

# LEGION

## NEW YORK



WINTER  
2020-2021  
Vol. 8 No. 1

**Museum Exhibit Modeled  
After New York Guardsmen**



## LEGION NEW YORK

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## WITH OUR AMERICAN LEGION FAMILY IT'S LIKE CHRISTMAS ALL YEAR LONG

by *MICHAEL McDERMOTT*

A new year is here. We pray that your holidays were blessed. And we're hopeful that the pandemic will fade to memory.

Instead of being a year to fondly remember, 2020 has been one of unprecedented personal and family challenge. Many businesses and organizations shut down, including Legion Posts. We adopted a new normal of keeping distant, wearing face masks, and constantly washing our hands. Some might say it's a year to forget.

But I reflect on 2020 with some pride and inspiration because of all the good works that you, our Legion Family, continue to do across New York State.

Deeds like...

- providing food, personal protective equipment and encouragement to first responders;
- feeding and/or honoring older veterans;
- helping to sponsor food pantries;
- finding creative ways to conduct fundraisers for good causes;



*Department Commander Mike McDermott*

...all while wearing masks and social-distancing.

So many of you in the Legion Family have turned adversity into opportunity. Your smiles may be hidden behind masks, but not your warmth and joy. It's as if you have learned to live the Christmas spirit all year long.

We pray that God blesses you and keeps you safe and healthy in this new year.

### COVER

*Three New York Army National Guard Soldiers served as the models for the figures in this display in the National Museum of the United States Army at Fort Belvoir, Va. Major Robert Freed (a Legionnaire) posed for the figure holding the radio, Major (Chaplain) James Kim was the model for the crouching figure, and Sgt. 1st Class Jonathan Morrison was the model for the rifleman at the right of the tableau. See Page 10. Photo by National Museum of the United States Army.*



## COMBATING HOMELESSNESS

# Legion Donates to Veterans' Shelters

"One homeless veteran is too many."

That comment by Department of New York Adjutant James Casey reflects what motivated The American Legion on the state level to donate \$10,000 to Guardian House, a shelter for female veterans, and another \$10,000 to the Vet House for men.

The funds will help prevent veteran homelessness. The shelters, part of the Veterans and Community Housing Coalition, also help veterans with everything from rent and utility payments to assistance with transportation and getting furnishings for apartments.

Another factor in the donations is that many Legion posts across the state have been hampered in their fundraising due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"We've been shut down for so long, it's tough," 4th District Sergeant-at-Arms David Lockhart told news media during the check



Photos by Erica Miller/The Daily Gazette.

**Department Adjutant James Casey chats with Cheryl Hage-Perez and Leigha Rosenberger of the Veterans and Community Housing Coalition in Ballston Spa after presenting them with \$10,000 checks for the Guardian House and the Vet House.**

presentation on Dec. 15 in Ballston Spa, where the shelters are located.

Adjutant Casey presented the checks to Cheryl Hage-Perez, executive director of Veterans and Community Housing Coalition (VCHC); Leigha Rosenberger, VCHC chief operating officer, and Michelle V. Straight, VCHC community relations director.

"Since March, the requests for donations has tripled,"

Hage-Perez told The Saratogian. "We've been delivering aid to 150 veterans and their families each week. We expect that once the moratorium on evictions is lifted, we're going to see a huge increase in demand."

Casey noted: "When we decided to make this donation, we were going to do it at our Mid-Winter Conference in January, but that got cancelled. I thought doing

it right before Christmas would be a good idea."

Also representing The American Legion were Catherine Erin of Fulton County and Keith Koster of Saratoga County.

"This is an organization of veterans helping veterans," Koster said, adding: "A lot of us gave and sacrificed for our country. And now, we're going to continue giving back to our communities."



**FROM LEFT: Legionnaires Catherine Erin and Keith Koster, Department Adjutant James Casey; Cheryl Hage-Perez, executive director of Veterans and Community Housing Coalition (VCHC); Leigha Rosenberger, VCHC chief operating officer, and Michelle V. Straight, VCHC community relations director.**



