

WINTER
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***Your
American
Legion in
Action***

LEGION

NEW YORK



LEGION NEW YORK

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2014 ENDS WITH NEARLY 2,000 NEW MEMBERS DEPT. COMMANDER: 'THANK YOU! KEEP IT UP'

In a New Year's message, Department Commander Frank Peters thanked membership teams and Legionnaires for their efforts that successfully recruited 1,958 new members before the end of 2014.

That's in addition to membership renewals. As of Dec. 28, the Department was at 75 percent of its overall membership goal, well on the way to reaching 80 percent by a Jan. 21st target date.

He called the Department's goal to increase membership by 3,000 over 2014 "modest," yet "ambitious" in the face of declining Legion membership across the country.

He reminded everyone of his incentive to award a pin to each member who recruited just one new member or reinstated a delinquent member.

"Membership recruitment is a vital part of the membership program because it not only helps us replace our dedicated members who pass on, but also allows us to reverse the trend of a declining membership and foster a culture of growth," the commander said. "Being the second largest Department in the National organization is something we all can be proud of. It is estimated that there are 600,000 eligible war time veterans living in New York State. Our current membership represents less than 25% of that number. And, as I have said on many occasions, that as a nation that has been in conflict for 25 years, I believe every member knows at least one person that is eligible



Frank J. Peters
Department Commander

to join our organization. It is my hope that this incentive would motivate and inspire every member to reach out to just one person and become part of this year's successful effort."

He added: "Equally important as recruiting new members is retaining our current members. National Commander Mike Helm has recently announced that he will award his membership incentive pin to members who reach out to current members who have not yet renewed for the 2015 membership year. (Three new members or five renewals earn the national pin.) Personal contact is the key here and this should be an easy task. Membership renewal notices are mailed out in January 2015 to all members who have not yet renewed. Please make every effort to follow up these notices with a phone call."

IT'S EASY TO RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP.

www.legion.org/renew

ON THE COVER

The Legion Family around New York State paid tribute to the sacrifices of U.S. military veterans by participating in wreath-laying ceremonies, parades and other events on Veterans Day on Nov. 11. Framed by POW/MIA and American Legion flags, Jim George of Utica Post 229 renders salute while leading ceremonies in Utica.

LEGIONNAIRE FIRE CHIEF REBUFFS ATHEISTS' DEMANDS

ACTION GRABS ATTENTION OF NATIONAL NEWS MEDIA

UTICA -- Legionnaire Fire Chief Russell Brooks found himself in the center of national attention in December when he rebuffed demands by atheist groups to take down a "Happy Birthday Jesus" sign in front of one of Utica's fire stations.

He said he received demanding phone calls and threatening letters, including numerous letters from the Wisconsin-based Freedom from Religion Foundation, which aims to keep religion and government separate.

People who risk their lives fighting fires are not intimidated by threatening letters, he said. Brooks, a former Marine and member of Utica



Legionnaire Russell Brooks, who heads the Utica Fire Department, rebuffed demands to remove a Christmas sign outside one of the fire stations.

Post 229, said he supported the firefighters who put the sign up. The sign says, "Happy Birthday Jesus, We Love You," and has been up at Station No. 4 every Christmas since the 9/11 terrorist attacks. "9/11 brought a lot of guys closer to God," he said.

Brooks has been barraged

by news media, appearing on national TV, including Fox and Friends, and in newspapers across the country.

When the controversy arose, a number of local groups began showing their support. For example, other fire departments posted their own "Happy Birthday Jesus"



signs. Utica Post 229 put the same message on its digital sign in front of the post and shared a photo of it on the UFD's Facebook page. Christmas carolers serenaded the fire station's crew.

Brooks said most government organizations back down to

threats involving religious controversies, but not the fire department.

"Pledge of Allegiance has God in it, money has God on it," he said. "This case isn't unique" -- which is why he can't help but wonder how a simple homemade sign can attract so much attention.

DEPARTMENT COMMANDER HONORS TOP RECRUITERS

Department Commander Frank Peters honored top member recruiting performers at the Membership Workshop for 3rd and 4th

Districts held Sept. 6 at John Wyszomirski Post 701 in Amsterdam. He honored Mario Cristaldi, 4th District, as recruiter of the year, with

the Gold Brigade Award, for recruiting over 50 new members.

The Commander's Award for the post with the highest

membership achievement, 195 percent, went to William Nolan Post 405, Willsboro. Mike Shea, Essex Co. service officer, accepted for the post.

MEET YOUR STAFF

*Department Adjutant Jim Casey will introduce staffers on a rotating basis. In this issue he spotlights Office Director **BARBARA KERR**.*



One might say appreciating veterans is in Barb Kerr's blood. Her grandfather fought with the Union Army; her father served in World War II; her son is a career army officer; her granddaughter and husband are West Point grads, her grandson is in the Air National Guard, and Barb herself belongs to Joseph E. Zaloga Post 1520 auxiliary, plus is approaching 16 years working for veterans with the Legion. (She has 2 sons, 1 daughter, 11 grandchildren, 2 great grandchildren.)

She describes her job as a little bit of everything, from assisting the adjutant

to working with service officers and veterans rehab to preparing hundreds of documents and handling plans for meetings, conventions and conferences. At Mid-Winter Conference and Department Convention, she's the go-to person in the headquarters room.

One might also say Barb marches to a different drum. She and her deceased Scottish husband, Roderick (a WWII/Korea vet), spent many years performing with pipe and drum bands; she on tenor drums and he as drum major. "That's what we did for fun -- go out and do parades."



