

LEGION NEW YORK

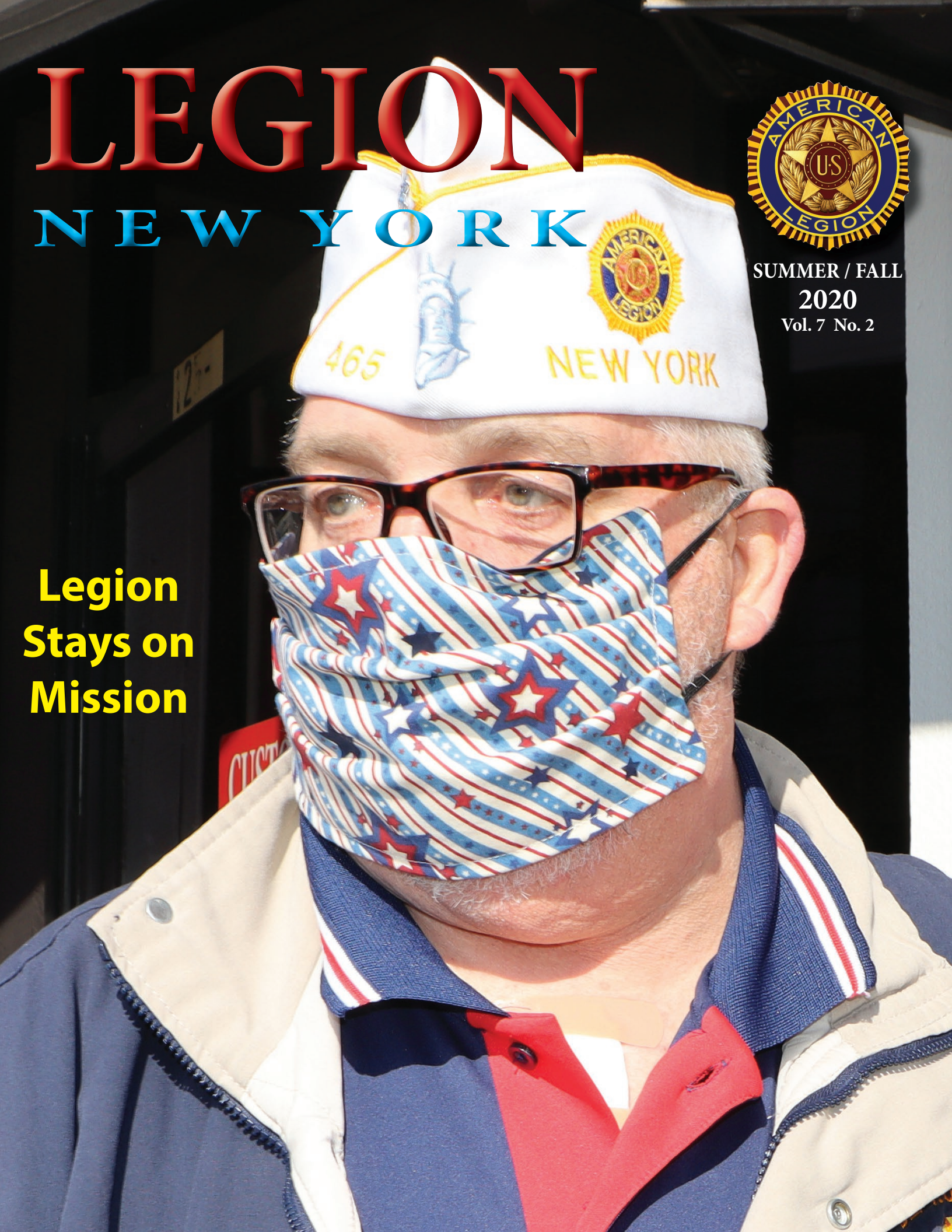


SUMMER / FALL

2020

Vol. 7 No. 2

**Legion
Stays on
Mission**



LEGION NEW YORK

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STAYING THE MISSION IN UNUSUAL TIME

by *MICHAEL McDERMOTT*

We have been in an unusual time, thanks to the coronavirus pandemic.

But it hasn't stopped the Legion Family from staying on mission, albeit in new and various ways.

For example, this past Memorial Day we did remember our fallen service men and women despite the fact that most of our parades and outdoor activities had been. Some of us visited graves in person while others participated virtually.

We also honored those who succumbed to COVID-19 – especially older veterans who survived the battlefield only to be waylaid by a virus.

For example: Because of the efforts of Department of New York legionnaires, those veterans who died at New York City's Javits New York Medical Station received a U.S. flag for their casket, to go along with proper military honors performed by the National Guard during the transfer of remains. When a veteran passed away on April 19, Army National Guard Sgt. Major Bob Jenks – a combat veteran and a member of American Legion Post 178 in Millerton, NY – prepared for the fact there would be a need to provide proper military honors. An honor guard was arranged for the transfer, but a casket flag was needed. Bob reached out to former Post



Department Commander Mike McDermott

178 and Dutchess County Commander Al Andrews. Within 12 hours, 15 5'x8' U.S. flags were delivered to Javits for the initial transfer of remains and any to happen going forward.

Al said assisting with the flag request was an easy decision. "If it's for the veterans, we're pretty much doing whatever we can to help meet a need. The support, although unique in this pandemic response, is exactly what The American Legion is intended for."

