

LEGION NEW YORK



WINTER-SPRING
2018
Vol. 5 No. 1



***Women
Make
American
Legion
History***



LEGION NEW YORK

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Volume 5, No. 1
WINTER-SPRING
2018

PUTTING OTHERS FIRST IS WHAT VETS DO

By Rena Nessler, commander

Putting others first.

That's what veterans do – whether on the battlefield or at home in a community service project at the local American Legion Post.

On occasions such as Memorial Day and Veterans Day, we put veterans first. And never again should we allow gratitude to be in short supply as it was some 50 years ago when Vietnam era veterans were treated with great disrespect. The irony is that hecklers failed to realize that it was not the protestor who ensured our freedom. It was the military veteran. The veteran who puts a lot of things first – country, mission, brothers and sisters in arms.

Before James McCloughan became a celebrated teacher and coach in Michigan, he was a combat medic in Vietnam. President Trump presented him with the Medal of Honor. His reaction was to note that "this medal is about love" – "a love so deep" among 89 men who fought on a hill beside him.

This is what being a veteran is about – a love so deep. There are many tangible ways to acknowledge the sacrifices of veterans and their families. But the easiest is to simply say, "Thank you for your service."

And my fellow veterans, I do indeed thank you. And welcome home!



Vietnam-era veteran Rena Nessler of Geneva made American Legion history in July 2017 when she was elected the first woman commander of The American Legion Department of New York.

A former Ontario County and 7th District commander, Nessler is an enrolled member of the Ojibwa Tribe from White Earth Indian Reservation in Minnesota. She lived in Minneapolis before joining the U.S. Navy in 1969. Upon discharge in 1972, she moved to Geneva, NY, where she resides with her husband, Jim.

Nessler retired in October 2011 from the VA Medical Center in Canandaigua. She holds an A.A.S. degree in business administration from Finger Lakes Community College. She is a 37-year member of Winnek Post 396 in Geneva, and a 14-year Auxiliary member of Seeley B. Parish Post 457 in Phelps.

ON THE COVER: MAKING HISTORY AT VETERANS DAY PARADE

Rena Nessler, the first woman commander of the Department of New York, led the Department contingent in the annual America's Parade on Veterans Day in New York City. It was her first time participating in the Veterans Day event in the Big Apple. It also was a first for Denise Rohan (bottom photo), the American Legion's first-ever female national commander. She served as honorary grand marshal for the parade, which attracted an estimated 40,000 participants and tens of thousands of spectators. See PAGE 3. Photos by Amy C. Elliott / The American Legion.

NEW YORK CITY VETERANS DAY PARADE

COLD DOESN'T KEEP LEGION FAMILY AWAY

By Steve B. Brooks
The American Legion / legion.org

Joseph Mondello, the Bronx County American Legion Riders director and a member of Theodore Korony Post 253, rode a motorcycle in temperatures hovering in the low 30s down Fifth Avenue in New York City.

And it was his choice – a choice that was never in doubt.

Mondello was one of a handful of Legion Riders who helped lead off the 99th annual New York City Veterans Day Parade Nov.

11 in Manhattan. The group was part of a large Legion family contingent that braves what felt like icy temps for most of the four-hour parade – the largest Veterans Day parade in the nation.

“Our motto is ‘We ride for those who can’t ride no longer,’” Mondello said. “It’s a great honor. Many of us, when we were at a young age, took that oath and



Legion Rider Joseph Mondello helped lead off the New York City Veterans Day Parade.

committed ourselves to our country. To be thankful for that time we gave up, for those who served in combat and for those who didn’t come home, I think it’s a great privilege.”

Tens of thousands of spectators watched the 99th annual New York City parade consisting of 300 units and an estimated 40,000 participants. Astronaut

Buzz Aldrin, a Korean War veteran, served as the grand marshal, while the parade marked the centennial of U.S. entry into World War I. The U.S. Air Force was this year’s featured service.

Serving as an honorary grand marshal was American Legion National Commander Denise H. Rohan, who spent part of her time with Legion family

members who marched in the parade and part of her time on the parade’s reviewing stand.

Rohan was making her first-ever visit to New York City. “To be here for this parade was amazing,” she said. “There were so many units and so many currently serving military personnel, also. It was amazing. And

Continued on next page.

MEET YOUR STAFF

Department Adjutant Jim Casey introduces staffers on a rotating basis. Here he spotlights retiring Program Coordinator Annie Wilsey.



Annie Wilsey

Long-time staffer Annie Wilsey retired in December after more than three decades of service. Some might say Annie “broke in” three department adjutants -- as she joined the Department 37 years ago when PDC Leonard Baxter was adjutant. She continued through PNC Dick Pedro’s nearly three-decade tenure, then through 2017, working on everything involving programs.

“It’s hard to describe my job because it’s everything,” Annie once said. “It’s being flexible” -- whether it’s coordinating Children & Youth and Americanism awards, handling numerous citations, typing innumerable thank-you letters, working on the oratorical contest (“my favorite”), helping with Boys State, or assisting Sons of the American Legion.

Or, as she had put it: “I’m never bored.”



Jim Casey

Continued from previous page

there was actually a crowd to watch the parade. The citizens actually showed up.”

Rohan praised the Legion family members who braved the cold to take part in the parade. “They were standing out there for four hours or longer,” she said. “They were talking to each other. You saw the camaraderie.”

The camaraderie he experienced is what has inspired Legionnaire Deryck Aird to march in the parade for 11 years and led him to ignore the chill this year. A member of 9-11 Memorial Post 2001 in Manhattan, Aird came to the United States from Grenada in 1965 when he was 19 years old and served in the Army in Vietnam three years later.

“I came here and was the only one in my family to serve,” he said. “I lost some good buddies (in Vietnam) that I’ll never forget. The passion that I got from the guys that I lost – I couldn’t stay home, man.

“The union among the soldiers in Vietnam was an incredible atmosphere of



The Department Color Guard helped lead off the Department of New York contingent.

brotherhood. I’ve never experienced anything like that.”

