

Welcome to
LEGIONTOWN
U.S.A.
established 1949

Celebrating all that
is good in America's
communities

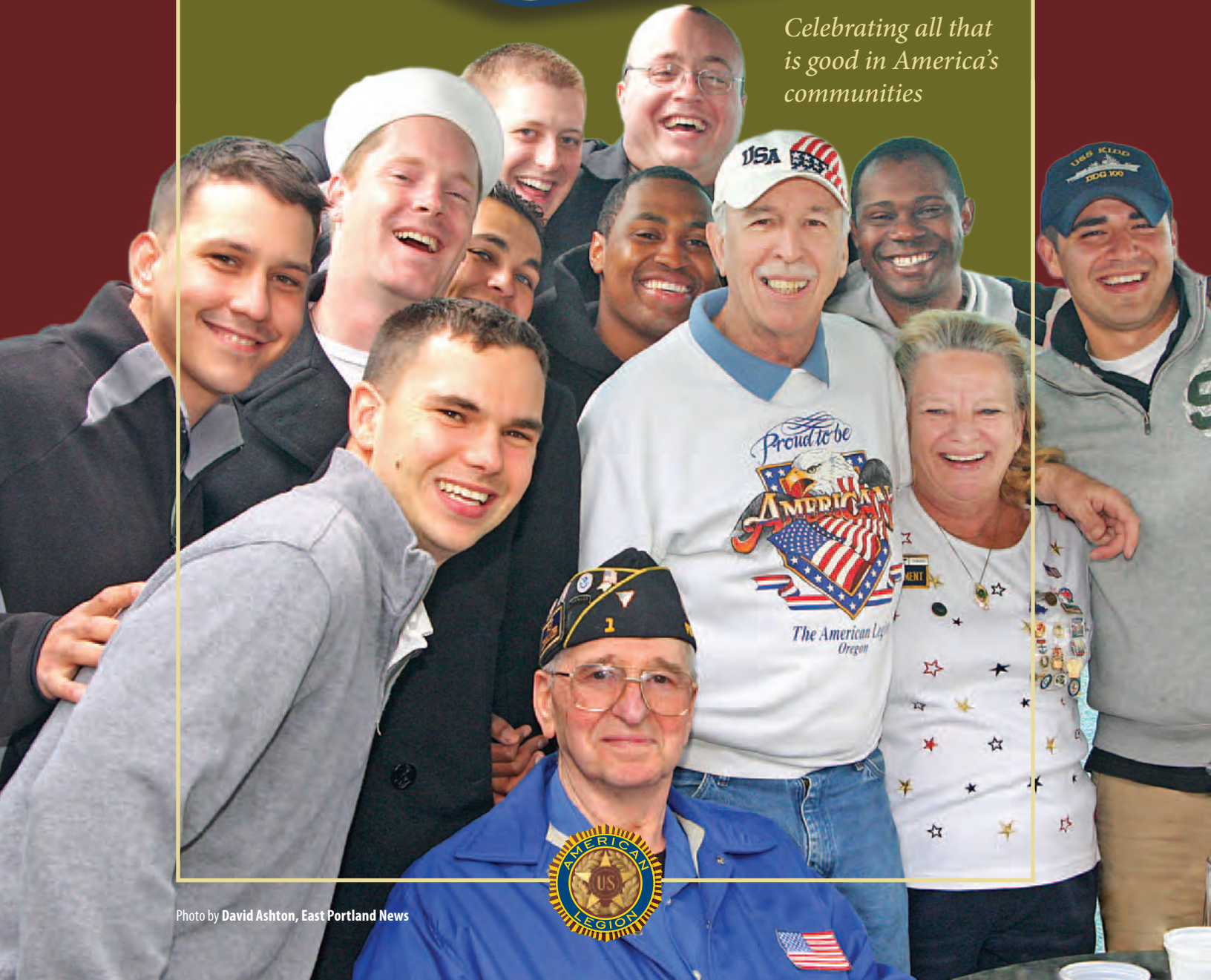


Photo by David Ashton, East Portland News



*The American Legion salutes everyone
taking an active role in making our country,
our states and our towns better places to live.
Serving one another at the local level
is the heart of this booklet's message.*



Welcome to Legiontown, USA

Service from post-to-post, coast-to-coast

What is Legiontown? Legiontown is *our* town. It is *your* town. It is *America's* town. The 'Legiontown' designation occurs wherever Legion family members dedicate themselves to a cause greater than themselves. It occurs every time a Legionnaire visits patients in a VA hospital. It occurs when Legionnaires pay final respects during a veteran's funeral. It occurs when a storm-stricken American Legion post converts itself into a makeshift emergency shelter or when a post sponsors a baseball team that realizes that *how* you win is as important as if you win. Legiontown members live by the words of Legionnaire and former President John F. Kennedy, "Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country."

They serve their country by operating first-class Boys State and Girls State programs, oratorical contests about the U.S. Constitution, and junior shooting sports competitions. Legiontown members serve their country by raising money for The American Legion's Legacy Scholarship Fund, so the children of our fallen heroes won't have to wonder if they can afford college. Legiontowns are the first to respond to requests from the Family Support Network, assisting the loved ones of those defending our freedom. They raise money for the Child Welfare Foundation, which helps victims of serious illness such as Huntington's Disease, Childrens Diabetes and Marfan Syndrome. Legiontowns fight for the religious freedom of veterans by defending their memorials and the right to express a belief in God.

Legiontowns educate their citizens and urge public officials to properly fund VA, field a military that is second-to-none and protect our nation's borders by securing them from illegal entry.

Legiontown is a land where people welcome home their men and women who are returning from our nation's battles. It is a community that believes patriotism is a good thing, and instills this value in its young people. Neighborhood homes not only display the Flag of the United States, but Blue Star Banners and POW/MIA flags are also common sights. Legiontown is a place that believes that America is not only a good nation, but also a great nation. It is a place where struggling families still manage to find the resources to mail a care package to our troops or a check to one of our esteemed war memorials.

The American Legion may have a national headquarters – three, in fact, - but it is not a national organization. It is a grassroots organization, made up of more than 14,000 autonomous American Legion posts. It is The American Legion post, its affiliated Auxiliary unit and Sons of the American Legion squadron that make an ordinary community a Legiontown. It is on the sandy beaches of Florida, Nebraska farm land, streets of Chicago and hills of San Francisco. Legiontowns are not just found "coast-to-coast," but overseas as well, because as veterans, Legionnaires are uniquely qualified to bring a slice of America to foreign lands. Legiontowns don't require bricks and mortar because the spirit of service exists with or without a post home.

Legiontown is The American Legion. In the words of country music artist Michael Peterson, "It's who we are." There are thousands of Legiontowns in the United States and overseas. Legiontowns provide service to the troops, service to youth, service to the community and service to veterans. These are just some of their stories.

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(cover photo) Sailors and Marines are given a “Fleet week welcome” by American Legion family members from Post 1 in Portland, Ore. *Photo by David Ashton*

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Service to Youth

Without the youth of America, Legiontowns would not exist. While The American Legion may be widely viewed as a veterans service organization, mentoring and providing for the welfare of youth is one of the four pillars that The American Legion was founded on in 1919.

The American Legion has always supported the Boy Scouts of America, with more than 2,500 Scouting units being sponsored by Legion posts today. One American Legion Eagle Scout of the Year is selected annually.

American Legion Baseball was created in 1925 and has bred many big league greats including Ted Williams, Yogi Berra, Dave Winfield, Don Mattingly, Jim Rice and Tony Gwynn.

In 1935, the first American Legion Boys State convened in Springfield, Ill. Forty-nine states conduct their own variations of Boys State, the most respected program of government instruction for high school students in the nation. Two of the most outstanding Boys State participants are invited to participate in American Legion Boys Nation, held annually in Washington, D.C.

It centers on the study of federal government. Alumni include a former U.S. president, past and current governors and members of Congress. The American Legion Auxiliary sponsors similar Girls State and Girls Nation programs.

The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation was formed in 1954 and has awarded more than \$9 million in grants that have been used to educate the public about diseases such as Marfan Syndrome, Juvenile Diabetes, Huntington's Disease and cancer.

The American Legion High School Oratorical Scholarship Program trains orators to speak eloquently about the U.S. Constitution and awards \$138,000 in college scholarships at the national level.

Since 1991 The American Legion has sponsored the annual Junior Shooting Sports National Air Rifle Championships in Colorado Springs, Colo. Through the Family Support Network, Temporary Financial Assistance, The American Legion Legacy Scholarship Fund, the Samsung Scholarships and other outstanding programs, The American Legion is not only committed to caring for the future of this country, but for many of the children and grandchildren of America's fallen veterans. The American Legion gives these programs structure, but it is the Legiontowns that give them life.