Well said, Al!

That's a perfect example of how the Legionnaires go out of their way to remember and honor those who have gone before us – even in a pandemic.

COVER

SAME LEGION BEHIND MASK

Department Commander Michael McDermott was sporting his patriotic mask while staying on mission during the pandemic state of emergency. He helped organize take-out dinners for first responders in Cortland County. See Page 5. Photo by Wayne Duncel.



Operation Groundhog Day

Post 205 Donates 100 Boxes of Produce to Food Pantry

by ROBERT STRONACH

KENMORE -- When a western New York food pantry started up during the pandemic to help families in the Kenmore-Town of Tonawanda (Ken-Ton) School District, Milton J. Brounshidle Post 205 reached out to help.

After looking at ways to maximize a donation, legionnaires launched "Operation Groundhog Day" (a reference to the Bill Murray movie that has him repeating the same day). They delivered 50 boxes of fresh produce to Ken-Ton Cares Food Pantry and then repeated the 50-box delivery a week later.

The donation was a hit, Post Commander Ted Balbierz reports. When the food pantry announced the addition of fresh produce, orders tripled, he said, "and they are



Milton J. Brounshidle Post 205 Commander Ted Balbierz and Dr. Jill O'Malley, founder of Ken-Ton Closet and Ken-Ton Cares. Selfie by Jill O'Malley.

currently exploring available grants to continue to be able to provide fresh produce" to families in need.

Balbierz also gave something else to Ken-Ton Cares founder Dr. Jill O'Malley, who started the food pantry as an offshoot of her Ken-Ton Closet, which provides

clothing to kids in need.

That "something else" was an American Legion Centennial Challenge Coin.

"One of the coolest things happened to me today," Dr. O'Malley wrote on Facebook on May 7. "I got a challenge coin! I have never heard of this before and I am so hon-

ored to receive it. I thought I was going to cry (and Lord knows how that would go with a mask??). Anyhow, I am a humble servant that does not need recognition but I am going to cherish this forever. Thank you Commander Balbierz!"

Continued on next page.



Post 205 Delivers Produce

From left: Post 205 Ways & Means Chair Fran Roselli, 3rd Vice Commander Ruth-Ann Coppola, Ken-Ton Cares Volunteer Scott Lackey, 1st Vice Commander Ray Borawski (orange coat), and unloading boxes, Children & Youth Chair Nick Scott and Adjutant Bob Haug. Photo provided by Ted Balbierz.

Continued from previous page

It turns out Post 205 has a history of supporting efforts that help children in the school district. The Post had adopted Ken-Ton Closet “as our primary Children and Youth project,” Balbierz noted, providing financial support, plus last fall purchasing 100 winter coats for children.

When schools were closed by the pandemic, Dr. O’Malley, who is president of the Ken-Ton School Board, “recognized the growing need to ensure local families were receiving proper nutrition,” the Post 205 commander said.

The legionnaires initially offered financial support, and then “explored maximizing our donation by attempting to purchase wholesale dry goods,” he said. “But we ran into a dead

end as every contact our legionnaires had in commercial wholesale food purchasing was unable to assist as they were currently not working due to the stay-at-home order.”

That’s when a different solution appeared “right in front of our noses.”

The commander’s daughter, Lauren, a recent Auxiliary member, and her boyfriend, Mike Pope, operate a local produce stand (George’s Produce Market) and regularly purchase wholesale produce.

“We reached out to Dr. O’Malley about the possibility of donating 100 boxes of fresh produce to be included with the non-perishables currently being offered and she accepted. Thus, what we lovingly named ‘Operation Groundhog Day’ was born.”



Post Commander Ted Balbierz with his daughter, Lauren, who acquired the produce to donate to the food pantry.

CENTRAL SQUARE POST 915 DONATES TO SCHOOL FOOD PANTRY



District Superintendent Tom Colabufo (2nd from left) accepts check from Legion Family representatives Mike Hall (left), Commander Kenneth Robarge and Katie Coe.

When the American Legion Family at Post 915 heard about a food program shortage in the Central Square Central School District, they stepped up and donated \$2,500 for the

school food pantry. Post Commander Ken Robarge noted that the district feeds about 1,600 kids who qualify for free or reduced-cost meals, but during the pandemic shutdown, “they

have been providing for all students where there is a need.” Noting that no student should go hungry, the Legion Family made a check presentation on April 27 to District Super-

intendent Tom Colabufo. Ken Robarge represented the Legion and the Riders; Mike Hall represented the Sons of the American Legion, and Katie Coe represented the Auxiliary.

CORTLAND COUNTY

Legion Family Treats First Responders to Free Meals

by ROBERT STRONACH

Department of New York Commander Michael McDermott and the Cortland County Legion Family turned out to provide spaghetti and meatball dinners to first responders from throughout the county on May 5.

"It was fantastic," McDermott said. "We served 235 dinners and had lots of help. We really worked as a team."

The Legion Family arranged for fire, police and ambulance services from the county, including state troopers, to safely pick up the dinners. After they drove up, Legion Family members wearing masks would load their vehicles and then the first responders departed, McDermott explained.

In addition, Legion Family members delivered 15 dinners to the Emergency Department staff at Guthrie Cortland Medical Center in Cortland.

