

LEGION NEW YORK

SUMMER
2018
Vol. 5 No. 2



***Legionnaires
never forget
the sacrifices
of veterans***



LEGION NEW YORK

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WE'RE BLESSED: AMERICA IS WORTH DYING FOR

By Rena Nessler, commander

The memory of fallen heroes blesses us. At first, I was going to say their memory haunts us. But no, they bless us. Whether you are a Gold Star family member, a battle buddy, or a friend, you remember their voice, their laugh, the way they walked.

All you have to do is look around and you will see their legacy. That legacy is us – all of us Americans gathered in a free society with the common purpose of honoring our fallen veterans. The point is that these men and women lost their lives in order to ensure our freedoms.

Did you know that more than a million U.S. heroes had their lives cut short while fighting in wars since the American Revolution? They are a diverse group.

Take, for example, a brash young World War I aviator, Frank Luke, who was the first pilot to receive the Medal of Honor. He shot down 18 enemy aircraft in 18 days, and, after being pursued by eight enemy fighters, was shot down himself. He pulled out a pistol and continued fighting on the ground before being shot to death.

Fast forward 50 years, where First Lieutenant Sharon Lane became the only female nurse to be killed by enemy fire during the Vietnam War. She was caring for her wounded heroes at an evacuation hospital in Chu Lai -- and protecting



them from rocket and mortar fire. In a letter home, she wrote of one attack, "We got all of the patients under the beds that we could and put mattresses over the ones in traction... Very interesting place but hardly anyone here is scared. It is just like part of the job."

Yes, the heroes we remember on Memorial Day -- and every day -- are a diverse group. Some died because of enemy fire, like Lieutenant Lane when a rocket blasted through her ward. Others died due to the risks of military service, such as the four Marines killed when their helicopter crashed in California this past April.

But all of these heroes are held together by the common principle that **America is a nation worth dying for.**

To these fallen heroes, we say thank you. Thank you for the freedoms you have given us. We are here because of you.

ON THE COVER: REMEMBERING OUR FALLEN HEROES

Memorial Day is a time for American Legion Family members to demonstrate that they NEVER FORGET the sacrifices of our military veterans, always keeping in mind that freedom is not free. Here three Legionnaires render salutes at the start of Memorial Day services at Utica's Soldiers and Sailors Monument. They are, from left, Vietnam combat-wounded veteran John Harrison, Desert Storm chaplain Col. (ret.) Gary Howard, and Utica Post 229 Commander Jim George.

See PAGE 18. Photo by Robert Stronach.

AG PROGRAMS OPEN DOORS FOR VETERANS

ROOSTER SOUNDS REVEILLE

By PAUL POST

HOOSICK FALLS, NY
-- Instead of reveille and drill sergeants, a rooster and hungry cows provide the wake-up calls these days for Kevin Miller, a veteran of the Afghan war who works at an organic dairy in Hoosick Falls, near the Vermont border.

Like a growing number of veterans, he has discovered that an adapt-and-overcome military mindset is well-suited to agriculture, whether it's growing mushrooms in New York City window boxes, because space is limited, or battling a biting-cold wind to harvest oysters in Great South Bay on Long Island.

Miller's adversity is much greater. He tackles chores at Sheffer's Grassland Dairy, nestled in Rensselaer County hill country, with a prosthetic leg, a byproduct of his service in Afghanistan. But he encourages others to follow in his footsteps.



Army veteran Kevin Miller lost his leg as a result of serving in Afghanistan but has found meaningful employment at an upstate New York organic dairy farm. Paul Post photo.

"The military carries over into farming in so many different ways," said Miller, 32, an Army National Guard veteran who is a member of Fred L. Stilson Post 57 in Cobleskill. "You're used to some type of manual labor, you're used to getting up early, you're used to following orders, you're used to getting tasks done that need to get done."

His friend and boss, Eric Sheffer, finds Miller's determination refreshing and invaluable. "There's a lot of jobs on farms that most people wouldn't do," he said. "With the mentality vets have, they just want to get the job done. It's very hard to find that in our society, which is unfortunate. With vets, the work ethic is there. They take pride in their

work. It's nice having that."

Both men shared their experiences with more than 100 former military personnel at the first-ever New York Veterans in Agriculture Conference, in Syracuse, in November. The event connected veterans to programs and agencies that can help them find jobs, or start farm businesses of their own.

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MEET YOUR STAFF

Department Adjutant Jim Casey introduces staffers on a rotating basis. Here he spotlights Melinda Marie Staton.

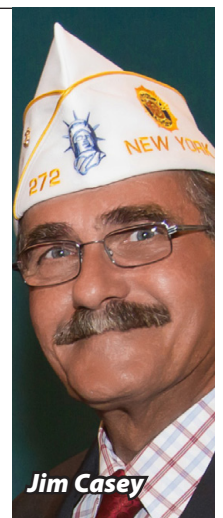


Melinda Marie Staton

Melinda Marie Staton is the first woman ADSO (assistant department service officer). She works out of the New York City office.

The 12-year Navy veteran was honorably discharged as a lieutenant commander in January 2003. She holds a B.A. in Sociology, an M.A. in Human Resources Development and an M.A. in Mental Health Counseling.

She brings to The American Legion a passion in the areas of advocacy, outreach, benefits counseling, mental health counseling and supportive services to the veteran and active/reserve military communities and their families. She puts it this way: "I am a FIERCE advocate!" Melinda resides in New York City with her two daughters, and is a member of Colonel Charles Young, Inc., NY Post 398.



