forward names of Sons of the American Legion 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 program, only one pin will be awarded per individual.



June 30, 2014, or when supplies are exhausted.

Also, National Commander Dellinger will award his "Building for Tomorrow Today" coin to any Legion Family member who recruits 15 new members.

www.legion.org/commanderpin

FUNDRAISING PROGRAM

NEF goal:
\$1 million

The American Legion's National Emergency Fund (NEF) program is National Commander Dan Dellinger's primary fundraiser this year.

A natural disaster can strike at any time, devastating the lives of men and women who honorably served their country. While we can't prevent a natural disaster, the Legion does provide relief to veterans and their families affected by devastation.

Since 1989, the NEF program has provided more than \$8 million in direct financial assistance to posts, Legionnaires and their families. The program helps with out-of-pocket expenses, including but not limited to food, temporary housing and clothing. All donations made to NEF go directly toward the program.

To donate: www.legion.org/nef

NEF Commander's Challenge

American Legion department commanders are challenged to assist in fundraising efforts for the Legion's National Emergency Fund. The departments currently in first place for their respective membership category include:

- Category 1 (100,000+): New York
- Category 2 (65,000+): Illinois
- Category 3 (40,000+): Maryland
- Category 4 (25,000+): Nebraska
- Category 5 (10,000+): Delaware
- Category 6 (9,999-): District of Columbia

www.legion.org/emergency/challenge

NATIONAL ADJUTANT'S MESSAGE

Post revitalization increases membership

Efforts in Georgia and New York transfer nearly 300 members into local posts.

By Daniel S. Wheeler

Post revitalization is one of the tactics within The American Legion's five-year strategic plan for sustained membership growth – a plan developed to help the organization reach a record total in membership by 2019, the Legion's centennial. Through recent successful post revitalization efforts in New York and Georgia, Legionnaires are supporting the plan and in turn moving the membership needle upward.

The Bronx, N.Y., revitalization effort was based out of Samuel H. Young Post 620 with the goal of revitalizing a district, rather than a specific post. For three days, dozens of New York Legionnaires, National Membership & Post Activities Committee Chairman Kenneth Orrock and national headquarters staff members made phone calls and knocked on the doors of relapsed members and department headquarters post members.

"We've all identified the same problems with membership throughout New York City, so it's great for so many people to come together to help out with this," said Bronx County Adjutant Joe Goonan. "It's important that we get these guys – especially these young guys – hooked up into a local post."

The revitalization team transferred 109 members into local posts, had two renewals and signed up four new members.

"It's been really exciting to see the camaraderie and everyone coming together to produce this kind of efficiency," Orrock said. "The work leading up to it, as well as the work by the local Legion family, has been exceptional."

Revitalization efforts in Augusta, Ga., at Carter Burdell Hagler Post 178 resulted in the transfer of 214 members into local posts, one renewal and six new members. The revitalization team consisted of 14 Georgia Legionnaires, several Auxiliary members and a service officer who assisted 20 veterans with VA benefits.

Orrock encourages other American Legion departments to take advantage of the resources available for revitalization efforts with national headquarters staff members.

"Departments need to recognize the value in (post revitaliza-



American Legion members from the Bronx knocked on doors of relapsed members during a post revitalization effort. Photo by Amy C. Elliott

tions)," he said. "It's really national staff coming in with a tool chest of opportunities that can benefit your county, district and department."

If you need help re-energizing or breathing life back into a post or district, I encourage you to utilize resources provided by national headquarters where staff members, along with assistance from department leadership, help with a revitalization effort.

To learn more about post revitalization, visit:

www.legion.org/membership

I also encourage you to access mylegion.org for assistance with recruitment and retention efforts. Post 1181 in Middletown, N.Y., was in fear of losing its charter after slipping to eight members. But Post 1181 now boasts 70 members – with more than 30 of them attending monthly post meetings – after utilizing mylegion.org. The site allows posts, counties and districts to search for veterans whose memberships have lapsed or who are members of the department headquarters post. Post 1181 members also visited the county tax office to identify veterans receiving a tax exemption.