A Grand Slam for America's Youth

If American Legion Baseball had a hall of fame for posts, Post 284 in Colonial Heights, Va., would certainly be enshrined. The post doesn't just sponsor a team. Not even two. Post 284 sponsors four American Legion Baseball teams at a cost of \$28,000 per year.

"American Legion Baseball teaches teamwork, discipline, leadership, sportsmanship and, most of all, respect for the flag of the USA, which so many fought and died for," said Bill Gilmore, athletic officer for Post 284. "The more boys that play Legion

baseball, the more we have the opportunity to teach and instill these qualities in today's youth."

The post can pride itself not only in the quantity of participants, but on the quality of its teams. San Diego Padres pitcher Cla Meredith played for the post, as did the late former big league player and manager Johnny Oates. Post 284 teams have won their state championship three times, regional once and finished third in the 1961 American Legion World Series.

"In the 11th District, we promote Americanism in today's youth," Gilmore said. "Our fathers fought for our freedom that we all enjoy today. The boys learn great values both on and off the field, whether in victory or defeat."

Gilmore naturally believes that American Legion Baseball is a cut

above other leagues. "It's the competition and quality of baseball that allows each boy to turn up his game, to make himself a better player and a better person. We have a history of baseball that no one will ever match. We have put more players in the majors than any other organization and assisted with and given out more scholarships than any other organization in the country."

It seems only natural that Legionnaires, who have served America's national interests during its wars, would also be guardians of its national pastime.



Education is a Woodbury Tradition

The state of Minnesota has always ranked high in studies measuring educational test scores. When it comes to teaching about military traditions and military heritage, Woodbury Post 501, in a suburb of the Twin Cities, has its community covered.

The Web site for "*The Fighting 501st*" points out the commonly misunderstood differences between a 21-gun salute and three-rifle-volley. But it is the post's dedication to teaching flag etiquette to young people that makes it a Legiontown.

"It is not just young people, but adults as well, who are grossly unfamiliar with what's appropriate with respect to the proper care and display of our flag," said Post 501 Commander Tom Grezek, Sr. "Most are also unfamiliar

with how the design came to be and the significance of the colors."

Grezek, an Army veteran of the Vietnam era, and post Sergeant-at-Arms Tom Genza address about 150 area Scouts per year.

"Having a basic understanding of the Flag Code is a requirement for one of the Scout merit badges. Our most recent school presentation involved 70 second graders," Grezek said. "It's a joy working with youth. It's very seldom that our post doesn't get a letter of appreciation, signed by all the kids who participated in our training sessions. Training in flag etiquette is one great way of carrying out The American Legion charter."



Tom Genza of Post 501 instructs Woodbury Cub Scouts on the proper procedure for folding the U.S. Flag.

Hockey Match Supports Legacy Scholarship Fund

Combine a great cause with a great sport and you have the ingredients for a successful fundraiser. Such is the case of the hockey game between the Citadel and the Virginia Military Institute.

Rev. Phillip Taylor, a life member of American Legion Post 132 in Smithfield, N.C., had the idea of a fundraiser for the children of fallen soldiers by organizing a hockey match between his alma mater, VMI, and The Citadel.

“I didn’t want to reinvent the wheel,” Taylor said, “so I did some investiga-

tion and found out about the American Legion Legacy Scholarship Fund on the Legion’s web site. I contacted the Raleigh Youth Hockey Association, and they gave us ice time at a rink (the Factory Ice House in Wake Forest) that was big enough to hold a crowd.”

Publicity for the match came far easier than Taylor imagined. Wake Forest Post 187’s Commander, Richard Heroux contacted Taylor when he learned of the game. Members of Post 187 worked at the front ticket desk and added to the proceeds with a raffle. Citadel alumni John Hunter, a member of Cary, N.C. Post 67, was able to procure the posters and tickets for the game and raffle at no cost, along with obtaining coverage in the local newspapers and radio stations.

Before the event, more than \$1,600 in donations poured

in. The NHL’s Carolina Hurricanes, donated game tickets, an autographed jersey and goalie stick to be raffled. The Citadel Hockey Club raised an additional \$405 by auctioning off Citadel hockey jerseys. At the game itself - where local Guardsmen presented the colors - another \$3,922 was collected.

“It was a combination of a lot of good luck and good people coming together,” Taylor said. “Once people found out who the charity was benefiting, it wasn’t any trouble for us to get them to do us a favor. We tried to include as many different people as we could. That’s how you have a successful fundraiser.

Ending up with almost \$6,000 was well beyond what we thought we could have done. Everyone wants us to do this again next year. We hope to double the amount we raise. I probably put in 1,000 hours working on this thing. But it was worth it.”



Soccer Diplomacy

Army Private First Class Nick Maderas loved soccer. He also loved his country. When the 19-year-old was killed by a roadside bomb in Iraq, his father Bill Maderas remembered Nick’s request to send soccer balls. The balls were a way for Iraqi children to view the Americans not as occupiers, but as friends. Shortly afterward, the Kick for Nick Foundation was born.

When local Legionnaire Ken Dartley learned of the request, a soccer ball collection net was placed on the lawn of Post 86 in Wilton, Conn. in 2006.

The post collects about 1,000 balls per year, which are shipped in care of the Kick for Nick Foundation to be used by the children of Iraq.

“The troops will tell you how helpful it is to bond with the local population,” Dartley said. “If you do something nice for my kid, you are my friend. Sometimes these kids will tell you where the bad guys and roadside bombs are.”

While Post 86 collects, stores and ships the balls donated at its home,



donations to the Kick for Nick Foundation catapulted across the nation after ESPN televised a piece about it. Dartley encourages people to visit www.kickfornick.org to help expand support for children from Legions everywhere.

Speaking Eloquently in Iowa

Post 298 in Marion, Iowa, has found a variety of avenues of outreach into the community, one of those being its renewed commitment to the High School Oratorical Scholarship Program.

Over the years Post 298, like other Hawkeye State posts, has struggled to find contestants, according to Mary Clapp, Children & Youth Chairman. "Upon talking with teachers and students, we were told the best way to improve participation at the local level

was to increase the award amounts," said Clapp. School officials told post members that due to the length of time to write speeches, difficulty arose because of other commitments such as after school programs and part-time jobs. Post 298 decided to raise the award incentive from \$100, \$50, and \$25 to \$500, \$200 and \$150.

Mary and her husband Karl Clapp, Commander of Post 298, were the organizers of the second district contest in Iowa. Post 298 had one contestant, whose second-place district finish earned him a \$500 scholarship for college.

Commitment to Children & Youth activities and Americanism projects are the order of the day for Post 298. Not only are post officials increasing publicity and their commitment to the oratorical contest, they also are

involved with Boys State, the 5th grade Flag Essay Contest and other scholarship programs.

Post 298's involvement in the oratorical contest has been spreading to other local posts across Iowa. According to Kathy Nees, Department of Iowa Program Director, "The posts are really getting out there and promoting the contest and their winners."

Legionnaire Gerry Wegmann ran Post 298's local contest and is committed to making it even better through school visits. "I do plan on working toward getting myself into the classrooms more. Persistence will pay dividends," Wegmann added.

Without a doubt, Post 298 will continue its commitment to the contest and the other community outreach programs to help spread the word of their successes to other posts.



'This is My Rifle'

As a retired Marine Corps major, Bill Barker can probably recite "The Rifleman's Creed" in his sleep. His dedication to marksmanship is a major factor in the success of Albuquerque, N.M., Post 49's junior shooting sports competitors.

The post sponsors shooters through the Navy and Marine Corps Junior ROTC programs at three high schools. Post 49 sends more shooters to The American Legion National Junior Shooting Sports Program than any other post, at an annual cost of about \$3,500.

"The main connection we have with the youth is through baseball and shooting. A baseball team has about 15 boys, but our rifle team has over 30 boys and girls," Barker said.

"So we have more young people and parents in the community that know about the Legion and what it does for the youth of today. Our shooting teams have brought several new members to our post as family members and friends learn about the benefits of belonging."

The JROTC cadets show their appreciation for the support. "Occasionally, the post will buy us dinner or help with travel costs to other national tournaments too, we are truly blessed but our cadets support every children's party or function at the post when called upon."



Post 49 shooter Tiffany Lowenstein competes at The American Legion Junior Shooting Sports National Air Rifle Championship. Photo by Price Chambers

American Legion Children's Home Caring for the Future

Writer Pearl S. Buck once said, "If the American way of life fails the child, it fails us all."

The American Legion Children's Home in Ponca City, Okla., is determined to not fail the child. In fact, the Children's Home has cared for generations of children since 1928, when it was established by World War I veterans as an orphanage or a place for the children of veterans that were unable to provide care themselves. It is owned and operated by the Department of Oklahoma.

