



SUMMER
July 2015
Vol. 2. No. 2

LEGION NEW YORK

***Does Your Post
Have Striking
Curb Appeal?***

***Oxygen Therapy for PTSD
#1 Priority***

***Your
American
Legion in
Action***



LEGION NEW YORK

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'LET US REMEMBER'

This past Memorial Day, American Legion members all across America and all across the great state of New York attended memorial services and laid wreaths at community memorials in tribute not only to those men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice to ensure our freedoms, but also to honor all who served and have reported to Post Everlasting. For our American Legion family, it's a sacred duty to honor all of our deceased members and remember the great works that they accomplished in advocating for the rights and benefits of all veterans. The founders of our organization knew that a strong unified voice would be necessary to advance the legislative initiatives needed to ensure that veterans who suffered from wounds, disease and want would receive the proper care they deserved when they returned home from the battlefield.

The veterans of WWI did not have a GI Bill to return home to.

After the nation became involved in the second world war, it was the American Legion who went to work and drafted the original GI Bill. It was the American Legion who went "all-in" to ensure its passage. Thanks to the efforts of our departed comrades, there is not a veteran alive today who has not been affected by the benefits of the GI Bill - this is our legacy.

With the 100th anniversary of the American Legion just a few short years



away, we need to reach out to our younger veterans and explain to them who we are and why it is so important to join the American Legion and keep this organization strong for the next generation of veterans – and to perpetuate the lessons our founding members taught us about the power of the strong unified voice of advocacy.

Let us remember all who have served: They fought the good fight for a just and noble cause. Let us be inspired by our memories of them. May their spirits continue to shine through us to consecrate and sanctify our devotion to mutual helpfulness.

For God and Country,
*Frank J. Peters, Commander
Department of New York*



ON THE COVER: TELL US ABOUT YOUR UNIQUENESS

A number of American Legion posts around New York State pay tribute to military service by decorating their property with a unique flare-- like this Cobra helicopter gunship at New Hartford Post 1376. The AH-1 Cobra was dedicated Aug. 24, 2002 to all present and past members of the post.

If your post has a unique decorative touch, tell us your story by contacting the editor at news@nylegion.net.

LEGION PUSHES OXYGEN THERAPY FOR PTSD

#1 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY FOR DEPARTMENT OF NEW YORK

ALBANY -- If The American Legion has its way, local New York veterans suffering from post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or mild traumatic brain injury (mTBI) could get life-changing treatment in the near future.

That's the word from New York State American Legion leaders, who announced March 3 that their number one legislative priority for New York is a hyperbaric oxygen therapy (HBOT) treatment program.

"We're urging Gov. Andrew Cuomo and the State Legislature to create and fund an HBOT treatment program," American Legion Department of New York Commander Frank Peters said.

The Legion's state legislative chairman, Harvey McCagg, briefed legislators at an annual legislative breakfast as well as some 200 legionnaires the evening before.

Pointing to over 300,000 military veterans returning from combat with PTSD or mTBI and a veteran suicide rate described as epidemic, he said HBOT's apparent success indicates it "could be the single most effective



Department Commander Frank Peters (left) and other legionnaires pow-wow with Assemblywoman Nicole Malliotakis following the legislative breakfast. At right is Legislative Chairman Harvey McCagg. Photos by Bob Stronach.



tive treatment" for giving afflicted vets their lives back and for curbing the suicide epidemic.

He said the Department of Defense and Veterans Administration (VA) medical establishments refuse to provide all known effective treatments, including "one of the most promising – HBOT – which has been internationally recognized as a viable treatment for mild TBI and PTSD at an overall lower cost than a lifetime of unproven prescription drugs."

Traditionally they have been treated as psychiatric disorders, but growing evidence suggests mild TBI and PTSD may be the result of multiple concussive exposures and should therefore be treated as medical conditions – "which may

be healed by providing extra oxygen to the brain."

He noted: "Successful treatment of mild TBI and PTSD would significantly reduce suicide, homelessness, unemployment, family disruption, and its economic loss among veterans carrying those unseen scars of war. Returning afflicted veterans to productive tax-paying citizens and reducing their dependency on social services is a win-win result for all New Yorkers." He added that the Legion believes that "all avenues of treatment should be explored" and that HBOT should be incorporated with a counseling and rehabilitation program.

McCagg also briefed legislators on two other priority issues:

- Establishing State Vet-

erans Cemeteries in areas not adequately served by national or local veterans cemeteries.

- Requiring school districts to offer a veterans tax exemption on their primary residence.

Several legislative and state leaders offered words of support for veterans, including **Sen. Thomas D. Croci**, chairman of the Veterans, Homeland Security and Military Affairs Committee; **Sen. Joseph Addabbo Jr.**, ranking member of that committee; **Assemblyman Michael Benedetto**, former chairman of the Veterans Affairs Committee; **Assemblyman Steve Hawley**, ranking member of the Veterans Affairs Committee, and **Eric Hesse**, director of the state Division of Veterans Affairs.



**Senator
THOMAS CROCI**



**Senator
JOSEPH ADDABBO JR.**



**Assemblyman
MICHAEL BENEDETTO**



**Assemblyman
STEVE HAWLEY**



**Veterans Affairs Director
ERICE HESSE**

NATIONAL COMMANDER VISITS NEW YORK WITH STRONG MESSAGE: 'USING FAR TOO MANY DRUGS' TO TREAT PTSD

American Legion National Commander Michael Helm swung through New York State April 15-17, bringing strong words about the way veterans and military personnel are being treated for post-traumatic stress and traumatic brain injury.