Jim Casey

WAYNE COUNTY ADDS 34 MEMBERS IN ONE DAY

REVITALIZATION TEAM SPENDS HOUR AND A HALF MAKING CALLS

A small diverse group of American Legion Family members from the Seventh District joined together on Wednesday evening, September 10, to contact members living in Wayne County who do not belong to a local post and personally invite them to transfer into one. Callers were prepared to discuss specific questions about local posts and to complete transfer paperwork while on the line.

(These members had joined the Legion through a "direct membership solicitation" from national headquarters and as a result had been assigned to a "holding" post known as Post 1.)

In just an hour and a half, the "phone bank" was able to speak directly to 43 veterans.

"In this short time, Wayne County posts grew by 34 transfer memberships -- a success rate of 79 percent!"



Wayne County team makes calls and fills out transfer paperwork. From left: Holly Trueman, Ray Freyn, Deb Hammon and Dennis McCarthy (top), Fred Percy and Ray Freyn, and Daryl Vanstrete. Photos by Michael Hannan.

noted Past Wayne County Commander Michael Hannan. "The lessons learned from Past Department Commander W. Michael Bowen, whose mantra is, 'Just Ask!', continue to be effective."

The revitalization team made the calls from Marion Memorial Post 1430 and was led by dual member

Daryl Verstrete Jr., Wayne County American Legion first vice commander and Seventh District Sons of the American Legion (SAL) commander.

Also participating were 7th & 8th District Membership Coordinator Dennis McCarthy; 7th District 1st Vice Commander/Membership Chairman Fred

Percy; 7th District 3rd Vice Commander Holly Trueman; Past Wayne County Commanders Michael Hannan, Raymond Freyn and Marshall Francis; Past Wayne County American Legion Auxiliary President Debra Hammon; and Auxiliary members Kimberly Hicks, Unit 286, and Jessica Rugenstein, Unit 1430.

GAETA HEADS JUNIOR BASEBALL PROGRAM FOR 2015



Greg Gaeta of Utica Post 229 has been appointed director of the Department's Junior Baseball Program for 2015 season, Department Baseball Chairman Bruce

Mayfield announced.

Gaeta will oversee the American Legion Baseball Junior Program, including the Department Junior Tournament.

He has been involved with American Legion Baseball for over 20 years as a player, coach and manager at Utica Post 229 and administrator for District 5.

BASEBALL TOURNAMENT IN UTICA THROUGH 2020

UTICA – After three years of hosting the State American Legion Championship Series in Utica, the City of Utica was awarded the honor of hosting the event through 2020. The an-

nouncement came just prior to the July 29th start of the 2014 tournament.

The tournament will "follow the same format that National uses, and that is to go to pool play," Department

Baseball Chairman Bruce Mayfield said in making the announcement.

"Pool play means every team is not only guaranteed a minimum of three games, but just as important for

the fans, they will know the times their team will be playing. We expect that will have a positive impact on travel plans for parents and friends from outside the Utica area."

ENDICOTT POST CLINCHES STATE BASEBALL TITLE

UTICA, NY -- Endicott Post 82 clinched the New York State American Legion Baseball Championship Aug. 3 in a double-win against Saratoga Stampede at Utica's Murnane Field.

Endicott, with one loss in the tournament, entered the final round against an undefeated Saratoga, so its first 10-6 triumph forced a playoff game, where it also took a 6-0 win.

State Baseball Chair Bruce Mayfield presented the Big Stick Award for high batting average to Endicott's Cameron Krowiak, who batted 526 in the tournament, and the Most Valuable Player Award to Endicott pitcher Nick Yesensky.

Tournament Director Mike Macchione saluted



Endicott players show their jubilation at winning the state title. Photo by Bob Stronach.

both Saratoga and Endicott players for their skill, competitiveness and sportsmanship, and drew cheers when he said that it doesn't get much better than playing top-notch baseball in American Legion uniforms.

Endicott Coach Jeff McKeveny said he gave a

pre-game pep talk to his players about family values, and fathers and sons playing ball -- which brought to mind his own deceased dad, whose birthday was "today"; perhaps, a portent of a good game.

"The kicker is," he said, "he would have been 82 (the

same number as Endicott Post 82)."

He added that it was "a terrific experience with a terrific group of kids," and he praised "the wonderful people in the Utica community and the wonderful people directing the tournament."

WEBSTER YOUTH GRABS NATIONAL SHOOTING TITLE ANDRE GROSS IS 2014 SPORTER AIR RIFLE CHAMPION

Antonio "Andre" Gross, sponsored by Cottreal-Warner Post 942 in Webster, is a 2014 Sporter Air Rifle National Champion.

The high school sophomore won the sporter category and a \$5,000 scholarship at the 24th annual American Legion Junior 3-Position Air Rifle National Championship held in August at the U.S. Olympics Training Center in Colorado Springs, Colo.

Gross, who finished with an aggregate score of 2,309.5, maintained a commanding lead in the three-day event.



Andre Gross receives his medals and is congratulated by American Legion Auxiliary National President Nancy Brown-Park on Saturday, August 2. Photo by Lucas Carter/The American Legion.

The precision title, decided in a final day shoot-out from the standing position, went to Michael Steinel of New Philadelphia, Ohio, who also

won a \$5,000 scholarship.

