



WINTER
January
2017

LEGION NEW YORK

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Family
in Action***

LEGION NEW YORK

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GIVING THEIR TODAY FOR OUR TOMORROW

By John B. Sampson, commander

One phrase kept coming to mind when we marked the 75th anniversary of the Dec. 7th attack on Pearl Harbor, which ushered the U.S.A. into World War II.

It's a phrase that eternally rings true:

Freedom is not free.

As wartime veterans, we instinctively know that. We live and breathe it.

I am also reminded of an epitaph emblazoned on the memorial at the Kohima War Cemetery in northeast India, where 1,420 Allied war dead are buried. They helped turn the tide in the Burma Campaign, stopping the Japanese advance.

The epitaph:

When you go home, tell them of us and say, For your tomorrow, we gave our today.

What a powerful testimony to the sacrifices of our World War II veterans, who gave their "todays" from Pearl Harbor to the Battle of Berlin.

What a powerful tribute to all veterans. Without hesitation, they give their today for our tomorrow.

DOING THE EXTRAORDINARY

The 2016 Veterans Day came just days after a contentious presidential election, which decided who will be the new commander in chief for the next four years.

Speaking of leaders, it was another future president, then-Governor Ronald Reagan, who posed a question about



veterans in 1974, "Where do we find such men?"

He answered: "We find them in our streets, in the offices, the shops and the working places of our country and on the farms."

He was referring to ordinary people -- both men and women -- doing extraordinary things.

Thank you, my fellow veterans, for stepping up and being extraordinary.

ON THE COVER: FIRST PLACE MARCHING UNIT

The Department Convention Parade, held July 15 in Binghamton, featured a number of award-winning marching units, including Chili Post 1830's Auxiliary Color Guard, which grabbed first place in the Auxiliary Unit Color Guard category. Another first-place winner was Post 264 Band of the Tonawandas (see back cover). *Photos by R. Stronach.*

A great year with more to come



By James Casey
Department Adjutant

The past year has been a great one for the Department of New York. Our dedication to our Veteran community is as strong as ever and we are always looking for ideas to improve.

Our NY Temporary Financial Assistance program has benefited many Veterans and their families, and you can be proud of the work your headquarters staff has been doing to assist our comrades in time of need. We will soon start a new NY Disabled Veterans Temporary Financial Assistance program geared toward helping our disabled Veterans and their families adjust to the many challenges they face.

In 2017 we will be looking at ways the Department can assist local Posts in time of immediate financial need

for structural building repairs; more to follow on that.

Commander Sampson has instituted the NY American Legion Family College, which will bring together the Legion, Auxiliary, SAL and the Riders at Morrisville College the first weekend in June for what we hope will become a yearly tradition.

Our Boys State program continues to set the standard for programs across the country and our grant from the NY State Legislature has helped keep tuition the same for the past four years and given us the ability to improve what is already a great program.

Our Americanism, Children and Youth and Junior Shooting programs led by outstanding Legionnaires continue to lead the way, and our Boy Scout program led by Steve Mataraza

and Jean Williams was awarded the 2016 Belgrano Award for the best Scouting program in the country, the first time New York has ever received this award.

The New York City and Buffalo Regional Service offices, along with our entire Veterans Services Committees, continue their tireless dedication to serving the needs of our Veterans and their families, and I want to thank them from the bottom of my heart for all they do, they are the 'tip of the spear'.

I could go on for pages about the fine work done by all of you for this American Legion of ours; if there is ever anything that you need or want, please drop me a line and I will always be willing to help.

Pro Deo et Patria.

MEET YOUR STAFF

Department Adjutant Jim Casey introduces staffers on a rotating basis. In this issue he spotlights Charlie LaHaise.



Charlie LaHaise

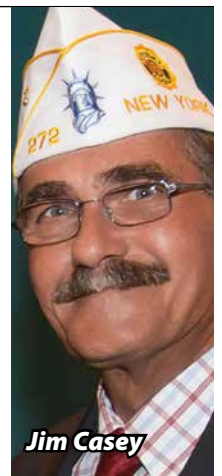
The Department Headquarters in Albany has a new face on the premises.

He is Charlie LaHaise, who joined the staff in May 2016 as membership coordinator for the Sons of the American Legion.

He also serves as shipping and receiving coordinator.

Charlie is a U.S. Army veteran, having served three years as a cavalry scout with 1-7 Cav, First Cavalry Division.

He holds a bachelor's degree in organizational communications from SUNY Geneseo. Charlie hails from upstate New York and is a graduate of Glens Falls High School.



Jim Casey

VETERANS DAY

'THE BEST DAY OF THE YEAR'

By **Steve B. Brooks**
The American Legion

NEW YORK, Nov. 11, 2016 -- Brooklyn resident Darryl Taylor admits he doesn't like coming into Manhattan very often. But one day the U.S. Marine Corps veteran doesn't mind braving the traffic and throngs of people is Veterans Day.

Taylor, a member of American Legion Post 1822, was at 2016's "America's Parade: New York City" to support Legion family members marching in the parade. Standing along 5th Avenue, Taylor said the nation's largest Veterans Day parade is very special to him.

"Veterans Day, to me, in the city is the best day of the year," said Taylor, who served in the U.S. Marines from 1980 to 1988. "The people, the stories, the camaraderie – everything is great. I really love Veterans Day. Actually it's the only day I like to come to the city."

Taylor started coming to the Veterans Day parade a few years ago. "I started coming because my father died like two days before Veterans Day," he said. "He was a World War II veteran, so in honor of him I said, 'You know what? I'm going to go to the parade.' And we came to the parade and had a great time, and we've been coming ever since."

The 97th annual New York



American Legion Riders roar through Manhattan in America's Parade on Veterans Day. Photo by Amy C. Elliott.

City parade featured approximately 20,000 participants representing every branch of the U.S. Armed Forces, first responders and veterans service organizations. The United States Coast Guard was the featured military branch, while three 9/11 first responders/post-9/11 veterans – U.S. Army veteran Joe Dugga, U.S. Army veteran Stephanie Dawson and U.S. Marine Corps veteran Nelson Vergara – served as grand marshals.

The parade commemorated the 15th anniversary of 9/11, with special recognition of Afghanistan, Iraq and other post-9/11 veterans, as well as first responders, and also marked the 25th anniversary of Desert Storm.

John Sabatino, a member of William Leonard Post 422 in Queens and a retired U.S. Army Special Forces major, rode on The American

Legion float. He's marched in the parade several years.