"We think the VA and DOD are using far too many drugs."

There are alternative therapies that the Veterans Administration and Department of Defense need to adopt, Helm said. "We can find better ways" because "the way we're using drugs leads to" addiction, depression, suicide.

Helm, joined by Department Commander Frank Peters and other Legion leaders, toured the Capital Region's Watervliet Arsenal and addressed a packed banquet hall in Saratoga Springs Wednesday before visiting Watertown Thursday to tour Fort Drum and speak at another Legion banquet. Friday he brought his mes-



National Commander Mike Helm receives a surprise \$25,000 donation from Post 1029 Commander Joseph Aniano. Photo by Doug Malin.

sage to New York City at a dinner in Queens.

Other key points he made:

- "We are a God and Country organization, and we're not going to back away from that."
- "We understand who and what a veteran is" and "it's up to us to remind the country" about the debt the nation owes for the sacrifices veterans have made.
- "We stand for a strong national defense," and that means sending servicemen and women into harm's way

with both the purpose and the right equipment to get the job done. It also means protecting the home-front and taking care of military families back home.

• Membership is critical to the American Legion's program pillars and advocacy, which makes it all the more important for posts to reach out to members who do not renew. Get them involved, he said. "It's important for you to do things in your community" and "for veterans in your community." With 2.4 million

Legion members, 800,000 Auxiliary members, 370,000 members of the Sons of the American Legion, the Legion Family can make a difference in community, state and nation. American Legion Riders "is the fastest growing facet of the American Legion," dedicated to welcoming troops home, providing escorts for fallen warriors, and raising nearly \$1 million for the Legacy Scholarship Fund (which provides scholarships for children of servicemen and women who died for their country).

POST 1029 HAS SURPRISE FOR NATIONAL COMMANDER

American Legion Post 1029 had a big surprise for National Commander Michael Helm when he capped his three-day swing through New York State by addressing a dinner in Queens on April 17.

Post 1029 Commander Joseph Aniano presented Helm with a check for \$25,000.

Post Finance Officer John Marino said the donation was "for whatever Commander Helm thinks will do the most good for the most veterans."

It wasn't the first time that members of Post 1029 garnered attention for their benevolence. "Over the past five years," Marino noted, "we have been able to donate ap-

proximately \$550,000 to various veterans organizations." The money had been raised through the sale of their building in Island Park, NY. "Losing the building was a sad day, but the good that the money is doing more than compensates for the sadness."

Also representing the post at the dinner – which was

held at Antun's in Queens Village – were Post Commander Aniano's wife, Jean, the Auxiliary Unit's chief fundraiser; First Vice Commander B. Willie Carrollo and wife, Rosemarie, Auxiliary president; Member Paul Marino and wife, Rae; Member Mickey Hastava and wife Marie.

OSCAR GOES TO DOCUMENTARY ON SUICIDE HOTLINE

FILMMAKERS SPENT MONTHS AT VA'S CANANDAIGUA CRISIS CENTER

Two filmmakers who won an Oscar in February for their documentary on a suicide hotline used their acceptance speech to urge troubled veterans to receive help, USA Today reported.

Dana Perry and Ellen Goosenberg Kent spent months in Canandaigua, NY at Department of Veterans Affairs' suicide hotline headquarters filming *Crisis Hotline: Veterans Press 1*, which showed the dedicated efforts staffers make to prevent veterans from killing themselves. Their Oscar was for best documentary short subject.

VA Secretary Robert McDonald praised the HBO



documentary for highlighting "the challenges our veterans can face and the work of our dedicated Veterans Crisis Line staff."

He added: "Our Veterans

in crisis need to know that there is hope and asking for help makes them stronger."

The suicide hotline center in Canandaigua (800-273-8255) takes about 1,000

calls a day from veterans or servicemembers on the brink of self-destruction or family members terrified a suicide might occur.

ACTIVE DUTY SUICIDE RATE 48% HIGHER THAN GENERAL POPULATION

In 2013, the suicide rate among active duty servicemembers was 18.7 per 100,000, according to data from the Department of

Defense (DOD), CBSNews.com reported in February. That was 48 percent higher than the suicide rate among the general population,

which was 12.6 per 100,000, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

The DOD's 2013 Suicide Event Report indicates 259

active duty service members committed suicide in 2013.

Also, the DOD found there were 1,080 suicide attempts in 2013.

MEET YOUR STAFF

Department Adjutant Jim Casey will introduce staffers on a rotating basis. In this issue he spotlights Membership Manager Cassi Harden.



Cassi Harden

Membership Manager Cassi Harden says she'd rather be working for The American Legion than a Fortune 500 company.

"I like the feeling that I'm helping people. I actually feel that I'm doing something worthwhile."

Cassi (pronounced Kay-see) is involved in everything just about membership-related – from processing membership applications and dues to fielding transfer inquiries to answering a lot of phone calls from the officers of American Legion posts across the Empire

State. Working with membership since joining the Department of New York eight years ago, Cassi is married and has a musical background.

She earned both a BS and an MS in music education from the College of St. Rose in Albany, and is certified to teach music and just about any musical instrument in Kindergarten through 12th grade.

