

THE AMERICAN LEGION

Dispatch

November 2014

A National Headquarters Publication

MEMBERSHIP

KIOSK SUPPORTS COMMANDER'S 4X4 GOAL

The Legion Family branded kiosk will help raise \$4 million and increase membership to four million.

By Henry Howard

American Legion National Commander Mike Helm didn't want to single out a Legion program for his fundraising goal during his year-long tenure as national commander. Instead, he included all six of the Legion charity programs, as well as those from the American Legion Auxiliary, in his goal to raise \$4 million.

The \$4 million in Legion Family charity program donations represents one part of the commander's 4x4 plan – the other “4” represents four million members for the Legion, Auxiliary and Sons of The American Legion combined.

“The goals look lofty, both for membership and fundraising, but in reality we'll reach those goals together,” Helm said. “If we're going to be strong, we also need the Auxiliary to be strong, the Sons of the American Legion to be strong and the Legion Riders to be strong.”

To achieve Helm's 4x4 goal, National Headquarters is providing new brochures and a kiosk display. All departments will receive one American Legion Family branded kiosk. The kiosk is intended to be used to display up to nine brochures during events, such as membership recruiting functions, job fairs and community events. Posts and departments can choose which specific brochures to display, but

they are encouraged to use ones promoting Legion Family membership and charities.

It is the responsibility of each department to coordinate usage of the kiosk with districts and posts that wish to borrow it. Departments, districts and posts can also purchase additional Legion Family branded kiosks through Emblem Sales. To purchase, visit: www.emblem.legion.org/legion-family-kiosk/productioninfo/735.5041

Or call: (888) 453-4466

With each kiosk purchased, 100 of the following brochures will be provided:

- A new American Legion Charities brochure that provides an overview of the six programs and includes a donation form.
- A trifold with membership applications for the Legion, Auxiliary and SAL.
- The Auxiliary's Foundation brochure that



Photo by Lucas Carter

NEWS ALERT

How the new Veterans Choice Card works

The Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act of 2014, signed into law by President Barack Obama on Aug. 7, is a special \$10 billion Veterans Choice Fund. Over the next three years, VA is to use the fund as needed to buy care from non-VA care providers for veterans if they face long waits for VA care – defined initially as more than 30 days – or if they reside more than 40 miles from VA care. Learn more about how the Veterans Choice Card will work: www.legion.org/legislative/qa

View upcoming Legion career fairs

Veterans and military spouses are invited to attend upcoming career fairs throughout the country sponsored by The American Legion, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and Recruit Military. Search for job fairs near you: www.legion.org/careers/jobfairs

Sign up for the Legion's electronic mailing of its Veterans Career Center Newsletter, which offers a listing of military job fairs, information on career resources and more:

www.legion.org/newsletters

Download 2015 National Membership Awards Manual

The American Legion's awards manual features important membership dates, information on awards and national contests, and material to help build a membership campaign. Download the manual online under Internal Affairs: www.legion.org/publications

COMMANDER'S MESSAGE

Help veterans with VA needs



Mike Helm
National Commander

In reaction to the scandal that surfaced within the Department of Veterans Affairs last spring, The American Legion began hosting Veterans Crisis Command Centers (VCCCs) in June, helping veterans enroll in the VA health-care system, file benefits claims and check on the status of pending claims. Over the course of four months, the Legion held VCCCs in 11 cities and towns, helped more than 3,000 veterans and their families, and secured nearly \$900,000 in retroactive VA benefits compensation.

On Sept. 30, the Legion transitioned from "crisis" to "out-reach" and hosted its first, of many, Veterans Benefits Centers in Washington, D.C., assisting 378 veterans with VA benefits. After noticing the success the VCCCs were having, several American Legion departments and posts saw the benefit of hosting their

own VCCCs by pulling together resources from the VA and other community providers to help local veterans with their health-care needs.

Post 71 in Lake Wales, Fla., hosted a veterans town hall meeting in July where local VA staff provided information on benefits claims, burial in a national cemetery, homeless outreach efforts and grants, and vet-ready centers to the more than 50 veterans in attendance. Also in July, the Department of Arizona conducted its first of three Veterans Crisis Command Centers. The department held VCCCs at posts in Mesa, Tucson and Peoria, assisting more than 100 veterans.

The Department of North Carolina hosted a Veterans Benefits Action Center Oct. 21-23 at Post 116 in Fuquay-Varina where Legion service officers and VA representatives assisted veterans with benefits claims and VA health-care enrollment. The department publicized the event through print and radio announcements and by collaborating with the Disabled American Veterans, The American Red Cross, Military Order of the Purple Heart, Wake and Durham County Veteran's Services, and the local VA.