"We did a lot of mailings and got some returns," said Bob Hayward, a member of nearby Post 151. "But the best source is myLegion.org."

Find archived issues of *Dispatch* online:

www.legion.org/dispatch

Dispatch

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From *The Eyes of Freedom* on Page 1

Since 2011, the Eyes of Freedom memorial has traveled throughout Ohio and to 14 other states, including Indiana. The American Legion Department of Indiana assisted Indiana Funeral Care in hosting the memorial at a community center in Greenwood, Ind., for three days.

“This memorial represents the Americans who have given their all to ensure our future,” said Ken Cooper, Department of Indiana southern vice commander. “We were honored to recognize their loss but more importantly, this memorial helps ensure that we go forward recognizing that their sacrifice has given us the grace and freedom to move onwards.”

Strahle said throughout his travels with the Eyes of Freedom memorial, American Legion departments and posts have been instrumental in helping their community partners host the exhibit. Additionally, Legion Riders oftentimes help escort the memorial into town, which travels in a freight truck provided by R+L Carriers, Inc., of Wilmington, Ohio. The truck, along with nearly 60 other R+L freight trucks, is wrapped with images of the paintings.

Strahle said the memorial can be set up in any indoor facility, such as a city hall or community center, as long as it has the capability to house the large paintings, which are meant to be arranged in an octagon.

A set of each fallen warrior’s boots is placed beneath his image in the painting, along with an ever-living candle. “The boots remind visitors that the painting is of a real person,” Strahle said. “And the burning candle signifies that the 22 Marines and Navy corpsman live on.” Visitors can leave notes or mementos in the boots for Strahle to take back to the families.

A Marine flag is also on display at every exhibit for visitors to sign and then it’s given as a souvenir to the event host.

“I have the best job ever - I’m still connected with my men,” Strahle said. “When veterans from all war eras come to the exhibit, they are standing in front of my men, but they are not seeing my men. They are seeing the guys that they served with. It’s very healing, and it’s empowering.”

To host the Lima Company Eyes of Freedom memorial in your community, visit: www.limacompanymemorial.org

ASK A SERVICE OFFICER

PTSD treatment options



Cajun Comeau
Department Service
Officer, North Carolina

Q. Are there PTSD treatment options at my local VA?

A. Every VA facility has post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) specialists and programs to provide treatment for veterans who suffer from the invisible wound of war. VA PTSD treatment services are available for veterans who:

- Completed active military service in the U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines or Coast Guard (or Merchant Marines during World War II).
- Were discharged under other than dishonorable conditions.
- Were National Guard members or reservists who completed a

federal deployment to a combat zone.

VA PTSD services offered include education, evaluation and treatment, as well as outpatient and inpatient care. Outpatient PTSD care can be provided by a specialist or in one of the following outpatient PTSD programs:

- PTSD clinical teams
- Substance use PTSD teams
- Women’s stress disorder teams
- Day hospitals

Specialized Intensive PTSD Programs (SIPPs) provide PTSD treatment services in an inpatient or residential setting. SIPPs include:

- Evaluation and brief PTSD treatment units
- PTSD residential rehabilitation treatment and PTSD domiciliary programs
- Specialized inpatient PTSD units
- Women’s trauma recovery programs

SIPPs also provide treatment to address other needs such as employment, housing and recreation. Some SIPPs offer services for veterans who experienced military sexual trauma, have a substance use disorder, and more. The PTSD programs include evaluation, case management in 24-hour therapeutic settings and psychotherapy treatment that is individualized to meet the veteran’s needs.

Find a specialized PTSD program online: www.va.gov/directory/guide/ptsd_flash.asp

Email claims questions to: askso@legion.org

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

CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION SPOTLIGHT

Post 201 in Louisville, Ky.

Chartered in 1936, Highland Post 201 in Louisville, Ky., purchased a log cabin in 1940 for \$15,800. Prior to it becoming the home of Post 201, the log cabin had been a night club called Inn Logola where visitors could purchase a “deluxe dinner” for \$1.