"We take kids from the state who need a home. Many of them have been abused," said Bill Alexander, Executive Director of The American Legion Children's Home. "About half are either the children or grandchildren of veterans."

The home features an on-campus school for children with learning disabilities and emotional disturbances. As soon as the children are assessed to have made sufficient progress, they are sent to attend public school. The children are also taught social and transitional skills that will help them manage

independently when they reach adulthood.

Funding is the biggest challenge facing The American Legion's Children's Home, which is filled to capacity with 62 children.

Although none of the resident children currently have parents deployed, Alexander is hoping that with greater financial resources the home could be a viable resource to deploying servicemembers and disabled veterans.

"We resolve that we will carry on the original mission of this home to care for the children of those who have made the greatest sacrifices and are more determined than ever to expand our ability to do so. Especially now, as the current wars are growing longer and casualties are increasing this becomes an immediate necessity." Alexander says on the Children's Home Web site. "We have provided for the most urgent needs of our community over the past eight decades and will continue to do so." To sponsor a child, visit www.americanlegionchildrenshome.org.



The American Legion Children's Home in Ponca City, Okla., has provided for the needs of children since 1928.

Photos by Brandi Simons



Executive Director Bill Alexander is passionate about providing more resources for the children at the American Legion Children's Home.
Photo by Brandi Simons

No Wasting Away in Legionville

Safety is the top expectation most parents have when choosing youth programs and school activities for their children. It is also the purpose behind The American Legion Department of Minnesota's Camp Legionville.

Known officially as Legionville School Safety Patrol Training Center, Inc., its primary function is to train boys and girls in the procedures of crossing safely at intersections and bus patrol work. Moreover, it does so in the fun-filled environment of summer camp located on the shores of North Long Lake in Brainerd, Minn.

"Legionville is the only camp of its kind that we know of in the world," said Camp Director Emily Hoeschen. "It's an opportunity for school patrol members to become captains for their squad. There has not been a cross-walk fatality while a patrol member has been on duty since camp opened in 1956."

Legionville campers are also taught swimming, first aid, canoeing and boating safety. The camp consists of eight one-week sessions, with approximately 150 boys and girls enrolled per session. In addition to receiving financial support from The American

Legion Department of Minnesota, hometown organizations often pay the campers' \$160 sponsorship fee.

Instruction at the camp is provided by Minnesota State Patrol Officers. While hired staff are responsible for the day-to-day operations at the camp, Hoeschen said, "Legionville would not be possible without The American Legion. Many local posts provide the funding for campers to come each summer. The American Legion has a board that the camp director meets with twice a year to touch base with general camp information."

What makes Camp Legionville successful is that it is pro-active. It is often the news that you don't hear, the child who isn't hit by a car or the swimmer that doesn't drown that is evidence of a program's success.



Boats and canoes await eager campers at North Long Lake.



(top) Skills such as canoeing are taught and enjoyed by many participants.

(middle) Campers receive instruction on the proper discipline of flag presentation.

(bottom) Gathering around the campfire with marshmallows on sticks is a great way to wrap up an action-packed day.

500 Boys and Counting

For more than a decade, Gordon Smith has made Boys State his passion. A member of American Legion Post 186 in Chesterfield County, Va., Smith is usually responsible for more than 50 boys attending Virginia Boys State every year.

Post 186 sponsors 5 young men to Boys State each year, but it is Smith and his dedication and enthusiasm for the program that steps the recruitment and sponsorship of participants to the next level.

Smith has recruited sponsors from a variety of organizations such as local parent-teachers-student associations, churches and other nonprofit organizations and clubs. Many of the sponsors are former Boys State participants.

“Year after year, there have been 15 sponsors for 46 boys,” Smith said. “We’ve never had less than that and there has never been a problem recruiting sponsors.”

Records indicate Smith’s efforts resulted in more than 500 boys attending Boys State since the mid-1990s.

“Boys State is the watershed for all the other programs,” he said. “From the many participants in Boys State, we have no lack in Oratorical participants or Junior Shooting Sports contestants.”



(top) Boys State delegates gather on the steps of the Virginia state capitol in Richmond.

(bottom) Delegates hang a Post 186 banner on a tour bus taking 55 young men to Boys State.

From One Generation to Another

One of the oldest Boy Scout troops in the United States is Troop 3 located in Evanston, Ill. Chartered in 1919 – sound familiar? – it was led in its early years by a field artillery officer from World War I. When the troop needed a new charter organization in 2001, it only seemed fitting that a group that was founded by World War I veterans would step in. That’s exactly what Evanston American Legion Post 42 did.

Post members are greatly involved with the leadership of Troop 3. Scoutmaster Bob Woodring is also a Sons of the American Legion Squadron 42 member. Squadron 42 commander Brian Lamberg was scoutmaster for the first five years.

Past Post Commander Greg Lisinski, a former assistant scoutmaster, has taken the

troop on camping treks in the surrounding areas. According to Lisinski, “We’ve had over seventeen Eagle Scouts emerge since the post became the troop’s chartered organization.”

The Scouts in turn share the post’s community involvement in major ways. When post members organize the annual “Rebuilding Together,” which is a fix-up, clean-up project for needy families in Evanston, the Scouts jump right in and enthusiastically help. The Scouts can be counted on to place flags on veterans graves for Memorial Day, participate in fundraising efforts such as the post’s pancake breakfasts; and sending packages to deployed servicemembers.

The relationship has been mutually beneficial, according to Lisinski. “Working with the post has given the troop insight into service to veterans and lessons in Americanism,” he said. “In turn, the Scouts’ energy and sense of service has kept Post 42 young.”



Troop 3 assisted the Dept. of Illinois’ 7th District with sending care packages to Iraq.

Blue Caps, Young People, and the Police

At every meeting, Legionnaires associate together for a number of purposes as stated in the Preamble to the Constitution of The American Legion. Two of those include: To uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States of America and to maintain law and order.

are selected by each district to attend the one week intensive exposure to law enforcement training. The cadets receive summer classroom instruction in the history of law enforcement, defensive driving, radar, motor vehicle laws, first aid, shooting demonstrations, drug abuse, and use of alcohol as well as demonstrations of police skills such as personal defense and weapons firing. Of course, organized sports are included as time permits.

Legionnaires supplement academy staff during the week and are on hand to congratulate the cadets at Friday's graduation ceremony. Since the Department of Missouri American Legion established the program in 1969, more than a thousand young men and women have seen law enforcement practices and concepts at their best. Many have gone on to successful careers as state troopers and police officers, thanks to the efforts of Legionnaires who remain committed to mentoring youth and serving their communities.

Posts throughout Missouri take those responsibilities to heart by nominating - and sponsoring - young people ages 16-to-18 each year to attend the Missouri Cadet Patrol Academy at the Missouri State Highway Patrol Law Enforcement Academy in Jefferson City.

While every post may nominate participants, only two nominees



(top) Cadets prepare for a session of physical training at the Missouri Cadet Patrol Academy.

(bottom) Legionnaire Floyd Wright, front row, is co-director of the program.



Cadets at the Missouri Cadet Patrol Academy receive a wide range of instruction from law enforcement professionals.

Service to Veterans

America's first commander in chief, George Washington said, "The willingness with which our young people are likely to serve in any war, no matter how justified, is directly proportional to how they perceive the veterans of earlier wars were treated and appreciated."

The American Legion not only believes in honoring and caring for veterans because of the practical reasons that George Washington pointed out, but because it's the right thing to do. We owe them.

In 1921, just two years after the formation of The American Legion, the new organization won a major victory when the U.S. Veterans Bureau, a forerunner of the Veterans Administration, was created. While the new agency was far from perfect, it did codify the government's commitment "to care for him who shall have borne the battle..."



Legionnaires and members of Congress stand on the steps of the Capitol with letters and petitions in support of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944. Created by The American Legion it became known as the GI Bill, enabling millions of veterans to live the American dream.

On Dec. 15, 1943, American Legion Past National Commander Harry W. Colmery wrote a longhand draft on hotel stationery at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, D.C., of what would later become the GI Bill of Rights. After the GI Bill became law on June 22, 1944, millions of Americans who served their country were able to obtain higher education and home mortgages. It transformed the U.S. economy and has been widely hailed as the greatest social legislation ever passed by the U.S. Congress.

The American Legion remembered succeeding generations of war veterans by becoming an early supporter and fundraiser for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, donating \$1 million to "The Wall" in 1982. The American Legion continued its advocacy for Vietnam veterans through its sponsorship of the Columbia University study of the effects of Agent Orange on veterans. The findings were presented to Congress and pressured the VA into funding treatment for Agent Orange-related illnesses.