"It's the camaraderie and esprit de corps," Sabatino said. "It's seeing friends that you see every year, and it's reunion. It's a time to celebrate all the fallen comrades that we lost, and the men and women that still serve today. We thank God for their service every day."

Seeing another strong turnout of supporters along 5th Avenue "means a great deal," Sabatino said.

Standing next to Sabatino on the float was U.S. Marine Corps Reserve Pfc. Pierre Landet, also a member of 9/11 Memorial Post 2001 in Manhattan. Landet, a 2015 New York Boys State participant, said while he appreciated the outpouring of support, it also felt a bit strange.

"For me, at least right now, it's still a little awkward," he said. "People are coming

up and thanking me, and I've only gone through boot camp. But it's nice to watch the support for everyone else. It's good to see there's still support out there, no matter what."

Landet was escorting Tony Mero, a 40-year member of Post 1212 in Manhattan.

Brooklyn American Legion Post 1636 Legion Rider Pete De Angelis, the Sons of The American Legion Detachment of New York's Districts 2 and 10 commander, rode in the parade with his wife for what he said was probably at least the 12th time.

"It gives me goosebumps," De Angelis said of seeing the crowds lining 5th Avenue. "It's unbelievable seeing all those people out there supporting veterans. And that's really what our organization is all about. Seeing the public out there doing the same thing brings so much joy to me."

OPERATION COMFORT WARRIOR

LEGION, SAL BRING \$6,000 WORTH OF COMFORT ITEMS TO VA VETS

CANANDAIGUA -- Members of the Legion and Sons of the American Legion (SAL) went shopping with Operation Comfort Warrior (OCW) Program Director Bruce Drake before Christmas to purchase \$6,000 worth of comfort and recreational items for veterans at the Canandaigua VA Medical Center.

The shoppers included Canandaigua Post 256 Commander Don Grundke, whose post secured the OCW grant; SAL Detachment Commander J. Bruce Ruthven; Rena Nessler, leading candidate for department commander; Jim Coates, Detachment Vice Commander for Districts 7 & 8, and Gabe Cinquegrana, Detachment PR chair and Canandaigua Squadron 256 OCW liaison.

As the Canandaigua Daily Messenger put it: "If you were out shopping in Canandaigua Wednesday and you saw a group of American Legion members filling carts - seven overflowing carts at Walmart alone - you witnessed shoppers on a key mission."

As the shoppers and their goods filled the Voluntary Service office at the Canandaigua VA, Cinquegrana told the newspaper that a number of programs at the VA would receive the items. The programs serve vets in such areas as hospice care, recreation, various therapies



Don Grundke, Gabe Cinquegrana and J. Bruce Ruthven hold a register receipt from their shopping trip for comfort items for VA vets. The shopping trip was made possible by an Operation Comfort Warrior grant.

and homeless outreach.

"All the shopping was done locally at stores including Seager Marine, Roseland Bowl Family Fun Center, Canandaigua Theaters,

Lowe's Home Improvement, and Bed Bath and Beyond," the paper reported.

"Cinquegrana said veterans were asked about their needs and encouraged to 'think out

of the box.' While many purchases were ordinary items such as paper products, blue jeans, bed pillows and cleaning products, there were electronic devices like the iPod Shuffle, appliances such as a microwave and mini-refrigerator, and recreational equipment that included water tubes."

Drake noted that this was the second OCW grant allocated in the Department of New York in 2016, and the first benefiting the Canandaigua VA.

The OCW program is dedicated to meeting the needs of wounded, injured or ill military personnel and veterans by providing comfort items not usually supplied by the government.



SAL Detachment Commander J. Bruce Ruthven and Detachment Vice Commander Jim Coates (7th & 8th districts) unload a mini-refrigerator at the Canandaigua VA Medical Center.

'WILL NEVER TURN MY BACK ON NATION'S COLORS'

LEGIONNAIRES HONORED AS LIVING LEGENDS

Maj. Gen. Russell Czerw (ret) presided at many funerals with flag-draped coffins.

It was always an honor to meet the family, get some insight into the fallen soldier, and then write a eulogy, he told the Oneida County Historical Hall of Fame banquet Oct. 5, 2016.

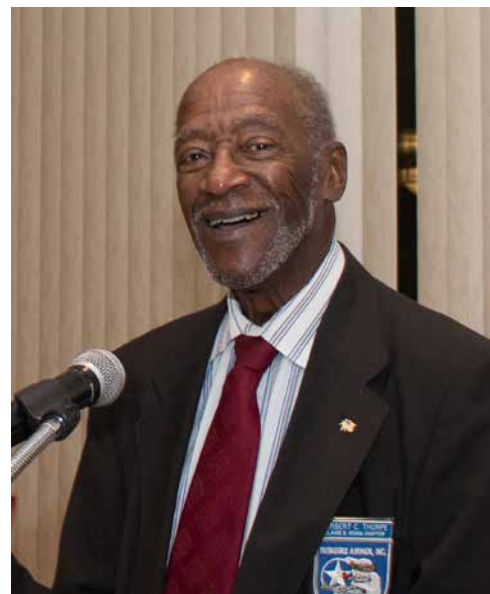
It was also an experience of gut-wrenching emotion.

Our nation's colors are sacred, he said. Those soldiers' lives are a testament to that.

"There is no time in my future where I will kneel or sit or turn my back on those colors," he declared to rousing applause from political and business leaders, veterans and other citizens.

Czerw, former commander of the U.S. Army Dental Corps and a member of Old Forge American Legion Post 893, was one of two Legionnaires being honored as a Living Legend by the Oneida County Historical Society.

The other was World War II Tuskegee Airman (2nd Lt.) Herbert Thorpe, a member of Harold Provost Post 1686 in Utica. Thorpe pointed to a need for a transformation in America, what with the contentious presidential campaign and racial unrest. Fortunately, the nation has "two great documents guiding us." One is the Declaration of independence, he noted, declaring that all men are created equal; and the other is the Constitution of the United



LIVING LEGENDS: Maj. Gen. Russell Czerw (ret) and Tuskegee Airman Herbert Thorpe.

States of America, which begins with the words, "We the people."

"A national transformation must include all of us as equals despite outward appearances."

Both Legionnaires received standing ovations. So did another Living Legend being honored for her work on behalf of military families and veterans – Gold Star Mother Mary Wheeler,

whose son, a Marine, was killed in action in Vietnam.

Another member of Provost Post was in the historical limelight last year when Harold McLeod, who died in 2013, was inducted into the Historical Hall of Fame. He was a former county veterans service officer and the first black Oneida County sheriff's deputy.