The log cabin suffered two fires, causing severe damage to the interior. However, according to Post 201’s Centennial Celebration web page, “Out of the ashes of both fires grew a bigger and better Highland Post 201, standing even stronger and prouder.”



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.legion.org/centennial

POST ACTIVITIES

Legion band heads to Normandy

By Laura Edwards

The Holland (Mich.) American Legion Band will travel to Europe in early June for a tour of concerts to mark the 70th anniversary of D-Day and the Battle of Normandy. Such a trip – which they also made in 2009 for the 65th anniversary – is entirely in keeping with the band’s history and purpose.



Allen Timmerman, a trumpet player for the Holland American Legion Band, rehearses for the band’s performance in Normandy in June for the 70th anniversary of D-Day. Photo by Lucas Carter

Band director Thom Working said that “even though we are technically a community band, we were formed by The American Legion in 1920.”

Willard G. Leenhouts Post 6 of Holland received its initial charter in June 1919, and quickly formed a musical group made up of both Legionnaires and community members – a mix that persists to this day, with around 85 performers. The band performs year-round at concerts, veterans homes and military funerals.

About 50 band members will make the trip to Europe, as well as members of Post 6’s color guard. The musical lineup is connected to the era, from Glenn Miller to the “Band of Brothers” soundtrack to European resistance anthems.

“When we performed at the Normandy American Cemetery (in 2009), there were a

couple of times where the band was having trouble playing because they were choking back tears,” Working said. “To this day, the French in Normandy are so amazingly grateful to the Americans and the other Allies.”

Post 6 commander and color guard leader Scott Peirce attended the 2009 Normandy trip and “felt like I was on hallowed ground many times,” said Peirce, an Army veteran. “The history came to life in a way that I hadn’t anticipated.”

Like Working, Peirce was struck by the band’s warm reception in Europe. “They haven’t forgotten us a bit,” Peirce said. His fascination with the time period keeps him in mind that “to read the history of that area, they did participate as much as they could, being unarmed people out in the country more or less. And they helped the Americans, and they still very much appreciate our sacrifice and our efforts to come over there and be part of their celebrations. We feel welcomed when we visit.”

Also during the trip, the Holland band will visit the gravesite of Post 6’s namesake: Willard Leenhouts. He was the first soldier from Holland to die in World War I and is buried at the cemetery in Belleau, France.



HONOR AND REMEMBRANCE

Celebrating the departed

By Capt. D.W. Janszky

In June 2009, I returned from my first year-long overseas combat deployment and was asked to join American Legion Post 38 in Haddonfield, N.J. Having no expectations on what being a Legionnaire would entail, I followed the guidance of the welcoming post members, and I was quickly petitioned to be part of the many social endeavors our post regularly takes part in, including the Last Man’s Club.

American Legion posts nationwide organized these clubs to preserve the memories of veterans from all wars and to pay tribute to departed comrades. On April 7, Post 38 celebrated its 74th annual Last Man’s Club dinner with more than 200 attendees.

The evening featured special guests, patriotic music, a POW/MIA remembrance service and special recognition of the veterans who passed away within the past year. One of my favorite aspects of remembering our past comrades is in considering the men and women I will never meet, and yet feel no less kinship with due to their commitment to service.

The dinner also makes me realize how I am just a small cog operating in a much larger machine that has and will continue well beyond whatever paltry contributions I make.

We are the only Legion post in New Jersey to have a Last Man’s Club dinner, and it is our great privilege to do so. We enjoy the sense of commitment associated with such a distinctive ceremony.

Did you know?

American Legion Emblem Sales sold 1.1 million U.S. flags in 2013. Visit Emblem Sales to purchase 100 percent American-made flags: www.emblem.legion.org

‘Like’ American Legion Flags on Facebook to participate in contests for a chance to win outdoor U.S. flags: www.facebook.com/americanlegionflags

Dave O’Brien, a member of American Legion Post 153 in Olathe, Kan., shook hands with former Sen. Bob Dole on April 21 during a three-day visit to his home state.

