

The Sons of The American Legion

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Indianapolis, IN 46206



NATIONAL UPDATE

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Spring 2013



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Crescendo from Page 2

opened in Pittsburgh back in December and another just opened in San Antonio in March. More houses will be built in other states, just as soon as we raise the money needed. I encourage you to visit a Fisher House. Seeing is believing.

I accepted an invitation to visit the Fisher House in Minneapolis earlier this year and met with the coordinators. On that cold, winter day I was fortunate to talk with a temporary resident, a woman named Sue. She informed me that her husband was receiving needed care nearby and would remain hospitalized for several weeks. Due to the financial burden, Sue would not have been able to be near her husband if not for the existence and hospitality of that Fisher

House. She was housed in one of 30 rooms in the facility, 29 of which were occupied. As you can imagine, there's a continued need for expansion of existing facilities and future construction throughout the nation. In addition to raising money for food and supplies needed, S.A.L. members can also help their nearest Fisher House by reaching out to volunteer.

Whether your actions are aimed at Fisher House or Child Welfare or any other American Legion program, make sure your squadron's efforts are noted when submitting the annual Consolidated Report Form. I cannot stress enough the importance of making sure the Consolidated Report is filled out and submitted. Our communities need to be made aware of what we do and this is a means we need to keep track of our

activities and report them annually.

Yes, we do assist our veterans every day. May 18 is the suggested date for the S.A.L. National Veterans Assistance Day. Make it a date our veterans will never forget. Do something special for one or more of them that day. Use your imagination and be creative. Just being there may be all that's needed. As you will read elsewhere in this edition of the newsletter, there are some squadrons that choose to observe our National Veterans Assistance Day on other dates - at least one of them waits and does it in June. That's perfectly fine!

Thank you for what you do for the Sons of The American Legion and The American Legion Family. Thank you for taking an active role in the largest and greatest wartime veterans organization.

Sneaking up on another record breaking year

By **Larry "Bear" Weinzirl**
Nat'l Children/Youth Chairman

Only a few, short weeks remain before the close of another administrative year for the Child Welfare Foundation. Any donations that will be counted yet this year must reach the National Headquarters by the close of business on Friday, May 31.

All-time S.A.L. donations to the CWF now total over \$5 million. Our slogan this year is "Just for Kicks, Let's Go for Six." We are also requesting support of Operation Military Kids, Temporary Financial Assistance, Children's Miracle Network, Ronald McDonald House, Child Safety Program, Special Olympics, Children's Organ Transplant Association, Family Support Network, Josh Dogs and other programs that benefit our Children and Youth.

Total donations from the Sons of The American Legion to Children & Youth programs last year totaled over \$9 million. Our goal for this year is \$10 million. From all indications, we are well on our way to reaching this goal. Also, please remember to fill out your Consolidated Report Form. The majority of all Squadrons and Detachments do something for C&Y and it is extremely important that we capture these donations and hours.

The children of our country are our greatest natural resource. My favorite quote is, "Fifty years from now it won't matter the type of house I lived in, the make of car I drove, or the amount of money I had in my bank account. But the world may be better because I made a difference in the life of a child."

Fisher House hits milestone

The nation's 60th Fisher House was opened in late March in San Antonio at the South Texas Veterans Health Care System. Since the first one opened 22 years ago, more than 180,000 veterans and their families have been served by Fisher Houses.

With the completion of this newest facility, all VA hospitals with polytrauma rehabilitation centers - there are five such centers in the country that treat the most critically wounded - are now being served by a Fisher House.

San Antonio has eight Fisher Houses, the largest concentration in any single city in the country.

Still time to hop on the Bandwagon

By **Raymond Jarvis**
Nat'l Membership Chairman

Our bandwagon is on the move and Houston bound. We're seeking out 105 percent in membership by July 24. That's 30 days prior to our National Convention.

How will we reach this goal?

The easiest way is to renew all of our members. Traditionally our National renewal rates are around 87 percent, give or take a little. That means that we are losing approximately 35,000 to 40,000 members each year who do not renew.

There are a variety of reasons for this.

A lot of our members move and leave no forwarding address. Parents or grandparents pay for

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Riding up the crescendo

By **Chris Huntzinger**
National Commander

Wow! It's hard to believe we're about to move into the final stretch of our year. The S.A.L. Bandwagon is cruising toward its destination in Houston and the National Convention near the end of August. Every Detachment in this great organization has been working with diligence each day to support the Four Pillars of The American Legion. I want to thank you for your labors of commitment to accomplish the goals we set out to complete in "Forging our Future Together."