INCLUDED IN LEGISLATION PASSED BY CONGRESS

## Boys State Governor Writes Artificial Intelligence Bill

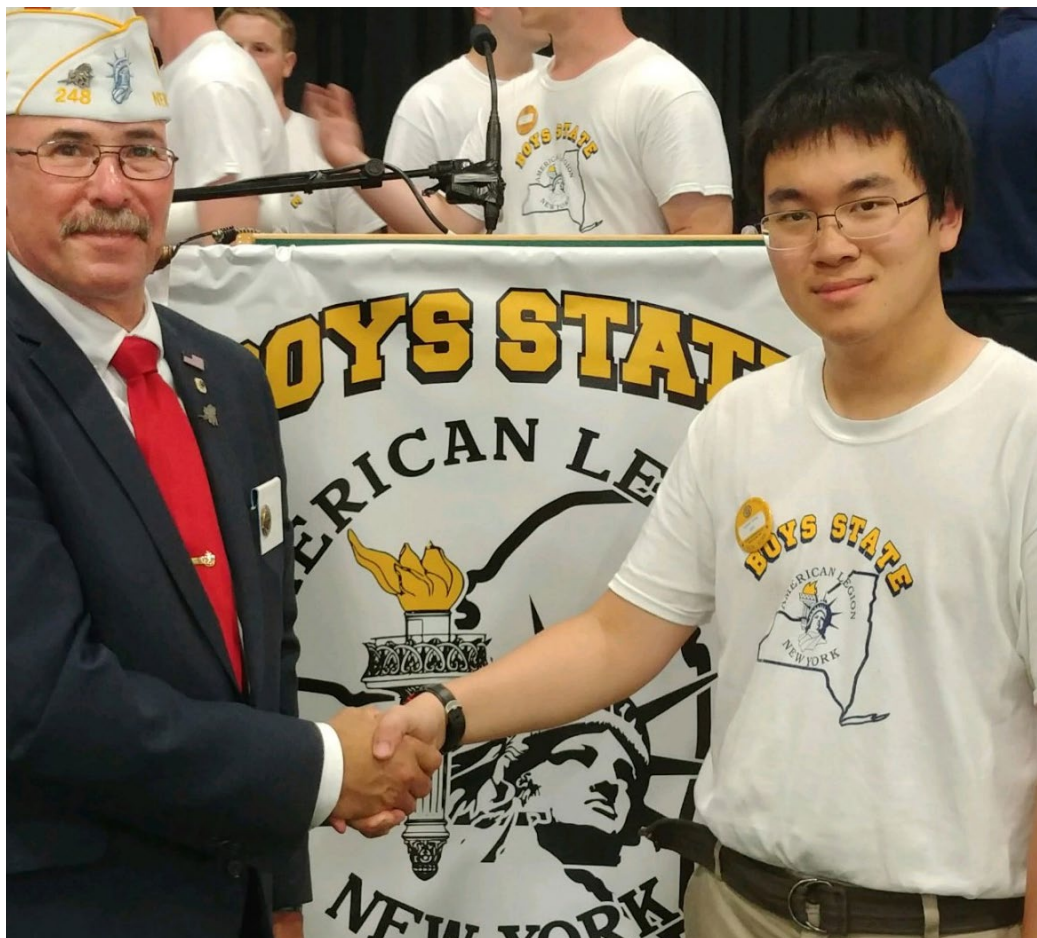
One might say Shuang Heng “Nathan” Wang has a passion for artificial intelligence (AI).

It was the centerpiece of his campaign platform at the 2019 session of New York’s Boys State at SUNY Morrisville. It fueled his election as Boys State governor and propelled him to Boys Nation in Washington, D.C. While there he got to visit the office of Congressman Paul Tanko, D-Amsterdam, and couldn’t resist handing over his proposed AI education legislation.

He thought they would take one look at it and toss it in the waste basket, Nathan told the *Albany Times-Union’s* regional correspondent “But to his surprise, Wang got a call from a legislative aide a month later asking for a meeting.”

The congressman turned Wang’s idea into a bill, and members of Congress included it in the annual defense bill, the T-U reported. The legislation directs the National Science Foundation to offer grants to schools and other organizations to increase access to artificial intelligence education for K-12 students. The bill also expands eligibility for scholarships for college undergraduates in science, technology, math and engineering if they go into K-12 education.

(The U.S. House of



**2018-2019 Department of New York Commander Gary Schacher congratulates Nathan Wang on being elected Boys State governor.**

Representatives passed the National Defense Authorization Act on Dec. 8 by a vote of 335 - 78. The Senate approved it, 84-13, on Dec. 11 with some changes agreed to by both Houses. President Donald J. Trump vetoed the defense bill on Dec. 23 because it did not contain a provision he was seeking to eliminate liability protections for social media companies for content and speech on their sites. The House overrode the veto on Dec. 28 by a vote of 322 to 87, and on New Year’s Day,

the Senate overrode the veto, 81-13, ensuring the bill becomes law.)

T-U regional correspondent Emilie Munson explained how the idea for his AI education bill was born:

“Wang took calculus as a freshman in high school at Hudson Valley Community College and progressed into multi-variable calculus courses and other mathematics at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. As he learned more about artificial intelligence, Wang realized other students did not need

so much advanced calculus to understand the basics of artificial intelligence and appreciate its applications – or even to develop their own uses of it.”

Wang, who was a student at Shaker High School in Latham in 2019, was sponsored to Boys State by Albany’s Joseph E. Zaloga American Legion Post 1520. He is now a freshman at Johns Hopkins University, studying biomedical engineering and applied mathematics remotely from his Latham home

# LAW AND ORDER AWARDS



*Department Commander Michael McDermott poses with 911 Dispatcher of the Year Christopher Tiffany (left) and Corrections Officer of the Year Patrick Thorpe. This is the first time that the Department has awarded the 911 Dispatcher award.*

## Department Honors Corrections Officer, 911 Dispatcher

The American Legion in Livingston and Ontario counties honored a corrections officer and a 911 dispatcher with Law and Order Awards. They went on to win awards from the 7th District, which covers the eight-county Finger Lakes region, and then received top Department of New York honors.

Even though they were honored and nominated by different counties, both work for the Ontario County Sheriff's Office.

Named the state Corrections Officer of the Year was Patrick Thorpe. He is a member of Lima's Francis M. Dalton Post 282.

Named the state 911 Dispatcher of the Year was Christopher Tiffany.