She used to perform in summer bands – such as the Guilderland Town Band -- playing both clarinet and bass clarinet.



Jim Casey

MILFORD'S GRIFFITHS SHINES AT BOWLING TOURNEY

2 PLAYERS BOWL PERFECT 300 GAMES

Dan Griffiths of Milford Post 174 grabbed first place in both the Singles and Combo events in the Department of New York Bowling Tournament, scoring 787 and 1521 respectively.

Oxford Post 376 Team #1 took first place in the Team Event with a score of 3646.

The team of Bohn & Cola from Greenlawn Post 1244 grabbed top honors in the Doubles Event with a score of 1470, edging out Thomas & Brown from LeRoy Post 576 who took second with 1469.

The 66th annual American Legion Bowling Tournament was hosted by Warren

E. Eaton Post 189 at Family Recreation Lanes in Norwich during April and May.

Sixty-three teams from around the state gathered in Norwich over four weekends to compete in team, doubles, and singles events.

Two bowlers created some excitement when they achieved perfect 300 scores. One did it twice.

Ray Sears of Candor American Legion Post 907 bowled a 300 game in the third game of his singles

event. His scores of 245, 204, and 300 totaled 749.

Later in the tournament, Tim Thomas of LeRoy Post 576 bowled two perfect 300 games in a series of 300, 222, 300 during the doubles event with partner Marc Brown.



LEGION BOASTS NEW 'CITIZENSHIP OUTREACH GUIDE'

Helping lawful immigrants prepare for citizenship and assimilation into American society has been a long-standing and proud tradition of The American Legion since our founding. Legion posts are recognized for having a leadership role in community betterment, and as such, are well suited to provide a welcoming and trusted space for immigrant communities.

In Washington D.C. last fall, National Commander Helm met with the Chief of Staff for the Office of Citizenship at U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), the government agency that oversees lawful immigration into the United States. Commander Helm returned from that meeting extremely enthused at the opportunities available to Legion posts in local communities throughout the nation for engaging in close collaboration with USCIS to promote and support the naturalization process for

immigrants seeking the lawful path to citizenship.

To that end, the Americanism Commission announces the availability of a newly developed Citizenship Outreach Guide that is conveniently accessible under the Americanism section of the Publications webpage on the Legion website at www.legion.org/publications. The guide is chocked full of ideas, guidance and web links to online information and resources for collaborating with USCIS in the planning

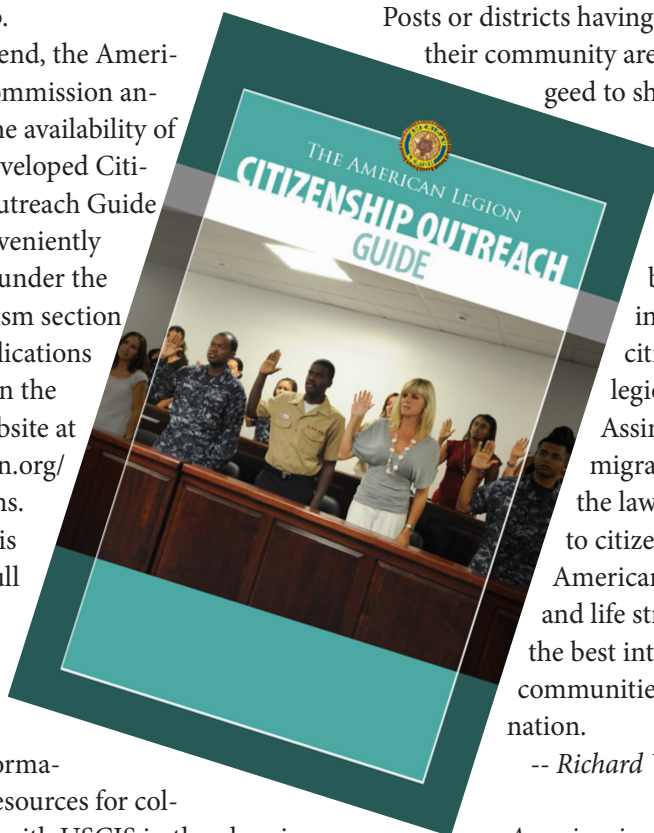
of naturalization activities.

Posts or districts having an event in their community are encouraged to share their

story with national headquarters staff by emailing immigration-citizenship@legion.org.

Assimilating immigrants seeking the lawful path to citizenship into American culture and life stream is in the best interest of our communities, states and nation.

-- Richard W. Anderson,
chairman,
Americanism Commission

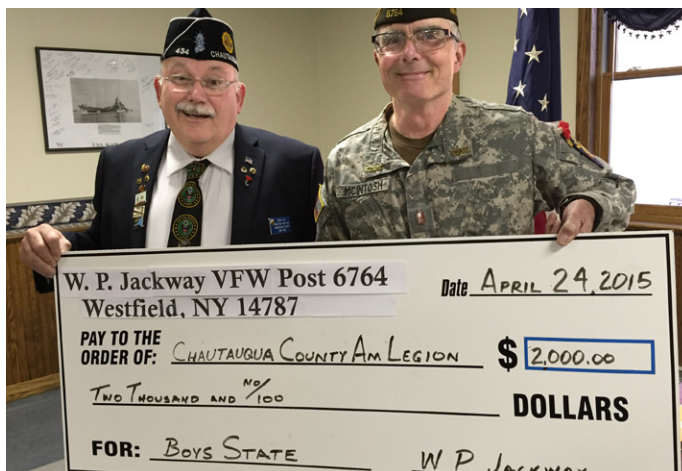


CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY GETS DONATIONS FOR BOYS STATE WESTFIELD VFW DONATES \$2,000 TO SPONSOR FIVE STUDENTS

Chautauqua County American Legion believes strongly in giving junior high school students a once-in-a-lifetime experience at New York's American Legion Boys State – which is why local posts reach out for donations to help cover the more-than \$12,000 cost “to send 27 of our best and brightest young men” to the week-long program, noted Chautauqua County Commander and Boys State Chairman Henry Link.