The advocacy for veterans continued as The American Legion publicly and financially supported the construction of the National Korean War Veterans Memorial and the National World War II Memorial in Washington.

The American Legion won another major victory in 1989 when the VA was officially designated the Department of Veterans Affairs and given cabinet-level status. Ten months later, the U.S. Court of Veterans Appeals began its operations, a longstanding objective of The American Legion.

continued...

SERVICE TO VETERANS

...continued

When the Smithsonian Institute's Air and Space Museum planned to exhibit a slanted and anti-American narrative to accompany the Enola Gay, which dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, The American Legion loudly protested. On January 30, 1995, The American Legion announced its acceptance of a scaled-down exhibit "without political commentary," ending the greatest controversy in the Smithsonian Institute's 149-year history.

In 2002, The American Legion increased public awareness about the backlog of patients waiting to use VA facilities, and launched its national "I Am Not a Number" campaign. This was followed by many years of record funding for VA due to extensive American Legion advocacy. In other legislation, the Disabled Veterans Tax was finally lifted in 2003 and 2004 for many veterans who were previously denied the ability to collect full retirement and disability benefits without paying an offset penalty. Some still must pay this penalty and The American Legion continues to fight to eliminate the Disabled Veterans Tax for all who are affected by it.

As time passed, the generous benefits offered by the original GI Bill dwindled and many veterans could not find college education affordable. The American Legion strongly lobbied for a new GI Bill, and on June 30, 2008, President George W. Bush signed the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act. Veterans could not only receive the benefits needed to attend college, they had the option of transferring those benefits to a family member. The American Legion refused to rest on its laurels after this victory, and continues to educate the public about the new GI Bill through its web site, www.mygibill.org.

As the war on terrorism continues, The American Legion's service to veterans is needed more than ever. Legiontowns across the nation contribute heavily by hospital visitations, grassroots lobbying and participation in the Heroes to Hometowns program, which helps disabled veterans transition back to their communities. They also raise money to send comfort items to hospitalized servicemembers through The American Legion's Operation Comfort Warriors, www.legion/ocw. It is through the grassroots efforts of local Legionnaires that The American Legion is able to be the leading national advocate for veterans.



John Hickey, right, department service officer for Indiana, assists a veteran with a VA disability claim. The American Legion has approximately 2,000 certified service officers who assist veterans free of charge, regardless of their membership status or eligibility for The American Legion. Photo by James V. Carroll



(above) Campers begin their journey at Camp American Legion.

(below) Campers gather around the picnic tables and grill to enjoy a feast fit for the great outdoors.



Summer Camp – Pause for Rest

Within the heart of Wisconsin's North Country surrounded by woods, a sparkling lake, fresh air and peaceful quiet, Camp American Legion is a respite for veterans who have served their country and now need help.

Funded by donations, the camp is a program of the Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Commission of the Department of Wisconsin. The camp has existed since 1925 and is open to all veterans, regardless of whether they belong to The American Legion.

Cabins are sponsored by Wisconsin American Legion posts. Volunteer carpenters, housekeepers, plumbers and cooks keep the place functioning. Physical therapists

also volunteer their services to help make the disabled veterans comfortable during their stays at the camp, which can run up to a week.

Director of the camp James Youngquist is a life member of Cudworth Post 23 in Milwaukee. "This truly is a place where there are veterans helping veterans," he said.

The camp accommodates amputees, those who have had strokes, nervous conditions, operations or other illnesses. It is open from Memorial Day through Labor Day each summer, with nearly two-thirds of the campers being repeat visitors. Camp American Legion features 19 cabins, a main lodge, a therapy building, chapel and motorboats. Traditional camp activities such as fishing, swimming and hiking are all available to the veterans.

Each summer Camp American Legion serves more than 400 injured and disabled veterans, giving Wisconsin veterans a helping hand back onto the road to good health.

Small Town, Large Presence

Involvement and commitment are the order of the day for American Legion Burns-McCauliffe Post 465 in Homer, N.Y.

Post family members place national ensigns along Main Street every May and at more than 1,000 graves in the local cemeteries. The Legion's presence in the picturesque upstate village of 4,000 residents is never felt more than at the annual Memorial Day parade.

Even tiny little Homer has lost one of its own in Iraq. Post 465 was the lead organiza-

tion in arranging for the public display to honor the fallen hero.

Whether it's through its support of the town's Cub Scouts and other youth programs, or the sponsorship of Civil War reenactments, Post 465 is a shining example of a Legiontown, USA.



Homer residents await the start of the annual Memorial Day parade.

'Every Day is Memorial Day' for Post 1941

When the Long Island National Cemetery in Famingdale, N.Y. reached its capacity in 1981, nearby Calverton National Cemetery became the new location for veteran burials in the area.

By the late '80's Legionnaires Frank Belsito and Cornelius Ferrick of Pearl Harbor Memorial Post 1941 in Port Jefferson, N.Y., realized there was a disparity in respect that was being given to the deceased veterans. Flags were being placed on graves on Memorial Day at Long Island National,

but not at Calverton National. Families with loved ones buried in both cemeteries were disappointed at this lack of equal respect.

Belsito and Ferrick learned from the Long Island cemetery that funds were not available to provide additional flags, so the two formed a committee and made trips to the Department of Veterans Affairs Headquarters in Washington to solicit support. It was a long road with many obstacles.

Nearly eight years later they were able to reach a compromise.

Post 1941 would raise the initial \$30,000 to purchase the flags needed, guarantee volunteers to place them and then pick them up a week after Memorial Day, and then the VA would commit to purchase all future flags.

Post 1941 raised the \$30,000 and 1,500 Boy Scouts were recruited to place and remove

the flags. Within 45 minutes 105,000 flags were placed and the tradition began. More than 15 years later, the placing of flags at gravesites on Memorial Day is still going strong. Approximately 100,000 additional graves have been located there and volunteer numbers have surged to 6,000. A patriotic ceremony is held after the placing of the flags, rain or shine because "our U.S. military fought and died in all kinds of weather," Belsito said.

"American Legion posts throughout the world should be the watchdog over the national cemeteries in their area. They need to be certain the grass is cut, the monuments clean and straight and that every veteran gets the military honor at the cemetery that he or she deserves," he added.

There is no doubt Post 1941 is a leader in this area, an example to others and lives its motto: "Every day is Memorial Day in National Cemeteries."



(top) Scouts and volunteers place flags on graves for Memorial Day.

(bottom) Representatives of the service branches attend the Memorial Day service at Calverton National Cemetery.



A Boy Scout places a flag on a grave at Calverton National Cemetery.

Vets Tap into Cyberspace

Colorado Department Adjutant Pat Smith stopped into the Denver Vet Center, located in the department's building, and was taken aback by what he saw; a single computer with a number of veterans hovering around it. They were trying to learn how to research career opportunities and create resumés without the help of a tutor or instructor.

Something had to be done. This was not acceptable and the seed was planted that day, growing to the opening of the department's first Internet café for veterans in April 2008.

An original bid for the creation of the café was \$60,000. Through a series of events the cost resulted in less than \$3,000. Events happened at the right time such as a private company giving up its leased space in the Legion's building, Heritage Bank donating ten almost new computers along with software and IBM donating desks.

Obtaining employment is high on the list of priorities for returning servicemembers from Iraq and Afghanistan. Without familiarity of researching jobs on the Internet or creating online resumés, finding a job can be a difficult task.

The café started with five students attending twice a week and quickly grew to five classes a week. Within a short few months, there were two to three classes being held a day, five days a week. Veterans from different war eras utilize the café. Although it is being used primarily for job applications and resumés, there are also WWII vets learning new skills.

As the department looks forward to the expansion of the café, its focus is on securing instructors certified to teach the Adobe suite of programs. This has the potential to equip veterans with skills to work from home if they are physically unable to perform in a workplace.

"Things just fell into place when they were needed," Smith commented. "This is the only veteran Internet café I know of in the U.S."

The need is great. Even with young people, it can't be assumed they have the skills needed.

"Young folks enter the military at 18 and possibly get out at 23 or 24, many with families. The skills learned during their time in the military or even when they were in high school often times did not include resumé writing or job searches. The Internet café is a place they can quickly get up to speed on these," Smith said.



Jobs for Veterans

Employment ranks as one of the top priorities for most veterans when they leave military service. Veterans are often at a disadvantage because they served their country while many other Americans were obtaining corporate experience. The American Legion believes that veterans not only deserve career opportunities, but that it is smart business for employers to hire these talented and disciplined workers.

The American Legion has partnered with the military-to-civilian firm RecruitMilitary and the Department of Labor's HireVetsFirst in hosting numerous career fairs for veterans and their spouses throughout the nation. More than 30 organizations and firms interview an average of 350 job seekers at each of these fairs.