Jim Casey

Continued from previous page

Several years ago, 10-year Army veteran Michael Mission, 52, of Ronkonkoma, Suffolk County, obtained a \$5,000 grant from the California-based Farmer Veteran Coalition, a non-profit that recently founded a New York state chapter. Mission used the money to purchase a boat and cages for his “Little A’s Oysters” business.

His main job is in the insurance industry, putting deals together for large Midtown Manhattan construction projects. Whatever free time he can spare is spent raising Blue Point oysters on two acres of seabed in Great South Bay, leased from the Town of Islip. Recently, he was awarded 10 more acres in Southampton. Now, he’s also trying to launch a new program helping disabled veterans learn how to farm oysters in Peconic Bay, on eastern Long Island.

Mission said he’s largely self-taught, the result of online research.

“In the service you’ve got to get something done,” he said. “They don’t always tell



Two dozen veterans from throughout New York state took part in a federally-funded Armed to Farm program last summer at SUNY Adirondack college in Queensbury, N.Y. The week-long course included classroom business lessons and field trips to area farms where veterans got to meet owners and see how their operations are run. From left to right are Kevin Miller, Jim Lewis, Nick DeGregorio, Gil Senger and Devin O’Neill. Paul Post photo.

you how. You have obstacles. There’s no choice. You’ve got to keep going. That mindset is perfect for farming. This has been a lot of fun.

“You’re not going to get rich, but the profit margin is much higher than other farms and you can do it all year, if you want. There’s no growing season.”

U.S. Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue praised farmer veterans during a visit to Kings Ransom Dairy, in Saratoga County.

“Veterans bring discipline and determination that are good skill sets that work very well in agriculture,” he said. “They’re goal-oriented. They’ve got good leadership in getting a job done.”

New York State Agriculture Commissioner Richard Ball shares a similar viewpoint. “Forty-three percent of our military personnel come from rural communities,” said Commissioner Ball. “They’ve seen farms. It’s not foreign to them. Then

they’ve gone to be trained to do the difficult and the impossible in tough conditions. There isn’t a better recipe for success in agriculture than having that kind of background. Here they are coming back from protecting our country, looking for a job, looking for a career. Agriculture needs that kind of skill level. So I think it’s a natural fit.”

Longtime farmer Michael O’Gorman, 69, of Davis, Ca.,
Continued on next page.



Veterans tour a farm during the Armed to Farm program held last year at SUNY Adirondack in Queensbury. The week-long course featured classroom business lessons and field trips to area farms to see how they are run. SUNY Adirondack photo.

Continued from previous page

founded the national Farmer Veteran Coalition in 2009. “I was inspired by my daughter, Anne, who was at 1 Liberty Plaza directly across from the World Trade Center on Sept. 11, 2001, and by my son, Gregory, who joined the Coast Guard shortly afterward and served in Kuwait,” he said.

A 2006 University of New Hampshire Carsey Institute report also prompted him to take action. The study found that a disproportionately high number of rural American service members had died in Iraq and Afghanistan. Of the 3,095 soldiers killed from late 2001 to October 28, 2006, nearly one-third, 825, were from rural areas, the report says.

O’Gorman decided veterans from these areas especially, needed help. Since its inception, the Coalition has awarded \$1.5 million in small grants to more than 400 farmers nationwide, and 1,200 veterans are enrolled in its Homegrown by Heroes labeling program, which identifies goods produced by veterans.

“The vets we’ve been working with seem to be sticking with it,” O’Gorman said. “That’s critical. With our all-volunteer military, I think there was a calling to go into the service, a sense of purpose going in. I think that’s what they’re looking for. The difficulty of farming is part of the attraction, more than a deterrent.”

A growing number of state and federal programs are also opening doors to veterans interested in agriculture by providing training, financial assistance and access to land.

The U.S. Farm Bill, for the first time ever, in 2014, provided money specifically geared to help veterans with programs such as Armed to Farm, which combines week-long classroom sessions and farm visits, where veterans learn from those already in the business.

At the state level, the first round of applications were recently accepted for a new \$250,000 Veterans Farmer Grant Fund. Awards up to \$50,000 are offered for things such as machinery, equipment and supplies, and

building or repairing farm structures. Money used to buy equipment could allow a farm to increase crop production. Offsetting the cost of a new barn would increase livestock capacity or dairy output.

Veterans may also apply for the fourth round of a New Farmers Grant Fund, which has already awarded \$2.5 million in its first three years.

In addition to helping veterans find jobs, there’s another factor at play for such programs. Nearly one-third of New York’s principal farm operators are 65 or older, and more than 90 percent of senior farmers don’t have a young operator involved in the management or ownership of their farm, said David Haight, American Farmland Trust state director.

“Unless you have programs to fill their shoes, there’s going to be a shortage of farmers in America,” said Dean Koyanagi, a Cornell Small Farms Program associate, who served in the Marines.

In downtown Syracuse, Air Force veteran Cindy

Seymour and Marine veteran June Worden run the non-profit Serenity for Women, a shelter for homeless women veterans. In December, they created an urban garden plot, complete with high tunnels -- a greenhouse-type structure used for growing tomatoes and cucumbers.

Plans call for women veterans to raise produce they can sell to Seymour’s restaurant, Laci’s Tapas Bar, and other local outlets. She and Worden are also looking for another 10 to 20 acres outside the city to duplicate such efforts on a larger scale.

