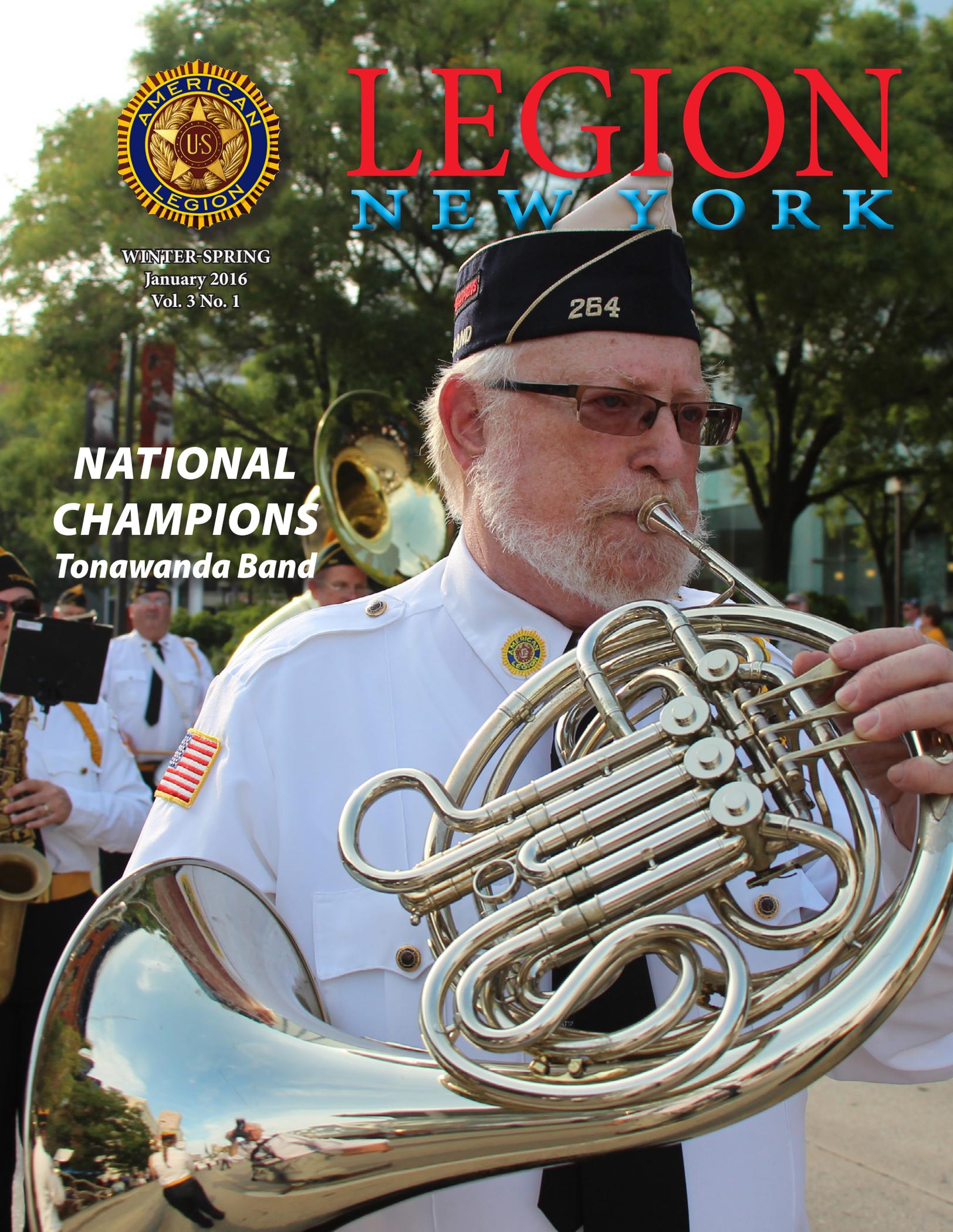




LEGION NEW YORK

WINTER-SPRING
January 2016
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**NATIONAL
CHAMPIONS**
Tonawanda Band



LEGION NEW YORK

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HOLDING IN HIGH ESTEEM

Every day should be Veterans Day, not just the annual Nov. 11th observance.

The debt America and Americans owe to veterans cannot be satisfied by an annual expression of gratitude and remembrance.

I was part of the Vietnam era of veterans who did not get a celebratory welcome home. Many of us were even spat upon. So it's heartening to see the current expressions of appreciation for our military men and women and our veterans.

Military veterans are trained to put themselves in harm's way for their country and for the folks back home – to run toward the gunfire, not away from it.

Whether it's combat or intense field training, veterans have distinct memories of ill lodging, discomfort, arbitrary rule and separation, and all kinds of adversity. It's part and parcel of military life.

It's why we hold veterans in such high esteem.

Take a look at the example of two American veterans and their longtime friend who bravely stopped a terrorist attack aboard a train bound for Paris last summer. Airman First Class Spencer Stone, Army Specialist Alek Skarlatos and Anthony Sadler could have run from the danger when a heavily armed gunman boarded the train. Instead, the men ran toward the terrorist. Even after enduring serious stab wounds that were inflicted as he disarmed the gunman, Airman Stone administered life-saving first aid to a passenger that was shot. Because of the actions of these three young Americans, the death toll aboard the train was zero.



The American Legion believes it is not surprising. While we take nothing away from the heroic actions of Spencer, Alek and Anthony, America's military men and women risk life and limb every day so that we can be free. From Bunker Hill to Baghdad, there has always been a select group of Americans willing to fight and possibly die for a cause greater than their self-preservation.

We should continuously endeavor to serve our veterans as well as they have served their nation.

And just as importantly, we must honor all of their families. Post Traumatic Stress, Traumatic Brain Injury and life-altering war wounds not only affect the veteran, but also take an enormous toll on the family.

Sometimes all that is needed is a simple "thank you."

For God and Country,
*James Yermas, Commander
Department of New York*

ON THE COVER: NATIONAL CHAMPIONS

American Legion Post 264 Band of the Tonawandas owns the national championship. The band took top honors in the concert band competition at the National American Legion Convention in Baltimore, and went on to grab first place in the marching band category in the Convention Parade (shown here). See page 10. Photo by Bob Stronach.

LEADERSHIP WORKSHOP PAVES WAY FOR MORE

SUFFOLK COUNTY HOSTS EFFORT TO ATTRACT, MENTOR MEMBERS

LONG ISLAND -- A special ad hoc membership team conducted a leadership and mentoring workshop in Suffolk County Sept. 19.

The focus was on “welcoming future legionnaires” and “mentoring our present members” in preparation for a membership marketing campaign on Long Island, noted Ad Hoc Chair and Past Department Commander W. Michael Bowen.

The workshop, held at Joseph Loeffler Post 1006 in Brentwood, attracted members and officers from most of the posts in the county.

Emceed by Past National Vice Commander Bob Neville, the workshop featured a keynote presentation on recruiting and mentoring by team members Gary Schacher, department membership chair, and Steve Mataraza, department Scouting chair.

Other speakers included 2015 Boys State Governor Elias Mastakouris, who hailed The American Legion for its life-changing youth programs, and George Carpenter and Jenn Beach of Carpenter and Damsky Advertising, who discussed the Department’s marketing campaign to reach out to veterans.