The Department of New York American Legion family contingent was led by Department Commander Rena Nessler, who also was at the parade for the first time. Seeing the thousands of spectators lining the streets as she and other veterans marched from 26th to 53rd Street made an impact on Nessler, the department’s first female commander.

“It was so heart-warming to see that,” she said.

“Sometimes when you go to a parade there aren’t that many people there. If there are, they don’t always stand and wave the flag. It was so heart-warming to see the street lined with people waving their flags and thanking and cheering as you went down the way.

“Leading the delegation of the New York American Legion and the Legion family down Fifth Avenue was such an amazing experience. As we walked down the street we saw all the people ... out

there supporting the veterans and yelling ‘thank you’ to the veterans and the military. It was an overwhelming event.”

Legionnaire Darryl Taylor, a Marine Corps veteran and member of Post 1822 in New York, made coming to the parade a tradition a few years ago. The cold didn’t scare him off this year.

“I was stationed in Korea,” Taylor said. “You’re dealing with 20 below, 10 below for months at a time. This was nothing. I wish it was like this in Korea.”



The Legion Family turned out in force for Veterans Day Parade in New York City on Nov. 11, including Alan Feuer (wearing dress greens), commander of Boulevard Gardens Woodside Post 1836.

COMMUNITY GROUPS HONOR BRONX LEGIONNAIRES

Several Bronx Legionnaires received recognition from community groups in November.

On Nov. 10, the East Bronx

History Forum honored Gene DeFrancis, 2nd vice commander of Theo. Korony Post 253.

Then on Nov. 16, the

Bronx Chamber of Commerce honored Bronx County Commander Tony Salimbene and Patrick Devine, also from Post 253,

at a luncheon. Devine and Salimbene are also inductees in the NY State Senate Veterans Hall of Fame, Albany.

LEGION PLAYERS IN CHARITY GAME WITH GREATS

SARATOGA SPRINGS
-- Two American Legion baseball players from the Saratoga Stampede took part in a charity softball game Sept. 23 with Baseball Hall of Famers Wade

Boggs and Ozzie Smith, among other celebrities, to raise money for Ronald McDonald House, reports David Lockhart, 4th District sergeant-at-arms.

In addition, two Legion-

naires provided the colors for the event, held at Saratoga Casino.

The Legion players are Noko Concha and Gorden Hogben. The Legionnaires are Lockhart and Josh

Cauffiel, commander of Horace D Washburn Post 533 in Corinth.

"The event was attended by nearly one thousand people... and raised tens of thousands of dollars," Lockhart said.



From left: David Lockhart, 4th District Sgt.-at-Arms, Noko Concha #33, Gorden Hogben #11, and Josh Cauffiel, Post 533 commander. David and Josh provided colors for the event that, he reports, "was attended by nearly one thousand people" at Saratoga Casino and "raised tens of thousands of dollars."

POST COMMANDER RECEIVES HISPANIC HERITAGE AWARD

In recognition of National Hispanic Heritage Month, Rockville Centre's Frank Colon Jr. was honored for his service as an Army veteran and his continued support of veterans' organizations through the years, the Long Island Herald reported. Town of Hempstead Supervisor Anthony San-

tino presented the Hispanic Heritage Award to Colon at a ceremony on Sept. 19.

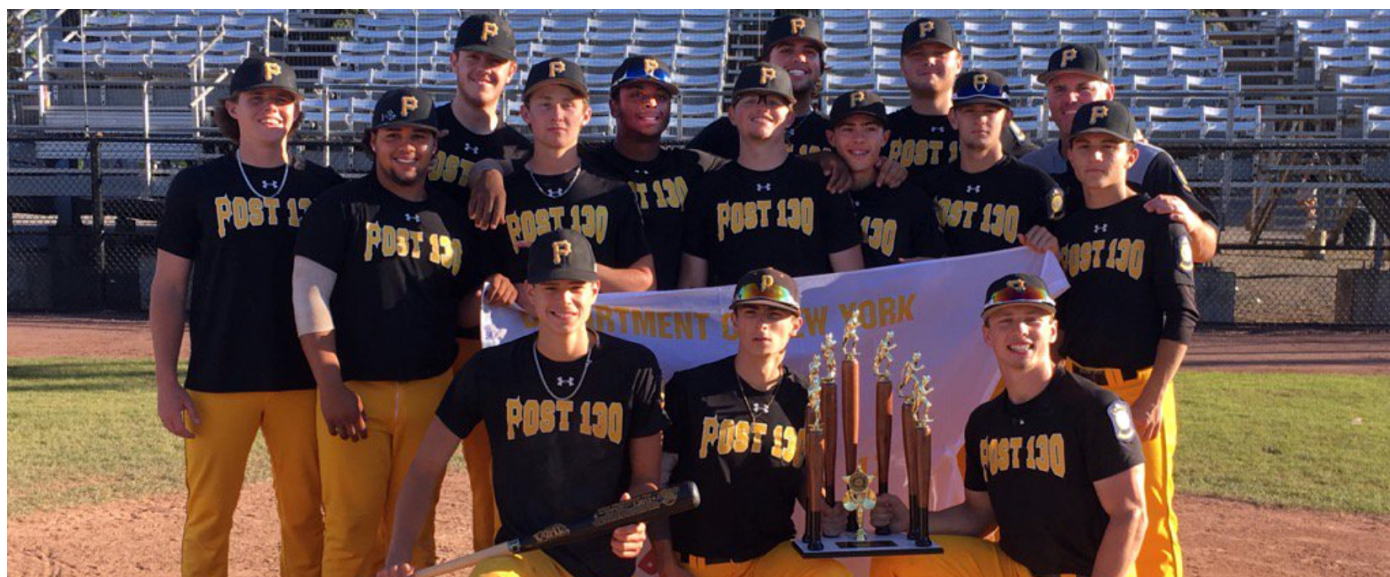
Colon, commander of Rockville Centre American Legion Post 303, and a member of Woodland Engine Company No. 4, grew up in North Bellmore, and joined the U.S. Army in 1972. He was sent to Hanau,

Germany, and then to Italy, and then back to Fort Hamilton, in Brooklyn, where he served with the military police. He also spent time in Korea after serving in Fort Meade, Md. Then, after being stationed in Harrisburg, Pa., for two years, he retired in 1994, as a sergeant first class.