Andre and his family attended the American Legion National Convention in Charlotte, N.C., with Post

942 Junior Shooting Coach Charlie Marvin, Post Commander Greg Cody, and Post Adjutant/Convention Delegate Don Linborg.

VA VISITATION TASK FORCE OFF AND RUNNING

TOWN HALL MEETINGS ACCOMPANY SITE VISITS IN ALBANY, BRONX

The Department of New York's VA Healthcare Task Force completed its first round of visitations at VA healthcare facilities in November and December.

The first-ever visit by a state-level task force took place Nov. 18-19 at Samuel S. Stratton VA Medical Center in Albany. The visit was preceded by four town hall meetings where the task force heard first-hand from veterans about the care and services received at Stratton VA, reports Task Force Chairman R. Michael Suter, who is also New York's chairman of Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation.

More town hall meetings took place in the Bronx prior to the Dec. 16-17 visitation at the James J. Peters VA Medical Center there.

Delegates at the Department Convention in July voted to mandate the site



Task Force Chairman R. Michael Suter

visits. Reports generated from these visits will be "compiled into a publication illustrating the manner in which each respective facility utilizes resources as well

as the facility's challenges and limitations," Suter noted.

The initial site visits, he said, aim to get an overview of "VA's progress achieved over the past ten years, cur-

rent issues and concerns as well as VA's five-year strategic plan for VA's budget, staffing, enrollment, outreach, hospital programs, mental health, intensive care unit (ICU), long-term care, homeless programs, information technology and construction programs."

The site visit program "is off and running across the state," Suter said.

Although very new, he added, it is "a complete success," thanks to training provided by former national visitation task force member Pat Rourke and Headquarters staff, and thanks to site visit and town hall meeting coordination provided by Steve Bowman, program vice chairman for VISN 2 (Veterans Integrated Service Network – upstate New York area), and Dan Morea, VISN 3 (downstate NY area) program coordinator.

LEGIONNAIRES HONOR FALLEN GUILDERLAND GENERAL

GUILDERLAND, NY – On the day Major General Harold Greene's body returned to the United States (Aug. 7), local American Legion members joined

together at his boyhood home to remember his life, News10 TV reported.

Legion members laid flags around the boyhood home of Major General Greene, who

was killed in Afghanistan on Aug. 5 making him the highest ranking official to die in combat since Vietnam. Legion Riders rode from the Altamont Legion to Greene's

father's home to offer a soldier's salute and prayer of their own. "We're here to honor a man who gave the ultimate sacrifice for his country," organizer Stephen Oliver said.

RYAN LEONE ELECTED BOYS STATE GOVERNOR

Ryan Leone, a student at Sachem High School East in Farmingdale, was elected governor of The American Legion's Boys State, held last July at SUNY Morrisville.

Nearly 1,000 high school students from around the

state participated in the week-long immersion in citizenship and democracy, electing Leone to Boys State highest office. Following Boys State, Leone participated in Boys Nation in Washington, D.C. as one of 98 "senators."

Leone has been class government president, co-president of the foreign language honor society, secretary of the National Honor Society, Captain of JV football, and captain of Varsity Winter Track. He is an Eagle Scout.



Ryan Leone with 2013-14 Dept. Commander Ken Governor.

POSTS DONATE WINTERWEAR FOR PRE-SCHOOLERS

UTICA -- The pre-schoolers were excited, singing for their American Legion visitors, and showing gleeful anticipation over the huge box decorated with Christmas wrapping.

The Calvary Head Start program, located in the former Calvary Church Parish House on South Street with the Mohawk Valley Community Action Agency (MVCAA), put out the word that children were in need of winter clothing.

"Two American Legion Posts answered the call," noted Marron Mcleod of Provost Post 1686. He was there with fellow post member Ed Jackson and a contingent from Utica Post 229 and its Auxiliary that included Jim George, Rosaria Haggerty, Rosetta LaPaglia and Pam Vogel. Mcleod told staff and children: "We have a box full of brand new mittens, hats,



scarves, socks and coats."

The children gathered around the box and on cue tore into the wrapping. Then Mcleod and George distributed a pair of gloves, hat and scarf to each of the children, who began modeling the

winterwear. Teacher Jackie Parks led the children in a rousing "thank you," and the kids presented huge thank-you cards they had created.

Auxiliary Unit 229 also donated a \$100 check.

"Most of the children we

serve are (from) low income families, single mothers," MVCAA Deputy Director Evon Irvin told WUTR TV. "Ninety percent of them work, but they struggle, so it's very important that we can give back to the children."

NY LEGIONNAIRES CONGRATULATE OLIVER NORTH

CHARLOTTE, NC – The nation's largest wartime veterans service organization honored Lt. Col. Oliver L. North, U.S. Marine Corps (Ret), with the National Commander's Public Relations Award during its 96th national convention here Aug. 26.

Among those congratulating the host of Fox News' "War Stories" were two Legionnaires from New York's Columbia County. In fact, North took a moment to pose for a picture with New York Legionnaires Jeff French and



Lt. Col. Oliver North poses for photo with New York Legionnaires Jeff French (left) and Richard Morris.

his friend, Richard Morris -- as North had been French's scoutmaster.

The author of several

books about military men and women at war, North was honored for "raising public awareness about the

honorable nature of military service and the sacrifices made by America's heroes."

LOWVILLE POST RENOVATING HISTORIC BUILDING PROJECT AIMS TO BRING OUT ORIGINAL BRICK AND WOOD BEAUTY

LOWVILLE -- American Legion Post 162 is restoring its historic building.

Over the past year, workers and volunteers have removed drywall throughout the building's ground floor, which exposed the original brick wall, replaced windows, and completed other extensive renovations to the structure, the Watertown Daily Times reported in December.