McDermott said the Legion wanted to show appreciation for the people on the front lines of the coronavirus pandemic, especially since many are military veterans.

The response exceeded his expectations. "I can't believe how big this has gotten," he said.



Cortland Auxiliary Unit 489 President Eileen Bentley and Homer Unit 465 member M.B. Kingsley bring meals out to first responders. Photos by Wayne Dunckel.

BELOW: 6th District Commander Leo Mackin loads meals into Homer PD car.



BRINGING MEALS TO GUTHRIE CORTLAND MEDICAL CENTER STAFF

From left: 6th District Commander Leo Mackin; Amber Minci, RN; Luke Atwater, RN; Department Commander Mike McDermott, & Donna Riley, president of Homer Auxiliary Unit 465.



Members of the American Legion in Rosedale, Queens, fed hundreds of residents left unemployed or hard pressed to buy food for their families. Photo by Todd Maisel

QUEENS POST HELPS TO FEED THOUSANDS

National Commander Bill Oxford praised Rosedale-Laurelton Post 483 in Queens in a Facebook post for its soup kitchen and food pantry efforts. The post also was featured on the national American Legion website.

by The American Legion

As a member of the Veterans Advisory Committee of Southeast Queens, Rosedale-Laurelton American Legion Post 483 in Queens, N.Y., works in tandem and shares resources with other organizations in the area to provide services to both veterans and the community.

Included in those services are a soup kitchen and four food pantries – one of the

latter being housed at Post 483 for the past 10 years. But what normally had been those in need coming to the post to get food has changed since the coronavirus pandemic hit New York City.

In addition to still providing food assistance at the food pantry while following proper social distancing guidelines, Post 483 has instituted a delivery service for those veterans and at-risk seniors and shut-ins who can't themselves get to the pantry. The effort has provided more than 1,000 families with food each week.

Post 483 First Vice Commander Sharon Sweeting-Lindsey said the post was approached about providing food delivery, which was an easy question to answer.

"Of course I said yes, because that's part of our military mandate of selfless service: to feed the community, especially during the pandemic when a lot of them cannot get out," Sweeting-Lindsey said. "That's where all this started."

Sweeting-Lindsey said during the first week of the operation 35 deliveries were made. That amount doubled the following week, and two weeks later the amount was at 154.

"It is definitely growing," Sweeting-Lindsey said. "It's a combination of being listed on the 311 (non-emergency assistance phone number), of word of mouth – one neighbor gets it and wants to know 'how did you get a delivery?' – and outreach

and social media."

A combination of Post 483 Legion Family members, members of other organizations and local residents make the deliveries, which go to those in need in Far Rockaway, Jamaica, Rosedale, Laurelton, Hollis, St. Albans and Rochdale.

Post 483 Commander Lee Blackmon praised those volunteers who have given their time to deliver the food. "To me, they're heroes," he said. "During the time of this pandemic, a lot of people are afraid to come out of their houses. When you find a few committed to serve the community like this, I call them warriors. It's a very courageous thing they're doing."

Sweeting-Lindsey said *Continued on next page.*

'We Lift Up America'

National Commander Bill Oxford in April saluted Isabella He, a junior at Pittsford Mendon High School in Pittsford, NY – for founding Teens for Veterans, for volunteering at Pittsford Post 899 and for organizing a virtual concert for veterans, called “We Are Thinking of You.”

“Isabella, you should be proud,” Oxford declared.

The national commander also recognized Wayland Post 402 for its drive-thru Easter candy giveaway.

“These are frightening times for children,” Oxford said.

“School closures and stay-at-home orders have had a dramatic effect on their normal activities. But it didn’t stop American Legion Post 402 in Wayland, N.Y., from cheering up local children by holding a drive-thru Easter candy giveaway.”

Wayland Auxiliary member Judy Perkowski told *The Evening Tribune*: “We are doing what we can to lift up everyone’s spirits in this time.” Added Oxford: “This is what The American Legion Family does. We lift up America.”



ABOVE AND BELOW: Members of the American Legion in Rosedale, Queens, fed hundreds of residents left unemployed or hard pressed to buy food for their families. PhotoS by Todd Maisel.

Continued from previous page.

Post 483 was able to take something it already was doing, the food pantry, and adapt it to still provide assistance during the pandemic – and something it will continue to do as long as there is a need.

“What we did is we enriched the program to do the home-delivery component,” she said. “(The recipients) are very grateful. Their children call us. A lot of our seniors live by themselves and their children live in Connecticut and New Jersey. We were getting calls from children to provide the services for their parents.”



HONORING VET WHO DIED AT NYC FIELD HOSPITAL

AT MILITARY'S REQUEST, LEGION POST PROVIDES FLAGS

by *The American Legion*

In mid-April a veteran who was being treated for COVID-19 at the Javits New York Medical Station (JNYMS) passed away. As a number of COVID-19 patients being treated at the medical station are 65 years or older, the reality set in that veterans likely will be among the casualties of the coronavirus pandemic's impact on New York.

But because of the efforts of New York Legionnaires, those veterans who did die at the JNYMS received a U.S. flag for their casket, to go along with proper military honors by personnel serving in Unified Command/Incident Command Javits during the transfer of remains.

When the veteran passed away on April 19, Incident Command Sgt. Major Bob Jenks – a New York Army National Guardsman, combat veteran and a member of American Legion Post 178 in Millerton, N.Y. – prepared for the fact there would be a need to provide proper military honors before being transferred to the City Medical Examiner or funeral directors in preparation for final burial.