“Several organizations have stepped up to the plate,” he said.

“The Sons of the American Legion and the Viet Nam Vets have always been big supporters of Boys State, and came through for us



Henry Link, left, accepts \$2,000 VFW donation from Bob McIntosh. Photo by John Miga.

this year in fine form. Even though Boys State is an American Legion program, other veterans' organizations besides the Legion have really jumped in to help get our kids there.”

Enter W.P. Jackway Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW)

Post 6764 in Westfield.

VFW board member Bob McIntosh, himself a 1971 Boys State graduate, was enthusiastic and took the Boys State sponsorship request to his board. The result? A \$2,000 donation that meant five young men could attend

Boys State (held June 26-July 2 at SUNY Morrisville).

“I was bowled over,” Link said. “...They may actually change a few lives with this donation.”

American Legion Boys State, founded in 1935, is among the most respected and selective educational programs of government instruction for U.S. high school students. Operated by students elected to various offices, Boys State activities include legislative sessions, court proceedings, law-enforcement presentations, assemblies, bands, choruses and recreational programs.

“It is an experience they will take with them throughout life,” Link said.

NORWICH ALR RIDES FOR VETS RECOVERING AT LANDSTHUL RING DONATED TO MARINE BATTLING DEBILITATING INJURIES

The American Legion Riders (ALR) at Lt. Warren Eaton Post 189 in Norwich hosted the tenth annual Landstul Hospital Care Project ride on May 16.

“What makes this fundraiser special is helping our veterans that are recovering at the hospital in Germany,” ALR Chapter President Paul Russo noted.

ALR member Jerry Reyes received a Danbury Mint Marine Corps ring “from a close friend and wanted to donate it for our ride,” Russo said. The group decided to give the ring to Landst-



This ring went to Lance Corporal Justin Reynolds, who has been battling combat injuries for the past nine years.

hul Hospital Care Project President Karen Grimord to in turn give it to a marine. She attended the Norwich ride with husband Brian to show their support. Less than a month later she gave

the ring to the mother of a marine she met in Germany and who has had several setbacks, including a stroke. The mom put it on the marine's finger and he woke up and surprised everyone by

stretching out his arm to see it and show it off.

“I want to thank Norwich American Legion Riders for allowing me to present the ring to Lance Corporal Justin Reynolds,” Grimord said. “I want them to know that as much as it means to his mom and me, it means more to a young marine who has spent the last nine years battling his injuries he received protecting our freedom.”

Said Russo: “Our ALR Norwich group is proud to ride for a cause and raise money for our veterans and Landstul Hospital.”

UTICA POST 229 HONORS 2 COPS OF THE YEAR OFFICER STOPPED GUNMAN WHO SHOT 4 PEOPLE

Utica Police Officer John Scaramuzzino was patrolling an area targeted for its gun violence around 2 a.m. last Oct. 11 when he heard gunshots. He turned his patrol car toward the sound, saw muzzle flashes and heard several more shots. He spotted the suspect, who had just shot four people, among a crowd leaving a nightclub, and exited his patrol car to give chase.

“Officer Scaramuzzino yelled to him to stop running and to let him see his hands,” Police Chief Mark Williams noted.

“The suspect did not comply and he pulled out a revolver from his waistband and pointed it at Officer Scaramuzzino.” The officer took aim with his own handgun and shot the



Cops of the Year Inv. Paul Paladino (left) and Officer John Scaramuzzino chat with Utica Post 229 member Bill Sequin prior to the awards ceremony April 2.

suspect, the chief said, “stopping the threat to himself and others.”

The officer’s actions led Utica Post 229 in April to honor Scaramuzzino as one of two Police Officers of the Year. Scaramuzzino also was honored by Oneida County and 5th District, and nominated for the Department Law-and-Order award.

Scaramuzzino was assigned to a GIVE (Gun Involved Violence Elimination) detail that night, partnered with State Trooper Christopher Swienton. The GIVE initiative targets areas known for gun violence in an effort to remove illegal firearms and those who possess them from the street.

The other Utica Officer of

the Year is Investigator Paul Paladino who was cited for curbing heroin and illegal gun use. Since joining the Utica PD’s METRO Narcotics Unit in June 2014, Investigator Paladino aggressively pursued numerous narcotics and weapons cases, leading to 125 arrests and seizure of 19 illegally possessed firearms.

COLUMBIA CO. LEGION HONORS TROOPERS FOR HEROISM

The American Legion honored three New York State troopers with heroism awards March 9 during Department Commander Frank Peters’ official visitation to Columbia County.