The American Legion has consistently lobbied for strong veterans preference legislation both on the state and federal levels. It also recognizes companies with its prestigious "Employer of the Year Awards for Hiring Veterans."

To learn more about career fairs or issues pertaining to veterans' employment, visit www.legion.org or www.recruitmilitary.com.



Veterans receiving instruction during a class at the Internet café.
Photo by Sean Crosier

Guard of Patriots

Revvng motorcycle engines, holding flags, or just simply standing shoulder-to-shoulder, the men and women of the Kansas Patriot Guard perform a solemn mission. They are protecting the privacy and sanctity of the funeral services of fallen heroes from the noise and disruption of misguided protestors.

In the summer of 2005, Terry “Darkhorse” Houck and his wife, Carol, of American Legion Riders of Post 136 in Mulvane, Kan., learned about the antics of an anti-military church that actually celebrates the deaths of American servicemembers, while offend-

ing every decent bystander in the process. Out of these unfortunate incidents, an idea took root and the Mulvane Post 136 Legion Riders formed the Kansas Patriot Guard.

Their first mission was to attend the funeral of Army Staff Sgt. John Doles in Oklahoma. With their bikes and bodies blocking the view of the mourning family from the protestors, they stood watch making sure nothing interfered with the military burial. This marked the first of more than 60 funerals the Guard attended in their first three years. “It’s about standing shoulder to shoulder,” Houck said. “It’s about respect.”

The task of the Guard is far from simple. After receiving approval from the hero’s family, the Guard works with law enforcement to map a safe procession route. A ride itinerary is created, and the riders meet 90 minutes before the service. Neither time nor weather prevents the Kansas Patriot Guard from showing up at a military funeral.

What began with 43 motorcycle riders in Kansas has blossomed into a mass movement in 50 states with more than 100,000 members.

Outside Mulvane’s American Legion Post 136, a 4,000-pound stone was put into place on June 17, 2006, officially recognizing the post as the birthplace of the Patriot Guard. “There’s no question the Patriot Guard has changed some folks’ impression of what contribution to society a group of tough-looking motorcycle enthusiasts can make,” Houck commented. “The Patriot Guard no longer has to sell the idea to families of the dead. The grieving relatives call the Patriot Guard.”



American Legion Legacy Scholarship

The American Legion assists families of military personnel who die on active duty on or after Sept. 11, 2001, by providing college scholarships for their children. It’s just one of the many ways The American Legion remembers those who have made the ultimate sacrifice while defending this nation against terrorism.

The American Legion Legacy Scholarship Fund was established by the National Executive Committee at its October 2001 meeting. Most of America’s active-duty, Guard and Reserve military members are married and many have children. Figures from the Department of Defense reveal that on average, in peacetime alone, more than 1,500 service personnel die each year from accidents and illness. Moreover, thousands of servicemembers have been killed by enemies in Iraq and Afghanistan. Just as sure as military service is a high-risk profession, there will be families that need help and children who can benefit from American Legion Legacy Scholarships.

Legion family contributors and the general public may direct their donations to: The American Legion Legacy Scholarship Fund, P.O. Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206.



Day or night, the Patriot Guard is there to salute the fallen.

Service to Troops

In *The American Legion, an Official History, 1919-1989*, author Thomas A. Rumer describes the plight of the World War I doughboys who founded The American Legion. “They had seen the worst and, in the case of lifesaving heroics, the best of which mankind was capable. They had acquired a viewpoint. Whether it intruded on their daily actions or remained brooding in the corner of the mind, these men and women would return home changed.”

The members of The American Legion know what it’s like to serve in the military because they have all done so. They know how to support the troops because they once *were* “the troops.” Legionnaires recognized early on that the bond troops share crosses all war eras. In September 1942, the Preamble to the Constitution of The American Legion was changed for the first and only time. The word “War” was changed to “Wars.”

The American Legion recognizes that some of the troops are missing. The American Legion family has consistently demanded a full accounting for all POW / MIAs from authorities in every war zone where Americans have gone missing.

As the largest veterans service organization, The American Legion wields enormous clout in Washington. It regularly lobbies for higher pay and better living conditions for the men and women who wear the uniforms of the Armed Services of the United States.

Knowing that the top concern for many of America’s deployed service-members is the family back home, The American Legion formed the Family Support Network to assist those families with tasks such as lawn mowing, household repair or other miscellaneous needs.

In 2007, the national commander of The American Legion, the national president of the American Legion Auxiliary and national commander of the Sons of the American Legion encouraged their members to donate money to purchase comfort items for wounded troops recovering at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany. During the following year and a half, \$338,000 was raised for these heroes who received clothes, iPods, books and other items. In 2008, The American Legion family expanded the effort with a new name, Operation Comfort Warriors, and included patients at all U.S. military hospitals as eligible recipients for assistance.

The American Legion continues to encourage families of those deployed to display the Blue Star Banner at their homes. Legiontowns always remember and appreciate the troops. Some Legiontowns demonstrate their support with Blue and Gold Star Salutes, while others send care packages to the troops. Most importantly, Legiontowns know that supporting the troops is not just a bumper sticker slogan, but a lifetime commitment of service.



Photo by Brandi Simons

Families Stay Connected in Cyberspace

Facebook, MySpace and other social networking sites may be the rage for most young people today, but what if you are in a war zone? Would you really want the public to be able to access your personal communications with your loved ones? Wouldn't it still be important to maintain close contact, and witness family events and milestones through the magic of digital technology? Past National Commander Tom Bock and members of the Department of Colorado think so.

Partnering with Colorado Funeral Services and Denver Suss Buick Pontiac, Legionnaires from the Rocky Mountain State have made it their mission to provide an electronic family visiting room, of sorts, for deployed troops and their families. The sponsors are paying for the deployed families to be able to access the site, Connecting Military Families (www.connectingmilitaryfamilies.org), a password-protected, DoD-compliant secure portal where families can chat, blog, post photos and leave messages.

The cost to sponsors dropped from \$175 to \$50 since the program's inception, but because of the sponsors, it is free to the servicemember and the family.

"Our original idea was to provide Web sites for families separated from their deployed loved ones, but the military has issues with security on many of the inexpensive Web site hosts," Bock said. "Through our portal which was custom built for us, everything is secure, and allows the family to easily stay connected. It's quick and easy with no learning curve involved."

The portal is available for all military families across the country and Bock has called the program "exploding" as the word gets out. Plans for adding secure video with one to one webcams are in the works.

Screenshot of the Connecting Military Families Web site. The site provides secure portals to families and deployed servicemembers.



Riders Roar Through Georgia

With a rousing roar across Georgia, American Legion Riders Post 178 rides its motorcycles to benefit the Ft. Gordon Fisher House each year in "Roaring Thunder." The stream of nearly 300 motorcycle enthusiasts

tour through the base with their final destination being the Eisenhower Army Medical Hospital, site of the check-presentation ceremony.

In 2008, the Riders raised nearly \$31,000 for the facility, which provides comfortable lodging for the families of wounded warriors during their hospitalization. The Fisher House Foundation depends on charitable donations in order to operate its homes.

The Fisher House at Ft. Gordon presently has seven bedrooms. A 21-bed-

room Fisher House will soon be breaking ground near the Augusta VA hospital.

"We want our wounded warriors to know they have our support one hundred percent. When I came home from Vietnam, it wasn't such a happy experience. We're here to guarantee that never happens again," said Rob "Sarge" Robinson. American Legion Riders Post 178 will continue to support this facility in the years to come, riding in honor for those who serve.



GR01 Brings Legiontown to Europe

Post GR01 in Germany is a respite from an overseas hospital ward. The post not only supports the troops in words, but in deeds.

Located in Kaiserslautern at the Rhine Ordnance Barracks, thirty minutes from Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, the post provides quarterly dinners for wounded warriors and logs in more than one hundred hours at the hospital

and 600 community service hours.

“We’re able to sit down with them when they first return from Iraq and Afghanistan and they’re elated to come to our post,” then-Commander Michael Young said in the March 2008 issue of *The American Legion Magazine*. “They tell us, ‘you guys seem to understand what we’ve been through.’ Sometimes they want to get out of the limelight, and The American Legion helps them do that. Their transition starts right here at GR01.”

“Our post service officer is continually at LRMC for one reason or another,” said Commander John Fleming, a retired Army staff sergeant. “We provided support to the Fisher House on several occasions. We are (also)

setting up to provide volunteers to assist the USO in providing coffee and snacks while the troops are at the Deployment Processing Center.”

Its overseas location presents unique challenges for the 100-member post, such as frequent deployments and a “five-year rule” that requires many of the civilian members to rotate from their federal positions. Even with high turnover, post members still impact the military community through their volunteer work and donations of clothes to the LRMC Wounded Warrior Ministry Center.