An honor guard was arranged for the transfer, but a casket flag was needed. Jenks reached out to former Post 178 and Dutchess County Commander Al Andrews.



New York Army National Guard Sgt. Major Nicholas Pardi, a member of the 104th Military Police Battalion, presents an American flag for a veteran who died of COVID 19 while a patient at the Javits New York Medical Station in New York City, on April 19, 2020. The flag was donated by The American Legion. U.S. Air National Guard photo by Major Patrick Cordova.

Within 12 hours, 15 5'x8' U.S. flags were delivered for the initial transfer of remains and any to happen going forward.

Andrews, a 47-year Legionnaire, said assisting with the flag request with an easy decision. "If it's for the veterans, we're pretty much doing whatever we can to help meet a need," he said. "The support, although unique in this pandemic response, is exactly what The American Legion is intended for."

And on April 19, with a plan developed to transfer the remains, that flag was in place as the facility's chaplain, Army Maj. Ivan Arreguin, provided a brief

service for the transfer and the casket flag was delivered with the deceased for the funeral home to pass on to family members. More than 60 servicemembers attended the transfer, as did representatives from all the civilian agencies assisting the efforts at Javits.

Andrews said being able to assist in one veteran's proper final transfer, and the possibility of assisting with additional transfers, was a silver lining in dealing with the pandemic. The post planned to send at least another 30 flags to Javits. "It's a real good feeling being able to help ... the relatives (of the veteran)," he said. "It's

sad they're not getting the recognition they normally would have gotten if it were better times."

Post 178 has a long history of being active in its community, and those efforts have continued through the coronavirus pandemic. The post has an electronic sign that it uses to advertising American Legion functions, and events, as well as to honor servicemembers killed on active duty. But the post has since turned use of the sign over to Town of North East & Village of Millerton officials to share critical information with the public: social distancing.

Continued on next page.

Yonkers Post Brings Food to Vets, Hospitals

Through its Front Lines Project, members of Charles N. Bajart American Legion Post 1122 Legion Family in Yonkers have been delivering ready-to-eat foods to health-care workers. In April they delivered food to three area hospitals for the workers battling COVID-19. The post also delivered food to homebound veterans. Legion Family members shop for the food and do much of the preparation and cooking from their homes, while other food comes from area restaurants. Small delivery teams distribute the food.

"Veterans know about what is needed in a time of crisis," Post 1122 member Jack Hannon told the Irish Echo. "The doctors and nurses and health care workers simply don't have the time to organize meals for themselves and that's where we come in. As long as they keep fighting, we'll support them."



Geneva Post Commander Dale Mosher and Past Department Commander Rena Nessler delivered meals to first responders in Geneva.

Meals for Geneva First Responders

The Geneva American Legion in partnership with The American Legion Department of New York handed out fish fry dinners to City of Geneva police officers and firefighters on April 17 "in appreciation of their service to our community in keeping it safe," declared a Facebook post by Geneva Post 396.

Past Department Commander Rena

Nessler, Geneva Post Commander Dale Mosher and Past Ontario County Commander Jim Nessler made the deliveries.

The posting concluded:

"Many thanks to Department of New York American Legion Adjutant James Casey for the sponsorship of this awesome gift to our community and its first responders."

Continued from previous page.

ing reminders, what to do if exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms, testing options and other messaging.

"It's pretty hard to get the word out to everybody, and it's very important that people know what's going on and how to stay healthy, and where to go and what to do," Andrews said. "Our Legion sign, people look at

that all the time and miss it when it's not on."

Post 178 Adjutant and Historian Sean M. Klay – an Army National Guard captain serving as the Operations Officer for the 53rd Digital Liaison Detachment at Camp Smith in Cortlandt Manor, N.Y. – said times like the coronavirus pandemic are an opportunity for American Legion posts to show their value to the

community.

"We were told to close. We weren't given the option," Klay said. "But on the flip side, just because our day-to-day operations can't necessarily take place the way we normally would like them to, it doesn't mean we don't have a role to fill in our community. We had (a post member) who said, 'Hey, we have a need to make sure these (veterans)

get recognized. That's a no-brainer. That's why we are here.

"There's a myriad of ways posts can step up and be relevant during times of crisis. Right now this is the niche we were able to fill. That's what makes the Legion so versatile is that we're able to identify those needs in our respective communities and help fill those needs."

Watertown Post Feeds Healthcare Workers

Members of Watertown's American Legion Post 61 made a special delivery to Samaritan Medical Center in April, WWNY reported.

They donated 50 spaghetti and meatball lunches to staff in the hospital's surgical services unit.

"The veterans of the the community appreciate the work, professional work that the hospital is doing right now," Vice Commander Rocco Crescenzi told the TV station. "The doctors, the nurses, the staff, are seeing less and less of their family and we just thought we would like to show our appreciation."



Lowville Post Provides On-Going Meals

FEEDING TRUCKERS, FIRST RESPONDERS, GROCERY WORKERS, FAMILIES

American Legion Post 162 in Lowville has been providing meals to truck drivers, first responders and grocery store workers, among others, since the pandemic hit, noted Post 162 Commander Lee Hinkleman.

