

KEYSTONE NEWS



A Publication of The Pennsylvania American Legion
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Feb/March/April 2014 Edition



Praise for the Legion in veteran hiring programs



It was praise for private industry and The American Legion on Jan. 28, as members of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs convened to ask, as the hearing's title stated, "What can the Federal Government Learn from the Private Sector's Successful Approach to Hiring Veterans?"

Committee chairman Jeff Miller was away on other business that morning, so the session was chaired by Rep. Phil Roe. The Tennessee Republican opened the hearing with encouraging news. He quoted the Dec. 2013 unemployment rate among military veterans as 5.5 percent.

"This is in sharp contrast to December of 2010 when the unemployment rate for all veterans was 8.3 percent," Roe said. "This equates to a difference of over 369,000 jobs and more veterans finding work."

"While I believe that programs like the new GI Bill and VRAP (Veterans Retraining Assistance Program) have helped position veterans to obtain the skills needed to get a job in today's tough economy, the most significant factor in the drop in the unemployment rate has been that American corporations and most especially small businesses have truly stepped up to the plate and have made it a priority to recruit, hire and retain veterans. These companies and trade associations have made hiring veterans a priority not out of charity but because it is simply a good business decision. They've learned that the soft and hard skills, as well as the incredible work ethic that veterans bring to the table, are a match and make them excellent employees."

After a round similarly upbeat opening remarks by Ranking Member Mike Michaud, D-Maine, and other committee members, Roe called upon a panel of five witnesses to tell their tales of veteran hiring initiatives. The first to speak was retired Army Brig. Gen. Gary Profit, senior director of military programs for retail



giant Walmart. He reiterated the company's highly publicized pledge to offer a job to any "qualified veteran who has been honorably discharged." Profit has appeared repeatedly as a panelist in Veterans Employment & Education Commission-hosted discussions at Legion Washington Conferences and national conventions.

Sean Kelley, a senior staffing director at Microsoft Corporation, spoke of the software company's assertive efforts to leverage the information technology skills veterans bring to the civilian workplace with additional training and job placement.

Maureen Casey, managing director of military and veterans affairs for JPMorgan Chase, then talked of the mammoth financial firm's commitment to the employment of veterans, pointing proudly to the fact that they have exceeded their original veteran hiring goals. The Legion has also worked with JPMorgan Chase on its veteran hiring initiatives.



Jim Amos, a veteran himself – as is Microsoft's Sean Kelley -- spoke on behalf of the International Franchise Association. He encouraged veterans to go into business for themselves through the franchise purchase route. The franchise industry, he said, is generous in offering special incentives and assistance to help veterans get established.

The last witness of the day was Ross Cohen, another party with whom the Legion's Veterans Employment & Education Division staff has worked closely. Cohen is senior director of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's three-year-old "Hiring Our Heroes" program and in his testimony lauded The American Legion for its strong hand in staging over 200 job fairs for veterans nationwide, saying "The American Legion provides invaluable resources in every state." It was the Legion and the Chamber who conducted a two-day National Credentialing and Licensing Summit two years ago. The event gave renewed impetus to the private and public sectors' efforts to hire more veterans.

After the testimonies, Roe thanked the witnesses not only for the content of their statements, but its "good news" nature. "For me, many times I will come to these hearings and leave in a depressed mood," he said. "This has actually elevated my mood -- and in Washington, that's doing something."

Committee members and witnesses agreed that dedicated veteran hiring practices must be pursued to meet the challenges presented by the rapidly increasing number of young veterans entering the civilian workplace as troop draw downs and trimming of the armed forces continue.



COMMANDER'S COLUMN

William A. Cleveland, Department Commander

Let me start out by wishing everyone a Happy New Year and I hope we all had a great Christmas.

The department has completed both Legion Colleges with no major problems, this was my first trip to legion college west and it was different. We have also completed the Christmas tour of the State Veteran Homes & VA Medical Centers, some I have praise for and some not. I believe the tour could be run a little better if possible, it depends on several factors.

Our January DEC is over and it was an interesting one, especially the budget. The Homeless Corporation held its annual dinner which turned out to be very successful. Special people that attended were Governor Corbett, Peter Gaytan from the National American Legion in the Washington DC office, Congressman Keith Rothfus, Gary Devansky the VISN 4 Director, Mrs. Terry Gerigk Wolf the Director of the Pittsburgh VA, along with our legion dignitary. It was a great night.