Czerw, a Utica native, now lives in San Antonio, Texas,

but his home Post is in Old Forge, NY, where he and his wife, Michelle, maintain a summer home.

Thorpe resides in the Rome area and got involved in The American Legion later in life when he was introduced to Harold Provost Post. "It's a great organization," he said. "I enjoy the camaraderie wherever I go. It's as if everyone belongs to one post."



Provost Post 1686 Commander Ed Jackson and Vice Commander Marron McCleod congratulate Gold Star Mother Mary Wheeler and Tuskegee Airman Herbert Thorpe on their selection as Living Legends.

FOOTBALL PLAYERS GO OUT OF WAY TO RESPECT FLAG

DEPT. OF NEW YORK HONORS THEM ON HIGH SCHOOL FIELD

MECHANICVILLE, – The Department of New York American Legion has honored a Mechanicville High School football player and his teammates for their demonstration of patriotism that ensured an American Flag was aloft during the presentation of the national anthem.

As the visiting team at a Friday night game last September, Daniel Hayner and his Red Raider varsity teammates realized there was no American Flag visible as players and fans stood for the Star Spangled Banner.

Hayner, a high school senior, rushed to the team's equipment bag and returned with a flag that he proudly held aloft in the middle of the field for the pregame ceremony.

"With an increasing number of professional athletes choosing to sit, kneel or otherwise protest and show contempt for the national anthem, it is refreshing and inspirational to see a young man like Daniel respect and embrace what our flag represents," said Department



Dept. Vice Commander Auseklis Krumins presents awards to Daniel Hayner and Red Raider teammates. Photos by Dan O'Connor.

Commander John Sampson.

To acknowledge Hayner's action, The Department of New York presented the gridiron standout a certificate of recognition and awarded the Mechanicville team a Red, White and Blue Award, as well as a donation to the school's football program.

"People are serving and dying to protect our country and the flag," Hayner said. "People are disrespecting the flag all the time, and it is not right. It needs to be respected and so do those who served our country."

The awards, presented

by Department Vice Commander Auseklis Krumins (Districts 3 & 4), recognize that the football players understand the principles on which America was founded and their willingness to show the spirit of Americanism. Hayner was joined on the field by fellow team co-captains Spencer Morgan, Andrew Clark, and Bobby Lebow, as well as coach Kevin Collins.

High School Principal Kevin Kolakowski called Hayner an outstanding young man, who is proud of his upstate community and

his country, as is evident by the American Flag that flies from his truck.

Hayner said the team always carry the flag with them, saying, "it's a long-time school tradition that our team has kept."

"The Mechanicville community and our state can be proud of these young men, whose actions exude patriotism and love of our country – qualities established as one of the four pillars on which The American Legion was founded nearly a century ago," observed Commander Sampson.



Department Vice Commander Auseklis Krumins announces awards on the field. At right is Dept. Legislative Chair Harvey McCagg.

LEGION RIDERS PROVIDE SURPRISE WELCOME

NATIONAL COMMANDER VISITS NEW YORK STATE

More than 50 American Legion Riders from the 7th District provided a surprise welcome for National Commander Charles Schmidt during his visit to the Department of New York in October 2016.

The Riders escorted Schmidt from his hotel to the luncheon at Marion Post 1430.

"The national commander walked among all the bikes in the hotel parking and greeted and talked to all the riders," noted Jerry Ketchum, vice director, Department of New York American Legion Riders.

"His aide went to the Riders and gave each the commander's pin. There were Riders from Williamson,



National Commander Charles Schmidt is welcomed by Legion Riders Robert Dominic (left) and Jerry Ketchum.

Webster, Waterloo, Lima, Sonyea and Canandaigua. A special thanks to the Riders from Williamson and Waterloo that closed the roads so the escort could get through.

"At the dinner that night, there were many Chapters represented and donations were given for Legion programs and the Commander's Project. The highlight was the \$2,000 donation

from the Chili Riders. Total donations from the 7th District were \$9,050. The commander talked about the history of the Riders and thanked us for escorting him."



Hamburg American Legion Post 527 presented a \$2,500 check to the Buffalo VA hospital during the National Commander's Visitation on Friday, October 14, 2016. The money was raised through a golf tournament. Pictured are, from left: 8th District Commander Jim Bojanowski, Department Commander John Sampson, VA Representative Mark Francis, National Commander Charles E. Schmidt, Post Commander Mark Wilson, and Golf Committee Members Dan Murphy, Bob Kenefic and Jim Koester.

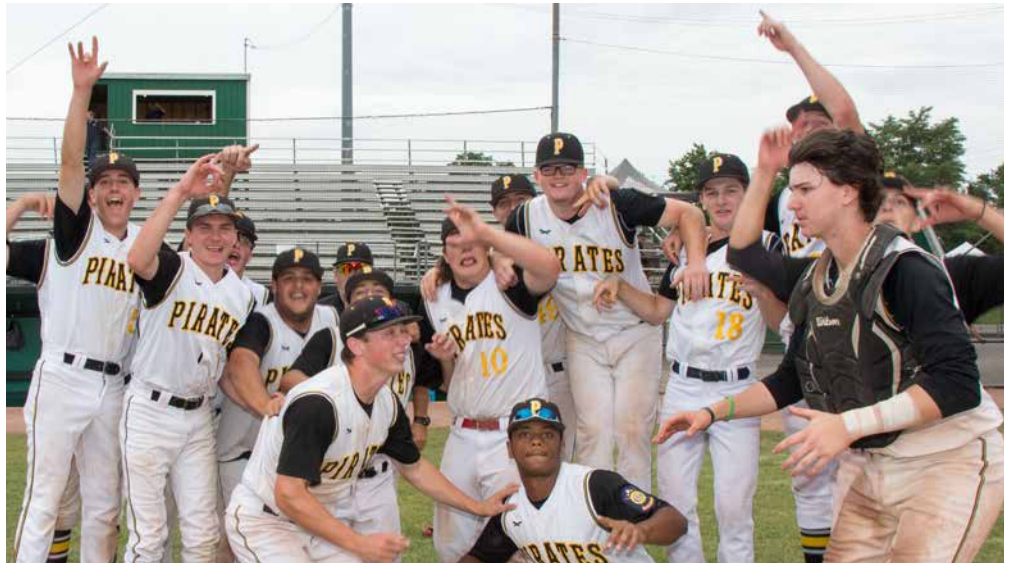
ROCKLAND PIRATES UNDEFEATED NY CHAMPS

UTICA – The undefeated Rockland Pirates (Rockland County OTB Post 130 of Stony Point) continued its winning streak to claim the title of New York American Legion Baseball Champions.