Seats on the Bandwagon are filling rapidly with each passing membership target date. It's been a smooth ride so far. Many Detachments have exceeded every percentage membership target throughout the year. Yet, here's your chance to spring into action as the weather warms. We need to continue signing up new members.

I have witnessed the untiring work being done by your National Vice Commanders, National Membership Committee and Detachment leadership. Continue to support them. Many Legionnaires are eligible to also join our ranks in the Sons. JUST ASK them to join. Now's the time to invite them onto the Bandwagon.

The success of our renewals this year will be the determining factor to hitting the overall 105 percent membership

goal. WE CAN exceed 90 percent rate of renewal but it will take a relentless effort. That one phone call to a delinquent member; that one letter asking for his support of our programs by renewing; that one smile and handshake by saying "Thank you for your membership" will get us where we need to finish. Achieving the goals for our programs this year will be determined by what we can do between now and the end of July.

Remember that donations to the Child Welfare Foundation need to be transmitted before the end of May. Sons continue to set records in fundraising and donations. What we were able to accomplish during the month of April, our Children & Youth month, was truly inspiring.

Has your Squadron made a donation to the Fisher House Foundation? We set a goal for my National Commander's Project of \$100,000. Fisher Houses are being built all across the country to improve the quality of life for members of the military, retirees, veterans and their families. The Foundation builds and expands comfort homes at military and VA medical centers. A Fisher House is a home away from home for families of patients who are receiving medical care. A new Fisher House was

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Giving our support to the Fisher Houses

By **Jeff Frain**
Nat'l VA & R Chairman

The idea to provide nearby housing for families of veterans being treated in VA facilities was first conceived in 1986. The first Fisher House was opened in 1991.

National Commander Chris Huntzinger supports many VA&R project's but one of them closest to his heart is the Fisher House. Commander Chris has instructed his National VA&R Commission to find ways to showcase, promote and support the Fisher House program.

To that end, we have been working on a book called "Top Secret - Declassified Project." The book's purpose is to help inform everyone of the Fisher House program, what the mission statement is, how the program started, who is supporting it, where they are located and what items are needed to keep the houses stocked for families. They should be able to simply arrive at one the houses and focus on spending time with their loved one without having to worry about the little things.

Get your hands on a copy of the "Top Secret - Declassified Project" book and use it. Make a donation to help support our military men and women. Sons have raised as much as \$78,000 for Fisher House in recent years, so this year's goal of \$100,000 is not out of line and is certainly something we can achieve.

Detachment VA&R representatives are required to be in contact with the National VA&R Commission but anyone is welcome to contact us and receive the latest Fisher House book. Send e-mail to SALvarNATIONAL@aol.com.

An open letter about the Consolidated Report Form

Dear S.A.L. Leader,

Your Americanism Commission thanks you, not only for the faith and commitment you have demonstrated, but for your continuous work and devotion to the programs and principles of the Sons of The American Legion.

Many of you have kept the commission informed of your activities this year and I commend you on this. Your participation in last fall's American Education Week and the disbursement of materials such as the "I Pledge Allegiance" and the "Our Country's Flag" booklets have definitely helped to educate many elementary and middle school students about how to respect and honor our flag. Your ongoing support of and participation in The American Legion High School Oratorical Scholarship Program has once again helped the growth of the program itself as well as the students who participated. Your sponsorship of candidates to the respective Boys State programs will shine even brighter as many of those leaders go on to participate at Boys Nation.

But now you have another task ahead of you. If you have not done so, it is now time to report all of the Americanism activities your squadron has performed since last June. You need to do this on the Consolidated Squadron Report Form. This is one of the most important documents your squadron is required to complete each year. Yes, this document is used for national awards, but much more important is that the report is used to tally all the volunteer hours and donations of Sons across the entire nation. Last year, a total of 1,565 reports were turned in. That means only about one in four squadrons of the S.A.L. was in compliance. Your challenge is to see that those numbers are increased. A gentleman's reminder is all that is needed for the squadrons which continually submit the report. However an overwhelming majority of our squadrons are still not reporting and that is where we need to step up.