Department Commander Michael McDermott presented the awards on Oct. 14

during a Livingston County American Legion meeting held at Matthew Cleary Post 255 in Caledonia. Dan Quick, commander of the Legion's 7th District, participated in the presentation ceremonies.

Thorpe was presented with the Livingston County American Legion Corrections Officer of the Year Award, a certificate of commendation for outstanding public service from the Legion's 7th District, and the Department Corrections Officer of the Year Award.

Tiffany was presented with a certificate of commendation for outstanding public service from the 7th District as well as the Department 911 Dispatcher of the Year Award.

The Livingston County News reported that Thorpe has served with the On-

tario County Sheriff's Office of Sheriff for 31 years in several capacities, including as a road and jail deputy. In 2002, he was named Ontario County Deputy Sheriff of the Year. Thorpe also served in the U.S. Army Reserve and reached the rank of master sergeant before retiring. Thorpe has volunteered with the East Bloomfield-Holcomb Fire Department for 36 years. In his capacity as a corrections officer, Thorpe also provides firefighting and fire prevention for the jail.

Tiffany has served as a 911 dispatcher for 22 years, the newspaper reported. In addition to his regular duties, he has several special assignments, including training officer for new employees, class coordinator at the annual dispatcher school, and providing reviews and qual-

ity assurance for medical emergencies handled by the 911 center.

In 2018, Tiffany received three outstanding service recognition letters. Two were for providing high quality emergency medical childbirth instructions to a father and at another time to a mother. Another letter was for his exceptional handling of several high priority incidents, including an active assault call with a combative suspect, a multi-person flight, a structure fire, a suspect armed with a pistol, a fully involved car fire, a motor vehicle crash with injuries, and a hit-and-run motor vehicle accident which resulted in a DWI arrest -- all on the same shift. In addition to his dispatcher duties, Tiffany volunteers as an emergency medical technician and firefighter.





**2019 VA Hospital Ward Party at the Perry Post**

## ROCKLAND COUNTY'S PERRY POST An Example of Legion Finding Ways to Adapt, Overcome

by DAVE MART, post commander

The COVID-19 pandemic may have impacted the routine activities of most American Legion Posts, but that doesn't mean Legion Posts haven't found a way to adapt and overcome. John M. Perry Post 1044, a Rockland County post located in the Lower Hudson Valley

Region, is one example of a Legion Post that has succeeded in supporting the needs of the local community despite the challenges of the pandemic.

To begin with, in a typical year the John M. Perry Post would normally drive across the Hudson river to the

Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) VA Hospital in Montrose and hold two or three ward parties for the veterans. These ward parties usually include a catered luncheon, soft drinks, home-baked desserts and professional entertainment for the vets. But the COVID-19 pandem-

ic forced the cancellation of a ward party planned to be held at the Perry Post in May, and of a BBQ that was scheduled to be held at the hospital in August.

Mindful of the hospital's safety restrictions, members of the post found a way to brighten the lives of the vets



**Post Members and youth volunteers, with piles of donated pet food and supplies.**





**Legion and Auxiliary members stand ready at the clothing and food donation tables at Perry Post.**

at the hospital. Starting in May the post has sponsored monthly luncheons at the hospital for the PTSD ward veterans. These luncheons provide an enjoyable break from their normal routine, gives them some very good catered food from local restaurants, and reminds the veterans that the American Legion cares about them.

The pandemic also forced changes in how the post presented scholarships. In a normal year Perry Post awards \$7,000 to \$8,000 in scholarships to children of post members and the local high school. Typically, the high school scholarships are handed out by post leadership during a senior class award ceremony. But for 2020 an in-person award ceremony could not be held since the high school was holding all of its classes virtually. Instead, the post commander and the scholarship chairman recorded a video award presentation that was subsequently used as part of a virtual award ceremony

held in early June.

In November the post contacted the FDR VA Hospital to see if their clothing locker could benefit from a clothing drive. The post had run such a drive back in 2019 resulting in \$18,000 worth of mostly used clothing donations. Unfortunately, the hospital's pandemic control measures ban the acceptance of used clothing donations. Not willing to accept defeat, Perry Post Legionnaires held a new clothing drive. There was an outpouring of generosity not only from the Post and Auxiliary, but also Legion Posts throughout the county as well as members of the local community. The drive raised over \$2,600 worth of shirts, pants, coats, undergarments and other new clothing. The staff at the FDR VA Hospital was grateful for such a large donation of new clothing, one that helped maintain the viability of their clothing locker during the pandemic.

When planning the clothing drive the post

also contacted a local food pantry which also normally provides used clothing to needy families. Unfortunately, the food pantry also indicated they couldn't accept used clothing, but countered with how strongly they needed food donations. The pandemic's impact on local families has resulted in very high demand for food at the pantry. So, the post held a non-perishable food drive, in combination with the new clothing drive. The drive raised over \$1,900 worth of food donations for the People to People Food Pantry.