After the DEC and the Homeless Dinner, I attended a System Worth Saving at the Butler VAMC for 3 days. The only major problem that seems to be there was due to construction. This was definitely a learning experience for me and all that attended. Next stop was the Charlotte Marriott City Center in Charlotte, NC to go over the hotel arrangements for the National Convention. We reviewed everything related to Pennsylvania delegates that will be attending National Convention. I have pros & cons on this, but this is my opinion only.

That covers the major events that have been going on this past quarter along with the weekly minor problems. Now let us get down to business, MEMBERSHIP. As of 1/28/2014 we only had 2 districts at 90 %, 4 districts at 89% and 5 district at 88%, all should make the 2/5/2014 90% target date if not already. That is only 11 districts in our 29, which leaves 18 districts that are in trouble of not making the goal now or possibly not at the end of the year either.

90%

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, MEMBERSHIP IS EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY! LET US PULL TOGETHER AND MAKE IT HAPPEN THIS YEAR AND THE YEAR AFTER THIS ONE AND START THE CLIMB TO TOP. I BELIEVE IN YOU. "LET'S GO!"

On a lighter side, we have our Oratorical & Essay contests coming up, let's all try to be part of this and get involved in all of our legion programs. Please continue supporting my project this year, Operation Comfort Warriors, as well as the other funds.

I Hope all are doing well this New Year, I have about six months left until our state conventions, and I would like to us make our goals. As always God Bless the United State, Our Troops and the American Legion.



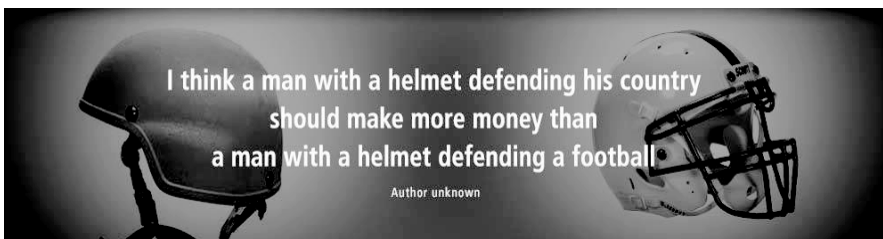
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**FROM THE DESK OF
Kit D. Watson, Department Adjutant**

Legionnaires and Legion family members, our National Commander Dan Dellinger and our Department Commander William Cleveland are traveling across our Commonwealth on the annual National Commanders Tour 17 – 19 of March. The 17th we will be visiting Lancaster American Legion Post 034 for a dinner. The 18th we will be in Middletown Post 594 and on the 19th we will conclude the tour at American Legion Post 474 in Zelenople. This is a great chance to come out and meet our National Commander and hear his important message. The flyers have been sent out to each post. Please plan to attend the dinner when it is in your area. Together we can show our Pennsylvania pride by supporting both the dinner ad book and attend the dinner. We look forward to seeing you there.

Our Department Oratorical Contest finals will be held at the Harrisburg Forum. They will start at 10 a.m. on the 9th day of March. There is one candidate from each section and they will compete that day. The state champion will then represent our department at the National Oratorical finals. These Pennsylvania candidates will be competing for \$16,500.00 in scholarship awards, to be awarded at the conclusion of the department finals. All three of them



will go home a winner. This is one of our most prestigious programs and other than your travel to Harrisburg is totally free of charge. The admission to the Harrisburg Forum and parking is free. I promise you this is an entertaining event that will impress you. If you are able, try and attend and show support for this program!

The Small Games of Chance law has been changed again. Effective January 27, 2014 the House Bills 290 & 1098 have become law. There are some key points that will affect our club and American Legion Post operations. The synopses of these changes have been mailed out to each of our Posts Adjutants. They in turn must pass this information on to the membership of the post and the management of the club quarters responsible persons. A very brief summary of these bills is as follows;