His parents were both born in Coamo, Puerto Rico. His father, Frank Sr., is a World War II veteran who fought on the destroyer U.S.S. Wainwright, and started teaching in the North Bellmore School District in 1952 as one of the first Puerto Rican teachers in the county.

AMERICAN LEGION BASEBALL

ROCKLAND CLAIMS BASEBALL TITLE - AGAIN



New York's baseball champions -- Rockland County OTB Post 130

UTICA -- Rockland County OTB Post 130 of Stony Point successfully defended its 2016 title Saturday, July 29, becoming the 2917 New York State

American Legion Baseball Champions.

Rockland trounced Grand Island Post 1346, 18 to 2, in the second game of Saturday's championship

series at Murnane Field's Donovan Stadium.

Rockland nearly repeated its undefeated 2016 performance until Grand Island forced the

second game by handing Rockland its first setback of the 2017 tournament with a 5-2 win earlier in the day.

MIDDLETOWN POST 151 COBRAS ARE JR CHAMPIONS

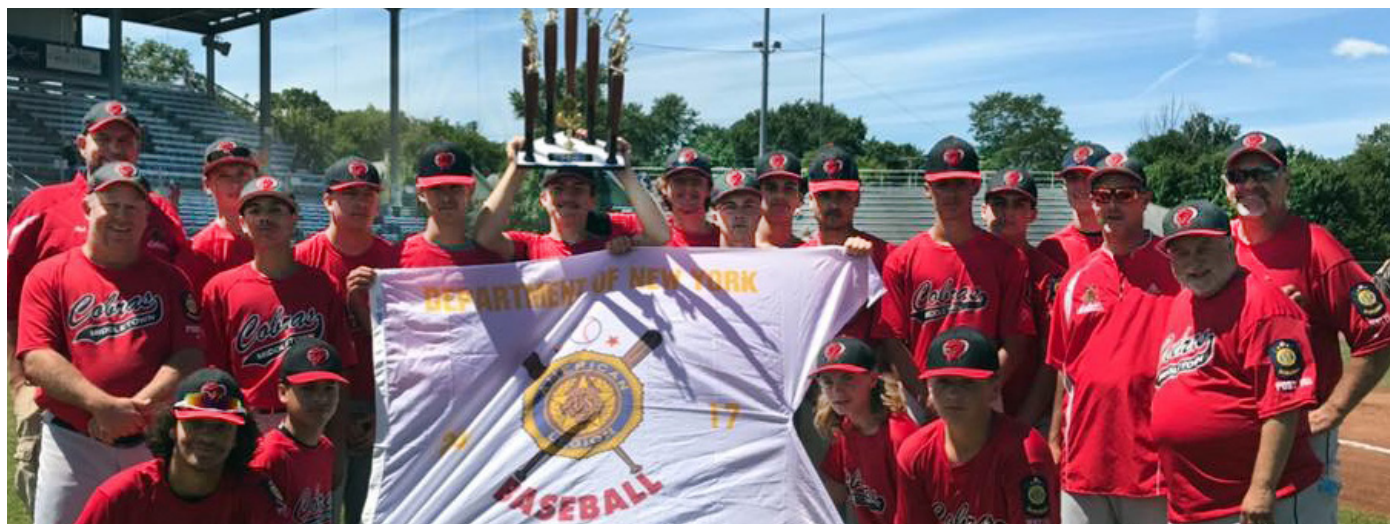
UTICA -- Middletown Post 151 Jr. Cobras soundly defeated the Whitestown Post Jr. team Saturday, July

29, to claim the title of New York State American Legion Junior Baseball Champions.

Middletown led 7-0 by the

7th inning when Whitestown scored on a throwing error and batted in another 2 runs, leaving the final score

7 to 3. The final game of the Junior Tournament took place at Murane Field's Donovan Stadium.



New York's Junior baseball champions -- Middletown Post 151 Cobras.



PLAYERS VISIT VETS IN NURSING HOME

UTICA -- Young baseball players in the New York State American Legion Baseball Tournament spent a pre-tournament day visiting military veterans in the nursing home and the military rehab center at Sitrin Health Care on July 24.

To show their appreciation for the sacrifices of veterans, the youth brought along baseballs and pens and asked the vets for their autographs.

Department Commander Rena Nessler, tournament officials and coaches accompanied the youth.

ABOVE AND BELOW: Players talked baseball with nursing home vets and asked for their autographs. Photos courtesy of Sitrin Health Care.



Department Commander Rena Nessler chats with veteran at Sitrin Health Care. With her are husband, Jim, and Tournament Director Mike Macchione.

DEPARTMENT AWARDS BASEBALL SCHOLARSHIPS

The following are the 2017 Department of New York Baseball Scholarship winners, Baseball Chairman Bruce Mayfield announced.

Daniel Parslow from Post 701 in Amsterdam received a \$1000 scholarship, with entry in the Regional Scholarship competition.

\$500 Scholarships were awarded to:

- Luke Miller of Post 1645, Binghamton.
- Scott Pufpaff, Post 1346,

Grand Island.

- Keaton Mark, Post 259, Oneonta.
- "Congratulations to all," Mayfield said.

PARADE HELPS KICK OFF NATIONAL CONVENTION

2017 American Legion National Vice Commander V. James Troiola, a past New York Department commander, and 2017 National Commander Charles Schmidt salute as the 99th National Convention parade passes the viewing booth in downtown Reno, Nev. on Sunday, August 20, 2017. The New York delegation marched in the parade, along with Legion Family members from across the country. Photo by Clay Lomneth / The American Legion.



NY LEADERS TAKE NATIONAL STAGE FOR DONATIONS

RENO, NEV. -- Department of New York leaders took to the national stage Tuesday, Aug. 22, when they presented checks totaling \$86,351 for American Legion charities at the 99th National Convention.