While executing the November clothing and food drive the post also learned, via a Rockland County American Legion meeting, that pet food drives were being successfully held to address the constant needs of a local animal shelter. Perry Post wasted no time in planning and holding a Pet Food and Supply Drive in early December. Similar to what had been done for the

prior drive, a flyer was created and distributed to other Rockland County Legion Posts, to the local baseball league that plays on a ballfield located on the post's property, and extending outward via Facebook to many organizations including local Scout Troops. The drive raised over \$2,900 worth of pet food, treats, toys, beds, leashes, collars, health products, office and cleaning supplies and more. All the items were donated to the Hi-Tor Animal Care Center in Pomona, NY. The drive also offered a rare opportunity for youth in the area to get in some community service hours. Community service opportunities in 2020 were limited for local youth because so many school and other organizations had cancelled their events.

Given the success of these drives, the post intends to continue holding them in 2021 along with continuing the sponsored monthly lunches at the FDR VA Hospital.

# ERIE COUNTY RED-WHITE-BLUE AWARD



**Joseph Dispenza of Forest Lawn Cemetery receives Red, White and Blue Award from Erie County Commander Thomas O'Connell (left) and Erie County Adjutant James Bojanowski.**

The Erie County American Legion presented the Department of New York Red, White and Blue Award to Joseph Dispenza, president of Forest Lawn Cemetery, for sponsorship of the 2020 Memorial Day and

2020 Veterans Day virtual services broadcast on WBEN Radio.

The presentation took place on Wednesday, Dec. 16, at Forest Lawn Cemetery in front of the American Legion Monument,

which was dedicated in 1929.

Due to the COVID pandemic, the Erie County American Legion was unable to hold the traditional services to honor departed veterans, which normally

include the decoration of over 7,000 graves in the Field of Valor with the assistance of JROTC and Scouting groups.

-- Jim Bojanowski  
Erie County Adjutant

## CHAUTAUQUA LEGION DONATES TO VETS VAN

In recognition of the help received by providing the transportation of the Chautauqua County American Legion Boys State Delegates to the State University at Morrisville, The American Legion has made a donation to the Chautauqua County Veterans Van Fund, the Jamestown Post reported..

County Commander James Lemanski, on behalf of the Chautauqua County Boys State program, made a \$1,000 donation. The Veterans Van provides transportation for local veterans to and from medical facilities



**Chautauqua County Commander James Lemanski presents a \$1,000 check to Chautauqua County Veterans Service Officer David Adams for the Veterans Van fund.**

and other veteran-related functions.

"American Legion officials said when it becomes necessary to replace the

Veterans Van, the replacement will be very expensive," the newspaper reported. "The donation is the legion's recognition that

they are paying forward to help ensure tomorrow's veterans will be treated as well as today's veterans are being treated."



# COVID Surge Led to Canceling Mid-Winter Conference

The Department of New York had a “Plan B” for January’s Mid-Winter Conference in case the pandemic lingered. It would have been a mini-conference, with key officers and chairs attending in person and others participating virtually.

But with the surges in COVID-19 cases across the state, especially in Albany County, the Department decided to cancel the Mid-Winter Conference altogether.

“Commander McDermott



and I spoke at length ... and our main concern was the health and safety of our members,” Department Adjutant James W. Casey said. “We could not bring Legionnaires from across

the state together and risk their lives.”

**Then the commander and adjutant announced a limited virtual conference, via Zoom, for Saturday, Jan. 23.**

Casey thanked

Department staffers -- Anne Rounds, Cassi Harden, Kristine Delap, Charlie LaHaise and Ann Brown -- for all their hard work preparing for the Mid-Winter conference.

“Their dedication to the Department did not go unnoticed and I can’t thank them enough.”

He also thanked conference chairman Harvey Martel and his committee for putting up with the changing dynamics of planning during a pandemic.

## VETERAN FROM MALVERNE HONORED FOR YEARS OF SERVICE

Nine veterans, including Malverne American Legion Post 44 member Joseph Schroder, were honored during State Assemblywoman Judy Griffin’s second annual Veteran Hall of Honor Ceremony on Oct. 4., the Long Island Herald reported. The ceremony, which was held

at Tanglewood Preserve in Rockville Centre, recognized veterans for their dedication, commitment, passion, bravery and service to the country and community.

A member of Post 44 for 32 years, Schroder was drafted into the U.S. Army

in 1966. After Schroder was discharged, he pursued a part-time career in the New York Army National Guard and the Army Reserve, and lasted 33 years in the Field Artillery and Quartermaster Corps. He retired as a Lieutenant Colonel with four overseas tours in Ger-

many, Iceland, Canada and Afghanistan.

In addition to his military service, Schroder was a Nassau County police officer for 24 years, and an EMT for 20 of those years. He also served in Malverne’s Volunteer Ambulance Corps for seven years.

## LEGION HELPS LYNBROOK COMMEMORATE VETERANS DAY

Veterans, residents and elected officials gathered at the Doughboy Memorial behind the Lynbrook Long Island Rail Road station on Veterans Day, Nov. 11, as American Legion Post 335

and Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 2307 hosted the annual ceremony, the *Long Island Herald* reported.

The festivities began at 11 a.m., the time when the armistice was signed on Nov.

11, 1918, ending World War I. The Doughboy statue was dedicated in the village on Oct. 12, 1920, and its base lists the names of 15 local residents who were killed in action during the war. VFW

Commander Pat Nealon, Nassau County Legislator William Gaylor, Lynbrook Mayor Alan Beach and American Legion Commander Bill Marinaccio each said a few words to those gathered.