With the Suffolk County event serving as a pilot, Membership Chair Schacher said the Department was looking at conducting additional leadership workshops



Ad Hoc Membership Team Chair W. Michael Bowen (left), and Department Membership Chair Gary Schacher (right). Below left is Ad Hoc Membership Team Member Steve Mataraza, who is Department Scouting chair. Other photos show some Legionnaires in attendance or asking questions and offering comments. Photos by Bob Stronach.



around the state.

The ad hoc team is part of the Department’s Centennial

Task Force chaired by Past Department Commander James Troiola.

OPERATION COMFORT WARRIORS

SUFFOLK CO. LEGION DONATES TO NORTHPORT VA

BABYLON, NY -- “It’s the act of giving – one veteran to another.”

That’s how Operation Comfort Warriors (OCW) Program Director Bruce Drake described Suffolk County American Legion’s presentation of thousands of dollars in comfort, recreational and rehab items to Northport VA Medical Center and Women’s Clinic on Nov. 24.

In a ceremony at Babylon American Legion Post 94, Suffolk County Commander Bill Farley and a dozen legionnaires helped load vans from the Northport VA with over 825 individual items – ranging from personal hygiene kits to sweat suits and undergarments to board games and pool table equipment to baby blankets and coloring books (for the young mom veterans). There were also a bunch of iPods being delivered separately for the VA’s music therapy program.

County Commander Farley said an \$8,000 OCW grant made it possible for the local American Legion to fill the VA’s “wish list” to



Suffolk County legionnaires Dennis Madden and Linda Beecher help load VA van with bags of comfort items for veterans at Northport VA Medical Center. Photo by Steve Gravano..

help veterans receiving care at the Northport facilities.

Operation Comfort Warriors, Farley explained, is an American Legion program that provides comfort, recreational and rehab items and equipment to wounded warriors and other veterans with service-connected disabilities and ailments. OCW helps wounded warrior transitional units, VA medical facilities and even individual wounded warriors recommended by members of the American Legion. Plus, he noted, the Legion covers any administrative and overhead

costs so that 100 percent of donations to OCW goes directly to helping veterans.

“This is our 27th grant for the year,” Drake noted, with a quarter of a million dollars being dispersed.

Farley and Drake had a busy pre-Thanksgiving weekend shopping for the items. At one Walmart store, Farley said, they created a long line to the cash register.

“I’ve never seen so many shopping carts in my life!”

Added Drake: “They’re going to be happy that their needs list is crossed off.”

The list included: iPods for

a music therapy program; food supplies for morale rooms; board games, decks of cards, and pool table racks, cues and balls for recreational areas; personal hygiene items such as soap, shampoo, lotion, shaving cream, razors, tooth paste, tooth brushes, combs, hair brushes, pill boxes, nail clippers, deodorant, sanitary napkins; clothing such as sweat suits, undergarments, slippers, socks, long sleeve tee shirts, women’s tee shirts, women’s pajamas, and hats, scarves and gloves; baby and child items for young moms such as baby blankets and hats, and coloring books.



Suffolk County volunteers pose with some of the comfort-item bags donated to Northport VA. Photo by Steve Gravano..

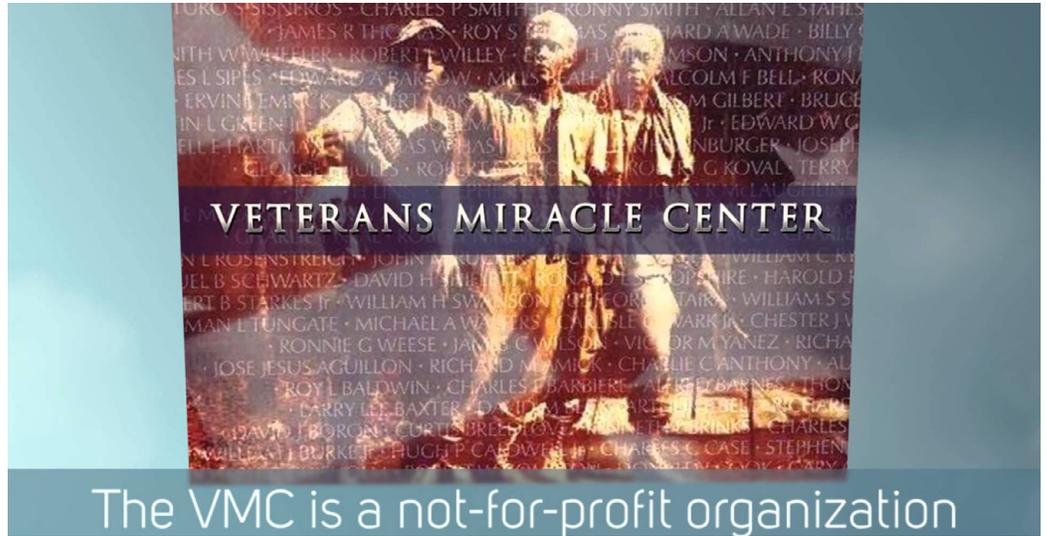
OVER 600 TURN OUT TO HELP VETERANS MIRACLE CENTER

FIRST-OF-ITS-KIND RESOURCE CENTER FOR VETS AND FAMILIES

ALBANY -- Over 600 people turned out to support the Veterans Miracle Center at a dinner hosted by the Marriott in Albany on Veterans Day, Nov. 11, 2015.

Guest speaker was Congressman Chris Gibson. The event also honored two veterans -- James A. Haggerty, a Korean War vet representing 38 veterans groups, and Roger A. Hannay, a Vietnam War vet supporting veterans issues.

WTEN News Anchor Mark Baker, who received American Legion state and national media awards, was master of ceremonies. Attending the event at Baker's request was 3rd District Membership Coordinator



Tim Burch.

“The Veterans Miracle Center was established to reflect God’s love for our military men and women who have faithfully served our great nation,” noted

Burch. “It is a first-of-its-kind resource center that brings help and hope to the struggling veterans and their families. Since its opening one year ago, the VMC has served over 2,100 veterans by

providing everyday necessities and more at no cost in its retail-style store.”

Burch added that he was humbled by the outpouring of care for veterans and their families.

VIETNAM VET EARNS VETERAN OF YEAR HONOR

Veterans advocate Joseph Pollicino, a member of American Legion Joseph E. Zaloga Post 1520 in Albany, received the Capital Region Veteran

of the Year Award during a ceremony Nov. 14 at the state Military Museum in Saratoga Springs. He is a Marine veteran of the Vietnam War. A Purple

Heart recipient, Pollicino is former director of Albany County Veterans’ Service Bureau and a state Senate Veterans Hall of Fame inductee.



Joseph Pollicino

MEET YOUR STAFF

Dept. Adjutant Jim Casey introduces staffers on a rotating basis. In this issue he spotlights Donetta Morse, CPA, the new fiscal manager & office director.