Just as the U.S. military performs magnificently abroad, Post GR01 proves that overseas Legionnaires can turn international communities into Legiontowns.



American Legion Post GR01, Department of France, provides quarterly dinners for wounded soldiers recovering at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center.

The Minnesota North Star

Nobody likes getting lost. Getting lost in a combat zone, however, can be deadly. Legionnaire Ed Meyer of Post 621 in St. Augusta, Minn., is doing his part to ensure this doesn’t happen to U.S. troops.

He is the founder of Operation Waypoint, a program that supplies complimentary Global Positioning System (GPS) devices to deployed servicemembers. The retired professor started the effort in December 2005 when a former student who was headed for Iraq asked his opinion about the devices.

“In the first three years, we have given away almost 200 GPS devices to troops going to Iraq, Afghanistan and even Djibouti. They are hand-held and equipped with a Middle East chip,” he said.

While the military often supplies its own

GPS devices, Meyer pointed out that those devices don’t help if the troops leave it mounted to a vehicle or helicopter or the device sustains heavy damage. The devices sent by Operation Waypoint cost about \$160 each but are given free to the troops. They have become quite popular.

“There is a pastor in Colorado that said he will not have a soldier leave for the war from his church without a GPS donated by the parish,” Meyer said.

Meyer believes that as veterans, Legionnaires have a special obligation to care for the troops. “It’s what the Legion is all about. By showing that we are interested and concerned for their safety, they will want to get involved with us when they get back.”

To donate or learn more about Operation Waypoint, visit www.gpsfortroops.org.



A Marine in Iraq displays his GPS device provided by Operation Waypoint.

Honoring the Families

Armed Forces Day, May 16, 2006, dawned to a bright clear sky. You couldn't have planned a better day for an outdoor event if you tried. For Ralph "Zoc" Zoccolillo and his Blue Star Salute Committee, that was the only thing their months of meetings had no control over. The purpose of their planning was as clear as the sky above: to honor the families of the service members in their community.

The committee met weekly for nearly eight months at Post 145 in Avon, Ind., working out the details and assigning tasks. In between the meetings they canvassed the community for sponsors and support and enlisted the help of local military units for displays and outreach assistance to contact the families.

When Zoccolillo was first asked to chair the committee, he was given the planning booklet prepared by the National Public Relations Division. "It was all there. Everything I needed including the dates, and checklists," he said. In the end, he was able to pay for the event entirely through sponsorships and support from the community. Although Zoc is not a salesman or fundraiser by trade, he approached potential sponsors with such a positive attitude it was difficult to say no. "When you think about it, what else is more important than this?" he says. "It's a no brainer. All you have to do is explain what you're doing and ask."

The first event was held in a small community park where 75 families were honored with speeches, certificates and Blue Star Banner presentations, and most importantly the appreciation of their neighbors and community leaders. In addition to the military displays, including the

arrival of a Blackhawk helicopter, cheerleaders and mascots from the Indianapolis Colts and Indiana Pacers were on hand to sign autographs and entertain.

As video and photos of the event reached the deployed servicemembers, letters of appreciation were sent to the post, along with a few membership applications. "The event was a total success," said Zoccolillo. "When you receive that first hug, that thank you from a family member, you know that all of the hard work is worth it."

Since that first event, the Avon Blue Star Salute has grown into the Hendricks County Blue Star Salute as all of the American Legion posts in the county joined forces to support the event. It is now the Indiana Blue Star Salute, inviting family members from all over the state to be honored. It has grown from 75 families the first year to a goal of 1,000 families just three years later.

The events have raised money for the American Legion Legacy Scholarship for children of servicemembers killed on active duty since September 11, 2001. More than \$60,000 was raised during the first three Salutes.

They may not always promise picture-perfect weather, but the members of The American Legion in Hendricks County, Ind., will continue to honor the families of their comrades for as long as they have heroes in harm's way.



Ralph "Zoc" Zoccolillo welcomes the crew of a Blackhawk helicopter, one of several elements from the Indiana Army National Guard on hand to honor the families for the Blue Star Salute sponsored by Post 145 in Avon, Ind.

(bottom right) Volunteers from the Junior Auxiliary unit collect donations for The American Legion Legacy Scholarship fund at the Blue Star Salute event in Avon, Ind. When combined with corporate donations, over \$60,000 was raised in the first three years alone.



A Rose City Welcome to the Navy

For decades sailors and Marines have been enjoying the hospitality of American Legion Post 1 in Portland, Ore., during “fleet week” every June, in conjunction with the city’s Rose Festival and Parade. The post would rent a hospitality suite at a waterfront hotel and provide free food and drinks for the visiting servicemembers, whose numbers ranged from 300 to 1,000 depending on the arriving ships. All of that nearly came to a halt in 2008 when the new management of the hotel made it clear that the fleet week contingent would no longer be welcome.

“We simply moved it to our post,” said Auxiliary member Cheryl Fulton, whose late husband Tom was a past

post commander there. “Our goal is to make these heroes feel like they are with family. They are out there day after day taking care of us, they shouldn’t have to spend a dime of their own money while they are visiting with us in Portland.”

Although Tom Fulton, who passed away in February 2008, was a lead organizer of past fleet weeks, Cheryl and the rest of the post family are committed to continuing its success.

“We are open all day until late at night for the whole week,” Cheryl said. “We have obtained some great corporate sponsors such as Reeser’s Food, Lays Potato Chips and Seattle Coffee, just to

name a few. It’s a place for the guys to get a good meal, have some camaraderie and see some of their friends from other ships. We have volunteer drivers pick them up so they can get off the streets and not have to spend anything. It’s The American Legion way to take care of those in the service.”



Helping to grill up some of the 450 hamburgers consumed during the Rose Festival hospitality mission are Don Mitchell and John Peterson. Photo by David Ashton

Lappy Top, Tennessee

Department of Tennessee Adjutant Mike Hammer knows what it is like to receive a useful and unexpected gift in a war zone. The retired Army officer still recalls receiving a battery-powered razor that he used everyday while serving in Vietnam more than 40 years ago.

While cordless razors are no longer – forgive the pun – cutting edge technology, the Department of Tennessee, led by Commander Earl Watson, sent items that are also greatly appreciated by hospitalized troops in Afghanistan; laptop computers with webcams.

“You want to get what people need,” Hammer said. “These webcams provide a tremendous way for loved ones to connect. It helps the healing process and you can see the results by the looks on their faces.”

Initially, The American Legion Department of Tennessee purchased sixteen webcam laptop computers and mailed them to the Pat Tillman USO Center at Bagram Air Base in Afghani-

stan for the purpose of having them placed and utilized by the hospitalized military personnel serving there. The computers were the results of a challenge Watson issued to The American Legion of Tennessee family; the ten American Legion districts, the American Legion Auxiliary, the Sons of The American Legion and the Legion Riders. The challenge was quickly met with donations. Dell was contacted and the computers were quickly on their way.

Troops who receive the laptops are able to take advantage of free VetCam services available through The American Legion’s Web site at www.legion.org.

Hammer hasn’t ruled out sending more computers. “These are very expensive, so we only would do it on an ‘as-needed’ basis,” he said. “But it’s just another way to show that we care and support what they are doing for us.”

What else could you expect from the Volunteer State?



Detachment Commander Rick Kaylor, Department President Linda Campbell, Department Commander Earl Watson and Post 88 Legion Riders Director Tom LaCroix stand behind a stack of laptop computers to be sent to troops in Afghanistan.

Maryland Legionnaires Race for Fisher Houses

A good Legion post knows that a veteran is a veteran, regardless of which war or era they served. It is no mistake that Vietnam Veterans Post 295, in Gaithersburg, Md., is the home post for Patriot Racing, a motocross team dedicated to raising money to help the families and veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan. One of its two racers, just happens to be a veteran of the Gulf War era.

Legionnaires Steve Levow and his stepfather, John Porter, race motorcycles in the Championship Cup Series and the American Sportsbike Racing Association. The pair raises money for the Fisher House Founda-

tion, a nonprofit organization that provides free or low-cost housing to veterans and military families that are receiving treatment at military medical facilities.

“Early in the race season of 2008, I came up with the idea of building my race team around generating donations for the Fisher House and also advocating the ongoing needs of our combat-wounded veterans and their families,” said Levow, who served in the Marines from 1989-1992, when he was medically discharged due to knee injuries. Patriot Racing’s primary goal is to raise \$10,000, but LaVoe said that’s just a start.

“I figured it would be a worthy achievement to reach that goal, but why stop there? Let’s get them \$1,000,000,” Levow said. “But first things first.” By early 2009, Patriot Racing had already raised more than \$1,600 for Fisher but there is no sign that the team will stop anytime soon.