In effort to ensure every VA-eligible veteran receives their benefits owed to them, I encourage departments, districts and posts to conduct their own veterans benefits center. Partner with local representatives from the local VA and from other veterans service organizations and promote your efforts in the media. Remember, face-to-face advocacy can produce real results for veterans and their families.

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

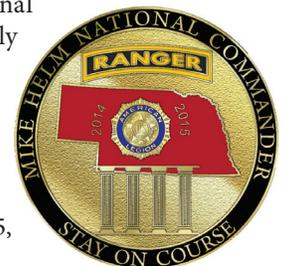
During the 2014-2015 membership year, American Legion National Commander Mike Helm will award his national commander pin to any Legion Family member who obtains three new members or renews five members into the Legion.

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

Legion launches fundraising, awareness campaign

The TV ads focus on the mental health needs of today's returning veterans.

By Daniel S. Wheeler

I recently sent a letter to national, department and post leadership announcing that The American Legion was launching a national awareness campaign on Oct. 28 to raise funds to help our organization assist veterans, their families, young people and communities. The first installment of the campaign focuses on the mental health needs of veterans, particularly those who are battling the signature wounds of today's war era: post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury.

The campaign is featured on various national networks and time slots. The network channels include: Smithsonian, Military, Hallmark Movie, Military History, Great American Country and Fox News.

Because these messages are aired nationally and before audiences that may be unfamiliar with The American Legion and its services, you and your post may receive calls, visits and other correspondences from veterans in need, or their families. If the request is routine, please handle as you usually would, as being a service organization.

If the need is urgent, refer the veteran or family member to a VA emergency support service, such as:

- Suicide prevention hotline: ☎ (800) 273-8255 and press 1
- Texting service: 838255
- Online chat service: 🌐 www.veteranscrisisline.net

If a veteran comes to you or your post as a result of the message, please be welcoming and helpful. Offer him or her the services of the nearest accredited American Legion service



officer, who can easily be found online: 🌐 www.legion.org/serviceofficers

Or connect the veteran to local resources through your post service officer or other members.

If you have further questions, please feel free to contact Chuck Krupa, American Legion managing director of non-member fundraising: ✉ ckrupa@legion.org

See 2014 Fall Meetings resolutions

🌐 www.legion.org/library

Dispatch

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describes its charity programs.

"Posts, units and squadrons that are doing things for veterans and for their community are growing the organization," Helm said. "Legion involvement at the local level is very important for membership success."

Helm also believes a strong membership helps drive donations to the Legion's six charities – Operation Comfort Warriors, Legacy Scholarship Fund, National Emergency Fund, Child Welfare Foundation, Endowment Fund and Soldier's Wish. Several Auxiliary charities are also a part of Helm's \$4 million fundraising goal, including the Emergency Fund, Spirit of Youth Scholarship Fund, Children of Warriors National President's Workshop and American Legion Auxiliary Foundation.

"The exciting part about fundraising for American Legion Charities is that you can tell people that 100 percent of all money raised is utilized for the charitable purposes," he said. "If you give \$1 to Operation Comfort Warriors or \$1 to Soldier's Wish, every dollar goes toward the fund that you care about."

Tax-deductible donations to American Legion Charities may be made by mail or online by visiting: www.legion.org/donate

A donation may be made to one or more programs of your choice. Donations provide: financial assistance to military and veteran families with children at home who are in need; relief for families of veterans who have suffered devastating losses after natural disasters; employment opportunities for transitioning servicemembers through the hosting of job fairs; representation on Capitol Hill to protect military retiree benefits and to quality of life for military members; and more.

ASK A SERVICE OFFICER

Veterans benefits by state



Cajun Comeau
Department Service
Officer, North Carolina

Q. What benefits does my state offer?

A. When most veterans think of VA benefits, their attention likely gravitates toward compensation for service-connected conditions, pension benefits, VA home loans and education benefits. These and many other federal VA benefits are the most widely publicized and utilized benefits for veterans and their dependents.

In many cases, the respective state of residence offers veterans assistance and rehabilitation programs and benefits. Many eligible veterans never realize that these programs exist and many do not have an idea of how to apply for the state-level benefits.

In the state of North Carolina where I live, the North Carolina Division of Veterans Affairs offers programs to assist eligible veterans and dependents with housing, property tax relief, employment preference, and educational benefits. North Carolina also offers guardian appointment, hunting and fishing licenses, veteran automobile license plates, and a veteran's driver license. North Carolina is not alone in providing special benefits and programs to veterans and dependents. The state of Massachusetts and others states may partially or completely waive the cost of college at state-supported institutions for eligible veterans and dependents. Massachusetts also awards certain discharged military veterans with \$500 to \$1,000 based on honorable service.