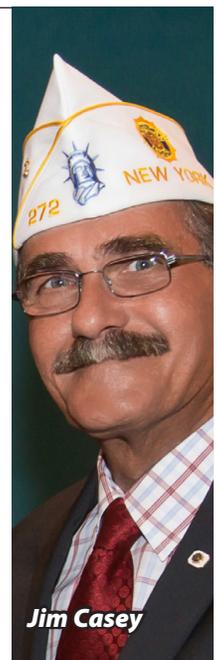
Donetta Morse

A cum laude accounting graduate of Husson University in Bangor, ME. Donetta Morse obtained her CPA license while working a decade at one of Albany’s top CPA firms. She has held both staff and manager positions, most recently with DALLE Accounting in Troy, NY. “I chose to work at the Legion because it is an organization that helps veterans, and as you can tell from my volunteering efforts, I enjoy helping people.”

She volunteers at her son’s school, including teaching Junior Achievement, one-on-one reading with chil-

dren, assisting in the school library, helping to set up an advanced library for teachers, and as ski club chaperone and homeroom mom. Previously she volunteered at church as head of the parent and tot program, and was an AICPA member, NYS Society of CPAs member, past treasurer of BPW (Business of Professional Women), and finance committee member for NY Special Olympics.

She lives with husband Jaret and son Riley, and enjoys boating on Lake George, skiing, traveling, and spending time with her family.



Jim Casey

VETERANS DAY TRIBUTE OCCURS IN SEA OF FLAGS

LEGIIONNAIRES OUT IN FORCE AROUND THE STATE

A sea of red, white and blue provided the backdrop for Veterans Day ceremonies in Utica, where American Legion-led tributes and wreath-laying took place at six monuments around the city – including in the middle of 1,000 eight-foot tall American flags set up in neat rows along the Memorial Parkway to honor veterans.

In fact, the American Legion Family was out in force across the state Nov. 11 honoring veterans by participating in parades, wreath-laying ceremonies, and dedication of roads and walkways to veterans.

In Henrietta near Rochester, for example, Post 1151 dedicated a memorial walkway that a Boy Scout built as his Eagle project.

“To do this walkway for us, and lay the bricks and put it together, it goes to show you that young people are not forgetting what our veterans have done,” former Monroe County Executive Lucien Morin told WROC TV. Also celebrated at the event was a new sign that will hang over a portion of Route 15A, the TV station reported. Area leaders are dedicating that portion of the highway to veterans.

A CONTINGENT of the Legion Family – Legionnaires, American Legion Auxiliary, Sons of the American Legion and American Legion Riders



Legionnaires Gary Howard, retired Army chaplain, and Timothy Morrell, retired chaplain's assistant, are faithful participants in Utica's annual Memorial Day and Veteran's Day ceremonies, offering prayers at veterans monuments throughout the city.

– joined New York City's America's Parade, billed as the largest celebration of veterans in the country, with 200,000 participants. Despite cold temperatures and occasional sprinkles, New York residents and visitors to the city lined the sidewalks of Fifth Avenue, cheering, waving U.S. flags and sometimes holding signs to thank veterans and members of the military marching in front of them.

“This just makes me feel so good... to see all this support for our veterans,” said Department Commander James Yermas, who marched along with Department Adjutant James Casey and other Legion Family leaders.

ON STATEN ISLAND, holiday shoppers got the chance to learn what Veterans Day means at the Staten Island Mall as Richmond County American Legion held its annual ceremony honoring veterans. Tottenville American Legion Post

126 Commander Walt Osborn told the Staten Island Advance how grateful he was for the annual event.

“People shopping in the mall will stop, and look over, and come to thank us for our service, which really means a lot to all of us.”

AT CEREMONIES in Corning, Korean War veteran Bill Crane laid a wreath at the base of the monument at Veterans Memorial Park as the Corning American Legion Color Guard presented the colors, the Corning Leader reported. Then Legion Post Commander Frank Edger spoke of the sacrifices that service members and their families make.

UP NORTH in Warrensburg, American Legion Post 446 Adjutant Gene Pierce expressed his frustration with politicians “paying lip service” and the VA bureaucracy in remarks at the annual service, the Lake George Examiner reported.

The Legion is one place where veterans can get help, he said.

Utica Post 229 Commander Chris Urban led the Utica ceremonies, noting at one point that veterans are set apart and share a bond because of the oath they took to defend America and even put themselves in harm's way. Then he quoted President Ronald Reagan's 1982 radio address:

“In James Michener's book, *The Bridges at Toko-Ri*, he writes of an officer waiting through the night for the return of planes to a carrier as dawn is coming on. And he asks, ‘Where do we find such men?’ Well, we find them where we've always found them. They are the product of the freest society man has ever known. They make a commitment to the military – make it freely, because the birthright we share as Americans is worth defending. God bless America.”

LEGION FAMILY HELPS GET RTE 15A DEDICATED TO VETS PORTIONS OF HIGHWAY IN SPRINGWATER AND LIVONIA RENAMED

LIVINGSTON COUNTY
– Portions of State Route 15A here are now known as Veterans Memorial Highway, thanks in part to the local American Legion Family.

Ceremonies took place Nov. 13 dedicating portions of 15A as Springwater Veterans Memorial Highway (Town of Springwater) and Livonia Veterans Memorial Highway (Town of Livonia).

State Sen. Catharine Young (R,C,I-Olean) led the ceremonies, along with Assemblyman Bill Nojay and members of the American Legion Family.

Senator Young said the movement to have State Route 15A designated as a “Veterans Memorial Highway” began after the Town of Lima passed a resolution requesting the route, which serves as the main street in



(L-R) Michelle Kavanaugh, chair, 15A Veterans Memorial Highway Committee; Sherry Standish, chaplain, Kern Robinson Legion Post 905; Sen. Catharine Young; Assemblyman Bill Nojay; James Krause, commander, Livingston County American Legion; Scott Standish, commander, Kern Robinson Legion Post 905; and Jerry Jobson, vice commander, Post 905, unveil the sign designating State Route 15A in the Town of Springwater as the Springwater Veterans Memorial Highway.

the town, be designated to honor local veterans. Upon learning of the request, members of Honeoye Falls Legion Auxiliary Unit 664, with support from Honeoye Falls Legion Post 664, saw an opportunity to expand the effort by incorporating the full length of Route 15A between Wayland and Rochester.

Led by Michelle Kavanaugh, past president of the Honeoye Falls American Legion Auxiliary, and the commander of the Honeoye Falls American Legion, the 15A Veterans Memorial Highway Committee was established. The group reached out to area veterans organizations to gather support and contacted each

of the municipalities that the road passes through to gain support and request formal resolutions. After successfully garnering the necessary request from each town, members of the 15A Veterans Memorial Highway Committee approached members of the Senate and Assembly to sponsor the legislation.

NOT TOO EARLY TO APPLY TO AMERICAN LEGION COLLEGE 3-DAY IMMERSION TAKES PLACE JUNE 17-19 AT SUNY MORRISVILLE

It is not too early to start applying for the 2016 American Legion College of New York, noted College Dean Tim Collmer.

The dates for the 2016 session are June 17, 18 and 19. Deadline for applying is April 1.

“We look forward to having 100 students this year,” he said, adding that the college is open to members of the Sons of The American Legion (SAL). Posts and



Squadrons are encouraged to sponsor members they want actively involved.