Rockland beat McKeever Post 64 of Buffalo, 4-2, in the July 30th championship game.

McKeever infielder Ken “Bam” Ruggiero received the “Big Stick” award for batting .524.

Rockland infielder Robert Ottaviano was named most valuable player (MVP).



Rockland Pirates celebrate their 2016 baseball championship. Photos by Bob Stronach.

PLAYERS ASK NURSING HOME VETS FOR AUTOGRAPHS WWII MARINE TALKS BASEBALL, OFFERS SPORTSMANSHIP ADVICE

UTICA– Young ball players in the New York State American Legion Baseball Championships spent a pre-tournament afternoon visiting nursing-home-bound military veterans, asking them to autograph baseballs and thanking them for their service.

“It’s such a great experience for the kids,” noted Tim Lucey, manager of Brooks Shepard Post of Fairport. It lets them see a “slice of life.”

Some of the veterans spoke of their war experiences while others talked baseball and even offered a few tips on life.

“Baseball is my big love,” World War II Marine Frank Traglia told the visitors, and then offered some advice: “Stay away from drugs. Play the game clean. Don’t brag... Team harmony is



WWII Marine Frank Traglia talks baseball and offers advice to players from the Maine-Endwell Post Spartans of Endicott. The players, from left, are Drew Gallagher, Alex Zimmerman and Jake Morris.

what it’s all about.”

Department Commander John B. Sampson and his wife, Vicki, accompanied one group of players to Sitrin Health Care. Another group visited St. Luke’s Home.

“The Legion runs many

programs,” said Commander Sampson. “Baseball is one of the biggest. These kids aren’t just learning athletics and sportsmanship and baseball. They’re also learning a bit about community service and what it means to serve your country.”

Tournament Director Mike Macchione of host Adrean Post organized the nursing home visits.

The tournament kicked off July 26 at Utica’s Donovan Stadium at Murnane Field, with Sampson throwing out the first pitch.

BEST SCOUTING PROGRAM IN NATION

NEW YORK AWARDED THE COVETED BELGRANO TROPHY

The American Legion Scouting program in New York State is not only top notch, but was recognized as the best in the country.

The National American Legion has awarded the coveted Frank N. Belgrano Jr. Trophy to the Department of New York for rendering “the most outstanding service” “to the program of the Boy Scouts of America.”

The award covers the period from July 31, 2015 to Aug. 1, 2016, and takes into account the number of Scout units organized, the strength of existing units, and the general welfare of the Scout movement under Legion sponsorship.

This is the first time New York has won the award, according to Department Scouting Chairman Steve Mataraza.

The American Legion in New York “sponsors approximately 230 Scouting units supporting 6,100 scouts,” he notes. “These numbers are representative of almost 10% of all Legion-sponsored units in the nation.”

But beyond the numbers “is the partnership shared between Legionnaires and our scouting community,” he says. “These partnerships are ingrained in each other’s programs throughout the Department. The scouts incorporate Legionnaires into their activities and ceremonies, and the American



Scouting Chair Steve Mataraza with Eagle Scout of the Year Steven McHarg.

Legion in turn relies on the Scouting groups to more effectively make our programs a success.”

Mataraza adds: “Legionnaires’ life experiences are passed on to scouts as merit badge counselors, in leadership positions, and in numerous activities throughout the year. They need us and we need them to continue to raise future leaders.”

New York’s Legion posts contributed over \$139,000 to scouting units during the 2015-2016 year, he points out.

He refers to the relationship between Legionnaires and Scouting at all leadership levels as an “unyielding bond.”

As Mataraza reported at the Department Convention in July, 2016:

“Scouting continues to evolve to keep up with changes and has implemented two big changes this year. Cub Scouts has introduced a new ‘Lions’ cub program to involve kindergarten age boys in the Scouting program. Boy Scouts has increased the community service requirement for all ranks on the path to Eagle Scout. This is a great opportunity... to connect with your local Boy Scout troop to assist in providing community service activities for the boys while strengthening that bond we have with the Scouting movement.”

The Scouting chairman

also announced top Department awards:

Pack of the Year is Pack 267 chartered to Fredonia Memorial Post 59 in Chautauqua County in the 8th District.

Troop of the Year is Troop 577 chartered by North Bellmore Post 1749, Nassau County, 10th District.

Adult Scouter of the Year is Michelle Brandon from Pack 42, chartered by Greenville Post 291, Greene County, 3rd District.

Venturing crew of the Year is Crew 14 out of Madison County in the 6th District.

Eagle Scout of the Year is Steven McHarg from Troop 162, chartered by Post 162 in Lewis County, 5th District.

NY LEADERS ON STAGE AT NATIONAL CONVENTION

American Legion charities got a \$85,000 boost during the 98th National Convention in late August in Cincinnati, thanks to the New York State American Legion Family.

Department of New York delegation leaders – including Immediate Past Department Commander James Yermas, Department Commander John Sampson and Department Adjutant James Casey – were presenting checks totaling \$85,120.

The checks were earmarked as follows:

- \$57,161 for Operation Comfort Warriors.
- \$16,801 for the Legacy Scholarship Fund.
- \$11,158 for the National Emergency Fund.



New York leaders were recognized for donations at National Convention. From left: Adjutant James Casey, 2015-2016 National Commander Dale Barnett, Immediate Past Department Commander James Yermas and Department Commander John Sampson.



Past New York Department Commander V. James Troiola was elected a national vice commander of The American Legion on Sept. 1, during the 98th National Convention's closing session. One of five national vice commanders, Troiola is spending 2017 representing and working with National Commander Charles Schmidt. A life member of Post 1682 in New City, N.Y., Troiola served in the U.S. Navy.



NY HAD LARGE CONTINGENT

The American Legion Family from New York had one of the largest contingents in the National Convention Parade – members of the Legion, the Auxiliary, Sons of the American Legion, American Legion Riders, and the Yankee Doodle Band (Fort Crailo Post 471, Rensselaer, NY) (above). At left are some of New York's Sons of the American Legion who marched in the parade — including 9-year-old Jordan Mahar and 8-year-old Elijah Clancey. The New York contingent was led by Department Commander John Sampson.

LEGION COLLEGE FOR AUXILIARY, SAL, RIDERS, TOO

American Legion College of New York is now American Legion Family College.

It is open to members of the Legion, the Auxiliary, the Sons of the American Legion, and Legion Riders.

The class of 2017 convenes June 2, 3 and 4 at Morrisville State College (SUNY Morrisville).