"This is how it looked 150 years ago," Post Commander C. Lee Hinkleman told the paper.

The second floor is being restored one office at a time, with the hope of eventually creating a small museum in one of the rooms. Additionally, the Legion is paying \$10,000 for the removal of pigeon droppings from the third and fourth floors of the structure, he said.

Volunteers removed wood from around the chimney in the bar area to return that to its more natural state.

Extensive work to the ceil-



Historic building houses Lowville Post 162.

ing and other areas remains to be done.

"We're trying to get everything done by April," Hinkleman said.

To help cover costs, the post started a capital fund project and is soliciting donations for the cause.

"We call it our SOB fund,"

Hinkleman told the paper. "Save Our Building."

Little changes already are noticeable.

Legion officials have hung the original charter, with names and signatures of original members, on a first-floor wall. An old running board from a Ford F-150

pickup now serves as a footrest in one section of the bar.

They also plan to hang some donated weapons on the downstairs walls, including a pistol taken from a Japanese soldier on an island in the South Pacific during World War II, Hinkleman said.

LEGION HONORS PEARL HARBOR FALLEN

WEST SENECA – A number of American Legion Posts held services Dec. 7 in honor of those who died and fought in the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor.

Among them was West Seneca Post 735, where veterans throughout the area gathered to pay homage to those who lost their lives in the attack, Time Warner Cable News in Buffalo reported.

Keynote speaker and Vietnam veteran Paul Rudnicki spoke on how America was changed forever after the attacks.

The TV station quoted him: "The one thing Pearl Harbor did, the movement against any American involvement vanished almost overnight because the lesson was very clear - We're either going to have to work together or we're not going to get anywhere."



Guest speaker Paul Rudnicki with Post Commander Ron Puckett. Post 735 photo.

EMERGENCY FUNDS FOR SNOW-BURIED MEMBERS

Some members of the Legion Family hit hard by the fall snowstorms in New York were able to take advantage of The American Legion's National Emergency Funds.

Anthony DeNatale, New York American Legion's homeland security and civil preparedness chairman, reported in November that National Emergency Funds (NEF) were available for the 10 counties declared disaster areas by Gov. Andrew Cuomo. The counties are:

- Cattaraugus (8th District).
- Chautauque (8th District).



- Erie (8th District).
- Franklin (4th District).
- Genesee (8th District).
- Herkimer (5th District).

- Jefferson (5th District).
- Lewis (5th District).
- Oswego (5th District).
- Wyoming (8th District).

Info on the NEF application is on nylegion.net. Please remember:

1. Maximum amount is \$3,000 for household applicants displaced by disaster (\$10,000 for Legion posts).
2. The money is not to be used for repairs or replacement of furnishing.
3. The money is for emergency expenses only - food, shelter, clothing, diapers, etc.
4. Pictures of your home must be included with the application.
5. Receipts must be included in your application.

WHOPPING DONATION TO NATIONAL EMERGENCY FUND

CHARLOTTE, NC -- The Department of New York made a whopping contribution Aug. 27 to The American Legion's National Emergency Fund, which provides grants to disaster-struck Legion members.

Accompanied by Depart-

ment Commander Frank Peters and Department Adjutant Jim Casey, 2013-2014 Department Commander Ken Governor took to the podium at the 96th national convention and addressed National Commander Daniel Dellinger:

"Mr. Commander, at the beginning of your term you asked If the Department of New York could raise \$61,500 for the National Emergency Fund. To date, the Department of New York has contributed almost \$27,000. Through the unself-

ish generosity of thousands of New York Legionnaires and American Legion Family members, we are pleased to present this additional check in the amount of \$66,000, bringing New York's total contribution this year to \$92,931.

POST 376 HONORS WWII VET BUD MOHR IN OXFORD

OXFORD – Members of Fort Hill American Legion Post 376 gathered at the State Veterans Home here in December to honor World War II Army veteran Elbert "Bud" G. Mohr. Also participating were Oxford Village Mayor Terry Stark, friends, and family.

They honored the 90-year-old Mohr with a commemorative "Gold Leaf" engraved with his name, on the "Giving Tree."

The Norwich Evening Sun reported that the mayor

brought along a copy of Bud's book, "Rambling Fever - An old Tyme View of Central New York" as a reminder of all the stories Bud has shared as "The Oldtimer." Anyone who has read The Oxford Review-Times over the past years got to know "The Oldtimer" through his column, "Rambling Fever," that started in the early 1970's.

In 1941, Bud left high school to join the Army at age 17, serving in the South Pacific as a truck driver with

combat engineers. He was discharged in 1946. Bud worked in law enforcement, first with the Police Department in Oxford working his way to the chief position, eventually leaving to work for the County Sheriff's Department.

Bud has been a long time member of the American Legion (70 years) and the Oxford Fire Dept. (66 years). He helped with innumerable Community Breakfasts, rode in Memorial Day parades, and

participated in flag disposal ceremonies, Veterans Day observances and more with Post 376.

The Giving Tree is a plaque of gold engraved leaves and bronze branches on the wall in the piano lounge of the Veterans' Home. Donations for the leaves go into an account used exclusively for the benefit of residents in the home. The Tree was donated by the Detachment of New York, Sons of the American Legion (SAL).

DDSO HONORS MONROE POST FOR ITS SERVICE

MONROE — The Hudson Valley Developmental Disabilities Service Office has honored American Legion Post 488 in Monroe with a certificate recognizing its 20 years of service to DDSO by hosting holiday parties for

developmentally disabled adults, StrausNews' PhotoNews reported in November.