Legion College is a three-day immersion into the Legion’s programs and structure as well as issues facing the largest veterans’ organization in the country.

Held at Morrisville State College (SUNY Morrisville), Legion College fosters leadership skills of Legion and SAL members as they work in teams to solve problems they may face in their home post or squadron. The curriculum covers an array of

topics, such as leadership and communication; Americanism, children and youth; MyLegion.org; legislation; constitution and bylaws; duties of post officers; media relations; membership.

The application is on the Department website (nylegion.net/department/american-legion-college/).

Send applications to Tim Collmer, 8968 Creek Rd., Nunda, NY 14517; Phone (585) 749-6209.

SOUTH GLENS FALLS POST SPRINGS BACK TO LIFE

YOUNGER VETS REVIVE POST AFTER BUILDING SOLD

SOUTH GLENS FALLS -- An American Legion post that withered away five years ago is now back, thanks to younger veterans, the Glens Falls Post-Star reported Nov. 21.

Mohican Post 553 in South Glens Falls had sold its building and only had “ghost” members – those who paid annual dues but were not active, Saratoga County Commander David Lockhart told the paper.

“They were one of the leading posts in Saratoga County American Legion baseball,” Lockhart said. “They nurtured and sponsored. Everyone knew about them. They were the pillar for American



Legion baseball in upstate New York for years.”

Lockhart told the paper that when he met locals at a veterans job fair, they thought the post was closed. When he told them he had everything stored, and that the post still had its charter, a young veteran took on the challenge of bringing it back.

Master Sgt. Kevin Giffords

of Schuylerville, who works at Stratton Air National Guard Base outside Schenectady, started recruiting. Several others from the base joined the post.

“He’s from the Desert Storm era. He knows that era of veterans,” Lockhart told the paper.

Soon younger veterans were joining. For now,

they’re meeting at the Moreau Community Center. Lockhart argued that not owning a building is not necessarily a detriment. An active American Legion post is “out in the community.”

Post members built a float for the Post-Star Holiday Parade – an opportunity, the paper noted, to tell the community that they’re back.

GREENE CO. LEGION HONORS SHERIFF’S DEPUTY

Green County Sheriff’s Deputy Ray Feml came to the aid of a choking victim on the New York State Thruway in October.

For his actions, the Greene County American Legion honored the deputy with its Law and Order Award at the Sheriff’s Department first annual awards dinner, held Nov. 20 at Leeds Inn in Leeds, NY.

Arriving at the Thruway’s New Baltimore rest stop, “those there were waving Deputy Feml down and screaming for help,” noted Department Law and Order Chair Tim Burch. “The female choking was non-responsive, limp and blue in the face and almost in respiratory arrest. Deputy



From left: Greene County Sheriff Greg Seeley, American Legion Award Recipient Deputy Ray Feml, and Department of N.Y. Law and Order Chairman Tim Burch.

Feml quickly preformed the Heimlich maneuver, forcing the obstruction from her throat. Within minutes she was able to breath on her own and later talked and responded to questions.”

Deputy Feml has been an EMT since he was 18 and it was the first time ever he used the Heimlich maneuver, Burch said. Deputy Feml is a CPR trainer with the Sheriff’s Department.

NORWICH RIDER EARNS NATIONAL HONOR PATCH

NORWICH -- Paul “Rizzo” Russo, the director of the American Legion Riders (ALR) Chapter at Lt. Warren Eaton Post 189 in Norwich, has received a special national award – the American Legion Rider of Honor -- recognizing his extraordinary work for the Riders and veterans.

In a July ceremony at the Norwich Legion Post, Department Commander James Yermas helped previous Rider of Honor recipients ‘Yankee’ Bill Fowler (Post 974, Whitney Point) and Emerson ‘Hornet’ Horth (Post 259, Oneonta) present Russo with the American Legion Rider of Honor Patch.

LEGIONNAIRES HELP 'WREATHS ACROSS AMERICA'

Legionnaires took part in the annual Wreaths Across America event on Saturday, Dec. 12, where volunteers across the country placed wreaths on the graves of veterans.

For example, two Auburn posts helped to sponsor Cayuga County's ceremony, and Honeyford Memorial Post 110 of Catskill participated in the Town of Catskill event.

In Auburn, SK American Legion Post 1324 performed the rifle volley and taps, and CI American Legion Post 1776 sponsored a luncheon for the wreath presenters.

The event also was sponsored by the students in Cayuga Community College's Criminal Justice Club and students at Dana L. West Jr.-Sr. High School in Port Byron, as well as the Cayuga County Vietnam Veterans



Wreaths adorn the 350 graves at Sampson Veterans Memorial Cemetery in Romulus. Members of Palmyra's James R. Hickey Post 120 Honor Guard joined with the Minute Men Color Guard of Marion Post 1430 to take part in the Dec. 12th ceremonies at the Sampson Cemetery. Members of Warner-VanRiper Post 435 from Waterloo also participated. Photo by Kim Walsh.

Chapter No. 704 and New York Army National Guard 102nd Military Police Company, the Auburn Citizen reported. In a ceremony at the Episcopal Church of SS. Peter & John, Cold Star Mothers and veterans presented wreaths.

In Catskill, volunteers gathered for an opening ceremony conducted by Post 110 Commander Sal

Pusatere and the singing of the national anthem by Laura Marriott, Department Law-and-Order Chair Timothy Burch reports. Then volunteers took the wreaths to designated locations throughout the town.

Volunteer groups included the Blue Star Mothers, Cub Scout Pack 44, Catskill Elementary School Student Council, Girl Scout Troops

1498, 1054 and 1444.

"Wreaths across America's mission is to remember, honor and teach by coordinating wreath-laying ceremonies on a specified Saturday in December," Burch noted. The wreath-laying takes place at Arlington, veterans' cemeteries and other locations in all 50 States as well as at sea and 24 cemeteries on foreign soil.

SENATOR HONORS ARTIST LEGIONNAIRE FOR WWII SERVICE

BOLIVAR – Richard H. Monroe, past commander of Kenyon Andrus American Legion Post 772, was honored Oct. 17 for his service in the Pacific Theater during the Second World War. During a ceremony at Post 772 here, State Sen. Catharine Young (R,C,I – Olean) presented Monroe with the New York State Medal for Merit, the U.S. Army's World War II Victory Medal, the Army of Occupation Medal with Japan Bar, the Honorable Service Lapel Button, and



State Sen. Catharine Young with Legionnaire Richard Monroe. Photo by Darrell Gronemeier/NYS Senate

the Army Marksman Badge with Rifle Bar "in recognition of his outstanding record of military service."

After Monroe departed

the Pacific Theater, he used his G.I. Bill benefits to attend the Rochester Institute of Technology where he earned a bachelor's of fine

arts. A distinguished artist, Monroe worked as an architectural designer for the Olean Tile Plant and his mosaics have been displayed around the world. He is also a prominent painter, having won numerous awards for his works. Among his paintings is a collection that features the likenesses of 28 local service members who were killed or died while on active duty, including Corporal Jason Dunham of Scio. A painting by Monroe now hangs aboard the U.S.S. Jason Dunham.