More recently, the post helped distribute food donated by the Food Bank

of Central New York and Renzi Food Service to more than 200 families.

"What's really nice about this community, we're getting donations mailed to us. We're not asking for anything," Auxiliary Unit 162 President Kathy Hinkleman told WWNY TV 7 News. "People are very grateful that we're doing this."

MONROE POST 488 FEEDS NURSING HOME STAFF, NYPD

American Legion Post 488 and Sons of the American Legion Squadron 488 in Monroe provide monthly lunches to Valley View Center for Nursing Care and Rehabilitation veterans but had to temporarily stop because of the pandemic. So instead, the Legionnaires and Sons made a freshly prepared lunch for the nursing home's activities staff.

"The support and love Mark La Bruna and his activities staff show all residents is second to none," Post 488 Lunch Committee Chairman Marty Currid told *The Photo News*. "They create an environment which brings smiles to the residents and reinforces how much they matter. We saw this every time we brought lunch to our veteran nursing home colleagues. This time, we wanted to demonstrate our appreciation to the activities staff and let them know how much they matter, because they really do."



On June 18 American Legion Auxiliary Unit 488 "had the pleasure of donating a wonderful meal to the brave men & women of the NYPD's 42nd Precinct in the South Bronx," Post 488 announced on Facebook. "In the current climate of the world, we thought this small gesture of appreciation for these men & women was the right message of support from the ALA to the NYPD. May God Bless & keep them safe! "A special Thank You to Angelo's Trattoria in Monroe for the very generous spread & for always supporting our post & our missions!"



Wayland Post 402 Honors Hero's Memory

HELPS PROVIDE MEAL FOR FRONTLINE VA WORKERS

In Wayland, the annual Sgt. Devin A. Snyder Memorial Foundation Ride to Remember had to be canceled. The ride brings in hundreds of people a year to honor the memory of a local war hero killed in action in Afghanistan in 2011.

So American Legion Post 402 teamed up with the foundation, along with the Steuben County Sheriff's Department, Paul and John Paul Holubek, Dollars and Cents, Kings Market and New York Chips to turn this year into

an opportunity to honor Bath VA Hospital frontline workers. The group provided a meal for the VA workers.

"We wanted to figure out how to still honor her on this day," Post 402 Commander Kevin Mark told the *Genesee County Express*.

"We have a few WWII veterans left in the Wayland area, so it is nice to include this on D-Day. It is a nice way to honor frontline workers and veterans on the 76-year anniversary of D-Day."



Valhalla's 'Operation Shower'

Valhalla American Legion Post 1038 conducted "Operation Shower" in June, collecting new baby items and donations in support of military families.

"Operation Shower donations were just wonderful!" the Post tweeted.

"The contributions of new baby items and donations on Monday, June 15th greatly supported this goal! Thanks to all that donated!"

FORESTVILLE LEGION DIDN'T LET COVID-19 STOP MEMORIAL DAY

It would have been the 96th consecutive year that J. Carter Knapp Forestville American Legion Post 953 would have had a Memorial Day Parade and ceremony, the *Dunkirk Observer* reported.

“Even though COVID-19 rained on the parade, so to speak, post members still honored veterans by placing flags at seven cemeteries, performing a 21-gun salute at the cemeteries and Memorial on Mall in Forestville and placing crosses around the Memorial Stone at the Legion.”



Sayville Legion Riders lead Memorial Day procession. Photo by George Etheredge

SAYVILLE POST IMPROVISES, OVERCOMES

By The American Legion

In Sayville, N.Y., the members of Smith-Wever Post 651 have the goal of working around problems, which has been exhibited during one of the most trying times in the nation's history. Since the coronavirus pandemic hit, Post 651's Legion Family has staged food drives and food pantries, and delivered medical equipment to front-line health-care workers – all while conducting post meetings via Zoom.

So when the town's Memorial Day parade was cancelled, the post wasn't

going to sit by and do nothing.

David Isaacs, who serves as both Post 651's adjutant and American Legion Riders Chapter 651 director, said that “thousands” normally attend the Sayville Memorial Day parade. When that was cancelled, members of the post planned on placing hundreds of wreaths on the gravesites of veterans in local cemeteries. But Isaacs and fellow Legion Riders also planned on riding down Main Street in a safe and legal procession. And from there the idea grew to a drive that went past

various memorial stops in the area and included dozens of members of the community.

“It just kind of ballooned,” Isaacs said. “We just wanted to do something. We were just trying to work around the virus.” Isaacs said that around 50 vehicles took off with the 20 or so American Legion Riders at the start of the procession, while another 25 or so vehicles joined in later.

“We work around things,” Isaacs said. “We adapt. We improvise. We overcome.”

FLAGS FLY EARLY, THANKS TO CASSADAGA LEGION POST

CASSADAGA — Thanks to Cassadaga American Legion Post 1280, flags were flying early in the village.

This show of flags was inspired by the patriotism and unity of a strong community during the pandemic state of emergency, the *Jamestown Post-Journal* reported.

More than 200 American flags are flown annually in Cassadaga, normally starting on Memorial Day, but the display was “accelerated this year to show community strength and unity during the nationwide crisis,” according to the *Post-Journal*.

The Cassadaga American Legion Post manages the flag sponsorship program.



Flags are sponsored annually by individuals in honor of a veteran, family member or loved one.