Delegation Chairman and Immediate Past Department Commander John Sampson, along with newly elected Department Commander Rena Nessler and Department Adjutant James Casey, presented then-Na-

tional Commander Charles Schmidt with a check for \$59,630 for the National Emergency Fund.

A little later, the New York delegation returned to the stage to present checks totaling \$10,610 for the

Legacy Scholarship Fund.

Then American Legion Riders State Director David Davis turned over \$16,111 raised by Riders, bringing New York's Legacy donation at the convention to \$26,721.



Department leaders presented donations to then-National Commander Charles Schmidt during the National Convention in Reno. From left: Department Adjutant James Casey, Immediate Past Department Commander John Sampson, Department Commander Rena Nessler and National Commander Schmidt. Photo by Doug Malin.

VA HEALTHCARE TASK FORCE RECEIVES TRAINING

The Department of New York Healthcare Task Force underwent training in October in preparation to visit various VA hospitals, clinics and centers.

The task force tries “to identify the good over the

bad in VA healthcare,” reports Patrick Rourk, one of the trainers.

The national American Legion group was “called the System Worth Saving Task Force” and “New York did not want to duplicate

the name, although we are duplicating the mission.”

Trainers and students in the task force class included: Pat Rourk, Steve Bowman, Edwin Thomas (national), Cliff Sterling, John Cournyea, Lynda

Pixley, Denise DiResta, Catherine Erwin, Kevin LeBoeuf, David Lockhart, Cayla Wick, Eilene Fisher, Thomas Charland, Mary McLoone, Dennis McLoone.

CSEA, LEGION CO-HOST ‘BANDS 4 VETS’ FUNDRAISER

The CSEA Region 4 Veterans Committee joined efforts with NYS American Legion to co-host a fundraising event on September 23, 2017, to benefit veteran’s programs.

This event, *Bands 4 Vets*,

was held at Chrome Food & Spirits in Waterford, NY, featuring four local classic & modern rock bands.

“Along with American Legion, our goal is to bring awareness in the community of programs offered

to our veterans,” the CSEA announcement noted.

“This event will help provide financial support to the capital region’s four homeless veteran’s shelters; two words that should never be associated together.

This event also supports Project Lifesaver, a national program adopted by the Albany VA Stratton Security office, and the American Legion’s Operation Comfort Warriors program.”



Members of Patchogue Post 269, including Commander Jonathon Ralph, present a \$9,000 check to the Patchogue Mayor Paul Pontieri for a canon restoration project. Photo by Nicholas Esposito / Greater Patchogue.

PATCHOGUE POST 269 DONATES \$9,000 PARTNERS WITH VILLAGE TO RESTORE CANONS

After months of fundraising, members of the American Legion Patchogue Post 269 presented the Village of Patchogue with a check to cover a portion of the cost for the newly restored M190s Field Guns that sit

at Harry T. Hanson Veterans Memorial Park, reported GreaterPatchogue.com.

“It was a lot of work doing all the fundraising, but the satisfaction of raising the money and turning it over is great,” Post 269 Commander

Jonathon Ralph told the news outlet.

Ralph handed Mayor Paul Pontieri a check worth \$9,000 at the Village Board meeting on Dec. 11.

The two guns had been shipped off to Maryland

for restoration, at a cost of about \$27,000. The American Legion partnered with the village on the project.

The efforts also received help of grants from Legislator Rob Colaraco’s office.



Legionnaires participated in the official opening of the World War I Exhibit at Buffalo & Erie County Downtown Public Library held Nov. 16. Pictured (from left) are Past 8th District Commander Jim Bojanowski, Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz (cutting the ribbon), Past Erie County Commander Peter Hurd, Library Director Jean Jakubowski, and Library Board Chairman Frank Housh.

BUFFALO WWI EXHIBIT FEATURES LEGION HONOREES EXHIBIT HOUSED AT DOWNTOWN PUBLIC LIBRARY

Two World War I veterans, whose names grace Buffalo area American Legion Posts, are featured in a new World War I Exhibit at the Buffalo & Erie County Downtown Public Library, 1 Lafayette Square, Buffalo, reports Past 8th District Commander Jim Bojanowski.

The exhibit opened Nov. 16 and features original and reproduced posters, and military artifacts from WWI. Featured in the exhibit, Bojanowski notes, are tributes to Adam Plewacki, the first Buffalonian killed in action during WWI (Adam Plewacki American Legion Post 799 is named after him) and Jesse Clipper, the first



Legionnaires browse the new WWI exhibit in Buffalo. Pictured (from left) are ERIECO Women's Post Commander Karen Patch, West Seneca Post member JoAnn Pressburg, and Erie County Commander Suzanne Quirk.

Buffalo African-American who succumbed to injuries from WWI (Jesse Clipper American Legion Post 430 is

named after him).

"There is a large cubicle display on the first floor, with a large room full of displays

on the second floor," Bojanowski says. "The exhibit will be open for the next two years. It is worth the visit."