“Working with your hands, taking something from start to finish, is tremendous therapy,” Seymour said.

“Especially for someone who may be struggling with PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) or military sexual trauma,” Worden said. “It brings us back to grassroots.”

Seymour said farming also provides the kind of structured environment veterans are used to in the military. In this way, agriculture can ease the transition to civilian life, which veterans sometimes find quite difficult, she said.

“I tell everybody, ‘Try it out,’” Miller said. “It doesn’t matter if you have livestock, flowers, bees or gardens. See what you like. It’s going to be hard work, but you’re going to enjoy it. Like me, I get home every day, I take a shower, I see the dirt fall off me and I say, ‘I earned my check today.’ I did something... I got out there. I earned it. I busted my butt the best I could.”

Air Force veteran Gil Senger had a successful career in the publishing world, but is now pursuing agriculture. He owns 34 acres near Binghamton, where he raises Christmas trees and has plans for expanding into fruits and vegetables with a roadside stand.
Paul Post photo.



WATERVLIET ARSENAL HOSTS LEGION LEADERS



National Commander Denise Rohan, Department Adjutant Jim Casey and Department Commander Rena Nessler on tour with arsenal guide. Photo by John Snyder. BELOW: Photos by Doug Malin.

National Commander Denise Rohan toured the Watervliet Arsenal in April during her swing through upstate and downstate districts. Department leaders accompanied her on the visit, including Department Commander Rena Nessler and Department Adjutant James Casey.

They received a command briefing and then a tour of several manufacturing facilities that produce canons and other components for tanks, howitzers and mortars.

“For nearly a century, we have built a strong relationship with the American Legion in New York and

nationally,” the arsenal’s publication, the Salvo, proclaimed. “These engagements help us to sustain those relationships.”

The publication went on to point out that the arsenal has engaged the Legion many times in the last nine years, “but our first recorded engagement was

in 1921.”

The Salvo report described the American Legion as having “the ability to speak to more than 2.2 million veterans and their families” and “the ability to engage elected officials, business and community leaders.”



Commanders Rohan and Nessler pose with Arsenal Commander Col. Joseph Morrow, and then pose for a selfie with employee Carl Rice.



Oratorical Champion Melissa Barnosky with Department Commander Rena M. Nessler. Photo by Frank Carletta

MELISSA BARNOSKY IS STATE ORATORICAL CHAMP

ALBANY —Melissa Barnosky, a senior at Charles D'Amico High School in Albion, is The American Legion New York State oratorical champion for 2018, Oratorical Chairman Anthony Paternostro announced.

Melissa competed against four other finalists from a cross section of the state in the 81st Annual American Legion Department of New York Oratorical Contest.

Melissa won a \$6,000

scholarship and represented New York in the National Oratorical Contest in Indianapolis, IN in April.

She was sponsored by the Sheret Post 35, Orleans County, 8th District, and Zone 5. The "Constitutional Speech Contest" took place March 3 at Sand Creek Middle School in Colonie.

The other finalists were:

- Jared Rios, a senior at St. Edmunds Preparatory High School, who won a \$4,000

scholarship. Jared was sponsored by the Flatlands Post 391 of Kings County, 2nd District, and Zone 2.

- Anusha Nambiar, a senior at John Jay High School, who was awarded a \$2,500 scholarship. Anusha was sponsored by the Hopewell Junction Post 1758 of Dutchess County, 9th District, and Zone 1.

Rounding out the awards were:

- Savannah Carr, a senior

at Unadilla Valley Central, who won a \$2,000 scholarship. Savannah was sponsored by the Oneonta Post 259 of Otsego County, 6th District, and Zone 4.

- Madelyn Brook Weiss, a sophomore at Cobleskill-Richmondville High School, who was awarded a \$2,000 scholarship. Anusha was sponsored by the Sharon Springs Post 1269 of Schoharie County, 3rd District, and Zone 3.

THE NEW YORK LEGION FAMILY COLLEGE graduated the Class of 2018 on June 3 at SUNY Morrisville after packing the classrooms with members of the Legion, Auxiliary and Sons of the American Legion.



MID-WINTER SPOTLIGHT

FROM MEMBER SUCCESS TO ALTERNATIVE PTS THERAPY



Bill Oxford
featured speaker



R. Micheal Suter announced support for an alternative PTS therapy and introduced Dr. Frank Bourke (right).



ALBANY -- The 99th Mid-Winter Conference, held Jan. 19-21 at the Desmond Hotel and Conference Center, put a strong spotlight on several topics, such as membership and post-traumatic stress. It also offered a wealth of seminars and briefings on American Legion programs and services.

MEMBERS = SUCCESS

Members were a focus for the Saturday evening banquet speaker, Bill Oxford, the man in line to become 2019-2020 national commander.

The American Legion is successful, he said, because its founding fathers created a strong foundation called the four pillars (helping veterans, promoting national security, mentoring youth and encouraging patriotism).

Legion programs, along with the preamble to its constitution, “are the building blocks of the foundation.”

Oxford, who hails from North Carolina, then asked: “What holds these building

blocks together? What’s the glue, the mortar, the cement?”

He looked out at the 400-plus banquet attendees and said:

“You are the glue... You are the cement that holds this organization together.”

He put it another way: “You are the bond that guarantees the success of The American Legion as well as its future.”

With the Legion on the verge of hitting its centennial year, he noted:

“Nobody in this room will be here to celebrate our 200th anniversary... If we believe in The American

Legion, we’ve got to supply our successors.”