Legion College is a three-day immersion into American Legion programs and structure, and issues facing the largest veterans' service organization in the country. The college fosters leadership skills of Legion Family



Some of the participants at a previous session of American Legion College. Photo by Doug Malin.

members as they work in teams to solve problems they may face in their home post, unit, squadron or chapter. The curriculum covers an array of topics, such as leadership and

communication; Americanism, children and youth; MyLegion.org; legislation; constitution and bylaws; duties of local officers; media relations; membership.

Applications are due by

April 1, 2017 and should be sent to Dean Tim Collmer, 8968 Creek Rd., Nunda, NY 14517.

For more information, go to nylegion.net/departments/american-legion-college/.

HIGHWAY DEDICATED TO SOLDIER KILLED IN VIETNAM

RICHBURG— In a ceremony complete with full military honors, Army Private First Class Duane C. Scott was posthumously remembered Dec. 1 with the dedication of State Route 275 as the "PFC Duane C Scott Memorial Highway."

Local veterans and the Daughters of the American Revolution began the effort to honor the Vietnam vet earlier in the year. Legislation sponsored by Senator Catharine Young (R,C,I- 57th District) and Assemblyman Joseph Giglio (R,C,I- Gowanda), and signed by Governor Cuomo, formally designated the highway in honor of Scott, who was killed in action in Vietnam on Sept. 29, 1969.

American Legion Department Commander



Dept. Commander John Sampson speaks at highway dedication for soldier killed in Vietnam

John Sampson spoke at the dedication, noting: "Duane's story of patriotism can be told so that the people will learn of his sacrifice and the real cost of freedom."

Also participating were Lester Baker Sr., third vice commander of AMVETS Department of New York; Ron Moore, Cattaraugus County American Legion Chaplain, and Morrison-

Hayes American Legion Post 702 Honor Guard.

Born on July 25, 1949, Scott grew up in Allegany County, attending school in the Village of Richburg. He was a graduate of Richburg Central School's Class of 1967, where he played both basketball and soccer.

PFC Scott completed his training at Fort Dix, New Jersey, and was then as-

signed to Bravo Company, 2nd Battalion, 35th Infantry Regiment. He deployed to Vietnam on August 3, 1969, and died less than 60 days later. PFC Scott was awarded the Bronze Star and Purple Heart.

A portion of State Route 275 dedicated in his honor passes PFC Scott's school and the cemetery in which he was laid to rest.

PATRIOT HIGHLANDER CHALLENGE

IT'S ALL ABOUT HELPING VETERANS AND WOUNDED WARRIORS

By MARK SEAVEY
legion.org

Three miles doesn't seem like all that long a distance, until you are running that far through the hilly countryside of Cobleskill, N.Y., with wounded veterans. The 13 obstacles spread out along the course at roughly quarter-mile intervals don't make it any easier.

"We start as a team, and we'll finish as a team, that's all that matters."

That was the mantra of our team representing the Adaptive Sports Foundation (ASF), and coaches Jimmer Hayes and Kardin Rabin repeated it during each pre-race meeting and as we made our way around the Patriot Highlander Course. Named after the Revolutionary War Patriots who fought in the valleys of Schoharie County, N.Y., the 2016 Patriot Highlander Challenge drew 600 runners, 100 volunteers and 300 spectators from around the area on Sept. 17.

Featuring races of 6 miles, 3 miles and a kids run of 1 mile, each of the courses was covered in patriotic themed obstacles. It began with the "Liberty Slide" (a roughly 100-foot slip and slide) and ended with "Delaware Crossing" which was a swim across a roughly 100-yard pond with guide ropes.

The Challenge is the brain-



Veteran of Honor Army Sgt. Ryan Major, center, and Adaptive Sports Foundation teammates clear the final obstacle in the 2016 Patriot Highlander Challenge in Cobleskill, NY. Photo by Kyle Adam

child of **Legionnaires Kirk Holmes and Gary Schacher** of Timothy Murphy Post 248 in Middleburgh, NY. Holmes is a lieutenant colonel in the Army, while Schacher is the American Legion Department of New York Membership chairman. Holmes' family generously offered the use of their "Sunny Knolls Farm," donating the land and resources to host the Patriot Highlander Challenge over the last three years. It took over a year to complete building the course, and it was largely completed by Iraq and Afghanistan veterans.

Schacher is a retired Navy chief petty officer who believes that events like this are a no-brainer for The American Legion. "Veterans for veterans," he said, "and

we are The American Legion, so this is something we should always be involved in."

In addition to offering a fun time for families in the area, the Patriot Highlander Challenge also provides monetary support for state-of-the-art adaptive sports equipment and helps wounded veterans participate in ASF events promoting physical, psychological and emotional well-being.

Hayes serves as the assistant program director of the Adaptive Sports Foundation in Windham, N.Y.

The "Challenger of Honor" for this year's event was retired Army Sgt. Ryan Major.

"I joined the Army after graduating high school in 2003," Major says. "My unit was 1/36th Infantry

Regiment ('Spartans') out of Friedberg, Germany. We deployed to Tal Afar and Ramadi, Iraq in January of 2006. Eleven months into the deployment I was hit by an IED in Ramadi resulting in amputations of my legs and several digits on both hands. After struggling with depression, I found my way back to athletics which has and is still helping me heal.

"Being part of a team to accomplish a mutual goal is what I loved most about the military," Major continued. "The Patriot Highlander Challenge helped me see that once again. The camaraderie that I have missed was there again as we all helped each other get through difficult obstacles as well as lending a hand to other athletes from other teams."

HUDSON FALLS POST CREATES ITS OWN MUSEUM

HUDSON FALLS -- Hudson Falls American Legion Post 574 opened a museum last fall, and “it’s going to be an ongoing project,” Auxiliary First Vice President Gloria Cameron told Glens Falls Post Star writer Bill Toscano.

“We have people bringing in items weekly, and we hope to record people talking about their experiences and have those available, too.”

Cameron is one of the guiding forces behind the museum, along with Post Commander Mike Cameron.

The museum is located on the second floor of the post at 72 Pearl St. and features items from various war eras,



Mural at Hudson Falls Post's museum.

such as World War I sewing kits and V-mail packets, pictures, scrapbooks, uniforms and newspapers.

One of the highlights of the museum is a mural painted by artist Gabi

Moore, with the assistance of Hudson Falls Middle School student Gavin Bennett, the newspaper reported.

“The mural is unbelievable. It’s just fantastic,” Gloria Cameron told the paper.

“They just did a great job.” The images reflect conflicts from World War I to the more recent ones in the Middle East.

Veterans of those wars contributed ideas and suggestions, the paper reported.

