Joe Gallagher has worked for The American Legion Headquarters in Indianapolis for the past 20 years. He’s a member of the Sons through Avon, IN Squadron 145. As Deputy Director of Information Technology for The Legion, he’s one of the biggest cheerleaders for the S.A.L.’s new MySAL.org internet site.

MySAL.org debuted last October. It’s a free and secure internet web site intended to support Squadrons in accessing some important and extremely helpful day-to-day membership tools. It links local Squadrons directly with the computers at National Headquarters.

Every Squadron in the S.A.L. is eligible to register one individual to access MySAL.org on behalf of that Squadron. Once logged in, the features that can be accessed allow that individual to view and edit Squadron membership data (CSV file format allows users to work with data in other applications such as Microsoft Excel and Access), generate reports, conduct membership database searches and much more.

CWF donations top $6 million

In late April, almost a full month before the end of the administrative year, a donation sent into the Child Welfare Foundation by a Florida Squadron put the S.A.L. over the $6 million mark in all-time donations!
On the final approach to landing
By Joe Gladden
National Commander

We are rapidly approaching the end of my administrative year and I’m so proud to have served this year as your National Commander.

Words really cannot describe it. The year has been filled with many incredible memories of accomplishment and of loss, but the only losses worth remembering are those of our comrades, friends and family members that have gone on before us.

This year I’ve had the great honor of traveling across this nation. Since being elected, I have traveled to 24 Detachments and have seen how we’re working the programs of The American Legion. We are working for the communities in which we live. Most importantly, we are helping the veterans who have served and the soldiers who are currently protecting us.

During my travels I have been talking about the programs that I have asked Sons to work on this year, especially my Commander’s Project, the Legacy Scholarship Fund. I have shared my vision of the Legacy everywhere I have traveled and have told the story of how a soldier would leave home to protect his country and his family with every intention of coming home. However, that soldier didn’t return, answering the final call instead. I would share how that service members’ family and children were left to take care of themselves. Long ago, The American Legion realized that we need to help the children of our fallen soldiers.

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On a recent trip to Ohio, National Commander Joe Gladden had an opportunity to congratulate nine year old Myles Eckert. Myles found a $20 bill one day in a parking lot. He wrapped the bill in a note and handed it to an Air National Guardsman. The note read, “My dad was a soldier. He’s in heaven now. We like to pay it forward in my family. It’s your lucky day! Thank you for your service.”

Myles was just four weeks old when his father was killed in Iraq in 2005. This simple, selfless effort made news across the country and landed him an appearance on a national TV show. The Detachment of Ohio honored him with a lifetime membership in Toledo, OH Squadron 587. The Legion Department of Ohio donated $5,000 in Myles’ name to a charity and is sending him to an Auxiliary-sponsored survivors’ camp this fall.

Myles also teamed up with a Friendly’s restaurant this spring and threw an ice cream party for an elementary school in Toledo. He used the opportunity to talk to the youngsters about paying it forward. While he was signing autographs, one young student handed him a one dollar bill and asked him to give it to a soldier.

MySL.org

At present, fewer than ten percent of all Sons Squadrons in the world have assigned a member to have access to MySL.org. To-date, about 550 Squadrons are using the service.

“I have a good feeling that this is helping the S.A.L.,” says Joe Gallagher. “You don’t have to be the Squadron Adjutant to get access to the system. But in many Squadrons, the Adjutant is the guy who does most of the paperwork involving membership, so it just makes sense that he would be the one with access. It’s completely up to the Squadron and its Legion Post to choose the one person who is authorized.”

Getting signed up for MySL.org is pretty easy. The first step is to go to the site and print the form on the entry portal. That form must be signed by, both, the S.A.L. Squadron and American Legion Post Adjutants. The form is then faxed, mailed or e-mailed to National Headquarters where it will be checked and processed. It usually takes only two or three days before a temporary sign-in is e-mailed to the person who has been approved. Once a Squadron Adjutant (or whomever) has logged into the system, he can change his password to whatever he wants. For security purposes, passwords must be changed every six months thereafter.

Individuals who are not necessarily computer-savvy can get support for using the system by calling a special tool-free help line. Not only will Legion Headquarters staff be able to talk them through problems, there is even remote assistance available. By activating a series of on-line codes, callers can allow MySL.org staff to look at the caller’s own computer screen to diagnose and fix problems they might be having with using the system.

While MySL.org is likely to have a huge, positive, impact of membership for many Squadrons, the future looks even brighter.

“We’ve talked about offering online renewals a lot for a long time. If we can generate enough interest in using this system, it might just be possible to program the computers to handle online registration in the not too distant future,” says Gallagher. “We’re not there yet, but who knows?”

Anyone interested in learning more about MySL.org can simply call the help line: 800-433-3318. Also, Libby Vickers, Product Support Specialist for The Legion’s IT office will have a booth in the exhibit hall of the Charlotte National Convention next month. Anyone is welcome to stop by and take the first step toward some monumental improvements of handling membership data inside the S.A.L.