## ORCHARD PARK POST MOVING TO NEW HOME

Orchard Park Post 567 officially closed its current building Dec. 1 after 73 years at that location. It was a house built in the 1840s

and purchased by the post in 1947 to provide a permanent home for its growing membership. The post will meet temporarily at the

Hillcrest Fire hall on 7125 Ellicott Rd., Orchard Park.

“They hope to be in the new location at 5784 Ellis Rd. in the spring after

remodeling has been completed,” reports Erie County Adjutant Jim Bojanowski. “Best wishes to them at their new home!”



# GUARDSMEN HELP BRING NEW MUSEUM TO LIFE

## 6 FROM NY SERVED AS MODELS FOR LIFE-SIZE FIGURES



*Three New York Army National Guard Soldiers served as the models for the figures in this display in the National Museum of the United States Army at Fort Belvoir, Va. Major Robert Freed, a Legionnaire, posed for the figure holding the radio, Major (Chaplain) James Kim was the model for the crouching figure, and Sgt. 1st Class Jonathan Morrison was the model for the rifleman at the right of the tableau. INSET: Legionnaire Robert Freed in his modeling pose. (Photos courtesy of National Museum of the United States Army)*

by **ERIC DURR**  
*New York National Guard*

When the National Museum of the United States Army opened its doors to the public on Veterans Day, six New York Army National Guard soldiers took special pride in the role they played in the museum. The men were the models for six of 63 life-size soldier figures that will bring exhibits in the museum to life. At least two of them are legionnaires.

The figures of the six New York National Guard soldiers populate two exhibits

from two eras. The National Guardsmen are:

- Maj. Robert Freed, from Central Valley (and a member of Hamburg Post 527);
- Maj. James Kim, a chaplain from Malta;
- Maj. Kevin Vilardo, from Saratoga Springs;
- 1st Lt. Sam Gerdt, from Watertown;
- Sgt. 1st Class Jonathan Morrison, from Forest Hills;
- Sgt. 1st Class Nick Archibald, from Tonawanda (and a member of Tonawanda Post 264).

Construction of the \$200

million museum began in the fall of 2016. On Nov. 11, the museum held a virtual ceremony to celebrate its opening.

The National Museum of the United States Army, open to the public at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, is the first and only museum to tell the 245-year history of the U.S. Army since its establishment in 1775.

The six New York soldiers served as models for the figures in 2018. While Studio EIS, a Brooklyn company that specializes in making

museum exhibit figures, would normally hire actors to serve as models, the museum wanted to use real American soldiers for their project.

“Having real soldiers gives the figures a level of authenticity to the scene,” Paul Morando, the chief of exhibits for the museum, explained at the time.

“They know where their hands should be on the weapons. They know how far apart their feet should be when they are standing. *Continued on next page.*”





**Three New York Army National Guard Soldiers posed for figures that inhabit this exhibit of a Higgins Boat landing craft loading up for the landings in Normandy on D-Day, June 6, 1944. Major Kevin Vilardo served as the model for the photographer in the stern, while 1st Lt. Sam Gerdt modeled the Soldier waiting at the side of the boat. Sgt. 1st Class Nick Archibald (a Legionnaire) served as the model for one of the soldiers climbing down the cargo net. (Photo: National Museum of the United States Army, Duane Lempke)**

**INSET: Nick Archibald, a member of The American Legion, displays the cast made of his face. (Photo courtesy of National Museum of the United States Army)**

*Continued from previous page.*

They know how to carry their equipment,” he said.

Figures based on Vilardo, Gerdt, and Archibald are in an exhibit that depicts soldiers clambering down the side of a ship to land in Normandy on D-Day, June 6, 1944.

The figure modeled by Archibald is climbing down a cargo net slung over the side of a ship into a 36-foot-long landing craft known as

a “Higgins boat.”

The boats took their name from Andrew Higgins, a Louisiana boat-builder who designed the plywood-sided boats, which delivered soldiers directly to the beach.

Vilardo was the model for a combat photographer. His figure is in the back of the boat taking pictures of the action.

Gerdt modeled a soldier standing in the boat gazing toward the beach, thinking

about what is to come.

The landing craft is so big that it, and three other macro artifacts, were positioned in the museum in 2017. The building was then constructed around those artifacts.

Kim, Morrison and Freed modeled figures in an Afghanistan combat tableau. They portray soldiers from the 2nd Cavalry Regiment on patrol in 2014. Each soldier depicts a different

responsibility on a typical combat mission.

The figure based on Morrison is holding an M4 and scanning for the enemy.

Freed modeled a platoon leader talking on the radio.

Kim was the model for a soldier operating a remote control for a MARCbot, which is used to inspect objects that might be improvised explosive devices.

The process of turning a



# Jim Troiola's Campaign for National Commander

"The Department of New York has been honored with Jim Troiola's selection as a candidate for National Commander of this great organization."

That's how Campaign Chair Rene Vanmulem put it in announcing a fundraising effort for the national commander candidate.

A Past National Vice Commander and Past Department Commander, Vincent James "Jim" Troiola is a member of Post 1682 in New York City as well as its SAL Squadron.