ADIRONDACK MUSEUM BECOMES SPECIAL PLACE FOR VETS



Veterans present the colors during ceremonies at Adirondack Museum.

For one day last summer, The Adirondack Museum at Blue Mountain Lake not only heralded the history of the Adirondacks, but also became a place where “veterans of war found peace in being together.”

That’s how Lanny Gagnier of American Legion Post 322 in St. Regis Falls described the museum’s Veterans Appreciation Day, held Saturday, July 16. Gagnier helped coordinate the event, which kicked off with breakfast at his Post, followed by a cavalcade of Legion Riders and cars to the museum.

Admission was free for veterans (and a guest each) from the 12 Adirondack counties (Clinton, Essex, Franklin, Fulton, Hamilton, Herkimer, Lewis, Oneida, Saratoga, St. Lawrence, Warren, and Washington).

Museum staff and board members welcomed the veterans, and the first order of business was to conduct a

flag-raising ceremony accompanied by bugler Jim Purcell.

It was a “moment that echoed throughout my day,” noted Gagnier. He quoted one staffer who put it this way:

“It was so beautiful, to see our flag, surrounded by our veterans and framed by the Adirondack Mountains.”

Other visitors were appreciative, too, such as the family that approached the bugler, a Vietnam veteran, and said they wanted to “thank you for your service.”

Others told Gagnier that talking to so many veterans -- who stood out in their t-shirts, hats and jackets -- “made it feel like a family.”

“Their conversations went on all day... and the museum became a special place,” Gagnier said, who noted that more than 130 veterans and guests participated.

VET FINDS LEGION AT SOUP KITCHEN

UTICA – U.S. Army veteran Kevin Shelanskey did two things on Thanksgiving Day that made a difference.

He coordinated a soup kitchen's Thanksgiving effort, and he joined The American Legion.

Shelanskey, who served from 1999 to 2010, was deployed to the World Trade Center on Sept. 11, 2001, and then to Afghanistan in 2008.

But on Thanksgiving 2016, instead of fighting terrorism, he was combating poverty and loneliness. At one point he was in the kitchen at Mother Marianne's West Side Kitchen, setting up a sample tray of a turkey dinner and trimmings to show his volunteers how to serve their "guests" who would be arriving shortly. The guests would be families struggling to make ends meet, the jobless, people living in shelters, and some living on the streets.

He called together the 27 volunteers to give last-minute instructions, but before assigning people to



Army veteran Kevin Shelanskey briefs volunteers at Mother Marianne's West Side Kitchen located at St. Joseph-St. Patrick Church in Utica. The soup kitchen is named after St. Marianne Cope, who grew up in the parish before becoming a Franciscan nun and spending the last 30 years of her life caring for lepers in Molokai, Hawaii.

their posts, he first made an appeal.

"I just met a family out there that doesn't have enough money to buy diapers for their children. Can we come up with some money and get diapers for them?"

The volunteers began reaching into their pockets and pulling out one, five, ten and 20 dollar bills. Within seconds, \$113 was handed over to two women who volunteered to go on a

diaper run. Trish LaBella and Lisa Morgan returned with enough diapers and baby wipes to hand out to several families who came in from the freezing rain to enjoy a traditional turkey dinner.

"It's a side effect of what we're doing, but it's awesome," said Shelanskey, who is a counselor at John Bosco House youth shelter.

Not quite sure how many people to expect, chef Bill Bogan, Shelanskey and crew prepared over a dozen tur-

keys, 60 lbs of potatoes, 20 lbs of stuffing, plus vegetables, squash, sweet potatoes. And, thanks in large part to the Knights of St. John, some 135 pies were donated.

Shelanskey said they ended up serving about 100 people.

Before the meal was over, Legionnaire Bob Stronach, who chairs the soup kitchen board, invited Shelanskey to join The American Legion, and submitted his application to Utica Post 229.

BAINBRIDGE TEAM GRABS FIRST PLACE AT GOLF TOURNEY

MARATHAN -- The Department of New York's annual golf tournament was held on August 5 at the Maple Hill Golf Club here and "once again the golfers were blessed with great weather," reported Golf Chairman Auseklis Krumins.

"This was the first year that the entire Legion family was included so the event was well-attended," he

said. "Everyone had a great time, regardless of how well they played."

Bainbridge Team #1, captained by Richard Rusakiewicz of Post 806, finished in first place.

The second place team was from **Post 974 in Whitney Point**, captained by Post Adjutant Suzanne Williams.

Another team from **Post**

974 came in third place, captained by Post Commander Leon Skinner.

David Hauber from Bainbridge Team #1 won the prize for longest drive for men and **Carol Krupitza** from Post 1645 in Binghamton won longest drive for women.

Dom Fortuno from Post 1650 in Syracuse won for making a shot closest to the

pin and **Carol Krupitza** won closest to the pin in the women's category, with a distance of only 6 feet, 4 inches.

Before handing out the awards at the dinner afterwards, Chairman Krumins welcomed everyone attending the first all-Legion Family golf outing and said he looked forward to seeing everyone again next year.

SAL SQUADRON BEHIND CHAPLAINS HILL UPDATES

An updated Protestant Chaplains Monument will soon be placed at Chaplains Hill in Arlington National Cemetery, legion.org reported Jan. 11.

The updated plaque and granite monument will still list the names of 117 Protestant chaplains who perished in service during World War II; however, it will also now feature the names of 24 Protestant chaplains who died in service during the Korean War, Vietnam War, Cold War and War on Terrorism.

Sons of The American Legion Squadron 135 in White Plains, N.Y., including SAL Radio Show Host Kenneth



Four Chaplains Monuments at Chaplains Hill.

G. Kraetzer, along with Past National Commander Mike Helm and Past National Chaplain Randy Cash, have been instrumental in the planning process of the updated monument, as well as a new monument on Chaplains

Hill that honors chaplains killed in service since 2000. They also have been part of the planning for a new walkway that will provide access up to the 30-foot high Chaplains Hill.

Four monuments on Chap-

lains Hill are dedicated to the memory of chaplains who have served in the U.S. armed forces. Plans are in place for a new plaque to be added to the Catholic Chaplains Monument that will honor chaplains lost in the War on Terrorism.

JR. SHOOTING SPORTS CHAIR SHARES BEST PRACTICES

Over the past 25 years, The American Legion Department of New York's Junior Shooting Sports Program tournament has grown from 21 youth air rifle competitors to nearly 130. The two-day American Legion tournament is held at Post 787 in Cicero, N.Y., in February, and 21 air rifle teams are expected to compete for the 2016-2017 program year.