In addition to those who already report, I challenge each National Vice Commander to get reports from three Detachments that did not report last year. I challenge each National Executive Committeeman to get three District / Regional reports that were not reported last year. I challenge each Alternate National Executive Committeeman to get three squadron reports that were not reported last year. And I further challenge each national committee and commission member to see that their own squadron has turned in a report. Our goal is 1,800 reports showing Americanism activities.

Leadership positions are not given, they are earned. Let us all step up and show we have earned the right to be here.

Warmest regards,

Bill Towns

Nat'l Americanism Chairman

In memoriam

John Hill, Jr., Adjutant for the Detachment of Georgia, transferred to the Squadron Everlasting on December 19, 2012. Hill, a dual member of the Sons and The American Legion, had been featured in a *National Update* front page story just last summer.

He was a WWII veteran, one of 20,000 black Marines known as the Montford Pointers, the men

who broke the color barrier in the last branch of the military to admit blacks.

President Obama signed legislation in 2011 giving the Montford Pointers the highest award that Congress can bestow on citizens. Last June, Hill and other surviving Montford Pointers traveled to Washington, DC to receive the Congressional Gold Medal, an honor long-denied yet richly deserved.

Do you have a story to share?

Send ideas and pictures to:

National Update
c/o Mike Pipher, Editor
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Bloomington, IN 47401
or
mpipher@iu.edu

Next deadline is June 1, 2013

SQUADRON NEWS CLIPS



Formerly known as “Battle at the Beach,” *Colonial Beach, VA Squadron 148* has been promoting a fundraising event that will now be known as the “Party in the Parking Lot.” Money they raise is donated to the Wounded EOD Warrior Foundation (EOD stands for Explosive Ordinance Device) located in Fredericksburg, VA in memory of a young Marine bomb technician killed in Afghanistan in 2009.

Each year on December 15, *Pelham, NY Squadron 50* participates in Wreaths Across America alongside other Legion Family members. Sons lead

a short ceremony, reading of the names of eleven Pelham natives who died in WWI and WWII and are interred overseas and the names of Pelham natives, residents and spouses who are interred at Arlington National Cemetery. At the same time they are placing wreaths at the Veterans Park, located next to the Town Hall, thousands of wreaths are also being placed at Arlington National Cemetery, the overseas cemeteries administered by the American Battle Monument Commission, and hundreds of other locations across the country.



Back in December, members of the *Detachment of Colorado* spent a Saturday afternoon hanging Christmas lights on the Fisher House in Aurora. They also brightened the holidays by handing over close to \$2,000 in donations collected by Sons throughout the state. (Left)

Every year at Christmas, *Walkerton, IN Squadron 189* hands out Christmas food baskets to needy families that apply. A percentage of the squadron’s fund raising projects pays for this project, along with any food or cash donations received. Sons gathered on a mid-December Friday evening and went

shopping. They packed and delivered the baskets following morning. Each basket contained an entire Christmas ham dinner along with enough cereal, bread, milk, dry goods, and canned goods to supply a family for a week. Oh yeah, there were toys for the kids, too. This year’s 52 Christmas baskets set a record.

Florence, KY Squadron 4 made donations to the Boone County Police “Shop with a Cop” program this past year. Sons also supplied the non-perishables to the Family Services of Burlington Elementary that were distributed for Thanksgiving. (Right)



The Sons of *Newton, MA Squadron 440* have begun sponsoring a bi-annual art contest for local school children. Coinciding with Veterans Day, contestants are encouraged to commemorate the dedication and commitment of the men and women in our Armed Forces in the art they create. Winners are announced publicly at a local high school football game and invited to The American Legion’s Veterans Day celebration. The students’ artwork is displayed on the post’s game room walls for six months.



(Left) Let’s hear it for the Yoopers! *Escanaba, MI Squadron 71* helped kick start the local Salvation Army’s annual Kettle Drive in their community this year by being one of the first to drop \$250 into the pot and stick around to ring those bells. If you’ve ever seen how cold it can be for Kettle bell-ringers around

Christmas time, just imagine what it’s like doing that important work a few feet from a frozen Lake Michigan!

One of the cardinal rules of public relations is that you always want to thank people if they have done something nice for your organization. The guys up in *Auburn Hills, MI Squadron 143* know this. They threw a special social hour back in January and handed out certificates to thank those who have participated in their American Flag program. Volunteers place flags on businesses around the community on special days throughout the year. The local Legion post turned this duty over to the Sons back in 1991 and they’ve been running with it ever since.