Peters and Columbia County Commander William Hogan presented American Legion Gold Medals for Heroism to State Police Sgt. Paul E. Strobel and Trooper Matthew Colwell, and then awarded the American Legion Medal of Valor to Trooper David G. Rose.

The citations noted that:

- Sergeant Strobel fought his way through dense smoke



From left: Trooper Matthew Colwell, Trooper David G. Rose and Sgt. Paul E. Strobel.

to rescue a woman and 7-month-old infant trapped in a mobile home fire.

- Trooper Colwell rescued a woman in a smoke-filled retirement home and then returned to extinguish the fire. In another incident, he discovered a suicide attempt, with a wound to the neck.

He administered first aid and summoned EMTs.

- Trooper Rose responded to a 911 call about a “suicidal man wielding an ax.” Upon arriving on scene, he determined that the man used the ax to access a gun cabinet, and found the distraught man with the barrel

of a shotgun in his mouth with his finger on the trigger. Spotting military photos on the wall, the trooper connected with the veteran, sharing the hardships of his veteran brother when discharged from service, and was able to talk the man into surrendering the gun.

PRATTSVILLE POST RECEIVES AWARD OF EXCELLENCE

Virgil E. Deyo Post 1327 in the Greene County community of Prattsville has received the Department Commander's Award of Excellence for its "dedication to our men and women in uniform, our veterans, their families and your community."

Among their activities, the post and its auxiliary recently raised over \$16,000 to purchase comfort and entertainment items for patients at Stratton VA Medical Center.

Greene County Commander Tim Burch accepted



Greene County Commander Tim Burch, left, accepts the Department Commander's Award of Excellence on behalf of Virgil E. Deyo Post 1327. Making the presentation are Department Vice Commander Gary Schacher, center, and 3rd District Commander Bob Vogt.

the award on behalf of the post in a ceremony held March 21 during a meeting

of the Legion's 3rd District. Department Vice Commander Gary Schacher and

3rd District Commander Bob Vogt made the presentation.

LEGION HONORS NEWS ANCHOR FOR STORY ON WWII VET

ALBANY – The American Legion honored WTEN News Anchor Mark Baker with a special Recognition Award for his story, "The Final Salute."

The award ceremony took place at North Albany American Legion Post 1610 on March 21 during a meet-

ing of 3rd District.

Greene County Commander and 3rd District Public Relations Officer Tim Burch called Baker's story "exemplary," noting that "the American Legion thanks Mark for his reverence and support of our veterans."

Burch explained that Baker stopped by the Baptist Health Nursing and Rehabilitation Center in Scotia on Veteran's Day last November to thank veterans for their service after staff there alerted him to a photo they had taken of 98-year-old

World War II army veteran Justus "Jay" Belfield, dressed in uniform saluting. Belfield, Burch said, died just hours after the photo was taken.

"Mark posted the story and photo on social media that went viral with millions of views all over the world."

LEGIONNAIRES LEAD VIETNAM DAY CEREMONIES

KINGSTON -- Veterans across the area descended on the Kingston National Guard Armory on March 28 for Vietnam Commemoration Day. On March 28 each year Veterans attend this event after the 50-year anniversary authorized by the Secretary of Defense in 2008.

Master of Ceremonies William Payne of Lamouree-Hackett American Legion Post 72 of Saugerties read the names of fallen Ulster County Vietnam vet-



Greene County Commander Tim Burch and Ulster County Commander Ira Weiner pose at the Ulster County Vietnam Memorial on Vietnam Commemoration Day.

erans. This event was hosted by the Kingston Veteran's Association adjacent to the

Ulster County Vietnam War Memorial. Guest speaker US Congressman Chris

Gibson, a decorated retired Army lieutenant colonel, spoke of a different time in our history as the Vietnam veteran returned home to a less thankful nation. Gibson said this event placed emphasis on the long overdue recognition and thank-you to all who served in the Vietnam War. Veterans representing World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Gulf War I, Gulf War II and the current war on terror were in attendance.

-- Tim Burch

\$50,000 GRANT TO HELP REPAIR OSSINING POST 506

State Senator David Carlucci (D – Rockland/Westchester) announced a \$50,000 grant for Ossining American Legion Post 506 and presented a ceremonial check at the post on Feb. 24 during a meeting with his Veterans Advisory Council.

The state grant will help Post 506 repair and modernize the building on South Highland Avenue, including the roof and kitchen.

“The Ossining American Legion does wonderful things for our community,” Carlucci said in a press release. “Whether it’s providing a meeting place and programs for our veterans, or awarding scholarships



State Sen. David Carlucci presents symbolic check representing \$50,000 state grant.

to local students, they are constantly giving back. It’s an honor to work with Commander Frank Faiella to ensure that our veterans have a comfortable and safe place to make meet.”

Senator Carlucci also took the opportunity to present

Commander Faiella with a Senate proclamation for his 50 years of service to the Ossining Volunteer Fire Department.

The Ossining Daily Voice reported that Carlucci also discussed the veterans tax exemption for school taxes,

and helping veterans who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, especially if they end up arrested. Carlucci said he would like to see judges take PTSD into account and to give corrections officers more training in PTSD.

STATEN ISLAND LEGIONNAIRES REMEMBER 4 CHAPLAINS

A number of American Legion Posts around the state in February commemorated the sacrifices of four World War II chaplains who gave away their life jackets to save other soldiers aboard a torpedoed army transport ship. For example, Richmond County Legion hosted its 72nd annual Four Chaplains Interfaith breakfast Sunday, Feb. 8.