Junior Shooting Sports "is one of the best kept secrets in The American Legion; we need to talk to everyone about it," New York Junior Shooting Sports Program Chair Lawrence Behling told attendees of the Legion's second annual JSSP Conference in Indianapolis on Sept. 17.

Behling, along with North

Carolina JSSP Chair Harry Flynn, shared best practices on starting a Shooting Sports program at the post level.

Locate program space.

For posts that don't have the required space (33-feet from target to edge of the firing line) to host an air rifle program, speak with community members who do. Several schools in New York have allowed Legion Shooting Sports programs to utilize their space for training.

Identify leadership.

The program needs Legion volunteers and a certified shooting club leader to teach the basics of gun safety and marksmanship. A certification can be obtained through the National Rifle Association, Civilian Marksmanship Program or USA Shooting.

Raise funds. Support the post program through fundraisers such as dinners, apply for available grants, or ask local businesses for support.

Obtain equipment. This includes traps, safety glasses, hearing protection, kneeling roles, shooting mats, spotting scopes, pellets, slings, air rifles.

Recruit shooters. Ask members' sons, daughters or grandchildren; advertise in schools and newspapers; contact local gun clubs; and reach out to youth programs such as Boy and Girl Scouts and 4-H clubs. "You can be successful in your recruiting efforts if you explain that air rifle safety is the foundation of our program, and that shooting activities complement many other youth activities," Flynn said.

Practice. Decide the day and time that works best for the post, air rifle competitors and parents. "Many programs practice one day a week, but if you can increase by one more day your program grows and your competitiveness grows," Behling said.

Promote the program. Attend Legion county and district meetings to educate members, and have business cards available to hand out when talking about the program. Within two years of starting a Shooting Sports program, Post 942 in Webster, N.Y., produced an American Legion national champion – Andre Gross won the sporter category in the Legion's 2014 Junior 3-Position Air Rifle National Tournament in Colorado Springs, Colo.

DEPARTMENT CONVENTION HIGHLIGHTS

HERO COP CALLS VETS 'TRUE HEROES'

BINGHAMTON -- Niagara County Sheriff's Deputy Joseph Tortorella, who was being honored as the New York State American Legion's Police Officer of the Year for stopping a gunman in Wheatfield last year, turned the tables on a convention of Legionnaires and proclaimed: "You guys who are veterans are true heroes... I can't thank you enough."

The opening day of the 98th annual state convention, held July 14-16 at the Veterans Memorial Arena in Binghamton, featured a number of awards, plus action by the Legion delegates to better assist returning service men and women.

Deputy Tortorella had confronted a gunman who had shot and wounded his parents at their home, preventing him from threatening the safety of students at a nearby elementary school. The deputy shot the man three times outside the house, but the gunman kept firing. Tortorella was hit in the chest, but was saved by his bullet-proof vest. Eventually the shooter took his own life. For actions credited with preventing a greater tragedy, President Barack Obama awarded Deputy Tortorella the Medal of Valor in May 2016.

The deputy wasn't the only one to hurl expressions of gratitude at veterans.



Joseph Tortorella
Police Officer of the Year

"Thank you for your service," said Binghamton Mayor Richard David. He went on to note that his city responded to First Lady Michelle Obama's call to end veteran homelessness by identifying 2,000 homeless veterans in the area, finding them places to stay, and now working with the VA and federal government to plan a \$20 million VA clinic in the heart of the city.

"I can't thank you enough... for the sacrifices you and your families have made," said Broome County Executive Debra Preston.

"Thank you for being a constant example... of service to our country and



John Murray
Regional Firefighter of the Year

of (its) ideals," Greater Binghamton Chamber of Commerce President Jennifer Conway said, noting that her grandfather was on the beach at Normandy in World War II.

LAW AND ORDER AWARDS

Incoming Law-and-Order Chair Dave Reilly announced the Department of New York law-and-order awards. In addition to police officer of the year, the honorees are as follows:

- Caledonia Fire Chief John Murray, honored last year as Firefighter of the Year for coordinating a multi-agency response to one of the



Samuel Fuller
Firefighter of the Year

worst fires in the history of Livingston County, received a regional honor from the National American Legion. He was named New England Firefighter of the Year.

- Samuel Fuller is Firefighter of the Year, recognizing his service to the residents of DeRuyter in Madison County as a 51-year member of the DeRuyter Volunteer Fire Department.

- Angela Hunter of Alexandria Bay Fire Department is EMT of the Year. She was cited for her campaign to educate the public about the life-saving impact of AEDs and to get them into more public and business sites.



PDC Doug Malin.

PHOTO GETS HIGH HONOR

Retiring Department Photographer Doug Malin was given a special honor at July's Department Convention. Delegates voted to bestow on him the honorary title of Past Department Commander, recognizing 16 years of traversing the state with 16 different department commanders,

Auxiliary presidents and SAL Detachment commanders. He also spent a year as the official photographer for Past National Commander Fang Wong. Altogether he has taken 70,000 photographs for The American Legion. A former Marine and retired New York City police detective, Malin is a member of Leonard H. Hawkins Post 156 in the Bronx.

POSTS VOLUNTEER SOME 160,000 HOURS

A total of 159,839 volunteer hours valued at \$4.35 million.

That's what Legion Posts across the state provided for such Americanism programs as oratorical contests, Scouting, junior shooting, baseball, Boys State, bowling and scholarships, Americanism Chair John Konkol reported at the 98th Annual Department Convention.

And that's with 95 percent of 862 posts submitting Consolidated Post Reports on time – a 10 percent jump from the previous year.

Also, Konkol said, posts spent \$1.32 million on Americanism programs this past year.

Forty nine counties had 100 percent reporting as well as three districts – First, Fourth and Fifth Districts.

He announced that **Kearns & Edwards Post 1600** (Rockland County, 9th District) received a National Certificate of Distinguished Service and **Robert Lee Walsh Post 337** (Fulton County, 4th District) won a National Certificate of Meritorious Service.

LEGION PROGRAMS IMPACT 160,000 KIDS

"Not only do we protect our country...but we are here to protect our children," Children & Youth Chairman John P. Powers said in announcing that Legion Posts statewide conducted programs impacting



Middletown Post 151 Junior Shooting Champs.



Legionnaire of the Year Joseph Mondello

over 160,000 children.

"It brings tears to my eyes seeing battle-hardened veterans working with children," he said, noting that Posts spent \$541,270 on those programs and volunteered a total of 58,870 hours.

Those stats came from 818 Posts (out of 862) that submitted annual reports.