Veterans can find their State Veteran's Benefits information online:

www.military.com/benefits

When applying for state benefits, it is important that the eligible veteran utilizes an accredited veterans service officer. Find a Legion service officer: www.legion.org/serviceofficers

An Internet search for state veterans service administration will yield a list of representatives or a point of contact. These state benefits programs were created and are funded to assist those who have served and those that have supported that service.

Email claims questions to: askso@legion.org

CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION SPOTLIGHT

Post 479 in Swanton, Ohio

American Legion Family members from the 1st District of Ohio recently celebrated the 90th birthday of Post 479 in Swanton by "reliving the roaring 1920s." A local high school band sang patriotic songs while the post hosted a hog roast and served food from the era.

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



LEGION CHARITIES

Teddy bears support Legion programs

Vermont Teddy Bear Co. — the nation's top producer of handcrafted teddy bears — is introducing limited-edition bears to support The American Legion.

The keepsake teddy bears feature the Legion emblem on a white T-shirt and cap, which can be personalized with a department, district or post name. Additionally, a collection of bears honoring all five branches of the military, as well as a camouflage bear, will be available for purchase. Twenty percent of proceeds from the sales of all the bears will be donated to The American Legion to help the organization continue to provide support to veterans and their families, active-duty servicemembers, youth and community members.

"The American Legion has a broad range of programs for America's children, veterans and military families, and we welcome the support of Vermont Teddy Bear," American Legion National Commander Mike Helm said. "Each purchase of these wonderfully crafted bears directly supports Legion programs, providing the necessary resources to continue our devotion to our fellow servicemembers and veterans."

The specially designed American Legion bears are only available now through Dec. 24, 2015.

Order the Legion bears online: www.vermontteddybear.com/legion
Call to order: (800) 829-BEAR (2327)



MYLEGION.ORG

Legion's new membership renewal campaign

American Legion National Commander Mike Helm wants to see all departments succeed at hitting 100 percent membership during the 2014-2015 membership year.

To help departments succeed, National Headquarters will be refreshing a list of members currently in the direct renewal campaign featured on myLegion.org. The data will be refreshed on the third Thursday of each month.

The data is compiled in separate files by district. Department commanders are encouraged to enlist their district officers to watch the renewal efforts at each post with the data.

To access the data, log on to:

www.mylegion.org

Once logged on, follow the four instructions:

1. On the tool bar, click "Downloads."
2. Click "Miscellaneous Reports and Downloads."
3. Click "Generate" next to "Members in Direct Renewal Campaign."
4. Save a file on your desktop by right clicking on "Download" and selecting "Save target as."

Did you know?

■ The American Legion's Child Welfare Foundation provided \$566,691 in grants to 18 nonprofit organizations whose mission is to care for the well-being of youth. See the list of 2015 grant recipients: www.legion.org/youth

■ The Samsung American Legion Scholarship awarded \$20,000 each to nine students. See the 2014 recipients and qualifications for the scholarship: www.legion.org/scholarships

■ Since 1926, The American Legion has been awarding its School Award Medal to students who demonstrate six qualities that define character: courage, honor, leadership, patriotism, scholarship and service. In its first year, 145 students received medals. In 2013, more than 18,000 medals were awarded.

Now that the 2014-2015 school year is in session, Legion posts are encouraged to visit local schools to promote the program and its awards. Download a brochure on The American Legion School Award Medal program, found under Americanism: www.legion.org/publications

■ Last January, The American Legion launched a new, simplified Paid Up for Life program. The Legion's goal was to sign up 850 new PUFL members by May 2014 Spring Meetings. The Legion surpassed the goal by March, achieving 3,269 new Paid Up For Life memberships. And as of early October, more than 15,400 Legionnaires are new PUFL members.

Learn more about becoming a Paid Up for Life member:

www.legion.org/join/pufl

LEGION MEMBERSHIP

Live goat is membership incentive

District commanders in The American Legion Department of South Dakota have an incentive to meet their membership goal for 2014-2015 — a live goat named Pinocchio. As of right now, South Dakota district commanders believe that whoever has the lowest membership percentage will be taking care of the goat until the end of the following membership year when another district is lower in membership.