House Bill #290

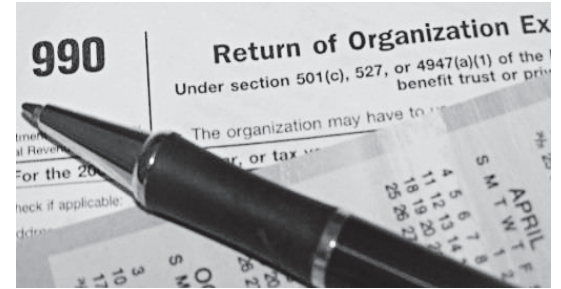
- Expands the definition of “public interest purpose” to include activities conducted by a veterans organization.
- Clarifies that an organization operating solely in the public interest has the ability to donate back to the home post.
- Increases prizes from \$1,000 to \$2,000
- Increases weekly limit from \$25,000 to \$35,000
- Provides that if a club license is affiliated with a veteran’s organization the club license may provide funds from their 60% of small games of chance proceeds to a veterans organization.
- Clarifies that Revenue, not LCE, is required to do biennial random audits of 5% of clubs.

House Bill #1098

- Changes distribution of proceeds for clubs to a 60% for the public interest purposes and 40% for general operating expenses.
- Removes the list of general operating expenses; the 40% can be used by the club for anything except the payment of fines.

These two bills will place the control of 100% of the proceeds under the combined control of the home association (40%) and the American Legion Post (60%). After the 60%, 40% split has been made the 60% is not under the scrutiny of the LCE. The fact is the post may spend these funds on the post or anything they want to improve in the post. It is very important to remember that although

our posts can receive the 60% from small games of chance proceeds they need to still be making the donations to support programs of our organization. The LCE will no longer have the oversight of the 60% but we must remember the IRS is always looking to challenge a non-profits tax exempt status. One caveat of this new law is it should reemphasize the close relationship between the American Legion Post and the post’s Home Association. Again it is important to remember each post and each home association “MUST”



file an IRS form 990. That’s two form 990’s one for the post and one for the home association. Failure to do so can and will result in the loss of the tax exempt status. Also the LCE has informed us: **CLUB LICENSEES & ELIGIBLE ORGANIZATIONS:** Club licensees and eligible organizations will NOT be required to submit electronic annual reports to the department by Feb 1, 2014. Reporting for 2014 will be required by Feb. 1, 2015 for clubs with proceeds of \$20,000 or more, and access to the online reporting system will be available from this site in late 2014.

Before posts go crazy and spend all their proceeds from small games of chance on the post’s wish list, I ask you to consider this, among post improvements one issue needs to be openly and adamantly addressed and that is **membership**. Posts and their home associations must realize our tax exempt status is reliant on keeping our membership strong! Regular members may not frequent your club operations but they are extremely important! As mentioned before, the IRS is always vigilant and we need to maintain a strong veteran membership to enjoy and maintain our tax exempt status. With that in mind posts should all make sure they have an active membership recruiting team. Each post should have goals to sign up all eligible veterans in their respective areas!



Our next Department Executive Committee meeting is April 25-27 at the Grantville Holiday Inn. Saturday the 26th will be our Department Commanders testimonial dinner. The flyers have been mailed to every post adjutant.

Until next time Kit

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THE CHAPLAIN'S DESK

Neal E. Smith, Chaplain

A GIFT TO MYSELF

This past December as the Christmas Season was starting, I began to think about the American Legion Christmas Tour. As a pastor, I thought this was a great idea and I wished that I could participate. However, logistically it was impossible to do the whole tour. I've never seen most of western PA's VA Hospitals and Homes and I would have liked to visit them. The problem I had to consider was that, I have oversight of two church congregations that depend upon my care, my Post had some activities for which I'm involved with, I have my children and grandchildren coming home for the holidays, my wife was depending upon me for the seasons preparations, and there would be expenses involved. I suppose it is fair to say that I am a busy person for someone who is supposed to be retired. However, something inside me kept saying, "Why not give it a try?" So, I gave it a try. It was too late for the western PA part but I could fit in the facilities here in my part of the state.

I began with the tour group at Wilkes-Barre, then Scranton, then Lebanon and two stops in Philadelphia. It took some effort and issues to overcome but as the article title says it was a "gift to myself". Just getting to meet and the fellowship with fellow Legionnaires as we visited our comrade veterans was a pleasure, some of these vets, though our time together was short I will never forget and always think of fondly. But the real joy was meeting and talking with the patients and residents. Each one warmed my heart with their stories, each was unique and special, their smiles were like Christmas carols in my ears. From some came the sense of having made a heartfelt connection between the two of us. From one or two I had the sense that I was the student in the classroom and they were the professors sharing with me new and wonderful information. From all I received a gift, Christmas joy and deep down inner peace. Thank you Vets! You gave to me more than you can possibly know.