Opportunities to be formally introduced at both the Department and National levels have been curtailed by the corona virus pandemic. The current



**PNVC V. James Troiola**

schedule would indicate that 2021.

Jim would make his first formal appearance as a candidate at the Department Convention this summer, followed by the Fall National Executive Committee meeting in Indianapolis in October

"Jim's campaign to become National Commander is both a time consuming and expensive endeavor," noted Rene Vanmulem. "He will most likely be invited to attend most Departments during his candidacy and

will be expected to provide hospitality during four sessions of the National Executive Committee. "

"Every Post, County, District, SAL Squadron and Auxiliary Unit have received a request for financial assistance to assure Jim's success during his campaign. Every donation, regardless of its size, will help him achieve his ultimate goal of becoming our National Commander."

He added: "Team New York, his campaign committee, sincerely thanks you for your consideration."

For more information, please contact Rene Vanmulem via e-mail at [mr41@aol.com](mailto:mr41@aol.com).

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## MUSEUM FIGURES MODELED AFTER SOLDIERS

*continued from previous page*

soldier into a life-size figure started by posing the soldier in the position called for in the tableau and taking lots of photos.

This allows the artists to observe and record how the person looks. Next, a model of the individual's face is made. A special silicone-based material is used for the cast. The model's nostrils are kept clear so the subject can breathe.

The soldiers were told what their character was supposed to be doing and thinking and asked to make the appropriate facial ges-

tures.

The soldiers were recruited for their look and, in some cases, their ethnic background.

The museum needed soldiers who were leaner than the 21st-century norm to portray World War II GIs. Museum officials also wanted Asian American and African American soldiers for the Afghanistan exhibit, which is why Kim and Morrison were approached.

Next, the artists sculpted the sections molded from the soldier into a complete figure and painted precise

details on the face and skin, crafting it to humanistic and historical perfection.

Being a part of the National Museum of the United States Army is an honor, the six soldiers said.

While their names won't be acknowledged on the exhibits, it will be great to know they are part of telling the Army story, they all agreed.

Freed said he was looking forward to visiting the museum. But because of the COVID-19 pandemic, he doesn't anticipate going until the spring or summer.

Admission to the museum is free, but visitors will have to acquire tickets online and attend at specified times to prevent crowding, according to museum officials.

Vilardo, who has a 9-year-old daughter, said she was pretty excited when he showed her photographs of him being turned into an exhibit figure.

"I told her it would be just like 'Night at the Museum,' he said, referring to the Ben Stiller movie about museum exhibits coming to life, "and that we could go visit anytime."



## ERIE COUNTY & 8TH DIST. HONOR TONAWANDA OFFICER

Town of Tonawanda Police Officer Julia Taylor received the Officer of the Year Award from both Erie County American Legion and the 8th District in August. Taylor was nominated for the award by Milton J. Brounshidle American Legion Post 205, for her actions following a stabbing that took place on the evening of May 20, 2019.

While responding to an EMS call about a stabbing, Taylor quickly took action after finding the victim unconscious, lying face down on the ground, and



**Officer Julia Taylor receives Law and Order Award from Erie County Commander Tom O'Connell. Photo by Ted Balbierz.**

bleeding profusely from a puncture wound to his

leg. Using her training and experience, Taylor

repositioned the victim on his back and removed his blood-saturated clothing to find the puncture wound, which was located on his upper leg. She then helped to control the bleeding by inserting her finger into the victim's wound and applying pressure to his femoral artery, until Town of Tonawanda paramedics arrived, and applied a tourniquet.

With the bleeding under control, the victim regained consciousness and was transported to the hospital, where he made a full recovery.

## POST 1123 SPONSORS BLOOD DRIVE AT SING SING

OSSINING -- Despite COVID-19, American Legion Post 1123 in Ossining was able to hold its annual blood drive and help the American Red Cross' urgent need for blood.

Members organized the blood drive Dec. 2 in the Quality of Work Life (QWL) building at Sing Sing Correctional Facility.

"The New York Blood Center technicians preferred the QWL building," the Post reports. "By not entering the prison, the NYBC was able to check everyone in using laptops, and additional equipment was used making this year's blood drive more successful than those in the past."

A total of 35 units of



**A blood donor at Post 1123's blood drive at Sing Sing.**

blood were collected vs. the previous year's 30 units.

The technicians used Alyx (automated red cell donation) technology. A special machine is used to allow you

to safely donate two units of red blood cells during one donation while returning your plasma and platelets to you. Every donor who utilizes this technology counts as two

donations. Forty-three people came to the QWL to donate and 14 were deferred, for a total of 29 donors.

"Excellent job by everyone involved," the post reports.



# ROCKVILLE CENTRE HOLDS LAW & ORDER NIGHT

## POST HONORS FIRST RESPONDERS DESPITE PANDEMIC



*Rockville Centre Post 303 honors Police Officer John Murphy by presenting him with a custom M4 rifle engraved with his name and shield number. Photo by Richard Law.*

Rockville Centre Post 303 didn't let the pandemic stop it from recognizing outstanding police, fire and EMS personnel. With participants wearing face masks, the post held the annual Law and Order Night on Oct. 23.

The awards ceremony is one of the "pinnacle events of the year," the Long Island Herald quoted Law and Order Chairman Paul Casazza. "Our post takes great pleasure in honoring our law enforcement and emergency personnel for their continued dedication

and service to the Rockville Centre community."