WAYNE COUNTY ADDS 16 MEMBERS IN ONE NIGHT

A small diverse group of American Legion Family members from the Seventh District joined together on Sunday evening, Nov. 1, 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 answer 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 two hours, the



Wayne County member effort included, from left, Daryl VerStreate Jr., Holly Trueman and Raymond Freyn.

“phone bank” was able to speak directly to 20 veterans.

“In this short time, Wayne County posts grew by 16 transfer memberships — a success rate of 80 percent,” noted Wayne County First Vice Commander Daryl VerStreate, Jr. “The lessons

learned from Past Department Commander W. Michael Bowen, whose mantra is, ‘Just Ask!’, continue to be effective.”

A similar “phone bank” effort the previous year garnered 34 transfers – for a total of 50 members in two years.

The revitalization team

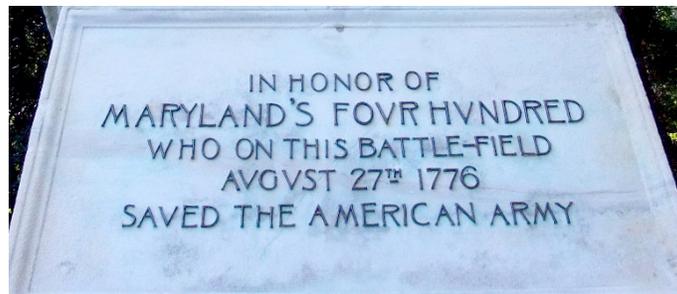
was led by dual member Verstreate. Also participating were Seventh District 2nd Vice Commander Holly Trueman; Past Wayne County Commander Raymond Freyn; Past Wayne County American Legion Auxiliary President Debi Hammon.

BROOKLYN POST WANTS REVOLUTIONARY WAR PARK

GOWANUS --Pete De Angelis, post adjutant and past commander of Michael A. Rawley Jr. Post 1636, has his mind on war heroes who died in this Brooklyn neighborhood 239 years ago.

De Angelis and other Legionnaires are worried about the city’s plan to build a pre-k facility next door to the post at Ninth Street and Third Avenue, the DNAINfo.com local news website reports.

“Some believe the empty lot where the city wants to build the school is the burial ground for the Maryland 400, the Revolutionary War soldiers who held off British forces so George Washington could retreat -- and live to fight another day -- during the pivotal Battle of Brooklyn



This monument commemorates the bravery of the Maryland 400, who fought at Lookout Hill, in what would become Prospect Park, during the Battle of Brooklyn (also known as Battle of Long Island) on August 27, 1776. Source: NY City Department of Parks and Recreation.

in August 1776,” the news outlet reported.

De Angelis, 83, has been working for years with local historian Bob Furman to get the property turned into a commemorative park for the Maryland troops.

The Maryland 400’s contribution to American history isn’t in doubt, but their final resting spot is.

Centuries of development have shifted the battle sites so much that finding the regiment’s remains is a near impossible task at this point, according to Kim Maier, executive director of the Old Stone House, the Park Slope history center that educates the public about the battle and colonial times.

Maier told the news outlet

that archeologists investigated the property next to the American Legion Post in 2012, and soil borings showed that the site didn’t contain human remains.

Historian Furman told the news outlet that even if no bones turn up on the site, he still wants a park there, not a pre-k.

“I got involved with this because I was shocked that this huge important event had taken place in Brooklyn and it was hardly known and hardly commemorated,” Furman was quoted by DNAINfo.com.

“The whole idea that there were several hundred Maryland soldiers who saved the country and no one commemorates them is pretty appalling.”

BICYCLING BOY SCOUTS, VIETNAM VET RAISE \$22,000



The Boy Scout and Vietnam vet bicyclists were welcomed by New York's American Legion Family. Here Post 381 Commander Duane Frost presents a \$200 check to Scout Bryce Nurning for Operation Comfort Warrior. The money was raised by Post 381, Marine Corps League 2nd Lt. John Paul Bobo Detachment 1118, and others.

Three Boy Scouts and a Vietnam War veteran bicycled across New York State in August to conclude a 59-day, 3,600-mile cross-country bike ride in New York City on Saturday, Aug. 15.

The Bike Trip America group (Boy Scout Venturing Crew 225 of Astoria, Oregon) raised \$22,000 for The American Legion's Operation Comfort Warriors (OCW) program that provides assistance and

comfort items to wounded, ill and homeless veterans and military personnel.

They more than doubled their \$10,000 goal, thanks to the generosity of people and groups along the way, especially the American Legion Family.

In fact, the Scouts encountered a series of welcomes from American Legion Posts across the state.

"We had great support from all parts of the Depart-

ment of New York American Legion family," noted New York State American Legion Scouting Chair Stephen Mataraza. "There were meals and lodging being provided as well as fundraisers and donations."

The bicyclists' itinerary brought them to the following areas in New York: Blasdell/Hamburg, Niagara Falls, Avon, Syracuse, Little Falls, Amsterdam, Hudson, Fishkill, and New York City

— where the trek concluded at American Legion-led ceremonies at the 9/11 Memorial at the World Trade Center.

The Scout bicyclists are Bryce Nurning, who organized the trek, Ryan Tallman and Jonathan Williams. The veteran is 70-year-old Don Child, a writer who was an infantry medic in Vietnam. Accompanying the crew in a support vehicle was Pat Wollner.



The bicyclists as they arrived in New York. RIGHT: They pose with Boy Scouts at American Legion Post 31 where Boy Scout Troop 31 served a spaghetti fundraiser. Nearly \$500 was raised.

AUXILIARY MEMBER, POST SPUR EFFORT TO ACQUIRE AEDs

ALEXANDRIA BAY -- Put an ambulance squad member and an American Legion Post together and what do you get?

First, post members approving an AED (automated external defibrillator) for their post, convinced that the lives it saves may be their own. Second, a resolution submitted to the county level to recommend that every post install an AED.

It all began when ambulance squad member and Legion Auxiliary member Angela Hunter approached Dean Erck, John B. Lyman Post 904 sergeant-at-arms, "about a need in our post, and, as she put it, a need in so many places across our com-



Dean Erck and Angela Hunter

munity and in all our posts."

Hunter "convinced our membership it was not a convenience to have an AED on hand at our post, it was an absolute necessity," Erck said. "... The facts she laid out about the AED and the numerous examples of it saving lives was impossible to ignore. John B. Lyman Post

904 approved its purchase that evening."

That was not the end of the story. Erck is resolution chairman for Jefferson County Legion and a legislative instructor at New York's American Legion College.

"Looking for ways to promote the resolution process, Angela and I did not just ask

for our post to purchase one, we asked them to support a resolution that would spread this issue to other Legion halls in the county, state and nation."

He added: "Angela addressed the County officers... One set of post officers was so impressed... that they, too, secured one for their post."

LONG ISLAND YOUTH ELECTED BOYS STATE GOVERNOR

Elias Mastakouris, now a senior at North Shore High School in Glen Head, was elected governor of American Legion Boys State, held June 26 to July 2 at SUNY Morrisville.