NEW PTS THERAPY

Post-traumatic stress (PTS) gained renewed focus, thanks to a newly studied therapy known as the RTM Protocol with an apparent success rate in excess of 90 percent.

The Corning, NY-based Research and Recognition Project (founded by Dr. Frank Bourke) has been doing clinical trials with the RTM Protocol, and is now beginning to train VA and other counselors in its use. The Department of New York Executive Committee was so impressed that

it voted to endorse it and recommend that the State of New York provide funding, Rehabilitation Field Coordinator R. Michael Suter told Sunday’s general session.

Based on Dr. Bourke’s groundbreaking work with survivors of the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center, the RTM (Reconsolidation of Traumatic Memories) Protocol removes dysfunctional emotions (such as fear, helplessness, horror) from a traumatic experience, according to the project’s literature. It is a non-traumatic, non-drug cognitive therapy that removes night-
Continued on next page.

LEGION ISSUES MEMORANDUM OF SUPPORT FOR PTS THERAPY

The American Legion Department of New York on Jan. 29 issued a Memorandum of Support for an alternative non-drug therapy to treat Post-Traumatic Stress (PTS) in military veterans.

Addressed to New York Governor Andrew M. Cuomo, Senate Majority Leader John J. Flanagan and Assembly Speaker Carl E. Heastie, the memorandum asks New York to keep the state

in the forefront of PTS research, training and treatment by providing funding for the Research and Recognition Project.

The Corning, NY-based project has demonstrated the effectiveness of the RTM (Reconsolidation of Traumatic Memories) Protocol in several clinical trials. The memorandum cites “an effective rate approaching 96% and permanently removes the impacts of the traumatic event(s).”

Continued from previous page.

mares, flashbacks and related emotional problems of PTS in several sessions. It's a "relaxed imaging procedure" that "changes the way the brain remembers an event."

USE SOCIAL MEDIA

With the interest in building membership, the public relations sessions offered tips on making effective use of social media to publicize what the Legion does and to attract younger veterans. The strategy to use social media like Facebook is bolstered by focus group research with unaffiliated post-9/11 veterans conducted by Gramercy Communications, Gramercy's David Doyle told attendees as he and Deidre Hargrave offered a Powerpoint presentation on Facebook basics.

SOME OTHER HIGHLIGHTS

- Well over a hundred Legion Riders packed a large meeting room to discuss the successes and challenges of the motorcycle-riding chapters. Outgoing State Director Dave Davis chaired the gathering.

- Navy veteran Gary Schacher, membership chair for the Department of New York, got the chance to introduce himself as the leading candidate for 2018-2019 department commander. He served aboard ship in the Persian Gulf; and then later, as a reservist in the Seabees, he was twice recalled to active duty to serve in Iraq.



Sons of the American Legion members Samuel and Christopher Mozzillo staffed a Scouting booth at the Mid-Winter Conference, selling candy for Troop 43 (sponsored by Cairo Post 983). They belong to Greenville SAL Squadron 291. Photos by Robert Stronach.



American Legion Riders turned out in force for their meeting at the Mid-Winter Conference.

HILL DAY DRAWS LEGION FAMILY TO ALBANY

SUICIDE AND PTSD AMONG TOP CONCERNS FOR NYS LEGION

ALBANY – Combat-ing veteran suicide is a top priority for The American Legion Department of New York, legionnaires told legislators March 13 at an annual legislative breakfast and in visits to Assembly and Senate offices.

Prior to “storming the Hill” with a veteran’s message, as Department Commander Rena Nessler charged the Legion Family, she and Rehabilitation Field Coordinator R. Michael Suter recognized Dr. Frank Bourke for his groundbreaking clinical trials in treating post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

They presented him with a check for \$25,000 for his Corning, NY-based Research and Recognition Project.

Using the RTM (Reconsolidation of Traumatic Memories) Protocol, the project conducted a pilot study and three replication studies to verify the more than 90 percent success rate.

“We really have a treatment for PTSD that works,”



Rehabilitation Field Coordinator R. Michael Suter and Commander Rena Nessler pose with Dr. Frank Bourke after presenting him with a check for \$25,000 for his work in successfully treating PTSD.

Dr. Bourke told the breakfast attendees.

“Over 90 percent” of the veterans they treated no longer have “PTSD or the symptoms.”

As one veteran who was treated put it: “You still have the memories. You lose the pain” associated with traumatic experiences.

The next step, Dr. Bourke noted, is to train counselors to reach more veterans across the state and country.

Also addressing the

Legion legislative breakfast were Sen. Thomas D. Croci, chairman of the Senate veterans, homeland security and military affairs committee, and Assemblyman Michael DenDekker, chairman of the Assembly veterans affairs committee.

Senator Croci thanked the American Legion for bringing priority veteran’s issues to the attention of the Legislature and the governor’s office. “It makes our job easier.”

He said the state budget

would maintain the level of support for veteran’s causes, and perhaps go further.

Referring to himself and colleagues such as Assemblyman DenDekker, “Our philosophy is, when it comes to veterans in the State of New York, politics stop at the door.”

In fact, he said he would like to see more veterans live, work and raise families in New York.

“This should be the most veteran-friendly state in the country.”



Legislative Chair Frank LaMarsh briefs legionnaires on priority legislative issues, such as veteran suicide, alternative PTSD therapies, property tax exemptions, a homeless veterans’ study.