MEMBERSHIP

Spot, assess, recruit

American Legion Post 295 in German town, Md., had 27 members when Bob Ouellette transferred there 13 years ago. Today, the post boasts 466 members and will surpass 129 percent for the current membership year. Ouellette attributes the tremendous growth and recruiting success to “working harder than other posts and going out in the community to seek new members,” he said. “Every Legionnaire has the ability to stop the slide because you believe in The American Legion.”



Members of Post 295 are active in their community by serving food to family members of wounded warriors at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, and by attending veteran-specific events such as Rolling Thunder, the Military Bowl Parade and Hiring Our Heroes job fairs. Ouellette said during the most recent job fair that Post 295 members attended, 54 new Legion members were recruited in four hours.

“To achieve this success, Post 295 members have used sales techniques and our knowledge of American Legion programs to break down barriers to membership,” Ouellette said. “And we use another technique that we developed called Spot, Assess and Recruit.

“Spot: ‘Hello, did you serve or are you currently serving in the military?’ Assess: Listen to their response to see if they meet the Legion’s membership dates. Recruit: ‘Thank you for your service! What Legion post do you belong to?’ If they don’t belong to one, explain the benefits of membership. The American Legion has something to offer everyone.”



DATELINE: CAPITOL HILL

TRICARE for Life to cut discounts



Brett P. Reistad,
Chairman, National
Legislative Commission

More than 400,000 military retirees and senior dependents in the TRICARE for Life (TFL) program will have to pay the full amount for certain prescription refills if they use a retail pharmacy rather than a military pharmacy or a mail service. The change, part of a pilot program created by Congress and approved by President Barack Obama, is meant to help control the cost of military health care and is expected to cut \$120 million this year from the \$3.3 billion the Department of Defense (DoD) pays annually for TFL pharmacy needs. TFL serves about two million military retirees and their dependents over 65, and it accounts for nearly half of the \$7.1 billion DoD spends each year on its pharmacy program.

The pilot program includes more than 400 medications – mostly brand-name – for chronic conditions, such as high blood pressure, diabetes and asthma. Prescriptions for pain relievers, antibiotics and other medicines for acute conditions are not affected. With TFL, members can fill approved prescriptions three times at a retail outlet, usually a 30-day supply, for a \$17 co-payment. If members don’t switch to a military pharmacy or mail service, they’re responsible for the drug’s entire cost for subsequent refills. If they do switch, they will owe \$13 for each 90-day supply through the Express Scripts mail service or nothing when they use a military base pharmacy. After a year, members can opt out of the pilot program and return to paying \$17 for a 30-day supply for their retail refills.

TRICARE for Life will grant waivers on a case-by-case basis due to “personal need or hardship, emergency, or other special circumstance.”

Work Opportunity Tax Credit extended

On April 28, the Senate Finance Committee passed **S. 2260**, the Expiring Provisions Improvement Reform and Efficiency Act. The bill will extend a number of expired or soon-to-be expiring tax credits, including a Legion-supported extension of the Work Opportunity Tax Credit for qualified veterans. Other provisions of the bill include a tax credit for employers of activated reservists, as well as a provision whereby any military basic housing allowance received by an active member of the military is not considered income for purposes of calculating whether an individual qualifies as a low-income tenant for the low income housing tax credit program. The bill will be sent to the Senate floor for consideration.

New veterans fellowship program announced

On April 8, Reps. Mike Thompson, D-Calif., Don Young, R-Alaska, and House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs ranking member Mike Michaud, D-Maine, announced the formation of the Veterans Congressional Caucus Fellowship Program. The mission of the fellowship program is to increase the number of veterans working on Capitol Hill by providing an educational curriculum where they will learn the legislative process and how to assist constituents dealing with federal agencies. Thompson and Young, both Army veterans, said the program will accept its first participants this summer. Learn more online: www.mikethompson.house.gov/

MEMBERSHIP INCENTIVES AND AWARDS

EAGLE INCENTIVE

The June issue of American Legion *Dispatch* will announce the six American Legion departments who showed the highest percentage of membership gain in their respective size categories to receive eagle statues (pictured below).