"The legion has graciously provided holiday parties to our clients," DDSO representative Janet Correa was

quoted as saying. "Post 488's acts of kindness, year after year, make the holidays no much nicer for our clients."

The Legion Post provides a catered dinner dance to developmentally disabled adults at its hall along with

gifts and a visit from Santa.

"It's a real treat to our clients, who are always thrilled to come to the legion," Correa said. "This is a wonderful community inclusion activity and we are very grateful."

EAGLE SCOUT CANDIDATE HELPS HASTINGS-ON-HUDSON POST

HASTINGS-ON-HUDSON, N.Y. -- After learning in the local news that the Hastings-on-Hudson's American Legion Post was struggling financially, Zak Armacost rallied his own troops and made sure his local veterans were taken care of, the River Towns Daily Voice reported in November.

The 17-year-old Hastings-on-Hudson High School senior organized the renovation of Admiral Farragut Post 1195's lower level for his Eagle Scout service project.

"It was really nice to see the reaction of the veterans," Armacost told reporter Dina Grace Zoe Sciortino.

Sciortino wrote that Ar-

macost's fellow Boy Scouts in Troop 2, Hastings-on-Hudson's Cub Scout Pack 1, his family, neighbors and friends all helped put in more than 450 work hours and raised more than \$4,000 over a 10-week period.

They repainted the lower level, repaired two rest-

rooms, re-tiled and installed new fixtures and rebuilt cabinetry and shelving.

"I'm an ex-Boy Scout myself and I always did favors when I had the opportunity, so when I heard they wanted to do this I was thrilled," Post Commander James Pasanello, a World War II

veteran, told the reporter.

"My favorite part of the project was seeing other people have fun with it," said Armacost, who hopes to pursue a career in medicine. "To see other people smiling as they repaired a wall or lay down some tile was really special."

Richard Saunderson, Troop 2's Scoutmaster, told the news outlet that this project is what Scouting is all about.

"Everyone should recognize that Scouting stresses not just outdoor skills and community service, but developing leaders who can organize others, think on their feet, and run the show."



Post Commander James Pasanello and Scout Zak Armacost. Photo by Scoutmaster Richard Saunderson.

DEPARTMENT WEBSITE TAKES TOP HONORS IN NATIONAL CONTEST

The Department of New York website is among the top in the nation. That's the word from the National American Legion Press Association (NALPA), which announced Oct. 3 that nylegion.net took first place honors in its 2014 media contest.

New York won the Mary B. Howard First Place Award in the department-level category. NALPA Media Awards Manager Patrick Rourk

called the award "prestigious" and "well-deserved."

The website officially launched in January 2014, under the guidance of Department Public Relations Chair Robert Stronach, who also serves as webmaster.

The number of hits and page views has been growing. From January to December, the website has had over 4.1 million hits, 757,556 page views and 51,112 unique visitors.



NATIONAL COMMANDER MAKES SWING THROUGH NY



National Commander Mike Helm honors William Renskers for 60 years of Legion service. Photo by Doug Malin.

The man who leads some 2.4 million Legionnaires visited New York's Southern Tier Saturday, Oct. 35, stopping at George F. Johnson Post 1700 in the Town of Union for a luncheon and admiring the POW Memorial there, Binghamton WBNG TV reported.

The local people are what

make his visit memorable, National Commander Mke Helm told the TV station. He cited the "good people and the things they do for the organization and how they do them," such as POW monument. "They remember veterans and remember those who have served and it also helps the community

remember at the same time."

Commander Helm also made a stop at American Legion Post 1645 in Binghamton for a dinner in his honor.

In his swing through the 8th district, **Helm honored William Renskers for 69 years of service as a Legionnaire.** Renskers is a member of Damcott-Jones Post 874

in Clymer.

Helm spent Thursday, Friday and Saturday in the Department of New York's 6th, 7th and 8th Districts, bringing a message that the Legion is a "God and Country" organization, and challenging Legion Posts to "stoke the fires" of their service to communities.

GREECE COMMANDER SALUTED

ROCHESTER -- Ralph Presciutti, commander of Greece American Legion Post 468 near Rochester, has made it his mission to help veterans in need -- such as organizing the Wounded Warrior Concert.

The third annual July concert, held at his Legion Post, raised over \$22,000 for New York Warrior Alliance, an upstate group that directly helps wounded warriors and their family care-givers.

He also has helped individual

veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.



Ralph Presciutti

"Ralph is one of those quiet champions for the veterans community who just does a ton of work," Warrior Salute's Tom Targtaglia told WROC TV 8. "Nobody ever sees what he does behind the scenes and he does some incredible things."

That's why Presciutti received the Veterans Serving Veterans Award during the "Serve. Honor. Support. Symposium" held Oct. 1 at Nazareth College.

NEW DEPT. HISTORIAN

Frank Carletta, an award-winning American Legion historian, has been appointed Department of New York historian, Adjutant James Casey announced. He succeeds long-time Department Historian Raphael "Buzz" Blevins.

A Legion member for 31 years, he is active with Henry P. Smith Post 24 in Rome, where he serves as first vice commander and Color Guard member/coordinator. He is both Oneida County and 5th District historian. In 2006, Carletta won the Department's first place honors for post history/yearbook. Then in 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2014 he won first place for county history/yearbook, and in 2013 he took top honors for district history/yearbook.