“We’re here to honor their service, to honor their commitment to duty and selflessness,” event chairman Joe Occhipinti told the Staten Island Advance. “We recognize their selfless service for the country and for the men aboard that ship.”

The annual event pays tribute to the Rev. George L. Fox, a Methodist minister;



the Rev. Clark V. Poling, a Dutch Reformed minister; the Rev. John P. Washington, a Catholic priest; and Rabbi Alexander Goode.

In 1943, the four Army chaplains joined 900 soldiers

aboard the USAT Dorchester as they headed for Nazi-occupied Europe. At 12:55 a.m. on Feb. 3, a torpedo from a German submarine ripped through the hull.

Working against time,

the chaplains passed out life vests from the lockers until they ran out. Then they took off their own life jackets and gave them to other men. The four chaplains were last seen standing arm in arm at the top of the ship singing hymns as the Dorchester sank beneath the waves. Of the 920 men on the ship, only 230 survived.

The Staten Island Advance reported that guest speakers at the breakfast included Dan Ocko, assistant director of the Chapel of the Four Chaplains in Philadelphia -- an organization dedicated to preserving the memory of the four chaplains -- and the Rev. Mother Rhoda Margaret Treherne-Thomas of St. John’s Episcopal Church.

HOME-SCHOOLED SENIOR IS ORATORICAL CHAMP



Oratorical champ Jessica Norris receives her award from Department Commander Frank Peters. Photo by Doug Malin.

ALBANY -- Jessica Norris, a home-schooled senior from Almond, NY, is The American Legion New York State oratorical champion for 2015, Oratorical Chairman Anthony Paternostro announced.

Jessica competed against four other finalists from a cross section of the state in the 78th Annual American Legion Department of New York Oratorical Contest.

Jessica won a \$6,000 scholarship and represented New York in the National Oratorical Contest in Indianapolis, IN in April. She was sponsored by Alfred American Legion Post 370 (Allegany County, 8th District). The "Constitutional Speech Contest" took place Feb. 28 at Sand Creek Middle School in Colonie.

The other finalists are:

- Bridget Kennedy, a

senior at St. Pius V School in Melville, who won a \$4,000 scholarship. Bridget was sponsored by the Greenlawn Post 1244 of Suffolk County, 10th District.

- Jasmeet Aujla, a senior at Immaculate Heart Central School in Watertown, who received a \$2,500 scholarship. Jasmeet was sponsored by Watertown Post 61 of Jefferson County, 5th District.

- Ingrid Castor, a se-

nior at Spring Valley High School, who was awarded a \$2,000 scholarship. Ingrid was sponsored by Anthony Moscarella Post 199 in Monsey, Rockland County, 9th District.

- Lauren Litz, a senior at Niskayuna High School, who won a \$2,000 scholarship. Lauren was sponsored by Niskayuna Post 1092 of Schenectady County, 4th District.

PIXLEY HEADS PRESS ASSOCIATION



Lynda Pixley, a past president of the New York American Legion Press Association, is the new executive director of NYALPA. She hails from Ransomville, NY, and has served as Niagara County Legion commander.

She succeeds Michael Duggan, who stepped down after serving at the helm of both the national and NY press associations.

"Mike has long been the driving force in the success and life of the press associations," noted Pixley. "We can't thank him enough for his leadership and dedication to improving communications in the greater Legion Family."

BINGHAMTON POST HOSTS VETS4VETS

VETS4VETS -- an all-day event benefiting Wounded Warrior Project -- took place April 25 at American Legion Post 1645 in Binghamton.

The day kicked off with a Chicken BBQ and an American Legion Riders "Ride In," followed by companion dog demonstrations (Hounds Helping Heroes). A spaghetti dinner program featured remarks by Afghanistan veteran Army Capt. Kevin O'Reilly, commander of the 827th Engineering Company in the 204th Army National Guard Engineering Battalion.

'COOKIES FOR THE SOUL' HELP OPEN MID-WINTER CONFERENCE FROM WORKSHOPS TO OCTOBERFEST TO PATRIOTIC CONCERT

ALBANY -- Legionnaires found cookies "to re-fuel the soul" at the opening of Mid-Winter Conference, held Jan. 23-25 at the Desmond Hotel and Conference Center.

Many were drawn to the cookie table set up by community health educator Julianna Tobak. She selected cookies to attract attention, she said, because, with "people going in and out of meetings, I wanted something to refuel the soul." She was sharing resource information on Hepatitis C.

Concurrent conferences for the American Legion Auxiliary and the Sons of the American Legion (SAL) were being held at nearby hotels.

LEADING CANDIDATE

James V. Yermas, the leading candidate for Department commander, and wife Shirley were busy with their volunteers setting up a hospitality suite for the weekend to formally introduce Yermas to Legion members. The Amsterdam native and Town of Florida resident



From left are Staten Island Legionnaires Joe Commarata, Tony Porgola and Dennis McLoone. All three have served as Richmond County commander. At right is health educator Julianna Tobak. Photos by Bob Stronach.

is a Vietnam War Army veteran. Yermas is a retired General Electric machinist and former shop steward. A 46-year member of the Legion, Yermas is a member of John J. Wyszomirski Post 701, Montgomery County, 4th District.