Department Adjutant James Casey talks issues with Sen. Thomas Croci (chairman of the Senate veterans affairs committee), who spoke at the Legion’s legislative breakfast.



Elizabethtown Legionnaires pose with oversized check representing the \$1,000 donated to Legion Post 551, thanks to Kinney Drugs' Favorite Pharmacist of the Year. Photo by Kim Dedam, Sun Community News.

ARMY VET NAMED KINNEY'S FAVORITE PHARMACIST DONATES \$1,000 PRIZE TO AMERICAN LEGION POST 551

by KIM DEDAM
Sun Community News

ELIZABETHTOWN – John Cotton, named Kinney Drugs' Favorite Pharmacist of the Year, donated his \$1,000 prize to the charity of his choice in January – Elizabethtown American Legion Post 551.

Cotton served four years in the U.S. Army as an animal care specialist before obtaining his degree in pharmacy.

He told The Sun that he chose the American Legion post to honor military service and military veterans.

"Being a veteran, it's the camaraderie, you know?"

he said with a smile. The pharmacist is also a member of Post 551, and many of his comrades gathered at Kinney Drugs to accept the proceeds from Cotton's award.

Essex County American Legion Commander Philip Jackson said the group was surprised to be honored.

"We're not sure what the money is going to go for yet," Jackson said. "Possibly toward scholarships (at Elizabethtown-Lewis Central School)."

For his part, Cotton was surprised to find himself named Favorite Pharmacist. Votes were cast by customers last September. Elizabethtown's pharmacist tallied the most of 100 Kinney Drug

stores in New York and Vermont.

"It was pretty shocking, but I appreciate it and the job that we do here. It's really this whole team that won," Cotton said, pointing to the busy staff behind the counter.

The annual Kinney Drug Favorite Pharmacist contest marks American Pharmacist Month every September.

The votes were tallied in October, according to Judy Cowden, senior director of advertising and marketing based at Kinney Drug headquarters in Gouverneur.

Cowden presented Cotton and American Legion veterans with the check.

Kinney Drug's corporate

announced the distinction a few months ago. "John joined the company in 2015 as supervising pharmacist. A native of Hamlin, NY, he served for four years as a SPC4 in the United States Army," Cowden's announcement said. "He was stationed at Walter Reed Medical Center, where he completed biomedical research on battlefield diseases such as malaria and dengue fever. After discharge, he worked for contract research organizations for about 15 years in the field of pharmaceutical toxicology – and it was this work that spurred his interest in pharmacy."

Cotton earned his degree at St. Fisher College, Rochester.

PRISON'S EXEC STAFF DONATES TO BOYS STATE

For the 2017 Holiday Season, the Lakeview Shock Incarceration Correctional Facility's Executive Office staff donated \$400 to The Chautauqua County American Legion Boys State program through John W. Dill Post 434 in Brocton.

Post Commander and Boys State Chairman Henry Link accepted the donation during the Annual Community Advisory Board Meeting held on Dec. 13 at the Lakeview facility.

He said the donation covers the cost of sending one high school student to Boys State.

"There are organizations that are willing to help do good for their community but they have never been asked," Link noted. "The Boys State Program is an easy sell if you present the program and explain how much weight it carries on a college application and to knowledgeable employers. I always end my talk with, 'if the military academies think enough of the program to ask the applicant if he attended Boys State, then Boys State is something I want to support and I ask for your support.'"



Walter Moss, Deputy Superintendent for Security at Lakeview, presents Boys State donation to Brocton Post 434 Commander Henry Link.

LEGIONNAIRE BRINGS POW/MIA TABLE TO JFK AIRPORT

When Legionnaire Brian Galarza was hired by American Airlines in March of 2016 as a fleet service clerk at John F. Kennedy International (JFK) Airport, little did he realize that he would spur awareness for American prisoners of war and those missing in action (POW/MIAs).

On Veterans Day that year, he set up a POW/MIA table in the employee break room, which sparked "many questions by my non-veteran co-workers," Galarza reports.

In 2017, the retired Army sergeant (SFC) was appointed veterans' coordinator for Local 501 of the Transportation Workers Union (TWU). It wasn't long before the Veterans' Committee asked him to set a permanent POW/MIA table at JFK, located at Terminal 8, Gate 12, "which is our veterans' gate giving tribute to our Medal of Honor recipients."

Brian is a member of the Daniel M. O'Connell American Legion Post 272 in Rockaway Beach, Queens.



Brian Galarza with the POW/MIA table at JFK.

DEPARTMENT HOSTS ITS FIRST-EVER TWITTER TOWN HALL

The Department of New York hosted its first-ever Twitter Town Hall on March 1. The social media forum was moderated by Department Membership Chairman Gary Schacher. It is a new way for the Department to connect with veterans and others who are interested in joining the American Legion, the Sons of the American Legion, the Legion Auxiliary, and the Legion Riders – collectively known as the "Legion

Family." Questions were submitted by using the hashtag #asknylegion.

For the latest news/info, follow the Department on twitter at [@NY_Legion](https://twitter.com/NY_Legion), on Facebook at facebook.com/AmericanLegionofNewYorkState and on the web at nylegion.net. Please share, like, and retweet and repost so the Department can reach as many people as possible.

LEGION KEEPS LONG TRADITION AT ADIRONDACK HIGH PEAK

VETS HONORED AT WHITEFACE MOUNTAIN

by KIM DEDAM
Sun Community News

WILMINGTON |-- Over 90 years ago, members of the American Legion from across New York state put plans in motion to design and build a winding highway up Whiteface Mountain. They sought to pay tribute to veterans.