Nearly 1,000 high school students from around the state participated in the week-long immersion in



Boys State Governor Elias Mastakouris with 2014-2015 Department Commander Frank Peters.

citizenship and democracy, electing Mastakouris to Boys

State's highest office. The Sea Cliff, NY, resident

is a student athlete, playing football and serving as captain of the Lacrosse team.

He founded the school debate team, is a member of the National Honor Society and is president of the Key Club.

Mastakouris was sponsored by Glenwood Landing Post 336 in Glen Head.

SYRACUSE TEAM WINS DEPARTMENT GOLF TOURNAMENT

MARATHON -- The Department of New York's annual August golf tournament was blessed with great weather at Maple Hill Golf Club here, reported Golf Chairman Auseklis Krumins.

Dominic Fortuno's team from Post 1650 in Syracuse came in first place, knocking



The winning foursome from Syracuse Post 1650. Photo by Doug Malin.

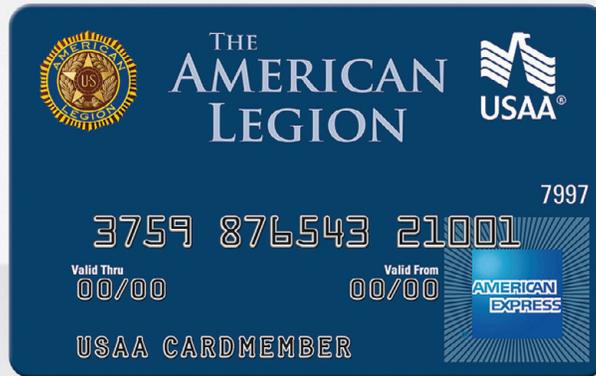
out last year's winning team from Bainbridge Post 806, headed by Richard Rusakiewicz, whose team this year

finished third. The second place team was from Post 151 in Middletown, captained by Abe Escobar.

Tim Spooky hit the longest drive. Richard Morris from Columbia County made the shot closest to the pin.



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NATIONAL COMMANDER SWINGS THROUGH WESTERN NY

National Commander Dale Barnett visited western New York Oct. 16-18 (swinging through the 8th, 7th and 6th Districts). One of his first stops was in Batavia, where he spoke with veterans at the VA Center

The Batavian and WBTA reported that his fall visits were aimed primarily at publicizing three things: the Walk with Veterans campaign to raise awareness about veterans; the VA healthcare system and its value; and role the American Legion plays in fighting for veterans' rights including education, jobs, and mental health/reintegration services.

The Veterans Administration is a system worth saving, he said, as it provides greatly needed services for veterans and their families.

Barnett mentioned the Veterans Opportunity to Work Act, which the legion successfully supported, state licensing credits, the



National Commander Dale Barnett greets the color guard that welcomed him to the 7th District. Photo by Doug Malin.

expanded GI Bill and new educational opportunities, including the ability to transfer educational benefits to spouse or children.

"We're fighting for benefits that affect them," he said. "We fight for veterans and their families."

Asked about efforts to shore up declining membership, especially among younger vets, Barnett said education and awareness are key, The

Batavian reported. They can't help fix problem if they aren't aware of them, he said. Since active duty military personnel and National Guards reservists can't lobby legislators about proposed defense cuts, Barnett said, it's imperative that newly retired and non-active personnel fill that gap, both for the sake of U.S. safety and preparedness, and the benefits and services at stake.

Asked about the alarm-

ing rate of suicides among young veterans, he noted that every day 22 veterans take their life. Barnett told media that VA is branching out in its efforts to help self-healing, "with less reliance on narcotics, over-medication that may have occurred in hospitals nationwide."

And no one is better suited to understanding the wounds of war better than other veterans, Barnett said.

NY NAVAL MILITIA PROMOTES MORISSEAU

Albany County American Legion Commander Robert A. Morisseau has been promoted to chief petty officer in the New York Naval Militia.



Robert Morisseau

Morisseau, an Albany native, joined the Navy in 1979 and retired after 20 years of active duty service.

He has been a member of the Naval Militia since 2001, and serves as a member of the personnel action team and as a small boat crewman.

American Legion leaders, family and friends gathered in Bronx's City Island Sept. 26 to dedicate a street naming in honor of William G. Clancy (at the



intersection of City Island Avenue and Cross Street). Clancy, a former post and county commander, had championed the cause to remember POWs and MIAs. He was nominated to be the leading candidate for Department of New York commander shortly before his death in 2012 at age 75. He was a member of Leonard H. Hawkins American Legion Post 156. Photo by Doug Malin.

FRANCE, STATE SENATOR HONOR WWII LEGIONNAIRE

OLEAN – World War II veteran Ernest Weller was the center of attention on Sept. 25, 2015, with a French consul and a state senator presenting him with commendations. Weller is a member of Franklinville Memorial Post 526. Participating in the ceremony were American Legion leaders and American Legion Riders, along with other veterans.

During the ceremony at War Veterans Park in Olean, Pascal Soares, honorary French consul of New York, and Sen. Catharine Young (R,C,I-Olean) presented France's National Order of the Legion of Honor, and other medals, to Weller in recognition of his contributions to the liberation of France.



Honorary French Consul Pascal Soares and State Sen. Catharine Young present Army veteran Ernest Weller with medals in recognition of his World War II service.

NEW YORK CHEERED FOR SIZE OF CHARITABLE DONATION

BALTIMORE – The Department of New York drew cheers and applause from the sea of delegates at the American Legion National Convention on Sept. 2, when New York Delegation Chairman and 2014-2015 Department Commander Frank Peters announced that New Yorkers contributed \$142,357.90 to the National Emergency Fund (NEF).

New York received a top award from outgoing National Commander Michael Helm for far surpassing his challenge to the Department to raise \$35,000 for NEF, which aids displaced Legion families. Peters and Department Commander James Yermas accepted the award on behalf of New York members.

That's not all. The generosity of New York members made it possible for the Department to donate a quarter million dollars to American



Department Adjutant James Casey, Department Commander James Yermas and 2014-2015 Department Commander Frank Peters with outgoing National Commander Mike Helm during the check presentation at the National Convention.

Legion charities, Peters noted.

“Our total contributions” to American Legion charities for the past year “amount to \$264,073.15,” he said, also including:

- Legacy Scholarship Fund (which provides scholarships to children of fallen warriors): “\$7,797.00 was transmitted to National prior to convention. We presented the national commander

with an additional 49,927.61, bringing our total Legacy Scholarship Fund contribution to \$57,724.61.”

- Operation Comfort Warriors (which provides equipment and comfort items to wounded warriors): “\$29,330.31 was transmitted to National prior to convention. We’re presenting the national commander with an additional \$13,493.92,

bringing our total Operation Comfort Warrior contribution to \$42,975.56.”

- Child Welfare Foundation (which provides grants to non-profits that help children): “\$20,330.31 was transmitted to National prior to convention. We presented the national commander with an additional \$684.77, bringing our total Child Welfare Fund contribution to \$21,015.08.”

THE MUSIC OF CHAMPIONS

BAND OF TONAWANDAS GRABS TOP NATIONAL HONORS

American Legion Post 264 Band of the Tonawandas took two top honors at the American Legion National Convention in Baltimore, winning the national concert band competition and then grabbing first place in the Convention Parade.