The Commander Dellinger Eagle Award will be awarded to the top department in each Big Twelve category showing the largest percentage of membership growth between the 55 and 100 percent target dates. A seventh eagle will be presented to the national vice commander whose region displayed the highest percentage of membership gain during the same period.

The Big Twelve categories are:

- Category I – departments of 100,000 or more members
- Category II – departments of 65,000 - 99,999 members
- Category III – departments of 40,000 - 64,999 members
- Category IV – departments of 25,000 - 39,999 members
- Category V – departments of 10,000 - 24,999 members
- Category VI – departments of 9,999 or less members



DISTRICT LEADERS REWARDED FOR POST VISITS

The District Commander Post Visitation Award is an incentive for personal visits to posts by district commanders and vice commanders. Personal contact at this level sets the example for post membership workers to make the personal contacts necessary for a successful membership program.

Criteria. The district commander and/or vice commanders must visit each post in the district during their year. For districts with more than 30 posts, the district vice commanders can assist in making visits, but the district commander must visit at least 30 of the posts personally.

Certification. A list of posts in each district can be obtained with the assistance of department headquarters. At the completion of the 100 percent visit requirement, the district commander will send the completed spreadsheet to the department, which will forward it to National Headquarters by Aug. 1, 2014.

Awards.

- Category 1 (up to 20 posts), \$100
- Category 2 (21 to 35 posts), \$200
- Category 3 (36 to 50 posts), \$300
- Category 4 (51 to 65 posts), \$400
- Category 5 (65 or more posts), \$500

www.legion.org/commander/districtpost

A MESSAGE FROM MEMBERSHIP



Kenneth Orrock
National Membership &
Post Activities Committee
Chairman

“Oftentimes, veterans need to talk to other veterans who understand the sacrifice and adversity that they have encountered as a servicemember – that’s what you’re going to find at an American Legion post. You’re going to find a veteran of your generation and of past generations who have gone through the same trials and tribulations that you have, and who will be able to help you navigate your way not only through the system but through life as you go forward.”

Learn more about membership messages from watching American Legion videos online: www.legion.org/recruiting

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EMERGENCY RELIEF

Legionnaires deliver supplies to mudslide victims

Oso, Wash., was devastated March 22 when a massive mudslide struck the small, rural community, killing more than 40 people and destroying many homes. Food, clothing and other necessities began pouring in to the nearby town of Arlington, but the neighboring town of Darrington was cut off from those supplies — the highway that connected Arlington to Darrington was flooded.

Realizing the need to distribute the overflow of supplies from Arlington to Darrington, members of American Legion Post 91 in Burlington, Wash., mapped out a new, extended route and acquired a truck.

"The mudslide has touched many, whether they personally know someone involved or not," said Jerry Hughes, sergeant-at-arms for District 2 in The American Legion Department of Washington. "Even though we (members of Post 91) don't live there, we are still fairly close-knit and want to help out."

After three trips from Arlington to Darrington, Post 91 members hauled more than 2,800 pounds of supplies and drove 482 roundtrip miles. The supplies were delivered in a Toys for Tots truck, donated to Post 91 by the Skagit Valley Marine Corps League. "The American Legion Post 91 enjoys a good standing relationship with other veterans groups in the area," Hughes said.



PLANNER

JUNE

- 14 Flag Day (Pause for the pledge at 7 p.m. Eastern Time)

JULY

- 1 Department Children & Youth reports due to National Headquarters
- 15 Child Welfare Foundation grant applications due to National Headquarters
- 18-26 American Legion Boys Nation, Washington, D.C.
- 31 - Aug. 2 National Membership Workshop, Indianapolis
- 31 - Aug. 2 Department Service Officers School, Indianapolis

 www.legion.org/dispatch