It was a local idea first, one that spread quickly. The allegiance that made the Whiteface Veterans Memorial Highway remains in place to date.

"It has become a tradition to, each year in June, hold a Memorial Service here, weather permitting," Essex County American Legion Adjutant Newman Tryon said in remarks at the highway complex rededication.

With an invocation met by Melissa Hodgson's soaring rendition of the Star Spangled Banner, the tribute was renewed by the legion.

Elizabethtown and Lewis American Legion members formed the core of color guard and gun salute brigades.

"Help us to remember, with reverence, the valor and devotion of our departed comrades," Tryon said as a crowd of veterans and tourists gathered.

"Not only those whose bodies consecrate our country's soil, but also those who sleep beyond the seas, and others whose resting places



Members of the American Legion from Elizabethtown and Lewis lead rededication ceremonies at the top of the Whiteface Veterans Memorial Highway in June. A gun salute, invocation and taps highlighted the event, with remarks from area elected officials. Photo by Kim Dedam / Sun Community News.

will not be known until that last day...teach us to honor them by ever cherishing the ideals for which they fought."

Tryon recalled the efforts, then and now, that built the mountain memorial.

In 1929, work began after years of organization and planning. It was to be a construction crew primarily of veterans with an eternal flame placed at the top.

Not all of the plans were fulfilled. But the road was formally dedicated in 1935 by then President Franklin D. Roosevelt to veterans of World War I.

The masonry of the mountaintop castle, its stone summit stairway and the elevator were designed and built to with a pinnacle viewing hut atop Whiteface. The elevator

makes it accessible to nearly everyone.

In 1952, the Essex County American Legion voted to make the highway a memorial to veterans of all wars, Tryon said of the history.

REPAIRS MADE

Wilmington Supervisor Randy Preston said investment in renovations and restoration through recent years helped preserve this treasure.

"We're very thankful to Gov. Andrew Cuomo for repairs to the highway and to the elevator," Preston said at the ceremony. "It means a lot to these vets here today. I want to welcome everyone here today, and I especially want to thank you veterans who showed up."

After decades of traffic and very little upkeep, Preston worked tenaciously alongside regional tourism and state agency leaders in 2012 to draw attention to immense disrepair.

In 2013, Gov. Andrew Cuomo allocated \$12 million of New York Works funding to resurface the roadway and masonry of the highway's drainage systems. Restoration of the road was completed in 2015.

Assemblyman Dan Stec (R-Queensbury) also spoke at the rededication and expressed the importance of upkeep here.

A U.S. Navy veteran, Stec said the castle at Whiteface, at the top of the highway, was a fitting place to remember and thank veterans.

SCHUMER PUSHES FOR CANANDAIGUA VA FUNDING



Sen. Charles Schumer welcomes Department Commander Rena Nessler at a press conference about funding improvements to the Canandaigua VA Medical Campus.

COMMANDER NESSLER JOINS PRESS CONFERENCE AT VA

Department Commander Rena Nessler joined veterans and VA officials at a press conference March 30 where U.S. Senate Minority Leader Charles E. Schumer announced he was launching “a campaign to secure \$190 million in much-needed funding for the Canandaigua Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Campus modernization project.”

Specifically, Senator Schumer was pushing for funding in the upcoming Federal fiscal Year 2019

appropriations bill for the second and final phase of the overall \$351 million plan. The project is split between a \$161 million Phase I that was set to break ground in March, and a \$190 million Phase II.

After his comments, the senator welcomed Commander Nessler to the podium who said it was important to continue to provide health care for veterans tomorrow in the communities where they reside.

The Phase II funding will go toward the upgrades and modernization of the Canandaigua VA campus, including the construction of a 120-bed Community Living Center Complex that replaces its now outdated long-term living spaces, the renovation of its now dilapidated 50-bed Domiciliary facility where veterans live for 3-6 months before re-entering the community after receiving assistance for homelessness, substance abuse, or mental

or behavior health therapy, and the renovation of building 3 to improve rehab and physical therapy offerings, as well as other upgrades. This final push, Senator Schumer said, is the culmination of a multi-year effort to save the Canandaigua VA from plans by the VA in 2003 to close the facility and to instead invest in the Canandaigua VA campus so that a new state-of-the-art facility can serve Rochester/Finger Lakes veterans for decades to come

LEGION 'WELCOMES' BASEBALL TEAM

ANNUAL DINNER HONORS ROCHESTER RED WINGS



Monroe County American Legion Color Guard performs at the Legion-hosted "Welcome Home" dinner for the Rochester Red Wings.

The Rochester Red Wings International League baseball team has long been a mainstay of the Greater Rochester community.

The team has been in existence since 1899, and in 1929 the Monroe County American Legion began a tradition of hosting a dinner each year to welcome the team to Rochester just prior

to the start of its new season.

On April 3, 2018, the Monroe County Committee of the American Legion hosted the 90th Dinner at the Double Tree Hotel with some 425 people in attendance.

That's "a very common attendance level for this event," noted Monroe County Adjutant Rene Vanmulem, who

has chaired the event for the past ten years.

The program got underway with the presentation of colors by the Monroe County American Legion Color Guard called by County Commander Chuck Zeiner, the singing of the National Anthem and an invocation by County Chaplain Connie Corwin.