Carletta

FOCUS IS ON OTHERS DURING LEADERS' VISIT TO ONEIDA COUNTY

CAMDEN MAN, UTICA REHAB PROGRAM RECEIVE AWARDS

ROME/UTICA -- The leaders of the New York State American Legion Family visited Oneida County Oct. 3, bringing their message of action-oriented support for veterans and communities, but the attention at a luncheon for them at Utica Post 229 was on a Camden man and a Utica rehab program.

Department Commander Frank Peters and Oneida County Commander Anthony Palladino presented Oneida County American Legion Awards of Excellence to Camden resident Frank Bergin and to Sitrin Health Care of Utica.

Bergin was honored "for patriotism and devotion to veterans that led to the creation of Camden's Freedom Park in honor of Oneida County's fallen heroes," Palladino said.

Jackie Warmuth and Cheryl Jassak accepted the award on behalf of Sitrin, its staff and volunteers, which was "for a Military Rehabilitation Program that provides a comprehensive healing environment for wounded warriors, veterans and their families," Palladino noted. Warmuth is Sitrin's vice president for clinical development and Jassak is special events/planning associate.

Accompanying Peters were Department Auxiliary President Diane Gerber and Sons of the American Legion (SAL) Detachment Commander Chuck Depot.



Department Commander Frank Peters tours Camp Sitrin rehab site with Sitrin's Cheryl Jasak. Photo by Bob Stronach.

Following the luncheon, the state leaders toured Sitrin Health Care's Military Rehabilitation Program, including its rural Camp Sitrin where wounded warriors and other veterans take part in retreats and other outdoor rehab/recreational activities.

They got to meet four veterans involved in the Sitrin program. Three of them joined the Legion on the spot; the fourth was already a member. The veterans are: retired Army Command Sergeant Major

Joe Ruggiero, an advisor to the program; Army Staff Sgt. Scott McCumber; former Marine Sgt. Kevin Corrigan, and former Army Specialist George Brandt.

In the evening, Peters, Depot and Gerber spoke at a dinner in their honor at Rome Polish Home in Rome. Some 200 Legion, Auxiliary and SAL members attended.

FAMILY MAKES THE DIFFERENCE

Chuck Depot summed up the dynamo behind the

American Legion in one word -- "family." The Legion, Auxiliary and the SAL, working together, make a difference, he said. "We have to do it all as a group."

Depot and Peters both talked of the importance of submitting consolidated reports. With less than half of the posts submitting reports, "I can't tell half of the story," Peters said. "We need to tell the whole story of the great work of the American Legion."

Depot pointed to some \$2.1 billion in volunteer hours



Camden resident Frank Bergin receives Award of Excellence from Oneida County Commander Tony Palladino (left) and Dept. Commander Frank Peters. Photo by Doug Malin.

provided by the Legion Family. Imagine what the Legion nationwide could tout if 100 percent of consolidated reports were submitted (as they were in the 5th District, Department Vice Commander James Ellis noted).

Like other SAL members, Depot joined to honor his veteran father, and “it’s been the greatest experience of my life.” It’s a way of paying his dad back “for giving me my freedom.”

His personal project is to support Commander Peters’ efforts to raise money for the National Emergency Fund (NEF). The NEF, Peters noted, poured \$500,000 directly to New York Legion Family members who were hard-hit by Hurricane Sandy and subsequent storms.

Depot said his goal for the Sons is to recruit 2,500 new members, swelling New York’s SAL membership to over 30,000.

Peters struck a similar tone on membership growth, pointing to the Legion’s 100th anniversary coming



Chuck Depot
*Detachment commander
Sons of the American Legion*

up in four years, and noting that a strong, growing membership makes possible all the great programs of the American Legion.

AUXILIARY SEEKS FEMALE VETS

Echoing Depot’s remarks on the Legion Family, Auxiliary President Gerber said it has been gratifying “to see a true American Legion Family” at work during their travels. And she was proud to announce -- to applause and cheers -- that the NY Auxiliary walked away with 21 national awards at the national convention. The



Diane Gerber
*Department president
American Legion Auxiliary*

convention launched a program called “Honoring Our Female Veterans,” aimed at getting women veterans to join as dual members (with the \$9-national portion of the auxiliary dues being waived for the first year).

National Auxiliary set an overall goal of signing up one million new members, emphasizing the theme, “making a difference in our communities.” The Mid-Winter Conference in Albany in January will offer training on the recruiting campaigns, with the national Auxiliary president participating.

Gerber’s personal project

is to raise funds for “Soldiers’ Wish,” which helps with unmet needs of veterans and service members. She closed by asserting: “I thank each and every veteran in this room for my freedom.”

EVERYONE KNOWS A POTENTIAL MEMBER

Similarly, Department Commander Peters pointed to “honoring all veterans” as his theme for the year. It started with World War I veterans, who founded the American Legion. Then World War II vets came home to the GI Bill, thanks to the Legion, which authored the legislation. In fact, WWII vets swelled New York Legion ranks with 100,000 new members.

With older veterans passing on and the need for younger men and women to get involved and assume leadership roles, he said it was vital to put a focus on attracting new members.

“Every veteran in this room knows someone who is eligible to join. All you need to do is, just ask.”

DOC GIBBS IS NATIONAL SAL VICE COMMANDER

Former NY Detachment Commander Greg “Doc” Gibbs, Ph.D., was installed Aug. 24 at the Charlotte, NC Sons of The American Legion Convention as national SAL vice commander.

Doc hails from Hamburg Post 527 in Erie County, District 8. He served as Detachment commander in 2011-2012 and served the past two years as a NY Legion College faculty



Doc Gibbs

member. Gibbs served the Detachment of New York as legislative chairman for the

past six years. He also serves as VAVS representative for the Buffalo VA Hospital.