But Terry Hanson, South Dakota membership chairman, said he's not going to make them take care of the goat — the goat will travel to district meetings and fall and winter conferences, but live at its owner's home. Instead, he's going to let everyone know at the mid-winter membership banquet and the department's convention which district has the lowest membership by making the district commander wear a neon yellow T-shirt that says "Goatbuster" on the front and "S.D. Basement District Commander" on the back with the Legion emblem.



"The best part is, we are all having fun with the goat," Hanson said. "I'm a big pusher in trying to get people involved and membership up."

The goat has also helped raise funds for the various department programs. Whenever Hanson brings Pinocchio to a meeting, Legion Family members pay money for other members to kiss the goat.



DATELINE: CAPITOL HILL

2015 COLA increase for veterans is 1.7 percent



Brett P. Reistad,
Chairman, National
Legislative Commission

On Oct. 22, the Bureau of Labor Statistics announced an increase to the Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for federal payments. The 2015 COLA for military retired pay, Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) annuities, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) disability and survivor benefits, and Social Security benefits will be 1.7 percent. This change will be effective Dec. 1, 2014, and it will appear in January 2015 payments, which will be paid on Dec. 31, 2014, because Jan. 1, 2015, is a federal holiday.

There are two groups of retired military servicemembers who will not receive the full 1.7 percent increase: servicemembers who retired in 2014, and servicemembers who selected the Career Status Bonus (CSB)/ Redux retirement plan.

Military retirees who retired in 2014 will receive a pro-rated COLA based upon the amount of inflation experienced in the calendar quarters since they retired. Those who retired in the first quarter of the 2014 year (January, February or March) will receive the full 1.7 percent COLA, and those who retired in the last quarter of the year (October, November or December) will receive no COLA adjustment. Those who retired in the second quarter of the year (April, May or June) or the third quarter of the year (July, August or September) will receive pro-rated COLAs. However, those amounts have not yet been announced. All who retired during 2014 will receive full-year COLAs in future years.

Military retirees who chose the CSB/Redux retirement plan agreed to accept reduced COLAs in exchange for the Career Status Bonus received while serving. Redux retirees' COLAs are 1 percent less than the regular COLA rate.

FY 2015 National Defense Authorization Act updates

House and Senate staff members of the Armed Services Committees continue to draft a compromise Fiscal Year 2015 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) bill. However, it appears the Senate will be unable to pass its version of the NDAA specifying the budget and expenditures of the Department of Defense (DoD). The Senate Armed Services Committee passed its version of the NDAA, **S. 2410**, and sent it to the Senate floor where it's on the Senate calendar and awaits debate. The bill provides \$514 billion, including \$496 billion for the DoD base budget and \$17.7 billion for other national security programs.

The likely bill to be worked on by the Senate is the House-passed **H.R. 4435**, the Howard P. "Buck" McKeon National Defense Authorization Act, which is currently on the Senate calendar. The legislation authorizes \$521.3 billion for the base budget and \$79.4 billion for Overseas Contingency Operations, primarily in Afghanistan.

Even though the Senate has not passed a NDAA bill, the committee staff members are pre-negotiating a conference committee bill at this time for review when Congress returns on Nov. 12.

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

The American Legion's Online Extension Institute is a great tool to help new members understand the structure and history of the organization. The veteran will come away with a different appreciation for the organization, for the role that they play in it, and for additional roles that they take on as their time as a Legionnaire continues. Take the course online:  www.legion.org/media

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

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MEMBERSHIP

2014 Gold Brigade spotlight: Robert W. Hicks of Milford, Del.

Two-time American Legion Gold Brigade Award recipient Robert Wayne Hicks of Post 2 in Milford, Del., recruited 198 new members into the Legion in 2014, placing him in the top five overall. The U.S. Navy Vietnam veteran said he has already signed up enough new members to earn his third Gold Brigade Award for the 2014-2015 membership year; his goal is to earn National Recruiter of the Year status.

Hicks said he attended events, parties and banquets, "you name it, and I was there always asking (people) if they were a veteran or if they knew of a veteran. I leave no stone unturned.

"I think membership is the most important part of The American Legion. Membership numbers show our strength when our national commander goes before Congress or the president, and they see the greatest membership representing and backing him."

As the first vice commander of Post 2, Hicks said his officers know "that I will not procrastinate when it comes to membership or any of my duties."



PLANNER

November

27-30 Holiday Blood Donor Drive

December

7 Pearl Harbor Day

10 75 percent membership target date

25 Christmas

January

9-10 Membership & Post Activities Planning Session

15 Deadline for the following nominations: Employer of Veterans Award, Employ the Older Worker Award, Employment Service Award and National Organization on Disability Award