Chicken Bar-B-Q’s and other fundraisers helped *Hamburg, NY Squadron 527* collect \$2,000 that they donated to the VA hospital in Buffalo. (Above) In turn, that money will be used to help support the National Veterans Golden Age Games, an Olympic-style series of events that will

draw together close to 700 senior-aged veterans from around the country in May. These games are heralded as the premier senior adaptive rehabilitation program. It is the only national multi-events sports and recreational seniors’ competition program designed to improve the quality of life for all older veterans, including those with a wide range of abilities and disabilities.

On Christmas Eve Day, Sons from *Southington, CT Squadron 72* joined with Legionnaires to deliver 19 complete dinners to local families who were a little down on their luck this time around. The dinners were purchased with donations collected by the S.A.L., Legion Family members and local businesses.

Above and beyond the benefits of The American Legion National Emergency Fund, Sons from *Mahopac, NY Squadron 1080* donated \$1,000 toward the purchase of needed supplies and food for victims of the hurricane Sandy. (Right) Two truckloads of food and cleaning supplies were driven to an American Legion on Staten Island. Local Legionnaires helped insure the

donated proceeds got to needy families whose homes were devastated by the storm.

An alliance of veteran organizations chipped in to help bring the Vietnam Memorial Traveling Wall into Clearwater, FL for a week last November. Sons from the *Detachment of Florida 16th District* donated their time to assist visitors, helping them find names of friends and family members etched into the Wall. (Below)



These pages are often filled with fantastic stories about big deeds accomplished by small squadrons. Such is the case with *Palm Bay, FL Squadron 117*. With fewer than 100 members, their Sons raised \$3,300 that was donated to the Brevard County Special Olympics program. Their contribution netted the guys a front page newspaper article.

Meanwhile, Sons from *Laingsburg, MI Squadron 248* have been handing out money just about as quickly as they can raise it. They’ve recently given \$500 to a nearby high school’s scholarship fund in memory of a local football star who was killed in Afghanistan. Another \$500 was given to the school’s sports booster program. Yet another \$500 was handed over to the Operation Wounded Warrior program.



Too many homeless vets

According to national data, on any given night, nearly 672,000 Americans are homeless. It's believe more than 60,000 of them are homeless veterans.

The longer someone has been homeless, the more difficult - and expensive - it becomes to restore stability. Homelessness prevention has been the focus of growing interest in the field. Not only is this a compassionate strategy, but it makes better fiscal sense. Once people have become homeless, it quickly becomes more difficult - and more expensive - to return them to sustainable self-sufficiency. Though the evidence base for homelessness prevention is in its early stages, recent efforts with the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program and a history derived from Federal initiatives provide information on lessons learned and suggest strategies that should be examined, studied, evaluated, and implemented.

The VA estimates that an additional 1.4 million veterans are at-risk of becoming homeless because of poverty, lack of support from family and friends, substance use or mental health issues, and unstable living conditions.

Membership Renewal Leaders

France	100 %
South Dakota	79.6%
Wisconsin	77.4%
Kansas	76.5%
Maryland	76.2%
Montana	75.9%
Virginia	75.9%
Minnesota	75.9%
Nebraska	75.4%
Florida	74.8%
Iowa	74.8%
Illinois	74.2%
Pennsylvania	74.1%
Vermont	73.6%
Louisiana	73.2%

Educating Youth in homeland security and civil defense

By **Robert Borkovich**
Nat'l Homeland Security Committeeman

As a young boy in the late 1950's and early 60's, it seemed to be easier growing up in our country. I can't remember hearing the word "terrorism" back then but now it's something our children and grand kids hear almost every day.

As times have changed, so has the technology we have at our finger tips and we search the Internet for anything we're interested in. Let me recommend a couple of websites out there for you and even for your children: www.fema.gov and www.ready.gov. Both of these sites are full of information on how to prepare for a natural disaster and they are also sites that are youth friendly. You can also go onto YouTube to watch videos on how to prepare a survival kit or how to react in a disaster situation. A variety of tools are in place for us to be able to pass on information and educate those around us, especially youngsters.