He said he “sincerely appreciates” all his New York supporters and “looks forward to a productive year ‘Building Bridges to the Future’ with National Commander Mike Moss from the Detachment of Colorado.” He said his main area of concentration is the eastern region covering Maine to

West Virginia, France, and Washington, D.C.

Gibbs will host a homecoming, an “Unofficial Eastern Gathering Weekend” on April 17-18, 2015 at Hamburg Post.

“The entire New York Legion Family is invited to attend. There will be a Leadership Seminar/Workshop that Saturday put on by Past National SAL Commanders for any SAL member seeking the challenge of leadership roles.”

BROCTON POST SURPRISES MAN WHO INSPIRES OTHERS

By Henry Link

Heroes come in all sizes and guises. Sometimes they wear a cape and save Metropolis. Ken Parks rides in a wheelchair and inspires those around him.

His effect on people was evident on Sunday, August 24 when a crowd of friends and relatives turned out at John W. Dill American Legion Post 434 in Brocton.

The Post holds an annual Lawnmower Run to raise money for its Scholarship Fund, and Sons of the American Legion member Parks is usually the “go-to” man on the event’s organizing committee. He is instrumental in getting the event together, but this year he was unable to participate, sidelined by medical issues.

His good friends, Steve and Jean Milliman, volunteered to organize the event in his stead. At the first meeting



Ken Parks with Steve and Jean Milliman.

of the committee, the group decided to make this year’s Lawnmower Run a benefit for Ken Parks himself, and to surprise their friend with the honor.

Since an operation on his back last March, Ken has been fighting a severe infection that has left him either hospitalized or homebound. Unable to work, Ken and his

wife Diane have been faced with mounting expenses.

And that is why, on the day of this year’s Lawn Tractor Run, Ken and Diane arrived at the Legion just in time to see the parade of 87 assorted yard vehicles finish the 3-mile, 4-stop journey through the Village of Brocton and Town of Portland. Hundreds of friends and rela-

tives were there to encourage Ken and give their best wishes.

Ken and his wife Diane said afterwards: “Words cannot express the emotions we had on that day.”

After marrying in 1979, Ken and Diane faced a life full of promise. They started their family in 1980 and bought their home in Fredonia. Three months after their daughter was born, Ken had a catastrophic motorcycle accident that left him paralyzed from the chest down.

He refused to give up, and went on to earn a living for his family when his health would permit. He was on the US Paralympics weightlifting team, and competed in England. He received a silver medal and participated in the National Wheelchair Olympics, where he still holds a national bench press record of 352.5 pounds.

NYC NAMES STREET AFTER WILLIAM CLANCY

BRONX -- Legionnaire and veterans’ advocate William Clancy is being immortalized with a street named in his honor.

The New York City Council approved a bill to co-name the intersection of Cross Street and City Island Avenue, where the Leonard H. Hawkins American Legion Post 156 stands, after its former commander, William Clancy, who passed away in 2012. Mayor Bill de Blasio signed the legislation into law on July 9, 2014.



William Clancy

The corner will be known as “Commander William G. Clancy Lane,” in a street salute proposed by Councilman Jimmy Vacca (D-Throggs Neck).

Clancy was a life-long resident of City Island and a carpenter by trade, but he was best known for his work on behalf of veterans with the American Legion, the Bronx Times reported.

Noted Vacca: “No one did more for veterans than Commander Clancy, so it is only fitting that every veteran who comes to the Leonard Hawkins American Legion Post 156 will see his name on the street sign and be reminded of him.”

Clancy served in the U.S.

Army from 1961 to 1963, when he joined the Hawkins Post. He held many roles there, including at least two periods as post commander. In 1993, Clancy was elected Bronx county commander. Later, when he again served as post commander in 1996, he became involved in the New York State American Legion. He later became district commander and department vice commander. He was a candidate for department commander before his passing.

AUXILIARY RAISES \$72,000 FOR 'COMFORT WARRIORS'

The American Legion's Operation Comfort Warriors (OCW) program received a donation of more than \$72,000 from the American Legion Auxiliary Department of New.

Barbara Corker, 2013-2014 New York Auxiliary president, said she was inspired to promote OCW as her fundraising program because of all the wounded servicemembers returning from war. "This was a way



Barbara Corker

for us to give our thanks to them," she said.

One hundred percent of donations to OCW

are turned into gifts for wounded servicemembers and those transitioning back to civilian life. Past gifts have included equipment for adaptive sports therapy programs, basic kitchen supplies for soldiers' rooms at military hospitals, and recreational outings for the veterans and their families.

During the Auxiliary's Department Convention in July, Corker presented James Ellison, program man-

ager at national headquarters for OCW, with a check for \$72,199, which included \$1,000 raised by the participants at Empire Girls State. During the 2014 Empire State Girls State session, the participants scrounged for pennies and other change over three days to donate to the OCW drive.

"I set a goal of \$50,000. I was speechless when the final tally was made. And that's the dedication of The American Legion Family of New York."

PRESTIGIOUS AWARDS HELP KICK OFF 96TH CONVENTION FIRST RESPONDERS AND AMERICANISM IN THE SPOTLIGHT

ALBANY -- The opening day of the 96th Department Convention featured prestigious awards honoring a top legionnaire, four first responders, and Americanism programs.

Charles Schack of East Aurora Post 362 (near Buffalo in the 8th District) is the Legionnaire of the Year for all of New York State, Committee Chair James Middleton Jr. announced.