The Legion Family manages the as-

sembly of flagpoles, purchase of new flags, disposal of unserviceable flags, display of flags and removal after the flying season.

COHOES POST 476 AND CITY HOLD MEMORIAL DAY PROCESSION

The City of Cohoes and the Cohoes American Legion E.T. Ruane Post 476 hosted a Memorial Day Procession throughout the city on May 25, *TV News 10* reported

Cohoes Mayor Bill Keeler and Post 476 Commander Leo Falconio, joined by State Assemblymember John McDonald, conducted a wreath-laying ceremony at four stops along

the procession route including the Cohoes Veteran's Memorial Park, the American Legion Post, Col. Robert R. Craner Park, and at the Van Schaick Pond flag.

POST, DEPT. DONATE FOOD TO NYPD PRECINCT IN QUEENS

The American Legion received a “shout out” for donating food to the New York City Police Department's 100th Precinct in southern Queens. The Legion had RBQ restaurant provide the food on April 2.

“I want to give a huge shout out to the **Daniel M. O'Connell American**

Legion Post 272 and **The New York State American Legion** for their generous donation of food,” RBQ proprietor **John Moroney** said in a Facebook post.

“The men and women in Blue from the 100th were very grateful for this tremendous act of kindness in a time

of such uncertainty.” Moroney went on to thank Department Adjutant **James W. Casey** for his “great act of kindness and compassion,” and concluded: “Bravo to all the members of The American Legion!!! A wonderful organization that still keeps giving to our Country!!!”

POST 64 GIVES GIFT CARDS TO BUFFALO VA NURSES



Erie County's David McKeever Post 64 recently donated \$7,000 worth of gift cards to the nursing staff of the Buffalo VA Hospital. The gift cards were presented to VA Volunteer Service Officer Nicholas La-Marca, by Post Commander Paul Wackowski and Vice Commander Kevin Lange as a thank you to the VA nurses for their dedicated efforts in caring for veterans, especially during the pandemic.

POST 964 LEADS MEMORIAL DAY CEREMONY WITH REP. STEFANIK

CHESTERTOWN — Although this year's Memorial Day service in Chestertown was billed as low-key due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the ceremony featured American Legion Post 964 Commander Joanne Ellsworth and U.S. Rep. Elise Stefanik, the *Elizabethtown Sun* reported. Also participating was VFW Post 5513.

Ellsworth told the crowd of some 70 people that it was a solemn day of remembrance for those who died serving in the U.S. armed forces, the news outlet reported.

"Although our current life is shadowed in lockdown mode — amid fears, anxiety, and an unknown end to the craziness — we think of those who have given us hope and secured our freedoms so important to our souls," she said.

Stefanik pointed to northeastern New York as having "more veterans



Post 964 Commander Joanne Ellsworth.

than most other parts of the U.S." She noted how the Battles of Saratoga in 1777 had "turned the tide" in the Revolutionary War, and that since then, area citizens have defended freedom in conflicts around the world.

"We should also take the time today

to think about our Gold Star families, who have given the ultimate sacrifice," she said.

American Legion Auxiliary members laid a memorial wreath at the center of the town's Veterans Memorial Plaza.



FROM LEFT: Past District Commander Henry Link, Howie Van Rennselaer, 8th District Chaplain Stan Kowski, and 8th District Service Officer Steve McCord, who is also Cattaraugus County director of Veteran Services.

8th District Honors Funeral Director for Service to Veterans

The Department of New York's 8th District honored a funeral director in May for providing pro bono funeral services for indigent veterans.

Past District Commander Henry Link, representing current District Commander Bill Miskell, presented Howie Van Rennselaer of Van Rennselaer & Son Funeral Home in Randolph with a District Letter of Apprecia-

tion, a Chautauqua County resolution thanking Van Rennselaer for his selfless service to veterans, and an American Legion challenge coin. The *Olean Times Herald* reported that when Vietnam veteran Walter L. Bunn died in a nursing home in February, with no family and no assets, a number of funeral homes were contacted. "All but one declined."

When Van Rennselaer heard the veteran's story — that Bunn received citations for bravery in combat only to lose both his legs in a tragic accident after returning home — "he knew it would not be enough to just have a simple service." Van Rennselaer contacted the American Legion and other veterans service organizations. "There was not enough room in the funeral home."

DEPARTMENT MID-WINTER CONFERENCE



National commander-candidate Randall Fisher (second from left) and Department Commander Michael McDermott enjoy a lighter moment during January's Mid-Winter Conference. Joining McDermott in welcoming Fisher are New York American Legion Press Association President David Lockhart (left) and Press Association Secretary Kevin Harrington (right). Photo by Robert Stronach.

Future National Commander Is Featured Guest

ALBANY — A future national American Legion commander – Randall Fisher of Kentucky – was the featured guest at the Department of New York's Mid-Winter Conference held Jan. 24-26.

The leading candidate to head the Legion in the 2021-22 year, Randall addressed the conference banquet Saturday, March 25, at the Desmond Hotel and Conference Center.

The banquet and a recep-

tion featuring the American Legion Yankee Doodle Band capped a day of meetings and seminars on veteran's issues and a host of Legion programs. Hundreds of veterans converged on Albany for the weekend conference,

held at the Desmond Hotel and Conference Center. Concurrent conferences were held in Albany by the American Legion Auxiliary and the Sons of the American Legion.