A POST IS REBORN IN TIME FOR 2018

GREENPORT AMERICAN LEGION'S GRAND OPENING DRAWS CROWD

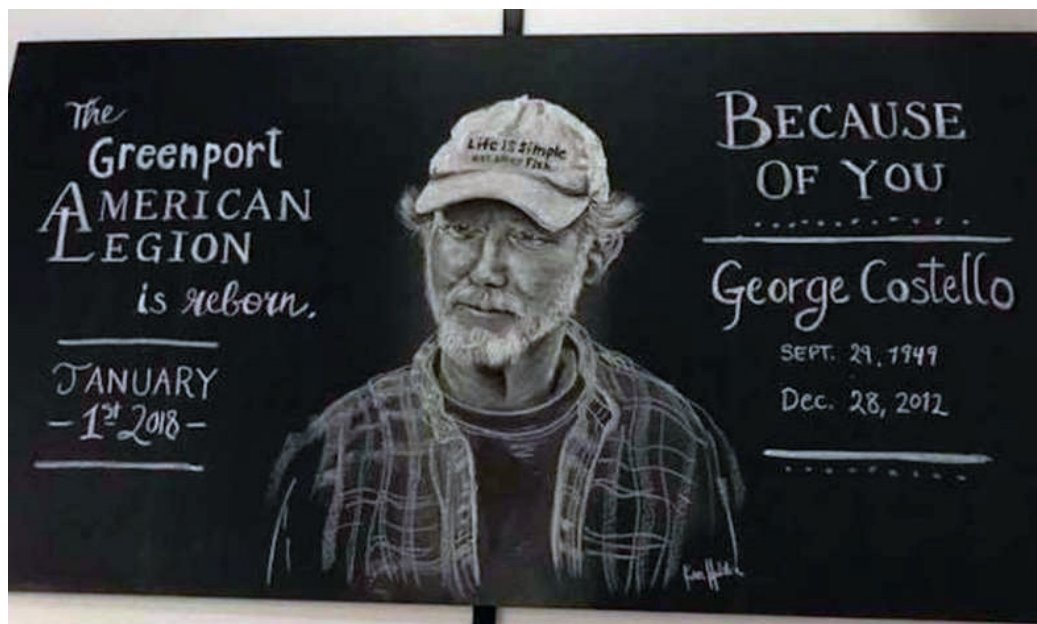
GREENPORT, NY — Burton Potter Post 185 in Greenport experienced a rebirth with the dawn of 2018.

Or as Post General Manager Mindy Ryan told the Greenport Patch: "When the ball dropped at midnight, the Greenport American Legion Burton Potter Post 185 was reborn."

A grand opening New Year's Eve fundraiser attracted a crowd to the facility, which houses a skating rink. Many of the attendees brought "memories of the days when the skate rink meant days and nights of fun for Greenporters," the news outlet reported.

Ryan was recently hired to tie together and shepherd the efforts to revitalize the Post in time for the gala.

Patch reporter Lisa Finn wrote that memories colored every corner of the building, with boxes of skates, photos of years gone by, an old Kist cooler — the Greenport company made soda — and "Skate Room" signs still on



Chalkboard honors the memory of George Costello Sr. who initiated the effort to revitalize Greenport American Legion Post 185.

the walls.

After years of restoration kicked off by George Costello Sr. in 2010, efforts have culminated in a beautiful new space, Finn wrote.

"The cool thing about last night is there were 300 people here and most of them probably don't go out on New Year's Eve. They were here because this place meant so much to them," Ryan said. "The grand

reopening of the Greenport American Legion was a huge success. The possibilities for this community center are endless. So many people made this happen. It was a true community effort."

Greenport artist Kara Hoblin created a depiction of Costello for the event — her first black and white chalk portrait.

The Patch reported her saying: "Although I never

had the chance to meet him, all the stories I've heard and all the love everyone has for George Costello is heartwarming, and lets me see how this man has truly touched the hearts of so many. The Greenport American Legion Burton Potter 185 is reborn. So excited to be a part of such an amazing community achievement. It truly takes a village."

VIETNAM WALL WARMLY RECEIVED IN BOLTON

BOLTON — The Vietnam War Memorial Moving Wall received a warm welcome in Bolton in July, the Glens Falls Post-Star reported.

Retired Lt. Gen. Stephen G. Olmstead, a seasonal resident of Lake George, was a featured speaker at ceremonies marking the arrival

in Veterans Park of the half-size replica of the monument in Washington, D.C.

"After each war, we erect our monuments — not to the war, not to the cause of the war, but the brave men and women who answered the call of duty," Olmstead said.

The paper reported that

American Legion Post 961 provided \$5,500 to bring it to the community and the town assisted with logistical support.

Olmstead said the Vietnam War was a particularly painful time in American history because soldiers coming back did not get a warm welcome, cheering

parades or picturesque kisses in Times Square. In 1982, they did get their names inscribed on the Vietnam Memorial. About 58,000 names are on the wall, including 4,000 from the state of New York.

"Let it be with solemn hearts that we celebrate the lives of those names on the wall."

MIDDLEBURGH POST CAPTURES GOLF TITLE

MARATHON, NY -- A foursome from Middleburgh Post 248 captured the first place title in the Department of New York's annual Legion Family Golf Tournament, held Aug. 4 at Maple Hill Golf Club.

"Once again the golfers enjoyed sunny weather with no rain," noted Golf Chairman Auseklis Krumins. "Everyone had a great time, regardless of how well they played."

The winning Middleburgh Post foursome included team captain James McBain, Ralph Benham, George Guest and Gerald Hooper. They wore shirts in memory of avid golfer Mike Saccento, who passed away this past year and who always enjoyed playing in the Legion tournament.

Second place team was from Middletown Post 151, captained by Abe Escobar.

A team from Post 974 in Whitney Point came in third place, captained by past Post Commander Leon Skinner.

Jim Poyer of Post 974 won



The foursome from Middleburgh Post 248 captured the first place title in the Legion Family Golf Tournament held in August. Team Captain James McBain (right) with team members Ralph Benham, George Guest and Gerald Hooper. Photo by Robert Gardner.

the prize for longest drive for men and Ed Carroll from Post 1610 in Albany won closest to the pin for men.

Department Legionnaire of the Year for 2016-17 Betsy

J. Gips of Post 1556 in Morrisville won both longest drive and closest to the pin for women.

A consolation prize was awarded to George Gelatt's

team from Post 1194 in Hillcrest for being most honest in scoring.

Robert Gardner from Post 974 took pictures of all the teams.

SAL HOSTED 'WELCOME HOME' GALA AT POST

CANANDAIGUA -- Military personnel, veterans and their families enjoyed a Welcome Home Celebration Sept. 23 at Canandaigua American Legion Post 256.

Hosted by the Canandaigua Sons of The American Legion (SAL) and the Canandaigua VA Medical Center, the event attracted 150 people, including 94

veterans, reported SAL Squadron Commander Gabe Cinquegrana.

"Some 23 Veteran Service Organizations, employers, colleges, and community partners participated with information tables, as well as several programs at the VA which provided on-the-spot benefit assistance and enrollment," he said.