"I'm overwhelmed," said Schack, who was recognized for his efforts to reach out to schools to teach children about America and its flag, to welcome home service members, to recruit new members, and to find housing for a homeless vet.

Law and Order Chair

Charles Hill announced top firefighter, EMT and cops. They are:

- Firefighter of the Year First Lt. Kyle Shane, who has been with the Geneva



Charles Schack

Fire Department (C.J. Folger Hook & Ladder Co.) for 13 years. He was cited for saving the life of a choking victim. Shane is a U.S. Navy Persian Gulf veteran.

- Police Officer of the Year Jesse Davis of Little Falls, who is a state trooper and dog handler. He was cited for helping to train search-and-rescue teams, for speaking up for animals and children, and for organizing snowmobile rides that raised more than \$100,000 for the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

- * EMT of the Year Arthur

"Rick" Churches, who is with the Odessa Fire Department Rescue Squad. An active firefighter for 48 years, Churches helped organize the rescue squad over 29 years ago. Churches teaches fire prevention in schools around the county and has held numerous leadership positions, including fire chief.

- Corrections Officer of the Year Sgt. Clayton Bramhall of Oneida County Sheriff's Office. In addition to being a shift supervisor for a 632-bed jail, Bramhall serves as coordinator for the Sheriff's Color Guard and as an instructor for new recruits at the police academy. A former Marine, Bramhall said he was honored to be in the presence of so many veterans and quipped: "Semper Fi!"

Americanism Chairman Edward Mallicoat announced distinguished and meritorious awards for

children/youth/family programs, noting that 596 out of 893 posts submitted reports.

A National Distinguished Service Award goes to Hamburg Post 527 (Erie County, District 8), and a National Meritorious Service Award goes to New Hartford Post 1376 (Oneida County, Dist. 5).

Department Distinguished Service Awards, by category:

Cat. I: Eastport Post 1545 (Suffolk County, District 10).

Cat. II: Seneca Falls Post 366 (Seneca County, District 7).

Cat. III: Penny Yan Post 355 (Yates County, District 7).

Cat. IV: Jamestown Post 777 (Cattaraugus County, Dist. 8).

Department Meritorious Service Awards:

Cat. I: Rochester Post 134 (Monroe County, District 7).

Cat. II: Mahopac Post 1080 (Putnam County, District 9).

Cat. III: Poughkeepsie Post 1302 (Dutchess Co., Dist. 9).

Cat. IV: Corning Post 746 (Steuben County, District 7).

A GLIMPSE OF THE 2014 DEPARTMENT CONVENTION

'WE VALUE YOU'

2013-14 Dept. Commander Ken Governor, on several occasions during the 96th Convention, made a point of letting over 650 attendees know that "we value your work, we value your service, we value your opinions" as well as "your strong support." He went on: "Be proud of your Department of New York," especially as it takes steps to be more communicative and more proactive.

57,000 VOL. HOURS

Legion Posts around the state devoted 57,111 volunteer hours to children and youth programs, Children and Youth Chair John Konkol reported -- and that was with only about 63 percent of posts reporting their activities through the Consolidated Post Report.

SCHOLARSHIPS

Education and Scholarship Chair John Murphy reported that the Consolidated Post Reports revealed that 131 posts awarded 2,112 scholarships worth \$365,167.

EAGLE SCOUT OF YR

Timothy Messmer is Department Eagle Scout of the Year, Scouting Chair Steve Mataraza announced. His Troop 577 is sponsored by Post 1749, North Bellmore.

CADET OF YEAR

Jamie A. Griganis, the graduating cadet commander in the Navy



After Dr. Henry Prince spoke about his success using hyperbaric oxygen therapy to treat post traumatic stress and mild traumatic brain injury, convention delegates approved a resolution calling on NY State to endorse the alternative treatment. Dr. Prince is shown with two Army veterans he treated, Jesse Prince and Matthew Scanapico.



The Convention Parade drew scores of marching units and bands, including the nationally award-winning Towanda Post 264 American Legion Band.

Photos by Bob Stronach.

JROTC program at Southold Junior-Senior High School, is the Department Cadet of the Year. "It's extremely humbling to be up here in front of so many role models" -- the kind of military veterans "I aspire to be," she said.

SAL DONATION

John Chang, outgoing Sons of the American Legion detachment commander, presented a \$12,947 check to outgoing Department Commander Ken Governor. It was a donation for their joint personal project, the Na-

tional Emergency Fund.

TOP LEGIONNAIRES

The District Legionnaires of the Year are:

Dist. 1: Colleen McCarthy, Theodore Korony Post 253, Bronx.

Dist. 2: Anthony DeNatale, Beauvais-Hudson Post 126, Staten Island.

Dist. 3: Harvey Martel, Joseph E. Zaloga Post 1520, Albany.

Dist. 4: Nikolaos Eggink, Malone Post 219.

Dist. 5: Elwin Woolschlager, Lowville Memorial Post 162.

Dist. 6: Kenneth Taylor,

Ouleout Valley Post 1689, Franklin.

Dist. 7: John Cook, Kirk-Casey Post 366, Seneca Falls.

Dist. 8: Charles Schack, East Aurora Post 362.

Dist. 9: Theodore Martine of Mahopac Post 1080.

Dist. 10: Joseph Ambrosino Sr. of Merrick Post 1282.

PR AWARD

Dave Lockhart received the Department Public Relations Award. Lockhart is a former commander of Horace D. Washburn Post 533 in Corinth and a past commander of Saratoga County Legion.