The first award went to Police Officer John Murphy, who was given a custom M4 rifle engraved with his name and shield number, donated by Dark Storm Industries. Murphy served in the Marine Corps for eight years, completing two tours of duty in Iraq and two in Afghanistan before joining the PD.

Post Commander Frank Colon presented the fire-matic award to Fire Department Honorary Chief William Ruckdeschel of

Alert Co. No. 2, for his "exceptional service" to the community.

"Bill has served for 48 years, and during that time he's held every company office and served on every committee within his company," Fire Chief Eric Burel said. "He was also captain, lieutenant, chief fire inspector, fire inspector and truck committee chairman."

The EMS award went to ex-Captain Dr. Neil Kirschen, a member of Floodlight Co. No. 1. Since joining the EMS department

in 2003, Kirschen has served as captain and lieutenant of the company, and has been the department medical director. He is a member of the Regional Emergency Medical Services Council and the Regional Emergency Medical Services Advisory Committee. "He is committed to the excellence of Nassau County Emergency Medical services," fellow company member Dave Showerer said, "and led a state-of-the-art system that has and will save many lives," the Long Island Herald reported.



# Valhalla Post Busy Despite COVID Pandemic

## FROM HOSTING FOOD PANTRY TO PRESENTING COLORS AT WREATHS CEREMONY

Valhalla American Legion Post 1038 has remained busy helping veterans and participating in community events despite the COVID pandemic.

Since Nov. 16, Adolph Pfister Post 1038 has hosted the VA Montrose Veterans Food Pantry Extension to provide grocery items to veterans in need. The food is distributed from 9 a.m. to noon on Mondays via a contactless drive-thru at the post.

On Dec. 19 Post and Auxiliary members joined the Wreaths Across America ceremony at Gate of Heaven Cemetery in Hawthorne. The Post Color Guard



*Valhalla Post 1038 Commander is interviewed by SAL Radio Host Ken Kraetzer.*

presented the colors and Auxiliary Unit 1038 read the Honor Roll and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Sons of the American Legion Radio Host Ken Kraetzer interviewed Commander John J. Creskey

and others about the food pantry in a report posted Dec. 28 on YouTube.



*Valhalla Post 1038 members participate in the Wreath Across America ceremony at Gate of Heaven Cemetery.*



# Western NY Veterans Cemetery Dedicated



*Artist's rendering of Western New York National Cemetery. The LA Group Landscape Architecture and Engineering.*

Government and veterans' leaders were on hand Nov. 30 to dedicate the new Western New York National Cemetery in Pembroke. It culminated a decade-long effort by local veterans.

"Today at long last, veterans across Western New York will have a fitting resting place and eternal place of honor right here in the very community they dedicated their lives to defend and serve," U.S. Senator Charles Schumer said. "Dedicating this hallowed ground today answers the call of veterans who organized over a decade ago for a local National Cemetery."

Other state and federal leaders making comments

were Lt. Gov. Kathy Hochul, Rep. Chris Jacobs, Robert Wilkie, secretary for Veterans Affairs, and Randy Reeves, undersecretary for VA Memorial Affairs.

A number of veterans' organizations were represented.

"We are deeply grateful to at long last dedicate the new Western New York National Cemetery and to know that local veterans and their family members will have an eternal home of honor right here in Genesee County," said Jim Neider, OIC of the Joint Veterans Honor Guard of Genesee County and member of the Glenn S. Loomis American Legion Post 332 in Batavia. "And

we are thankful for partners like Senator Schumer who heard our call and stood with us at every turn to see that this day would come. As the home of our Nation's newest National Cemetery we are gratified to host the cemetery and honor the thousands of Western New York veterans for their service and sacrifice to our nation."

A press release from the office of Senator Schumer described the cemetery: "The total 269-acre site on Indian Falls Road in Pembroke is located approximately 30 miles from Buffalo and 48 miles from Rochester. The cemetery will provide a fitting burial

option to approximately 77,100 currently underserved veterans and family members living in Western New York. Veterans with a qualifying discharge, their spouses, and eligible dependent children may be buried in a VA national cemetery. Also eligible are military personnel who die on active duty, their spouses and eligible dependents. Burial benefits available for all eligible Veterans, regardless of whether they are buried in a national cemetery or a private cemetery, include a burial flag, a Presidential Memorial Certificate, and a government headstone or marker."



## 2 Receive PNC Kogutek Scholarships

Bradley Belmondo of Westfield Academy and Central School and Alyssa Wright of Attica High School are the winners of the 8th District's American Legion Past National Commander Michael J. Kogutek Scholarship.

Each received \$1,500, reported Henry Link, Post 434 commander and past Chautauqua County commander.

"The scholarship committee (James Bojanowski, Martin Moot and Timothy Winterhalter) looks for well-rounded individuals in a number of areas; scholastic excellence, school activities, service to the community, while respecting the wishes of PNC Kogutek to help veterans and their families," he said.

Belmondo ranked fourth in his class at Westfield with an average of 96.2%. Bradley's passion is music, both school and community bands and chorus. He was a trumpet player with the 2019 National American Legion Champion Band -- Post 264's Band of the Tonawandas. He plays the national anthem for school sporting and community events, and Taps at funerals.