Over 100 Participate in Legion Riders Session

By ROBERT F. WALLACE
Department ALA Director

More than 100 American Legion Riders (ALR) attended the Department ALR meeting on Friday evening of the Mid-Winter Conference. They represented all 10 Districts.

Each Department ALR vice-director shared activities from chapters in their districts. These activities

included fundraisers like poker or dice runs, dinners, breakfast buffets, raffles, and swap meets.

Proceeds from fundraisers support our military, veterans, their families and the community. Examples include raising \$17,500 to fund an entire Honor Flight Mission, supporting flag displays and veteran's monuments, donating to local food banks, supporting

BINGO nights with hospitalized veterans at their local VA. Often proceeds are donated to the local Post home for new roofs, upgrades to kitchens or needed renovations.

One chapter continues to support a local youth sports team and has an American flag patch put on each of the uniforms. This last year they actually had flag patches placed on all the

team uniforms within the League. This Chapter feels very strongly that this is the place to begin to help teach respect for our Nation's flag. The theme that ran through all the reports was that community service and support for our veterans was very important.

The meeting concluded with donations totaling \$2,000 for Operation Comfort Warriors.

LEGISLATIVE HILL DAY

Treating PTS Remains a Top Legislative Priority

ALBANY -- Advocating for alternative therapies to treat post-traumatic stress and traumatic brain injury remains a top legislative priority for The American Legion Department of New York.

That message was conveyed to state legislators and senators during the Legion's Legislative Hill Day, held Feb. 25. Leading the annual Hill Day were Department Commander Michael McDermott, Department Adjutant James Casey and Department Legislative Chair Dorothy Button.

Members of the Legion Family from around the state met with members of the state legislature during an American Legion legislative breakfast, held at the Desmond Hotel and Conference. Then Legion members followed up with visits to legislative offices near the State Capitol.

"The devastating impact of Post-Traumatic Stress and Traumatic Brain Injury demand a dedicated and comprehensive study to delineate viable treatments such as animal therapy, hyperbaric oxygen treatment, peer-to-peer support programs and other courses of action, including medical marijuana, that have demonstrated beneficial results," Department Legislative Chair Dorothy Button noted. She then pointed to



Commander Mike McDermott with State Sen. James Seward. Photos / Sen. Seward's Office.

the RTM protocol, or the Reconsolidation of Traumatic Memories, as having "a proven track record and The American Legion Department of New York strongly urges the State Legislature to approve and fund this work."

She added: "(W)e ask that state agencies be directed to undertake such studies as necessary and make public the results."

Button also listed as top priorities two related issues

– preventing suicides and treating war trauma.

Citing an "epidemic" of veteran suicides, "still averaging more than 20 a day nationwide," she called on the state legislature and state agencies to provide greater awareness and to keep funding programs and groups that reach out to men and women in uniform, veterans and their families.

She also urged the governor and legislature to iden-

tify and pursue alternative treatments to assist war-time veterans dealing with the trauma of war. The Legion also calls upon the legislature "to provide to Congress a 'Memorial Resolution' urging establishment and implementation of alternative treatments for PTS and TBI and to ensure that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides such treatment to afflicted veterans and military personnel."



FROM LEFT: Senator James Seward, Schoharie County Veterans' Service Officer Eilene Fisher, Wells M. Farr, and Assemblyman Chris Tague.

ORATORICAL CONTEST

RICHFIELD SPRINGS STUDENT IS STATE CHAMPION

ALBANY — Victor Gelfuso, a senior at Richfield Springs Central School in Richfield Springs, is The American Legion New York State Oratorical Champion for 2020, Oratorical Chairman Anthony Paternostro announced.

This year's contest was conducted on March 14 at the Desmond Hotel and Conference Center instead of the Sand Creek Middle School in Albany due to the school closing during the coronavirus state of emergency.

The only people allowed at the contest finals were the contestants and their families, Chairman Paternostro's working crew, and few Legionnaires.

"We did not want to cancel the competition after all the hard work these orators have done all year to get to this point," Paternostro noted.

Gelfuso competed against four other



FROM LEFT: Riley Meckley, 3rd place; Scott Siegel, 2nd place; Victor Gelfuso, Department of New York Champion.

finalists from a cross section of the state in the 83rd Annual American Legion Department of New York Oratori-

cal Contest. He was sponsored by the Hugick Purcell Shepard Post 616 (Otsego County, 6th District, and Zone 4).

WASHINGTON CONFERENCE

NY Delegation Pays Respects at Monuments, Visits Congressional Offices

A delegation of Legion Family members from New York, led by Department Commander Mike McDermott, participated in The American Legion's Washington Conference March 8-11.

Auxiliary President Linda Tome and Sons of the American Legion (SAL) Detachment Commander Dennis George were part of the delegation.

Commander McDermott took time to place a wreath at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, then laid a wreath at the Korean War Monument with Detachment Commander George. The SAL commander laid a wreath with the NY delegation at the World War II Monument in honor of his father.

Delegation members also made time

to bring the Legion's legislative priorities to their Congressional representatives in visits to their offices.

On the last day of the conference, National Commander James W. "Bill" Oxford presented a three-step mission to lawmakers during a joint session of the Senate and House Committees on Veterans' Affairs.