The concert performance win was its 20th national championship, the Niagara Gazette reported. Band President David Abrahamian said the band's 30-minute performance drew cheers, rousing applause and a standing ovation.

The American Legion Band from Kansas City, Missouri, finished second, Brattleboro American Legion Band from Brattleboro, VT, finished third, and Waltham American Legion Band from Waltham,



American Legion Band of the Tonawandas performs in the National Convention Parade. Photo by Bob Stronach.

MA, finished fourth.

Selections performed by the Band of the Tonawandas

were "Ride," "Purple Pageant" and "Suite from Hymn of the Highlands."

The band, now in its 86th year, performed under Music Director Michael Shaw.

FINAL SALUTE

Among the Legionnaires who have gone on to Post Everlasting in the past year are three who had impact on the Department level. They are:

- **Alton H. Carpenter**, 1981-82 department commander and consultant to the Department Legislative Committee, who died May 2 at the age of 87. He served in the U.S. Army Air Corps and U.S. Air Force in World War II and the Korean Conflict. He was a member of Harpursville Post 1596 in Broome County.

- **Kenneth F. Governor**, the 2013-2014 department commander who helped usher in a new era of commu-



Al Carpenter

nications and marketing for the Department of New York. He died Dec. 23 at age 73. A retired U.S. Army major with nearly 30 years of active and reserve service, Governor was a member of North Greenbush Memorial Post 1489.

- **Albert Paviglianti**, Boys



Ken Governor

State icon and proud World War II marine who, at the age of 92, died on Nov. 10 – fittingly, the birthday of the U.S. Marine Corps. A member of Charles Miller Post 140 in Canastota, Paviglianti fought in the Battle of Iwo Jima. He believed so strongly in the



Al Paviglianti

value of American Legion Boys State that he spent 40 years there as a counselor, and many years as assistant program director. "Al was an icon at Boys State," Department Photographer Doug Malin notes. "He was like the Pied Piper... The kids loved him."

BALL PLAYERS ASK NURSING HOME VETS FOR AUTOGRAPHS

UTICA -- A group of American Legion baseball players brought baseballs to St. Luke's Nursing Home July 27 and asked military veterans for their autographs.

"It was pretty cool," said Noah Jones, a third baseman with Utica Post 229. "It feels good to thank them for their service."

"Really cool," echoed Johnny Ploffe, an outfielder with Endwell Post 1700 Spartans. The 14 veterans, who served from World War II to Vietnam, talked "of what they went through and what they had to do...If they hadn't done that for us, we wouldn't be playing baseball,



Vietnam War Marine Corps vet Richard Weston jokes with Utica Post 229 players Stone Hickey, Ben Kilian and Noah Jones at St. Luke's Home. Photo by Bob Stronach.

so I'm really thankful for them."

Some of the veterans were surprised they were being asked to autograph baseballs. "One of the group said he had never been asked for

an autograph before," noted Nick James, pitcher for the Spartans. "He was tickled about that."

Spartans Manager Steve Barrett described the experience as a telling moment

for the young players. "It connects Legion Baseball to what (the American Legion) really means."

Players were from teams playing in the State Legion Baseball Tournament.

HUMOR HELPS OPEN STATE BASEBALL TOURNEY

UTICA — Humor won out at the opening of the New York State American Legion Baseball Championship Tournament July 28.

Department Commander James Yermas threw out the first pitch to catcher Bucky Dent, a New York Yankee World Series MVP. The pitch was a shy short, with the ball bouncing to Dent – who then acted as if he didn't like the pitch, throwing down his glove. The ump jokingly tossed the former Yankee out of the game "for throwing equipment."

Rivals from a previous championship tournament

W. SENECA PLAYERS ARE NEW YORK STATE CHAMPS



squared off for the opening game at Utica's Murnane Field – Clinton County Mariners from Plattsburgh and West Seneca Post 735 from West Seneca. **West Seneca**

went on to win the championship. Other tournament teams were: Saratoga Stampedo from Saratoga Springs, Maine-Endwell Post 1700 from Endicott, Utica Post 229

from Utica, Fairport-Brooks Sheperd (Brooks Shepard Post 765) from Fairport, Rockland OTB Pirates (Leo Laders Post 130) from Stony Point, and Ilion Post 920 from Ilion.

4 PLAYERS RECEIVE NY STATE BASEBALL SCHOLARSHPS

New York State American Legion Baseball Scholarship Committee has awarded a \$1,000 academic scholarship to a young Rome player and \$500 scholarships to three other players from Amster-

dam, Eden and New Paltz.

The \$1,000 scholarship winner is Joseph Campbell, son of Joe and Mary Campbell of Rome. He played for Lee Post 1794.

The following each re-

ceived \$500 scholarships:

- Brett Flint, son of Matt and Regina Flint of Amsterdam. He played for Amsterdam Post 701.

- David Baskerville, son of Keith and Teresa Baskerville

of Eden. He played for Eden Post 880.

- Taylor Digilio, son of Craig Digilio and Georgette Verdier of New Paltz. He played for Lloyd Post 193 in Highland.

DEPARTMENT CONVENTION AT A GLANCE

July 15

CONCERT WELCOME

BUFFALO -- American Legion Post 1041's Buffalo Niagara Concert Band welcomed Legionnaires and families to the Department Convention July 15 with a stirring patriotic concert in the atrium at Hyatt Regency Hotel and Conference Center.

July 16

WARM HEARTS

Buffalo Mayor Byron Brown welcomed hundreds of legionnaires by suggesting they move to his city and enjoy its "historic" revitalization and economic resurgence. Instead of retiring to "someplace warm," he said to laughter and applause, "I wouldn't be doing my job if I didn't try to convince you to retire to a place with cold weather, but warm hearts."

RESTAURATEUR HONORED

Past Department Commander Tim VanPatten took to the podium to praise Buffalo restaurateur Russell Salvatore who thinks "giving back is important." Salvatore created Patriots and Heroes Park as a tribute to veterans and first responders. Salvatore was awarded a plaque of his own to rousing applause.

LEGIONNAIRE OF YEAR

Linda Yelle of Montgomery Post 912 (4th District) in Rouses Point, NY, is the State Legionnaire of the Year.

TOP FIRST RESPONDERS

A Utica cop and paramedic are 2015 Police Officer of the Year and EMT of the Year. Officer John Scaramuzzino stopped a gunman who had



Buffalo Mayor Byron Brown



Officer John Scaramuzzino



EMT Milton Reeves Jr.



Fire Chief John Murray



Officer Scott Delfa



Firefighter Kyle Shane



Eagle Scout M. Parker



Lt. Gov. Kathleen Hochul

just shot four people outside a night club. Utica FD Paramedic Milton Reeves Jr. is constantly being praised for the extraordinary care he provides.

OTHER TOP RESPONDERS

Caledonia Fire Chief John Murray was named Firefighter of the Year for coordinating a multi-agency response to one of the worst fires in the history of Livingston County.

Scott W. Delfa of Westchester County Dept. of Corrections was named Corrections Officer of the Year for long-time mentoring and teaching in the corrections system and for extensive community service.