HISTORIANS ELECT

James Randle of Williston Park Post 144 in Nassau County is the new president of the New York American Legion Historians Association.

The New Hyde Park resident was elected during the Historians meeting Friday evening.

Elected as vice president was Barbara Beebe, former commander of Broome County and 6th District. She is a member of John F. Johnson American Legion Post 1700 in Endicott.

Re-elected as secretary-treasurer was John Kasmer Jr. of Thomas Tehan Post 1449 in Bladell.

Randle, who succeeds

Michael Duggan as president, has been post historian since 1999 and county historian since 2006. He also twice served as 10th District historian. He has been a member of The American Legion for 27 years, and is active in both the National and New York American Legion Press Associations.

Newly appointed Department Historian Frank Carletta presided over the meeting along with Secretary-Treasurer Kasmer.



Leading Candidate James Yermas.



Historians' President James Randle and Department Historian Frank Carletta.



DAY 2: SATURDAY 'LEGION LIKE HOME'

"The American Legion feels like home."

That's how teenager Andre Gross summed up his junior shooting experience, starting with Webster Post 942 and culminating with the national air rifle sporter championship.

"Andre is the first New Yorker to take first place" in the national American Legion Junior Shooting competition, New York Junior Shooting Chair Lawrence Behling told the packed room at the Mid-Winter Conference's Americanism session on Saturday, Jan. 24. In fact, "out of the top 15 shooters" at the national competition, "New York had three."

Andre said it was "humbling to be in the presence



Andre Gross
Shooting Champ

of so many great men and women who served their country," and spoke of the memorable experience of being a 14-year-old on stage with the national commander at the Legion's National Convention this past August, where he received a championship medal; and staying on stage to watch Lt. Col. Oliver North, host of Fox News' "War Stories," receive

the national commander's public relations award.

"None of this would have been possible," he said, without his local Webster post and the many Legionnaires at various levels mentoring and encouraging him.

"Each of you have led by example," he told the Legion audience. "...You can't imagine the impact of The American Legion on me and my family."

MANY SEMINARS

Americanism was one of a host of seminars on such topics as American Legion College Alumni Association, ROTC/JROTC, Law and Order, Boys State, Children and Youth, Veterans Employment, National Security, Oratorical Contest, Scouting, Junior Shooting, Protocol, Compliance, Membership.



Dale Barnett
National Leading Candidate

NATIONAL CANDIDATE

The leading candidate for national commander, Dale Barnett of Georgia, dropped in on several sessions, starting with the morning public relations workshop, where he emphasized the need to get the word out. "If people know what The American Legion does...how diverse we are... it's going to attract membership." He pointed to posts like

his own that are "in the media several times a month" for "doing a lot of work for God and country in our community."

AN OCTOBERFEST

An Oktoberfest greeted attendees during breaks between the afternoon sessions. Queens County Legion has hosted a themed courtyard hospitality area at the Mid-Winter Conferences, and this year was no different as costumed Auxiliary and Legion members entertained conferencegoers.

Continued on next page.



Queens County Legion and Auxiliary entertained during conference breaks.

Continued from previous page.

SOME STOOD OUT

Some participants stood out for their appearance and size. For example, Santa Don Guernsey was taking an early Christmas request from a Legionnaire jokingly eyeing the position of department commander, and 7-year-old Jordan Mahar, proudly sporting a SAL cap, was attending his second Mid-Winter Conference with his grandfather, 6th District Vice Commander Robert Gardner of Whitney Point Post 974. Jordan has been a member of the Sons of the American Legion for four years and has already participated in two national conventions.

PATRIOTIC CONCERT KICKS OFF BANQUET

The Yankee Doodle Band – as Band Director Owen Johnson put it, “America’s oldest American Legion band” – performed a rousing patriotic concert to kick off the Saturday evening ban-



“Santa” Don Guernsey with Bill Sequin.



Robert Gardner with grandson Jordan Mahar.

quet festivities

The courtyard concert featured an array of tunes from “Hogan’s Hereos” to a medley of Armed Forces theme songs.

Formed in 1928, the band is from Fort Crailo Post 471 in Rensselaer and actually consists of two bands – a concert band and a marching band.

The banquet attracted a crowd of 480 Legion Family members and featured remarks by Dale Barnett of Georgia, leading candidate for national commander. The American Legion changes

people’s lives, he asserted, including his own – being encouraged to apply to West Point Military Academy after attending Boys State. The West Point graduate is a veteran of Desert Shield, and says he was a recipient of the Legion’s support for returning vets.

His theme as national commander, he said, would be, Duty – Honor – Country. “That’s what The American Legion stands for,” he said, whether it’s “helping a homeless vet” or “mentoring youth.”

Department Commander

Frank Peters drew rousing applause when he said he was proud to be among “the most dedicated Legionnaires in New York State.”

A few others offered brief remarks:

- Albany County Director of Operations John Evers welcomed the Legion Family to the area on behalf of County Executive Daniel P. McCoy. Evers, who is a member of the Sons of the American Legion (SAL), praised the Legion for “constantly working for veterans benefits.”

- SAL Detachment Commander Charles Depot offered heartfelt thanks for veterans and their service, as did Auxilliary Department President Diane Gerber. National Auxiliary President Janet Jefford struck a similar tone, noting that she has “come to realize there is no better place to live than in the United States,” and that the sacrifices of veterans have assured “our freedoms.”