Bradley was planning to attend Berklee College of Music in Boston, Mass., with a goal of



*Alyssa Wright was presented the scholarship award by Martin Moot (left) and Jim Bojanowski on July 24.*



*Bradley Belmondo received the scholarship award on July 25. From left: Chautauqua County Cmdr. Jim Lemanski, Past District Cmdr. Martin Moot, Bradley Belmondo, Past District Cmdr. Jim Bojanowski, and Past Chautauqua County Cmdr. Henry Link.*

composing and writing music. His father served 12 years with the Marines and was planning to rejoin the American Legion.

Wright ranked 5th out of her class at Attica High School in Wyoming County with an average of 96.2%. Her main pas-

sion is as captain of the school's Youth Court. She has been involved on the county's Youth Court for five years, participated in many school activities and completed 200 hours of community service. Alyssa attended the 2019 Girls State. Her goal is a master's

degree in education, with a focus on biology adolescent education at the State University at Fredonia. Her father served four years in the Army, 21 years in the National Guard and is member of Harder O'Donnell Post 734.



# REMEMBERING PEARL HARBOR



*Rockville Centre Mayor Francis X. Murray and Lynbrook American Legion Post 335 Commander Bill Marinaccio toss a commemorative wreath into the river during Pearl Harbor Day ceremonies organized by Rockville Centre Post 303. Post 303 Commander Frank Colon (below) spoke of the importance of remembering Dec. 7, 1941, when the surprise Japanese attack propelled America into World War II, and said: "The men and women of today's armed forces carry on that tradition of fighting for the freedoms we care so deeply for..." Photos by Rich Law.*





# ABUNDANT GRATITUDE FOR VETERANS

## Despite Scaled-Down Ceremony at Massena Legion

MASSENA – There was no Veterans Day parade and no outdoor ceremony, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but the gratitude was abundant at a scaled-down ceremony at American Legion Post 79.

The appreciation came in the form of stacks of letters from 7th grade students at J.W. Leary Junior High School.

Some were heartfelt, some were funny, the *Watertown Daily Times* reported.

“They’re right from the heart,” the newspaper quoted guest speaker John Lambert of DAV Chapter 171. “They’re right from the



**Guest speaker John Lambert spoke of the heartfelt letters to veterans from students.** Photo by Massena Amvets Auxiliary 4.

kids. They’re right from the people that we stood out there and did our job for, did what we were told as we were told to do it for them.

They can’t do it. Remember Abraham Lincoln said, “Take care of your kids. They’re the next generation.”

English teachers Julie

Pratti and Bernadette Frohm said the students read about the significance of Veterans Day in class, and wrote letters to veterans expressing gratitude for their sacrifice.

“Our current state of affairs, the protective measures implemented across the country to stop the spread of COVID-19 have forced us to think creatively and stay safe while honoring our nation’s heroes,” Lambert noted.

The venue may have been different, but the message resonated -- “Your service and sacrifice have kept this country safe and kept it free,” he said.

### PAST DEPT. COMMANDER CALLED TO POST EVERLASTING

PDC Stanley H. Clark, 85, of Canandaigua, passed away on December 21, 2020. The Korean and Vietnam veteran was 2005-2006 depart-

ment commander. He represented New York on the National Executive Committee from 2013 to 2014.

“Stan was a friend and

mentor to everyone he met,” noted Department Adjutant James W. Casey, “and all of us and The American Legion have lost a true Legionnaire.”



### FIRST PUBLIC EVENT FOR OLEAN POST SINCE COVID STRUCK

OLEAN, NY — Members of Olean American Legion Post 530 conducted their first public event since the start of the pandemic, a Veterans Day ceremony under the shelter at Lincoln Park on Nov. 11, *tapinto.net* reported.

The ceremony’s 11 a.m. start time marked the time of the armistice that ended World War I.

Along with other dignitaries, Post Commander Jim Farmer addressed the approximately three dozen people gathered.

“We only get a limited number of breaths on this Earth,” the news outlet quoted Farmer.

“And when someone uses a few of them to thank me for my service, it really hits home. Whenever anyone thanks me for my

service, I thank them for their support.”

The ceremony concluded with three shots fired in unison by Post 530’s three-man rifle squad, followed by a performance of “Taps” on the trumpet.



# New Faces of the Legion



Photo by Robert Stronach



Photo by Rich Law



Photo by Rich Law

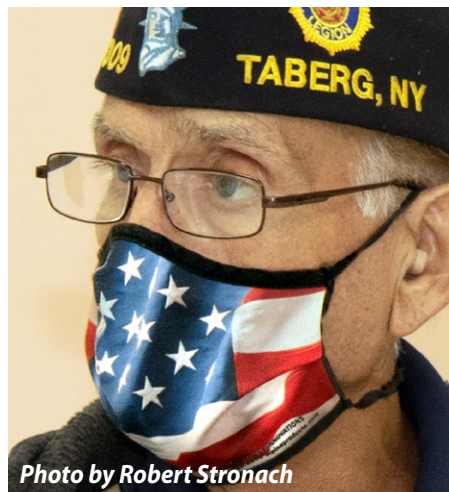


Photo by Robert Stronach