The 2014 firefighter of the year, Kyle Shane of Folger Hook & Ladder Co. in Geneva, was invited back to receive the

nine-state Northeast Region Firefighter of Year award.

RECRUITER OF YEAR

Mario J. Cristaldi Jr. of Robert Lee Walsh Post 337 in Broadalbin (Fulton County, 4th Dist.) is Recruiter of the Year. He signed up 51 members. "It's not just about asking, but explaining what the American Legion is all about; namely, the four pillars and... the importance of their membership... In numbers there is power."

EAGLE SCOUT OF YEAR

Eagle Scout of the Year Michael James Parker of Mayville Troop 126 is also runner-up for the top national Eagle Scout honor, Scouting Chair Stephen Mataraza announced.

July 17

'VETS NEED LEGION'

NY Lt. Gov. Kathleen C. Hochul pointed to the four marines shot down in Tennessee the day before, and said: "It struck me that men and women in uniform are still in danger" – even in the U.S. But danger, even in Afghanistan, wasn't always on the minds of troops she visited there as a congresswoman. "I asked them what is your biggest fear? It broke my heart when they said their fear is going back home and not having a job."

She said the Legion fights for the military and is there for returning vets. "They need you."

"When you put on the uniform to protect us, we formed a pact with you... We owe you for the rest of your life," she said to rousing applause.



Legionnaires render salutes at opening of convention in Buffalo.

DEPARTMENT CONVENTION *continued from previous page*

VA TASK FORCE

The newly formed VA Health-care Task Force visited a number of VA medical centers and clinics, plus conducted town hall meetings with veterans, VA and Rehabilitation Chairman R. Michael Suter reported. Their findings boil down to a need for staffing and better communication between veterans and care providers. On the positive side, when a cure for Hepatitis C was introduced, at \$3200-\$3500 per pill, the VA didn't hesitate to bring in patients and treat them, despite budget restrictions.

SERVICE OFFICER OF YEAR

Suter announced the Department's "first woman Service Officer of the Year" – Donna Kestner, an Army veteran with Oswego County Veterans Service Agency for over 15 years and a member of Fulton Post 587.

980 AT BOYS STATE

Boys State Executive Director John Murphy said a total of 980 youth graduated from the 2015 Boys State, with 59 counties sending delegates. He introduced Benjamin Schafer, a 2014 Boys Nation delegate from New York. "The American Legion taught me important lessons," said Schafer. One was the definition of a hero. It's not someone wearing a cape with super powers. It's someone who "makes extraordinary sacrifices so the rest of us can live ordinary lives."

A WINNING TOPIC

Oratorical Chairman Tony Paternostro introduced Jessica Norris, the 2015 oratorical champ. "This is the fourth year I competed," Norris said, placing second twice at the Zone level.



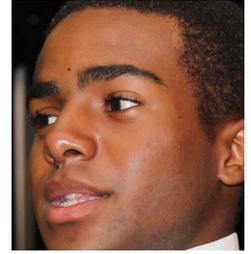
Service Officer Donna Kestner



Boy Stater Ben Schafer



Orator Jessica Norris



Cadet Jordon Greene

"It became a running joke in my family. 'You just have to pick up your thousand dollars and move on.'" She decided to change tactics and focus on the question, "What are you doing with your freedom?" Her speech covered freedoms declared sacred in the U.S. Constitution – speech, press, religion, to peaceably assemble, to petition the government – and sacrifices made to protect them. Then she repeatedly asked, what are you doing with your freedom?

EMPLOYER OF YEAR

Employment Chairman Thomas Rielly announced the employer of the year, but not before honoring employment specialists who help veterans find jobs. **James Davies** and **Declan Callan** received National Employment Service Awards as the Department's Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialist of the Year and Local Veterans Employment Representative of the Year, respectively. Davies

works out of Binghamton, and Callan, out of Watertown. They are both legionnaires.

Logistics One of Saratoga Springs is Employer of the Year. Since starting a veteran hiring program in 2011, Rielly said, the firm has increased vets to nearly one quarter (44) of its workforce. He said the company also backs local veteran support groups.

POSTS SPEND MILLIONS

Children and Youth Chair John "Sean" Powers said posts across the state spent over \$1 million on children and youth activities and racked up over 64,000 volunteer hours.

Earlier, Americanism Chair John Konkol said 778 of 892 posts submitted Consolidated Post Reports by deadline. Even without timely info from all posts, statistics reveal the Legion impact. Posts spent a total of \$1.374 million on Americanism programs (Boys State, oratorical, jr. shooting, bowling, Scouting, baseball), with 128,869 volunteer hours

(valued at \$3.46 million).

Similarly, Education and Scholarship Chair John Murphy reported the next day that 67 posts awarded 603 scholarships totaling \$346,490.

PR AWARD

Public Relations Chair Robert Stronach presented the Department PR Award to Third District PR Officer Tim Burch for helping to generate positive publicity – in particular, honoring and publicizing Prattsville Post for raising \$16,000 for patient comfort items, and a news anchor for doing a story on a World War II nursing home vet.

July 18

COMMANDER ELECTED

The convention concluded with the election of Amsterdam native and Vietnam veteran James V. Yermas as commander of the New York State American Legion.

CADET OF YEAR

Prior to the election, delegates heard reports and voted on several issues, and JROTC Advisor John R. Kasmer Jr. introduced the Cadet of the Year, Cadet Lt. Col. Jordon Greene, who attended Hutch Technical High School in Buffalo and "competed against 50 seniors from JROTC programs across the state."



Monroe County color guard took first place in the Convention Parade.

PATRIOT HIGHLANDER CHALLENGE

OBSTACLE COURSE EVENT BENEFITS WOUNDED WARRIORS

About 800 community members, military personnel and veterans converged on Cobleskill Aug. 29 for the second annual Patriot Highlander Challenge – a Legion-sponsored event that has participants racing through a six- or three-mile course with 18 different obstacles.

Named for Revolutionary War Patriots who fought in Schoharie County, the event benefits wounded warriors and sends participants over hills, across balance beams, through mud puddles and ponds, up ropes, and around and through various kinds of other obstacles in a timed competition.

Patriot Highlander Challenge was founded by local Legionnaires and Iraq war vets Kirk Holmes and Gary Schacher (Department membership chair). “We’ve run a few Spartan Races, and we decided to do a similar event locally to help our fellow Iraq-Afghanistan veterans,” Schacher said.

Participants, organized by teams, run either a six- or three-mile course, both of



which feature the same 18 obstacles. Times are taken for each participant, and a winner of each course is crowned at the end. In 2015, organizers added a 1.5-mile children's obstacle course to make it a family friendly event.

“We had military personnel, both active duty and

reserve and Guard, as well as people from the local community show up,” Schacher said. “We had a good mixture, everything from veterans to law enforcement to librarians and bank tellers.”

The 2016 event -- The Highlander Awakens -- is scheduled for Sept. 17. (Reg-

istration goes live in February at patriothishighlander.com.)

The goal, Schacher says, is to sign up 1,000 participants.

“We are showing that the Legion is out there supporting our broken veterans,” he says. “That’s what this is for: to help raise money for our wounded.”