It also was a step back in time for some as several restored military vehicles were also on display from the Finger Lakes Chapter of the Military Vehicle Preservation Association.

The family fun celebration offered children's activities, including face painting. "Lunch was served to all in attendance, and a number

of door prizes awarded," Cinquegrana said. "Both the local newspaper and Rochester TV were on hand to cover the event."

He added: "All agreed it was a great success, with a number of organizations, as well as the VA, reporting assistance provided to many of our veterans and military families in need."

OPERATION COMFORT WARRIORS

SAL SQUADRON SECURES GRANT FOR VA FACILITIES

The American Legion established Operation Comfort Warriors as a mechanism to support sick and wounded warriors — including providing rehabilitation, recreational and clothing items to VA medical facilities. The New York Harbor VA Healthcare System was a beneficiary of OCW, thanks to Windsor Terrace Sons of the American Legion Squadron 1175 of Kings County. The squadron sponsored a grant that benefitted the three campuses that make up the NY Harbor VA Healthcare System (Manhattan, Brooklyn and St. Alban's, Queens).

Windsor Terrace Squadron Commander Joe SantaCroce served as New York Detachment Commander in 2015-16. Joe and then-Department Commander Jim Yermas both selected OCW as one of their projects and, in addition to raising money for the fund, helped spread the word of the benefits of the pro-



Squadron Commander Joe SantaCroce, Marie SantaCroce, Russell Dolecal of the VA Voluntary Service and squadron member Joe Montesserrato stand under the new 48" TV installed in the Brooklyn Radiology Department.

gram throughout the state.

Toward the end of his term, Joe and his wife, Marie, met with Yvette Cintron, the director of Voluntary Services for the three cam-

puses. Yvette formulated a wish list, and after a few meetings, the OCW grant was born.

Starting in April 2017, approximately \$9,000 in

equipment and apparel were received at the Brooklyn facility for distribution. Included in the grant were two 50" flat screen Smart TV's, two 48" flat screen TV's, 4 DVD players, 2 ping pong tables and a foosball table. Also in the shipment were accessory items for their existing pool table and the newly purchased ping pong and foosball tables. One of the 50" Smart TV's was installed in the St. Alban's Adult Rehabilitation Center to enhance their WiFi capability.

Apparel items for both men and women included dozens of sneakers, socks, t-shirts, sweatpants, belts and under garments. These apparel items are kept in reserve for needy veterans admitted to any of the three facilities.

Said SantaCroce: "It is safe to say the items provided the New York Healthcare VA were appreciated by both the staff of the hospital and the veterans who they serve."

DEPARTMENT OFFERS ANNUAL RICHARD PEDRO SCHOLARSHIP



PNC Richard M. Pedro

The Department of New York now offers a \$1,000 scholarship in memory of Past National Commander Richard M. Pedro, who was a past department commander and long-time department adjutant. It is available to high school seniors residing in New York who are descendants (child, grandchild, great-grandchild) of living or deceased Legionnaires; or who are children of New York service members who died in the war on terrorism. Annual deadline is June 15. The application must be accompanied by an essay less than 500 words or a video on the topic of "the importance of The American Legion in my community." The scholarship will be awarded during the annual Department Convention in July.

FIRST RECIPIENT ANNOUNCED

The first recipient of the **Ricard M. Pedro Memorial scholarship** in the amount of \$1,000 is Haleigh Theresa Rock from Hudson Falls High School.

Her family is associated with American Legion Post 574.

STREET HONORS FORMER POST COMMANDER



Veterans, family, friends and officials gather for the naming of "Jimmy Lanza Way". Photo provided by Alan Feuer.

A street in Woodside, Queens now honors a former post commander and firefighter who died from a 911-related illness.

The corner of 54th Street and 31st Avenue now bears the name, "Jimmy Lanza Way," in memory of James Lanza, former commander

of Boulevard Gardens Post 1836, reports Post Commander Alan Feuer.

Elected officials, relatives and the Legion Family gathered Saturday afternoon, Sept. 9, for the dedication ceremony.

Lanza, a native of Woodside, died in April at age 71

from cancer he developed working on rescue and recovery efforts at the World Trade Center, Spectrum News reported. He was part of the team that rescued 16 survivors out of the rubble, the TV station reported, and he worked for the FDNY for nearly three decades.

"99 percent of the time, Jimmy Lanza's way was the positive way," Marian Penachio, Lanza's sister, told news media.

Councilman Costa Constantinides said: "He was a hero, a true American hero. He defined what it means for the word 'service.'"

NATIONAL COMMANDER VISITS



National Commander Denise Rohan visited the Department of New York in October, swinging through the 6th, 7th and 8th Districts. She was interviewed by news media and warmly welcomed by the Legion Family, including some World War I "Doughboys." Photos by Doug Malin.



VETS CREATIVE ARTS FEST

NATIONAL COMMANDER JOINS NY VOLUNTEERS



Volunteers at the Buffalo National Veterans Creative Arts Festival included (from left) Erie County Adjutant Jim Bojanowski, Erie County Commander Sue Quirk, National Commander Denise Rohan, National Auxiliary President Diane Duscheck, Erie County President Deb Diebold, Hospitality Chairperson Anne Baglio, and 8th District President Cheryl Kollander.

BUFFALO -- The 2017 National Veterans Creative Arts Festival took place Oct. 29 at UB Center for the Arts, featuring 51 categories of art, creative writing, dance, drama and music.

A local veteran, James Becker of Grand Island, took a gold medal for his painting, "Intraflektion," in the Military Combat Experience category.

The arts fest is open to veterans across the nation who are treated in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care system.

It is sponsored by the VA and the American Legion Auxiliary.

National Commander **Denise Rohan** and National Auxiliary President **Diane Duscheck** joined Department of New York Legion and Auxiliary members who volunteered at the arts festival.



Gold Medal Winning Artist James Becker, a veteran from Grand Island, is pictured with his painting "Intraflektion". Photo by Jim Bojanowski.