Attendees that reserve a full table of ten may request a player to join them. With 24 players on the roster each year, those 24 tables are sold out annually.

"It's a most enjoyable evening that the Red Wings staff, the players and the baseball fans look forward to year after year," Vanmulem said.



HEAD TABLE INCLUDED, from top row, left to right, **Event Chairman Rene Vanmulem, Red Wings General Manager Dan Mason, Red Wings President & CEO Naomi Silver, RedWings Broadcasting Director Josh Whetzel, Red Wings Board Chairman Gary Larder, and Jennifer Skinner and her husband, Red Wings Field Manager Joel Skinner.**

\$5000 FOR SCHOLARSHIP IN MEMORY OF AIRMAN

DANSVILLE — The American Legion Department of New York on April 28 donated \$5,000 to help establish a scholarship in memory of local Air Force Staff Sgt. Alexandria Gleason Morrow.

The check presentation by Department Commander Rena Nessler followed a day-long fundraiser, featuring food, raffles and auctions at Legion posts throughout Livingston County.

Overall, the night brought in a total of \$7,168 for the scholarship, news media reported.

Alexandria, 25, died in March 2017 after being injured while performing maintenance in Jordan in support of combat operations during Operation Enduring Freedom. She was a member of the 366th Fighter Wing at Mountain Home Air Force Base in Idaho and was with the 332nd Air Expeditionary Wing while



Department Commander Rena Nessler presents \$5,000 check to Staff Sgt. Alexandria Gleason Morrow's family. FROM LEFT: Livingston County American Legion President Anita Martuccio, Livingston County American Legion Commander Bob Wallace, Alexandria's grandparents, Debby Herrmann and Ken Herrmann, her mother Stephanie Shirley, and Commander Nessler.

in the Middle East. She also was a dual member of the American Legion and American Legion Auxiliary.

"The American Legion Department of New York is proud help establish this scholarship in memory of Staff Sgt. Alexandria Gleason Morrow," Commander Nessler said. "The Legion's core pillars include honoring our veterans and military members and giv-

ing back to our communities, and there are few better ways to accomplish both tasks than to help fund a scholarship like this. We are forever grateful for Staff Sgt. Gleason Morrow's service to our country and are proud to help her legacy live on."

Supporting local students with a scholarship was just one way to repay Alexandria for her service and sacrifice, Livingston County Ameri-

can Legion Commander Bob Wallace noted.

Livingston County American Legion Auxiliary President Anita Martuccio added: "As a dual member of both the American Legion and American Legion Auxiliary, Alexandria committed herself to serving our community, so it's only right that we return the favor by establishing a scholarship in her name."



FLAG DAY TRIBUTE ON FOX & FRIENDS

Legionnaires and other veterans and service members unfurled a huge American flag along 6th Avenue in New York City on June 14 as part of the Flag Day tribute on Fox News' Fox & Friends, reports Alan Feuer, commander of Boulevard Gardens-Woodside American Legion Post 1836 in Queens. The group held the flag up as a soldier sang the national anthem, Feuer notes.

WWII D-DAY VETERAN TURNS 100

UTICA POST 229 HONORS JOHN LOPERFIDO IN MARCH

UTICA – World War II veteran John Loperfido, who was part of the landing forces that stormed Omaha Beach on D-Day, turned 100 years old in March, and The American Legion's Utica Post 229 honored him with the Senior Legionnaire of the Year Award.

The honor took place during Post 229's March meeting, which immediately followed dinner and a birthday celebration.

Utica Post 229 Commander Jim George said Loperfido is a 59-year member of The American Legion and served as post commander from 1981 to 1982. In 2011 he was co-grand marshal for Utica's Memorial Day Parade.

"John truly is one of the



Despite the inclement weather, World War II vet John Loperfido attended Utica's Veterans Day ceremonies in 2011 and rendered a salute at the age of 94. Utica Post 229 threw a 100th birthday party for him in March. INSET: John Loperfido at Utica Post.

greats from our 'Greatest Generation,'" noted George.

Loperfido served in the Army Air Corps from 1942 to 1946.

Attached to the Amphibian 336th Engineer Combat

Unit, Loperfido was part of the landing forces that stormed Omaha Beach on D-Day.

He spent time in France, Belgium, Holland and Germany, coming within

50 miles of Berlin by the end of the war. He earned the Good Conduct Medal, WWII Victory Medal, European Theater Occupation Medal, and the French Croix De Guerre Medal.

RIDERS' STATE DIRECTOR IS DESERT STORM VET

Bob Wallace, the new director of New York's American Legion Riders, is a U.S. Army veteran who served in Operation Desert Storm. He is a 26-year member of the Francis M. Dalton American Legion Post 282 and a charter member of the American Legion Riders Chapter 282.

At the Department level, Bob served as an instructor of the American Legion Family College. At the District level, he has been co-chair for the American Legion Riders. Bob currently serves as Livingston County



commander. At the post level, he is vice commander and a past post commander.

Bob graduated from the

New York American Legion College in 2015 and National American Legion College in 2016.

Within the Post 282 Family, Bob has co-chaired the Bike and Car Show to benefit Honor Flight of Rochester, and served on the Legion Family Jamboree Committee to benefit Operation Comfort Warriors.

Bob says he was proud to represent Chapter 282 and honor Vietnam veterans at Rolling Thunder in Washington D.C. over Memorial Day Weekend in 2017.