“I plan on racing for as long as I can,” Levow said. “If JP (John Porter) can race at 62, why can’t I? While still young, my son Jake is showing a lot of interest in motorcycles. If that continues, we’ll get him on one in a couple of years and see where that takes us.”

The results have been impressive. The team, which has only been in existence for a couple of years, has had several fourth through eighth place finishes, and Levow won the 2008 Summit Point Motorsports Park’s GTO Track Championship. But it’s the team’s dedication to the troops and their families that sets it apart.

Patriot Racing often hosts groups of servicemembers from Walter Reed Army Medical Center’s “Wounded Warrior” program at its races. For more on Patriot Racing, visit www.patriotracing.us.



The Fisher House™ program is a unique private-public partnership that supports America’s military in their time of need. The program recognizes the special sacrifices of our men and women in uniform and the hardships of military service by meeting a humanitarian need beyond that normally provided by the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs.

Because members of the military and their families are stationed worldwide and must often travel great distances for specialized medical care, Fisher House™ Foundation donates “comfort homes,” built on the grounds of major military and VA medical centers. These homes enable family members to be close to a loved one during the hospitalization for an unexpected illness, disease, or injury.

These houses assist families in need and ensure that they are provided with the comforts of home in a supportive environment. By law, there is no charge for any family to stay at a Fisher House operated by the Department of Veterans Affairs; and Fisher House Foundation uses donations to reimburse the individual Fisher Houses operated by the Army, Navy, and Air Force. No family pays to stay at any Fisher House!



Steve Levow and John Porter form motocross’s Patriot Racing team.



Service to Community

Taking care of your own is a leadership philosophy instilled in every branch of the U.S. military. While The American Legion certainly believes in taking care of its own, it expands its spirit of service to include not just veterans but the entire community.

For instance, when a natural disaster strikes it is often an American Legion post that becomes a shelter of refuge or a center for emergency operations. It is often the American Legion post that hosts debates between candidates for political office or townhalls for members of Congress.

When The American Legion and the American Legion Auxiliary donated \$50,000 to The American Heart Association – a considerable sum at the time of the presentation in 1946 – the money not only benefited veterans but anyone who suffered from rheumatic heart disease.

The American Legion, long considered the leading authority on flag etiquette, became the foremost champion of the effort to protect Old Glory from desecration after the Supreme Court ruled that defiling the flag was free speech. In 1994 The American Legion created the Citizens Flag Alliance to work for a U.S. constitutional amendment to give Congress the legal authority to protect the flag of the United States from physical desecration.

The American Legion has joined its friends in the Alliance Defense Fund and Liberty Legal Institute in calling for Congress to pass the Public Expression of Religion Act, which would protect religious symbols at public memorials.

Most importantly, it is what The American Legion brings to its communities – the Legion-towns – that truly make The American Legion a service organization. When a sick child needs help, it is often the local Legion post that holds the fundraiser. The American Legion is not just an organization of 2.6 million veterans scattered across the country. It is the home just down the street.



Michael L. Emerson, life member of Post 649, Castro Valley, Calif., spearheaded and campaigned for a memorial for Flight 93 in Union City, Calif. As the driving force behind this endeavor, he received huge support from his post in drafting and advancing a resolution to support a national memorial in Shanksville, Pa. Due to the urging of many Flight 93 families, Emerson was appointed to serve on the steering committee to oversee the national memorial.

Northern California Lifesavers

Post 108 in Amador, Calif., not only operates an effective community service program, it saves lives.

In 1929 the post formed a volunteer ambulance service. It relied on a 1928 Buick Hearse. As demand for its services increased, the post needed to raise money. In 1933, the first “Ambulance Ticket” was sold for \$3. Eight decades later, the ticket idea still survives.

“The last thing our post wanted to do was price our community out of our service by having our citizens worry about calling 911,” said Al Lennox, the Post 108 and California Department Commander. “So we created a subscription service. Buy an ambulance ticket (now \$50) and it covers all costs. We will bill insurance but any remainder is waived as a public service. If there is no insurance, we waive the entire bill. It also creates a feeling of ownership for the citizens. It’s their ambulance service.”

Today, Post 108 provides a full service ambulance team with a paid staff that covers an

area of 1,400 square miles and a population of 80,000. It deploys nine ambulance stations in two counties and includes a medical director, six registered nurses, 42 paramedics, 28 emergency medical technicians and eight management and administrative staff.

Lennox, himself an EMT-P, believes his post fulfills the long American Legion tradition of community service. “Our post believes we should be the hub of our community. Amador Post 108 provides a myriad of services to our members and the local community beyond ambulance service. Again, it is a commitment whenever there is need in our community, we should be a resource for the solution,” Lennox said. “Any public service project the post has the ability to provide, it should attempt to do so. Veterans still serving America. It is as simple as that.”



1929 photo
(left to right) Al Davies, Lute C. Bourne, Louis Malatesta, Charles Raggio, Antone Spinetti, Clyde Getchell, Alexander Gibson, Howard Dayton, Alfred Malatesta



Richie Wilson of Post 162 gives blood at a recent blood drive.

Blood and Sacrifice

For seven years, every 62 days like clockwork, husband and wife team Michael and Barbara Gagliari run a blood drive at Post 162 in Deerfield Beach, Florida.

Michael is a member of Post 162 and wife Barbara is a member of the post’s Auxiliary unit.

Response has been unwavering over the years the Gagliari’s have run the program. Approximately 25-30 donors come each time the bloodmobile arrives at the post and beyond the running of a standing announcement in local area papers as to date and times, they’ve not needed to do more publicity to persuade folks to come.

Barbara writes an article every other month in

the post’s newsletter telling people how to prepare to give blood, and reminding them that a standard bonus to all donors is the blood pressure, iron level and cholesterol checks.

“More than likely, at some time during a person’s life, the possibility of needing blood will happen,” Barbara said. She expressed that in her experience Legion members seem particularly sensitive to the acute need of the blood banks.

Blood banks are vitally important. Since blood is only good for 42 days, it becomes a “use it or lose it” situation. It is a never-ending demand, yet Post 162’s track record over the years is definitely meeting that demand time after time.

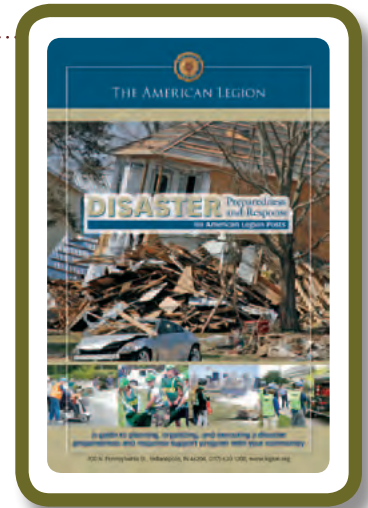
Texas Post Promotes Preparedness

Post 157 in Bandera, located in south central Texas, takes the affiliation of The American Legion with the Department of Homeland Security very seriously. Its outreach to the community has made local citizens more aware of the need to prepare for any emergency, natural or man-made.

Post officers and members are trained in first aid and CPR. They coordinate four first aid/CPR classes for the community during the year as well as Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training, a federally funded program under the Department of Homeland Security. With the understanding that following a major disaster, first responders who provide fire and medical services may not be able to meet the total demand for these services during the first 72 hours, CERT training provides members of the community the knowledge to make a difference for those who might need help. After the immediate

danger has passed, CERT teams can impact the recovery effort by providing direct assistance to victims, organizing volunteers who have not had the training, and collecting disaster intelligence that would assist professional responders with prioritization and allocation of resources.

Following the guidance provided in the booklet, *Disaster Preparedness and Response for American Legion Posts*, Post 157 has not only increased the awareness of citizens to prepare for and survive catastrophes, but also stands ready to respond. The post home has been designated a primary shelter during disasters for the county. Under the jurisdiction of the Bandera County Emergency Operations Coordinator and The American Red Cross, the post is prepared to provide shelter and serve meals for up to 30 people. It also offers respite and food to the county's first responders.



This *Disaster Preparedness and Response for American Legion Posts* booklet can be downloaded at www.legion.org.

American Legion Hospital at Your Service



The American Legion has long been recognized as one of the leading authorities of veterans health care. But what about community health care? In the Bayou State, one could find such expertise at the Jennings American Legion Hospital, in Jennings, La.

In 1952, physicians in the rural com-

munity needed a hospital to treat local residents. Enter James O. Hall Post 19, which bought the "Shirley Clinic" from Dr. Louis Shirley for \$68,000. Today, it is a full service hospital with an obstetrics wing, emergency room, and recently renovated surgical suite and radiology department.

"The American Legion has a board that, by and large, allows professionals to run and manage the facility," said Terry Terrebonne, the hospital's CEO and president. "We have historically provided the services the community has needed and have kept up with the latest technology to provide services that many rural hospitals do not."