RIDERS OF HONOR NEWEST HONOREE – STEVE OLIVER

Story & photos by
ELIZABETH FLOYD MAIR
Altamont Enterprise
& Albany County Post

ALTAMONT — Only 120 of the country's half-million American Legion Riders have ever won the organization's highest award, the American Legion Rider of Honor.

Steve Oliver, president of the Helderberg Chapter of the American Legion Riders Post 977 in Altamont, is now the 120th.

"It's like our Medal of Honor," past recipient Fred Truax told the crowd of riders assembled at the post Saturday, Aug. 26, after the fifth annual Poker Run to benefit area veterans' programs, before calling Oliver's name and handing him the square black patch with gold thread spelling out ALROH in the center and a gold star in each corner.

The award is given to people who go above and beyond the call of duty for the American Legion Riders, Truax told the post members.

Past recipients vote, Truax said, choosing just 10 people



The patch stating that Steve Oliver (center) is an American Legion Rider of Honor was presented by two past recipients, Fred Truax, at left, of Post 1552 in Hannibal, New York and Dan Nolin, right, Ride Captain with Post 574 in Hudson Falls, New York. Truax won the award in 2014, and Nolin last year.

from throughout the country each year for awards.

Oliver was nominated by Polly Miller, who told The Enterprise she was the first woman member of the Helderberg Chapter of the American Legion Riders.

Since Oliver took the helm four years ago, membership has increased from 48 to 67 members, including three women, Miller said. "It's one of the largest Riders groups around," said member Ed Ackroyd, "especially for such a small post."

The nominating package Miller sent in was 20 pages

long, including not only a cover letter of several pages but also many news clippings and photos outlining the contributions Oliver has made.

Truax had joked to Miller, while waiting for the riders to return from the Poker Run, "I took your 20-page dissertation down there. They had never seen anything like it. A 'brief history' of his accomplishments. Beautiful!"

"He's the go-to guy," Miller said of Oliver, who is also Guilderland's highway superintendent. "He's charismatic, and he gets everyone

all ramped up and we all want to do it. It's not just veterans' causes, but it's this town that he loves."

Oliver rallies the Legion Riders to raise funds for causes including Woofs for Warriors, which provides service dogs to veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder; Wounded Warrior Project, which helps injured veterans and their families; Soldier On, which helps homeless or incarcerated veterans; and Guilderland's Victoria Acres, which offers equine therapy to veterans and to individuals with disabilities.



As Legion Riders applaud, Steve Oliver hugs Polly Miller, the American Legion Riders Post 977 member who nominated him as an American Legion Rider of Honor.



Steve Oliver hugs a member of the group he leads, the Helderberg Chapter of the American Legion Riders from Post 977, after learning that he had been named an American Legion Rider of Honor.

DEPARTMENT CONVENTION

LEGIONNAIRES AND FIRST RESPONDERS HONORED

SYRACUSE -- More than 1,000 wartime veterans and family members converged on Syracuse July 19-22 for the Department's 99th Annual Convention.

The Legionnaires discussed issues affecting veterans, community and nation, such as better ways to treat post-traumatic stress, monitoring the VA healthcare system, and advocating for a strong military.

They also honored a high school cadet of the year, an Eagle Scout of the year, top first responders from law enforcement and fire departments, a Legionnaire of the year, among others.

Before the convention ended on Saturday, the Legion delegates made history, electing Navy veteran Rena Nessler as the first woman state commander. The convention assembly was chaired by outgoing Commander John Sampson.

At the same time as the Legion convention, concurrent conventions for the American Legion Auxiliary and the Sons of the American Legion were held in Syracuse.

LEGIONNAIRE OF THE YEAR

Betsy J. Gips of Madison County was honored as the state Legionnaire of the Year during the 99th Department Convention.

Then-Department Com-



Legionnaire of Year Betsy Gips poses with Chairman Joe Goonan, 2016-2017 Department Commander John Sampson and National Vice Commander Jim Troiola. Photo by Doug Malin.

mander John Sampson presented the award along with Legionnaire of the Year Chairman Joe Goonan and National Vice Commander V. James Troiola

SERVICE OFFICER OF THE YEAR

William Rodriguez of Suffolk County Veterans' Service Agency was honored as the 2017 Service Officer of the Year.

He was cited for superior advocacy skills and personal initiative "embodying the high standards of an accredited representative of The American Legion."

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2016-2017 Department Commander John Sampson (left) presents Service Officer of the Year award to William Rodriguez. Photo by Doug Malin.

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EMPLOYMENT SPECIALISTS OF YEAR

Outstanding veterans' employment specialists were honored.

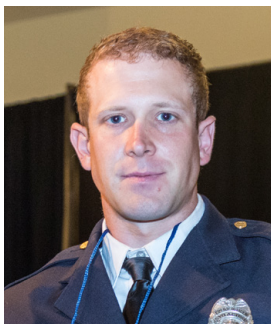
Matthew Flynn of Massena (Jefferson County) was named Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialist (DVOP) of the Year, and Lisa Padilla-Hansen of Kingston (Ulster County) was named Local Veterans' Employment Representative (LVER) of the Year.

Flynn covers One Stop Career Centers in Massena and Ogdensburg (St. Lawrence County), noted Department Employment Committee Chairman Thomas Rielly. "Matthew placed 54 veterans in full-time employment, five placed as a result of job development, and 27 were disabled veterans."

Flynn served on active duty for eight years with the Marine Corps.

Navy veterans Padilla-Hansen, who is assigned to the One-Stop Career Center in Kingston, "was instrumental in helping over 150 WWII, Korea and Vietnam Era veterans receive their high school diplomas through the NYS Education Department's 'Operation Recognition' program," Rielly said.

"She placed approximately 30 veterans in full-time employment as a result of job development and approximately 15 were disabled veterans."



Firefighter Marcus Perritano, Officer Jacob Breen, Officers Brandon and Kenneth Poddany.

LAW AND ORDER AWARDS FOR FIRST RESPONDERS

Top Law and Order awards were announced by Chairman David R. Riley Sr.