Bob Wallace retired from the Canandaigua VA Medical Center in 2012 where he served as the supervisor of Grounds and Transportation. Active in his community, Bob is a volunteer firefighter, adjutant and Board member at the West Bloomfield Volunteer Fire Department. He received the department's Firefighter of the Year Award in 2014.

Bob and his wife Terri have been married for 13 years. Their son is an Air Force veteran and a member of the American Legion.

MEMORIAL DAY 2018

'None will be forgotten,' declares Commander Nessler

"None will be forgotten."

That is how Department Commander Rena Nessler put it in a Memorial Day op-ed piece in the *New York Post*.

She reminded readers that Memorial Day is officially recognized as first having been celebrated upstate in Waterloo in 1866 as a community remembrance (then known as Decoration Day). When the first official Decoration Day ceremonies were held at Arlington National Cemetery in 1868, James A. Garfield, a future president and a Civil War combat veteran, told the thousands gathered, "For love of country they accepted death, and thus resolved all doubts, and made immortal their patriotism and their virtue."

"Today," Commander Nessler wrote, "we still remember their patriotism and virtue, and that of the scores who have selflessly sacrificed since to make this the greatest country in the world."

Utica American Legion Post 229 struck up a



American Legion Color Guard from Waterville Post 92 helped lead the Memorial Day parade in the village of Waterville.

similar theme, kicking off a series of wreath-laying ceremonies at Utica's Civil War Soldiers and Sailors Monument on Monday. "One flag, one land, one heart, one hand, one nation evermore," Utica Post Commander Jim George declared to the crowd, quoting the inscription around the top of the circular monument.

Like Utica Post, the American Legion organized

Memorial Day observances in communities across the state.

A few examples:

- **In Waterville**, C. J. Fulmer American Legion Post 92 led a morning parade featuring a couple of Legion Riders, the post color guard, classic cars ferrying older Legionnaires, fire and emergency vehicles, and two Waterville Central School marching bands.

- **In Pearl River**, John H. Secor American Legion Post 329 hosted the annual parade.

- **On Long Island**, parades highlighted Memorial Day in a number of communities. "Today is a sacred day, for all the people that fought for our freedom," declared Bill Wolf, commander of Wilson Ritch Post 432 in Port Jefferson Station, *Newsday* reported.

WELLSVILLE LEGION HONORS MEMORY OF VETERANS WITH FIELD OF FLAGS AT HOSPITAL



The American Legion Family from Wellsville Post 72 installed a Field of Flags at Jones Memorial Hospital on June 2 in memory of deceased veterans, reports Jerry Ketchum, a department vice director for The Legion Riders. "With the help of Sue Kays and her staff at Jones Memorial Hospital, Wellsville American Legion Post 72, the American Legion Auxiliary and the Legion Riders were able to install a total of 430 flags." For \$5 each, members of the public were able to sponsor the flags, which would bear the names of veteran friends or family members. Proceeds, Ketchum notes, would go to L.E.E.K., which provides outdoor experiences for veterans with disabilities.

ARTIST OFFERS TO PAINT OLD GLORY ON POST

Brooklyn Post garners attention after installing flag bench outside



This bench in front of Brooklyn Post 1833 made the headlines when the NY City Department of Transportation tried to have it removed -- which got the attention of a prominent artist known for painting Old Glory on the facades of buildings.

by The American Legion
legion.org

A prominent artist specializing in the U.S. flag has reached out to a New York American Legion post with an offer to paint an American flag on the outside of its building.

Scott LoBaido, a Staten Island-based artist who has painted Old Glory on the outside of dozens of Legion posts across the country, has extended an offer to Sixth Memorial Post 1833 in Brooklyn to paint a mural on the outside of the post's brick building.

The offer came after the post was involved in a dispute over an American flag painted on a bench

outside of the post facility built by a Legion Family member from the post. The post originally was ordered to remove the bench after a complaint made to the New York City Department of Transportation, but the order quickly was rescinded.

"The flag, to me, is the greatest work of art created," LoBaido said. "My job is to reproduce it, celebrate it and promote through the gift that I have, which is art. When this story broke, this was kind of my Bat Signal ... especially when you're talking about a building that houses the real celebrities in this country that we forget about: the men and women ... who have fought so I can be a crazy artist who can

paint whatever I want. So I reached out."

LoBaido has spent the past 25 years painting the image of the flag on schools, homes, fire and police stations, cars and as pictures. For six months in 2015 he traveled across the country painting flag murals on the outside of Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars posts in order to thank veterans.

"My grandmother had the flag in her front yard where we played every day," LoBaido said. "Grandpa was a World War II (veteran). Our uncles were in Vietnam. It was embedded in us. I have this unbelievable freedom, and who do I owe this to? I owe it to that flag, and I owe this to the men and women

who sacrificed under it for me.

"I get emails and texts and messages and letters every day. Just getting a letter from a Vietnam veteran thanking me, that's like a \$1 million check to me. This is my passion. I'm living the life, and it's all because of that flag and the men and women under it."

The post's Sons of The American Legion squadron commander, who asked to be identified only by his first name Joe, said he was stunned by LoBaido's offer. "For him to offer us to come and paint our building, I'm blown away," he said. "I think he's an amazing person. I'm honored by what Scott has done."

DEPARTMENT MID-WINTER CONFERENCE

Yankee Doodle Band (Fort Crailo Post 471 of Rensselaer) entertained the Legion Family in the Desmond Hotel courtyard during the Saturday evening reception.