Right: Commander Joe Gladden thanked 9-year old Myles Eckert for his “pay it forward” attitude.

Above: Pam, Ilene and Andrea are ready to help with real time support for the MySL.org system. Callers can get remote assistance, allowing the experts to see what’s on your screen and help.
Above: When a member of Oak Harbor, OH Squadron 114 went to visit his father in a nearby nursing home, he saw that the TV that his father and other veterans had depended on was broken and beyond repair. The Squadron took matters into their own hands. Using money made from a series of fund raisers, they purchased and donated a 46” flat screen to the nursing home and the vets are once again enjoying their favorite programs.

Below: No event is too big or too small when it comes to veterans out on the eastern end of Pennsylvania. Just call on the guys from Allentown, PA Squadron 9 and they’ll rustle up plenty of help for plenty of events. They take the position that men and women in our military have made sacrifices and dedicated their lives in protecting our country and our freedoms. They’re only too happy to be able to give something back.

Right: Guys from Limerick, PA Squadron 626 think everyone should adopt a highway somewhere. Four times each year, they head out into Berks County to perform clean-up and beautification operations on their road.

For nine years, Sons from Adena, OH Squadron 525 have been awarding scholarships to deserving high school students who are headed to college. This year, the Squadron handed out $500 to each of four deserving students. One of the recipients was the great-great grandson of one of the original Legionnaires who first chartered Post 525. Sounds like a good example of karma coming back around. Squadron 525 raises all of their scholarship money through an annual golf scramble.

Earlier this year, Sons from around the Detachment of New York participated in the Center for Disabilities Telethon at Albany. About 15 Sons manned the telephones and took donations from callers. They plan to make it an annual event and might even increase the $500 contribution the Detachment made that day.

Right: It’s not unusual for Squadrons to present awards to their members and others who have rendered outstanding service to The Legion Family and/or to their community. That was the case this spring when Whitman, MA Squadron 22 recognized their Sgt. at Arms, Joseph Marzilli. “Jay” used his own cherry picker to paint the post flag pole a few years ago. He put together a tribute to veterans along his own street. He installed stepping stones in front of the post. He serves on the Honor Guard. And much more.

Sons in the Erie County, NY area have gotten together with other representatives of The American Legion Family and are working to build the state’s largest female veteran homeless center. It’s been two years in the undertaking. When finished, the center will be located near the Buffalo, NY VA Hospital.

The town of Quincy, MA is looking a lot nicer this summer thanks to the efforts of some community-minded Sons. Members of Quincy, MA Squadron 294 teamed up with local high school students, Junior ROTC students and some other members of The Legion Family during the community’s Cleaner, Greener Cleanup back in early May. The group planted flowers and decorated a large traffic island, known as Veterans Island that the Sons created just about a year ago. It’s also the site of Memorial Day ceremonies, complete with hundreds of U.S. Flags.
Legacy Run

S.A.L. National Commander Joseph Gladden has made The American Legion’s Legacy Scholarship Fund one of his primary projects this year. The scholarship fund was established to ensure college education is a possibility for children whose parents have been killed while serving our country’s military since 9/11.

One of the most successful ways of raising funds for the scholarship in recent years has been the now-annual Legacy Run. Hundreds of Legion Family motorcyclists ride from Indianapolis to the site of the National Convention and raise hundreds of thousands of dollars.

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K9TAL is looking for members

The idea of an amateur radio club is not new inside The American Legion. As early as the 1930’s – long before the development of today’s various worldwide communications technologies – Legion posts were encouraged to form amateur radio groups in support of civil defense. Today the buzz phrase is Homeland Security, but the mission remains largely the same: serving the needs of the community.

The American Legion Amateur Radio Club was formed in 2011, thanks in large part to some S.A.L. members in Southern Maryland who donated the first Ham radio equipment to organizers at the National Headquarters in Indianapolis. With equipment in hand, an antenna was installed on the roof and a room in the basement was fixed up to serve as the club’s official headquarters.

The call sign for TALARC is K9TAL. It has the ability to operate in the HF, VHF and UHF frequency ranges. Monthly “nets” (on air get-togethers) are held in the afternoon of the second Saturday every month. There are now just over 1,900 members of the club.

Martis Justis, recently retired Executive Director of The American Legion, is a Ham operator (call sign W9WMJ) and has served as president of the club since its formation. He’s also a member of Little River, SC Squadron 186.

“There are many radio clubs out there but very few of them are nationwide. Ours is the largest amateur radio club in the country,” says Justis. “This club is yet another opportunity we have to serve our communities, states and the nation. We have great potential to assist in times of disaster. Getting active can also pay dividends within your own Legion post or Squadron. This can be a tool for generating membership, building youth programs, practicing disaster preparedness training and other forms of public service to the community like serving as trained weather watchers. And it’s fun.”

Justis believes the easiest way to bring TALARC into your community is to find a member.

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