A contingent of NY members visit the Washington office of Congressman Tom Reed (R, NY-23). Among them are Department President Linda Tome (4th from left), Past Department Commander Rena Nessler (next to Congressman Reed), and Past Detachment Commander James Coates (right).

D-DAY REMEMBERED



Omaha Beach, Normandy, France.

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Despite the celebratory spirit, it is a somber and sobering trip. In 2014, my first trip to the beaches brought me to Omaha Beach, where our least experienced troops stormed ashore to face near-annihilation. Our greatest losses of the European theater occurred there at the most impassible location under the greatest concentration of defensive firepower imaginable.

The tetrahedrons and other obstacles are gone from the beaches. The mines have been removed. But it doesn't diminish the emotional pall that settles over you as you walk on that sacred ground. No picture, no movie, no story can prepare you for your first trip to Omaha. I descended to the sand from the monument at the center of the beach just north of Pointe du Hoc behind the National Guard Monument. At this location, portions of the Atlantic Wall fortifications have been

removed to allow easier access to the beach, and stairs and walkways have been constructed to facilitate the walk down to the beach.

It was low tide when I arrived, much as it was when our troops landed, and I made a conscious decision to walk to the water's edge without looking back. Of course, the images were well-ingrained in my mind of what the scene looked like on D-Day. When I reached the water I paused, took a deep breath, and turned to face the cliffs 250-300 yards in the distance. This was when my emotions got the best of me. One cannot take this walk and not be overwhelmed with emotion thinking about those who were lucky enough to have survived the trip to the beach only to be mowed down by machine gun fire, blown up by mines or artillery rounds and mortars, killed or maimed- these are the heroes of the Greatest Generation!

My time in the region was spent mainly in and around Sainte-Mere-Eglise, the area so well memorialized in the movie, *The Longest Day*, and a mannikin hanging from one of the parapets of the church still commemorates the Airborne troops who dropped into town in the early morning hours of 6 June 1944 to liberate the town. Everyone knows the story of Pvt. John Steele, and how he escaped being killed while hanging there on the church parapet suspended by his shroud lines.

While there, I had the honor of spending some great time with American Legion National Commander Brett Reistad, veteran and historian Lt. Col. Keith Nightingale (US Army, Ret) who served from Vietnam through the Gulf War and a past commander of the 82nd ABN, and General John Nicholson III (US Army, Ret) who recently left military life after serving as our
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D-DAY REMEMBERED

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commander in Afghanistan for 2½ years. I had the honor of meeting the latter two in 2014, and Brett Reistad at stateside events in 2019.

There is so much more to tell and remember about D-Day, but the important lesson is that we never allow the memory to die. As veterans and Americans, regardless of our respective ages, it is incumbent upon us to carry the message to those who are too young to have lived through hardship, some of whom have no concept of why our country is so great, and what our military has fought for throughout the ages. I encourage Legionnaires, Posts and all other veterans to get involved in the education programs at local schools if you aren't already- our children must understand the cost of freedom, especially in these troublesome political times. If our children don't have the knowledge and the pride, we will lose everything we have fought for since the First Continental Congress. We must keep the story alive!

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A Vietnam Era veteran, the author is a member of Williston Post 144 and is chaplain for Nassau County American Legion. He was born in Brooklyn, NY in 1943, and is of Jewish descent from Russian and Romanian grandparents.



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To permanently commemorate the early morning hours of D-Day (June 6, 1944) in which U.S. paratrooper John Steele landed and got stuck on this church tower in Sainte-Mère-Église, a replica hangs from the tower.

The author, Legionnaire Eric Spinner, is shown with General John Nicholson (l) and Lt. Col. Keith Nightingale (r) at the Normandy D-Day events in 2014.



D-DAY REMEMBERED



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French reenactors in Sainte-Mere-Eglise celebrate the town's liberation during last year's 75th anniversary of D-Day.

by ERIC SPINNER

After three quarters of a century, there is at least one date that is not lost to memory, at least to those of us who are old enough to understand its significance in our lives. My reference is to 6 June, specifically that day in 1944, when the course of history was changed for the better for all of mankind, especially those who lived in Europe under the thumb of one of the greatest despots of all time, Adolf Hitler. For the Nazis, it was the beginning of the end.

Americans have many opinions of the French on an individual level, but all of that seems to become irrelevant

as the attitude of the French is totally positive when one travels to the Normandy region. To the French in the 'Manche', D-Day is celebrated with much vigor, and Americans visiting the region are treated to a great welcome! French reenactors turn out in military uniforms of the WW-II period, and in the towns surrounding the five beaches - Utah, Omaha, Sword, Gold and Juneau - they wear the uniform and insignias of the liberators: 101st ABN, 82nd ABN, 1st Division, 3rd Army, etc. They drive vehicles which were left when our troops returned to the States, all of them fully restored

and operational. The convoys are ever-present and moving about on the highways and secondary roads. There are Jeeps, three-quarter ton trucks, 2½ ton trucks, tanks and other armored vehicles. The only thing absent are the sounds of gunfire and falling bombs. Signs abound in business' windows that proclaim, "Welcome, Americans!," and "Bienvenue Americains!." The atmosphere is thick with the spirit of liberation, and it is contagious.

After my trip to Normandy for the 70th Anniversary in 2014, the decision to return for the 75th was a logical one.

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