Terrebonne added that other Legion posts or nonprofit organizations that wish to open medical facilities should

do so for pure community service motives. "If the hospital is later sold, the profits from the sale would have to go to another nonprofit hospital. Legally there are no benefits that would go back to the Legion members because of IRS rules," Terrebonne said. "If a post wants to get in the hospital business, it really is a challenge because they need a lot of money plus there is no personal gain other than knowing that you are providing a community service."

Community service is what this Legiontown is all about. Surely no other American Legion post would have the resources to build or run a hospital, one might surmise. Skeptics should ask the hospital located a mere 19 miles east of Jennings. That would be the American Legion Hospital in Crowley, La.

Spirit of Giving

Bringing the spirit of the season with generosity to the community is the core focus of the annual Christmas dinner held at Post 96 in Lima, Ohio.



Members of Post 96 serve Christmas dinner to needy families.

Started in 2002 as a Thanksgiving dinner for those in need within the community, it was shifted in the following years to Christmas.

Each year the post has an increasing need for volunteers along with donations including the turkeys. Not knowing each year whether the need would be met, the members of the post and the community would then meet the need. “As many people who call us needing help, an equal number of people call to help,” Kyle Catlett, co-chairman and Post 96 SAL member said. “It

seems like every time we needed something we didn’t think we could get, we got it.”

Dinner is no small task. To serve 300 to 400 people requires at least 20 turkeys, preferably donated ones. Volunteers are at the post by 5 a.m. Christmas morning to make all the side dishes for the meal. Still others come to serve and clean up. Additionally, every child who attends receives a wrapped gift.

For some the draw of the function is the free holiday meal, but others are drawn to it because of the companionship that would otherwise mean the day would be a lonely one. Maybe children and grandchildren were out of state and they couldn’t be with them that day or possibly they were without family and had no one else to spend the day with. These folks come and press bills into the organizers hands – they could afford the meal, but nowhere else could they find the companionship.

The Marietta Melting Pot

The American Legion has always been a leader in mentoring candidates for U.S. citizenship. Working closely with federal courts, it conducted naturalization schools throughout the country, teaching immigrants English proficiency, American history and civics.

The latest example includes the Horace Orr Post 29 in Marietta, Ga. Legionnaires there met with officials from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services to help in naturalization efforts with legal immigrants in its community.

For Post Commander Amador Rodriguez Jr., there was a personal reason.

“We all know that immigration is a hot issue,” said Rodriguez, a Navy

retiree. “But personally, there are five to six people I know right now who are not citizens of this country but who are serving this country in the military. What I’m hoping is that something like what we’re doing here is going to help people like that become citizens.”

Carlos Munoz-Acevedo, program manager for the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, attended the meeting with Joe Kernan, the USCIS’s District 8 community relations officer.

“We thought that traditional civic organizations like the Legion are great to lead these efforts,” Munoz-Acevedo said. “They have a great number of volunteers. They believe in patriotic ideals.”



Photo by Steve Brooks

Munoz and Kernan went over the naturalization process with the dozen Legionnaires who attended the meeting, explaining each step in gaining U.S. citizenship while providing a list of the questions on the citizenship exam. The hope is that the post can begin to conduct outreach efforts to the legal immigrant community, including co-sponsoring citizenship information workshops and citizenship study groups.

'Hamming It Up' for Disaster Readiness...

Amateur radio operators, or "hams" as they are affectionately known, have a motto: "When all else fails" - referring to the long history of ham radio operators who provide emergency communications when disasters knock out power and phone lines, cell phone towers and other forms of mass communication.

Legionnaires at Post 283 in Pacific Palisades, Calif., have taken to heart the affiliation of The American Legion with the Dept. of Homeland Security and set up a communications command post and shelter at their post home.

With a half dozen members holding FCC amateur radio licenses, Post 283 is ready to provide a way for citizens to request assistance from first responders should telephone communication fail during a potential earthquake, fire storm, terrorist incident or other natural disaster that could isolate their community.

Post radio operators are able to move emergency radio traffic in and around the area or relay health and welfare messages to loved ones across the country using the post's amateur radio station, FCC call sign - KI6IRL. With their own generator, they are able to operate without commercial power. The post also mentors local youth by providing ham radio instruction.

Post 283 Legionnaires are prepared to host Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) courses, Family & Business Disaster Plan presentations, Neighborhood/Building Preparedness Plans and Red Cross First Aid and CPR courses.

As radio amateurs say, "73," (ham radio lingo for 'best regards,') from the blue-capped hams at Post 283.



Past Post Commander Bill Branch (amateur radio call sign W4GEYA) mans the emergency communications center at Post 283 in Pacific Palisades, Calif. The building also serves as a community disaster shelter for local residents.

'Open Your Heart' Touches Many During Christmas

Joyful, yes, but the Christmas season is hardly relaxing at Lloyd Spetz Post 1 in Bismarck, N.D. Post members work like Santa's elves, organizing, publicizing and raising funds for their "Open Your Heart" campaign.

Since 1929 the post has held the charity drive and its core mission today, although evolved, has remained the same as then-Post Commander A.D. McKinnon stated, "to solicit the help of those persons who might not care to assume a large responsibility, but who can help a little. We feel we can supply leadership for the general public in a work which enlists the sympathy of everyone."

"Open Your Heart" provides Christmas food baskets and children's clothing to needy families in the counties of Bismarck and Burleigh.

The campaign kicks off early every December with a 12-hour radio broadcast on a local radio station. Donations flow in from pennies to thousands of dollars. According to program chairman Bob Wefald, "It is our 'shot in the arm' as this radio show brings us an average of \$25,000 each year. From there the funds keep pouring in."

Throughout December, students, teachers and staff of the Bismarck Public School system collect cans of non-perishable food items, which are transported to the exhibit hall of the Bismarck Civic Center by Army Reservists. Volunteers there stack, count and label baskets. Along with the purchased food items, everything is delivered in a day.

With the campaign running for so

long, many people contact the post relating how this yearly event made a difference in their lives on Christmases past. "One guy in California told me that when he was a kid growing up out here, he got a new pair of shoes. He sent in a \$1,000 donation," Wefald commented. "Some people say that when they were kids, 'Open Your Heart' was the only Christmas they had."



Chicago, a Legion Kind of Town

Dorie Miller Post 915 of Chicago has never had a post home even though it was chartered in 1946. The post saw slim and inactive years, apathy and little commitment. It even lost its temporary meeting place in 2004 due to the building being determined as unsafe.

That was then. Fast forward to nearly the end of the first decade of the 21st century and Post 915 is alive, well and definitely kicking.

Under the leadership of Commander Robert Davis, Post 915 is becoming known in its large community and that is exactly what the commander wanted.

The post, which now meets at the Richard Jones Armory, is nearly 500 members strong and involved with a variety of Legion programs and other activities within the community. It partners with other veteran service organizations to hold career fairs. Moreover, it now has a strong Boys and Girls State program and hosts the High School Oratorical Scholarship Program.

The Auxiliary sponsors a nursing scholarship

program available to Chicago area residents. Past Auxiliary President and founder of the scholarship program, Dee Reid commented, "We are very aware that the city of Chicago has one of the highest high school incompleteness rates in the United States. If we can plant a seed in our youth very early about numerous opportunities in the field of nursing, we hopefully can see more of our youth pursuing a career path in nursing."

Post 915 participates in the Chicago Memorial Day parade and when troops deploy and return from within the armory, the post rolls up its sleeves and pitches in with homecoming celebrations and offers assistance to families of the deployed.

Davis is passionate about the role The American Legion can play in his community. "We need to be visible, to reach out at every opportunity. By lobbying everywhere we can, the goals are that everyone knows who we are, will know what we do and how to find us when they need us."

Davis is in the process of writing a \$20 million grant proposal that would allow construction of a post and community center. Included in the complex would be handicapped-accessible apartments for returning wounded warriors and their families. Maintenance and upkeep would be provided by post members.

While the goals may be ambitious, one need only look at how far Post 915 has come in the last few years to believe in its passion, commitment and dedication to community.



(above) Post members participate each year in Chicago's Memorial Day Parade.

(bottom right) Post 915 sponsors a homecoming event for returning deployed servicemembers.



*“Success in life has nothing to do with
what you gain in life or accomplish for
yourself. It’s what you do for others.”*

— Danny Thomas



Members of American Legion Post 18 and the Naval Sea Cadets march in the Aquidneck Island National Police Parade in Middletown/Newport, R.I.

Photo by Arthur C. E. Perry



THE AMERICAN LEGION

Public Relations Division

700 N. Pennsylvania St. • Indianapolis, IN 46204

www.legion.org