Department Adjutant Jim Casey served as master of ceremonies.



Yankee Doodle Band member Jane Quick on baritone.

DAY 3: SUNDAY GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The Mid-Winter Conference's closing assembly featured remarks by Col. Lee Schiller, commander of the Watervliet Arsenal.

He spoke of the arsenal's proud heritage of equipping America's Armed Forces for every conflict since the War of 1812. He said he saw a parallel between the Watervliet Arsenal and the American Legion, with both advocating for America's defense, especially at times when the nation is inclined to downsize the military. In the arsenal's efforts to keep its workload going and the Legion's efforts to build membership and keep programs thriving, "giving up, rolling over, letting others take charge of our destiny is not in our DNA."

He added: "I know you don't do what you do for the thanks. But as a soldier in uniform...I truly thank you for all you do."

VARIETY OF SPEAKERS

Over 800 Legionnaires attended the weekend of seminars and workshops, Conference Vice Chair Harvey Martel reported.

VA and Rehabilitation Chair R. Michael Suter re-



Col. Lee Schiller of Watervliet Arsenal.

ported on the launch of the Department of New York's VA Visitation Task Force, which so far had conducted six town hall meetings with veterans and visited VA medical centers in Albany and the Bronx, plus four remote community-based outpatient clinics. The task force expects to do several more visitations before the Department Convention in July. With the ultimate goal of assuring that veterans receive quality care in a timely manner, he noted: "This is truly an American Legion Department of New York health care program."

Department Commander Frank Peters presided over the session, which also heard brief remarks by Department Auxiliary President Di-

ane Gerber, National Executive Committeeman Stanley H. Clark, Department Office Manager Barbara Kerr (who described how the Legion's temporary financial assistance program helped save a Legionnaire from becoming homeless), Department Historian Frank Carletta (who presented several volumes of a souvenir yearbook for Immediate Past Department Commander Kenneth Governor), and Legion College Dean Michael Hannan, who said he was "very excited about the program we will be offering this year," and added: "Don't think you're too old or too young to attend. It's a great experience."

The session ended with posts and counties bringing donations for the command-

er's project and other Legion programs. Among them was a \$5,000 check for the National Emergency Fund from Kings County, presented by executive committee member Marty Connelly.

One of the Legionnaires attending Mid-Winter for the first time was Toba Adeyemi Lacrown, a Nigerian immigrant who served in the U.S. Air Force. Now adjutant of Co-op City Post 1871 and Bronx County oratorical chair, Lacrown showed up Sunday morning wearing his traditional native garb. In civilian life, he said, he is a New York City police officer.



Nigerian native Toba Adeyemi Lacrown



VA&R Chair R. Michael Suter, Dept. President Diane Garber, National Committeeman Stanley Clark.



PETERS CALLS ARSENAL 'PILLAR OF NATIONAL DEFENSE'

WATERVLIET – The commander of the Watervliet Arsenal “had at least 120,000 reasons why it was important to host” a visit by New York American Legion Commander Frank Peters on the day before the Department of New York Mid-Winter Conference (held Jan 23-25 in Albany).

“After all, that is how many members” Peters “envisioned this year for his organization,” Arsenal Public Affairs Officer John Snyder wrote in a story for the Army Material Command (army.mil/amc).

Arsenal Commander Col. Lee H. Schiller Jr. “leveraged a rare opportunity by inviting Peters, who is continually on the road fighting for Veterans rights, to the arsenal for a command briefing and tour,” Snyder wrote.

“The arsenal has in recent months hosted a significant number of senior Army leaders to its production facilities to discuss ways to better support our nation’s troops, but this visit by Peters offered a different perspective -- Discussing ways to better support our veterans and their families.”

This was Peters’ first visit to the historic arsenal that has, since the War of 1812, manufactured the products that have helped hundreds of thousands of Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines to safely come home from war.

Schiller went beyond simple charts and production numbers to discuss how in many ways the arsenal and Legion share common goals and values. Both organizations have strong historical



New York American Legion Department Commander Frank Peters receives command briefing from Arsenal Commander Col. Lee H. Schiller Jr. and Lee Bennett, director of Benet Laboratories.

ties to all branches of the military; both strive to build strong communities; and both organizations never lose sight on the proper care of the nation’s veterans and their family members.

One other key point that Schiller hit on was the responsiveness that an Army-owned and operated manufacturing center provides. Most civilian visitors are not aware that Watervliet is one of the few remaining Army

manufacturing centers in the country.

“Because we are Army owned, we have a direct line of communication,” Schiller said. “...we are able to quickly shift production priorities to respond to any urgent troop requirement.”

Lee Bennett, director of the Army’s Benét Laboratories that is collocated at the arsenal, echoed Schiller’s comments regarding today’s value of the arsenal, noting:

“The beauty of our collocation is that our scientists and engineers are working next to the best machinists in the world. If there is ever an issue with a product’s technical data, we can walk across the street and come up with a quick answer or a fix.”

Peters, throughout his tour, remarked on the amazing effort that goes into each weapon system designed and manufactured at Watervliet.

“Before today, I never thought much about the high degree of technology and the significant amount of machining that goes into the weapon systems that are placed into the hands of our troops,” Peters said. “But I will tell you that after today, I will promote the great work that is going on at the arsenal as a pillar of building a strong national defense for our country.”