Recent natural disasters such as hurricane Sandy and the earthquake in Virginia have shown us that emergencies can pop up anywhere. After the earthquake, my oldest grandson, who is 13, put together survival kits for his younger brother and sisters. It was something he was taught in the Boy Scouts. Giving our young men and women this information is something they will carry on into their adult lives.

American Legion Family members have the opportunity to pass along information to others at post, unit and squadron meetings. We all have a chance to become teachers and we owe it to our young people to pass on the know-how that we've obtained. They are the future of this country and we need to educate and prepare them for any situation the future may hold for them.

Becoming certified in Legion lore

By **Damon Bradtmuller**
Nat'l Public Relations Chairman

They say that you should try to learn something new each day. Some Detachments host training sessions that cover programs and inform members of why we work to support them. The American Legion has the Extension Institute that is available online from their website www.legion.org/alei. There is a \$4.95 charge for this class, and it will open your eyes as to what and why we support these programs.

Let's all become better informed members and tell the public what we do and why we do it. It will encourage more successful fundraising activities and bring a better understanding as to why we work so hard in support of our programs.

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their children's dues while they are young but expect them to pay dues for themselves when they turn 18 or get their own job.

Whatever the reason, we need to help ourselves. We need to reach out to the family members of those that have moved, ask if they have a new address. Ask those members who have not paid their dues if there is a problem and if they need help. We always say that membership is everyone's responsibility. Just asking works as well for getting new members as it should for renewing all of our members.

We are not having trouble recruiting new members. We have managed to reach our 100 percent or more in membership for a number of years in a row. Imagine what our membership would be if we could just get our renewal rate up to 92 or 93 percent every year. This is very achievable; it only takes some communication and cooperation.

If a member signs up five new members, there is a form on the National web site that you can download, fill out, then let your area National Vice Commander know and you will receive a special recruiter pin. There is an award (the Triple Nickel) for any Detachment that achieves 105 percent membership, a renewal rate of 85 percent, and charts five new squadrons. The Detachment that wins a Triple Nickel will receive \$555. We have only had two Detachments achieve this and one of them has done it twice. I challenge you to help your Detachment reach this goal.

You can view a video of National Commander Chris Huntzinger remarks made during this year's American Legion Washington Conference at www.youtube.com/watch?v=cmvuM06kez4&feature=youtu.be

Operation Comfort Warriors

By **Bruno Williamson**
Nat'l VA&R Vice Chairman

Operation Comfort Warrior is The American Legion's own program to provide comfort items to our active duty troops at DOD hospitals. It should not be confused with the Wounded Warrior Project, founded by an OEF/OIF veteran initially to provide comfort items to our troops and now a full blown program providing counseling, education, and rehabilitative programs.

In May of 2007 American Legion National Commander Paul Morin was visiting the Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany and found that entertainment equipment was broken. He saw there was minimal access to music and magazines and that the clothing allowance for our wounded troops was insufficient. Commander Morin came back home with a mission to raise \$50,000 in a few months to provide comfort items to our recovering service members at LRMC. The American Legion Family responded by raising \$257,000 by the deadline to purchase TV's, stereos, phone cards, pool tables and other comfort items. Operation Landstuhl was born.

The following year, National Commander Dave Rehbein continued the program and Operation Landstuhl was renamed Operation Comfort Warriors. Since then, OCW has continued to provide comfort items to those recovering in military hospitals and transition facilities throughout the U.S. and at overseas facilities.

With the lack of storage at our VAMC's and DOD hospitals The American Legion prefers monetary donations to speed up the process of buying and shipping items to our service members. Legion officials contact DOD hospitals, warrior transition units and the surrounding communities, and they obtain lists of items needed for our wounded, injured or ill service members.

All of the administrative and marketing costs of Operation Comfort Warrior are paid by The American Legion so that 100 percent of every dollar donated to OCW is used to purchase comfort items for "those who have borne the battle" Raising money is what we Sons do best: from shaving your commander's head to poker runs, with fish fries and with bowling tournaments.

Donations can be made on line at www.tal.org or mailed to: Operation Comfort Warriors, The American Legion, PO Box 1055, Indianapolis, In. 46206.

Calendar misprint

An error was found earlier this year in S.A.L. calendar cards printed for 2013. Since then, a second error has been discovered.

If you have any of the S.A.L. calendar cards for 2013 - green in color - please destroy them.

A limited quantity of new 2013 calendar cards are being printed and should be available in early May. We apologize for the mistakes.