FIREFIGHTER OF THE YEAR

Firefighter of the Year is Marcus Perritano, assistant chief at Frankfort Fire Department (5th District, Herkimer County). A 22-year member of the fire department, he has received numerous awards including: firefighter of the year in 1999 for saving a disabled woman who was trapped in a house fire, and the Heroism Award in 2003 when he saved his own father after he had suffered a heart attack. After 911 he was part of the Frankfort Fire Department team who assisted the NYC FDNY with ambulance calls and also treated rescuers at ground zero who were injured during the search for survivors.

POLICE OFFICER OF THE YEAR

Law Enforcement Officer of the Year is Syracuse Police Officer Jacob Breen (5th District, Onondaga

County). A six-year veteran of the department, he serves with the Patrol Division's First Platoon. In 2014 he received the police department's Life Saving Award. On Father's Day night of Sunday, June 20, 2016, at an outdoor celebration involving hundreds of parties on the city's west side, a gun battle broke out between rival gangs. Many shooters were involved and dozens of shots were fired which ultimately resulted in a fatal officer-involved shooting. The crowd was large and aggressive, attacking responding officers. Police agencies from all over Onondaga County responded. It was the members of First Platoon who were there first and who were tasked with handling the aftermath. Officers were met with rocks, bottles and bricks, yet those officers, some injured, steadfastly held the crime scene perimeter, preserving the integrity of vital evidence.

Breen's follow-up initiative resulted in witnesses corroborating the fact that the suspect killed by the officer was in fact armed and actively firing a handgun at another person.

CORRECTIONS OFFICER OF THE YEAR

Corrections Officer of the Year honors goes to a pair of officers – in fact, a father and son -- who helped save the life of an inmate who had overdosed on heroin on Dec. 30, 2016 at Groveland Correctional Facility (7th District, Livingston County). Officer Brandon R. Poddany has over four years of service with the Department of Corrections. Officer Kenneth R. Poddany has over 29 years of service, is a Marine Corps vet and is a member of American Legion Post 1582.

Brandon noticed two inmates carrying another inmate, who was unconscious and foaming at the mouth. Brandon radioed a medical emergency, and began CPR using a bag valve mask (BVM). The medical staff arrived along with his father, Kenneth. He continued CPR with his father assisting with the BVM while the nurse prepared the AED. The AED did not advise shock, so CPR was continued. The inmate had no pulse and flatlined. After three doses of Narcan, the inmate opened his eyes and his pulse and respiration returned to normal.

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PACK, TROOP, CREW, SCOUTER & EAGLE SCOUT OF YEAR

Department Scouting Chair Steve Mataraza announced the following awards.

Pack of the Year is Pack 42 chartered to Greenville Post 291, Greene County, 3rd District.

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

Adult Scouter of the Year is Edward P. Coons Sr. from Troop 102 Columbia County, 3rd District.

Venturing Crew of the Year is Crew 14 chartered to Woodford-Burdick Post 894 in Madison County in the 6th District.

Eagle Scout of the Year is Koen Weaver from Troop 4077, from Livingston County, 7th District.

NEW RECORD SET IN JUNIOR SHOOTING

Nineteen teams from around the state participated in the American Legion Junior Shooting Sports program this past year, reported Chairman Lawrence Behling.

The NYS League Championship took place at the Cicero American Legion Post in Cicero in February 2017. Thirteen teams with over 120 youth competed.

"A new state American Legion record was set in the precision air rifle in prone position with a perfect 200-20 by Andre Gross," Behling said. "He finish the match in



EAGLE SCOUT OF YEAR
Koen Weaver

1st place in precision air rifle with a score of 595-45."

Middletown Post 151 finished in 1st place in the Sporter air competition and Central Square Post 914 finished in 1st place in Precision air rifle.

944 COMPLETE BOYS STATE

A total of 944 students completed the 2017 Boys State program, with 59 counties sending delegates, Executive Director John Murphy reported.

A total of 485 young men took the Bar Exam with approximately 40% passing and receiving a certificate.

The two young men who represented the Department of New York at Boys Nation



CADET OF YEAR: Cadet Maj. Tamara Cross from Hutchinson Central Tech High School in Buffalo received the Cadet of the Year Award, including a check, from 2016-2017 Department Commander John Sampson. The award recognized Tamara's "outstanding accomplishments in the Junior ROTC program and her service to the community."

Photos by Doug Malin.

at Marymount University in Arlington, Virginia are James Caracciolo from Sanford H. Calhoun High School in Nassau County, 10th District, and Ryan Van Splunder from Williamsville South High School in Erie County, 8th District. Chosen as alternates for Boy's Nation were Thomas A. Knight who attends Cooperstown Central School (County of Otsego in the 6th District) and Paul Di Stefano who attends Tottenville High School (County of Richmond in the 2nd District).

SCHOLARSHIPS AWARDED

Scholarship Chair John Murphy reported the awarding of a number of scholar-

ships within the Department of New York.

The Past National Commander Michael J. Kogutek American Legion Scholarship Trust awarded two \$1,500 scholarships to students from the 8th district entering college in the fall of 2017. The first recipient is Trey Rees, salutatorian at Wilson Central High School in Niagara County. The second recipient is Kaitleigh Longoria, who graduated third in her class at Panama Central High School in Chautauqua County.

The New York American Legion Press Association award its Albert M. Becker Memorial Scholarship in the amount of \$1,000 to Taylor Blake, salutatorian at Cuba-Rushford High School.

The Anthony J. Minei Scholarship was awarded to Thomas A. Knight, a 2017 Boys State attendee and a student at Cooperstown Central High School.

The Dr. Nicholas F. Sallesse scholarship was awarded to Paul Di Stefano, also a Boys State attendee and a student at Tottenville High School.



BOYS STATE: Emmanuel Tay from Albany County, who was elected the 2017 Boys State governor, was honored at the convention by Boys State Executive Director John Murphy and Department Commander John Sampson. Photo by Doug Malin.

DEPARTMENT CONVENTION

PARADE PHOTO ALBUM by Doug Malin