TOP PERFORMERS IN JR. SHOOTING

The Junior Shooting Sports program held a championship tournament in February 2016 at Cicero American Legion Post, attracting some skilled competitors. Junior Shooting Chair Larry Behling announced top performers:

- **First Place Team / American Legion National Match Sporter Air Rifle:** Middletown Post 151 team consisting of Nickolas Weier, Kaylee Morales, Angel Ryes and Tyler Jetomlong.

- **First Place Individual / American Legion National Match Sporter Air Rifle:** Tyler Jetomlong of Middletown Post 151.

- **First Place Team / American Legion National Precision Air Rifle Match:** William Floyd Post, Mystic Beach, with team members Rebecca Phillips, Christopher Ballas, Scott Amato and Rebecca Shanley.

- **First Place Individual / American Legion National Precision Air Rifle Match:** Andre Gross of Webster Post 942.

JOSEPH MONDELLO IS LEGIONNAIRE OF YEAR

Joseph Mondello of Post 252 in the Bronx (First District) is Department Legionnaire of the Year, Chairman Joseph Barilla announced.

Mondello has been active in Legion programs for over 20 years, serving in leadership roles on the post, county, district and department levels. A past Department Public Relations Committee chair, he helped start a cable tv access program called "Veteran Focus." He has played key roles in educational and PR outreach for such things as flag appreciation, POW/MIA ceremonies, World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C., and veterans' funerals. Mondello is a charter member of his local Legion Rider chapter, participating in rides to Ground Zero, the Vietnam Memorial in Lower Manhattan, funeral escorts, and the Legacy Run to the national convention.

Mondello was picked from a group of eight

DEPARTMENT CONVENTION ROUNDUP ... continued.

District Legionnaires of the Year. The others are:

- 4th Dist.: **Leon “Bud” Emond**, Post 219, Franklin County.
- 5th Dist.: **Walt Constantini**, Post 1794, Oneida County.
- 6th Dist.: **Philip J. Swaney**, Post 676, Schuyler County.
- 7th Dist.: **Darryl E. Cady**, Post 367, Monroe County.
- 8th Dist.: **Suzanne K. Quirk**, Post 1586, Erie County.
- 9th Dist.: **Robert Young Sr.**, Post 199, Rockland County.
- 10th Dist.: **Robert Santo**, Post 1244, Suffolk County.

RECRUITER OF YEAR IS JERZY FOLTA

Jerzy M. Folta, who recruited 27 new members, is the Department’s Recruiter of the Year, Membership Chair Gary Schacher announced at the Department Convention in Binghamton. Folta is a member of Post 362 (Erie County, 8th District).

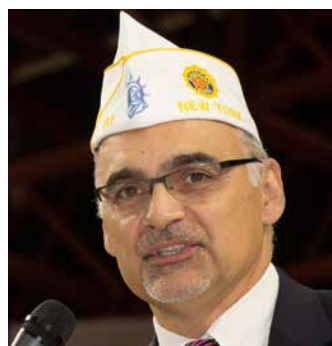
SERVICE OFFICER OF YEAR IS PETER FAZIO

Peter J. Fazio, a service officer with Jefferson County Veterans’ Service Agency, is 2016 Service Officer of the Year, Veterans Services Chair R. Michael Suter announced.

Fazio was cited for “his superior advocacy skills and personal initiative” as an accredited representative of The American Legion.



Jerzy Folta
Recruiter of the Year



Peter Fazio
Service Officer of the Year



Elizabeth Hendricks
DVOP Specialist of the Year



Michael Casselman
LVER of the Year

DEPT. HONORS 2 REPS, BUSINESS

The Department of New York honored two New York State veterans’ employment representatives for their outstanding work with military veterans, and hailed a Poughkeepsie-based com-

pany for hiring veterans.

Department Employment Chair Thomas Rielly announced the awards..

Elizabeth Hendricks, who works in Flushing, is the Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP) specialist of the year.

Michael Casselman, who



Arnoff staffers accepted the Employer of the Year award from then-Department Commander James Yermans. The staffers are, from left: Tyrone Davis, Alyssa Bergenson and Chris Haig.

works in Watertown, is Local Veterans Employment Representative (LVER) of the year.

Arnoff Moving & Storage, which employs 14 veterans in a workforce of 133, is employer of the year. Two veterans on the management team – former Marine Tyrone Davis and former Coast Guardsman Chris Haig – accepted the award on behalf of the company along with Human Resource Director Alyssa Bergenson. Dutchess County’s Parker-Haight Post 260 nominated the firm for the award.

EIGHT UNITS TAKE 1ST PLACE IN PARADE

Eight marching units won first place awards in the Legion Parade that took place July 15 in Binghamton.

The winning units by category are:

- District Color Guard: 10th District.
- County Color Guard: Albany County.
- Post Color Guard: Post 468.
- Legion Family Color Guard: Post 337.
- Senior Marching Band: Post 264 Band of the Townawandas.
- Auxiliary District Color Guard: 6th District.
- Auxiliary County Color Guard: Suffolk County.
- Auxiliary Unit Color Guard: Chili Unit 1830.

'YOU MAKE ME A BETTER PERSON'

WOUNDED WARRIOR THANKS AMERICAN LEGION

By **BOB STRONACH**
editor

Rick Yarosh's life changed forever when a roadside bomb in Iraq left him battered and engulfed in flames.

He lost a leg and the use of his hands. Badly burned, he would never again look in a mirror and see the face of the man he was. But he had hope, the former Army sergeant told the Annual Department Convention held in Binghamton July 14-16.

Membership Chair Gary Schacher introduced Yarosh to convention delegates, pointing out that he was a guest of honor at Patriot Highlander Challenge, an obstacle-course run/walk in Schoharie County that raises funds for wounded warriors and selected support networks.

Yarosh, a life member of



Membership Chair Gary Schacher with former Army Sgt. Rick Yarosh.

Binghamton Post 80, said he spent six months in the hospital. Two of those months he doesn't remember.

"When I left the hospital, I didn't know if people would accept me." But fellow veterans told him, "We're

with you."

He put it this way:

"I wouldn't be here today without the American Legion."

Recounting how his doctor forced him to start walking without the help of a walker, he noted: "That's

what the American Legion does. It takes you for a walk when you're down."

He added: "I talk a lot about hope. I'm able to be-cause of you... Thank you all for what you've done for me to make me a better person."



POST 264 BAND WINS FIRST PLACE

The Post 264 Band of the Tonawandas played its way to first place honors in the senior band category during the Department Convention Parade, held July 15 in Binghamton. See list of winning marching units on page 19.