Chaplains are the Legion's hands and feet

By National Commander Daniel M. Dellinger - February 1, 2014

If you hang around an American Legion post long enough, you'll hear the tale of the Four Chaplains. It's one of those true and inspiring stories that should be told in every U.S. history class but isn't.

On Feb. 3, 1943, the Army transport ship *Dorchester* was torpedoed by a German U-boat while crossing the icy North Atlantic in a convoy. Of the 902 soldiers, merchant seamen and civilian workers aboard, only 230 were rescued.



The fact that even that many survived is in part because of the level heads and steady hands of Lts. George Fox, Alexander Goode, Clark Poling and John Washington.

As *Dorchester* slid beneath the waves, the four Army chaplains calmed frightened men and led as many as they could to safety. When they ran out of life jackets, they gave away their own. Those swimming in the water and floating in rafts never forgot their last glimpse of the chaplains: all four –

Methodist minister, Jewish rabbi, Reformed Church in America reverend and Roman Catholic priest – were linked arm in arm, praying and singing hymns as they went down with the ship.

In a way, they have achieved immortality. For a nation at war, the chaplains' triumph in the face of tragedy became an enduring example of faith, courage, selflessness and sacrificial love. In 1988, Congress designated Feb. 3 "Four Chaplains Day." But long before that, American Legion posts were commemorating the anniversary of *Dorchester's* sinking with ceremonies and memorial services, usually on the first Sunday in February. We encourage every one of our 14,000 posts to mark Four Chaplains Day in some manner – a short program, a longer service with a wreath-laying or candle-lighting, maybe even a

breakfast or banquet that includes an empty table set for four. However your post chooses to mark Four Chaplains Day, it should be a community event – an interfaith gathering open to all races, religions and creeds. In the words of a prayer offered at many of these services, "May we remain faithful to the spirit of the four chaplains who, having learned to live and serve together, in death were not divided."

These observances are an integral part of the Legion's "Service to God and Country" program, carried out by our chaplains nationwide. Talk of one's religious duty isn't popular nowadays, and recent polls show that Americans' faith in God is declining. But the Legion won't abandon its support for religion's place in the public square. Our nation's founding fathers recognized God as the author of life and liberty. So did the veterans who founded The American Legion in the ashes of the bloodiest war the world had yet seen. Without God, they believed, there is no Americanism. We are nondenominational and nonsectarian, but we are not and never will be hostile to faith. We celebrate it.

Whether offering a prayer for wisdom at a post meeting or visiting an ill comrade in the hospital, Legion chaplains are the hands and feet of our organization. This month, as we honor the legacy of the Four Chaplains, let's acknowledge those among us who strive to meet the spiritual needs of the nation's military, veterans and their families. In a challenging time, they are willing and able to remind us all of our dependence on God, if we'll hear them.

Legion's new app

A new American Legion mobile app offers several reasons to join the nation's largest veterans service organization, along with a direct route to join, renew, donate or find a local post from any smartphone or electronic tablet. The app is now available through iTunes and the Google Play Store.

The American Legion app is the fourth in a series of mobile platforms developed by National Media & Communications Division, which also produced The American Legion Claims Coach app for veterans filing benefits claims, as well as annual apps to promote and provide information about the national convention.

The new app, introduced to market last week, includes the following channels: "About Us"- Our Mission: The Legion's role in advocacy, troop support, youth programs and Americanism is stated in simple terms.

- How We Help: A brief explanation of the ways in which The American Legion fulfills its mission to assist veterans, military personnel, families and communities.

- Member Benefits: A listing of membership benefits, from discounts on hotels and prescription drugs to a one-year subscription to *The American Legion Magazine*.

- Find a Post: Search either by ZIP code or by simply allowing your phone to find your current location. American Legion post addresses, maps and directions are presented, as well as phone numbers and websites.

- Join: The app provides easy access to The American Legion's online membership application platform and the ability join or renew using a credit card.

"Donate"- The app offers easy access to The American Legion Charities mobile giving page and the ability to make fast, secure, tax-deductible donations.

"Follow Us"- There is no faster, easier way to access American Legion Facebook and Twitter pages than through the new app. Under "Follow Us," you can keep up with the latest news and information and jump into the social media conversation.

"Images"- A variety of photos and videos housed on the organization's YouTube channel flow into the app.

"Renew"- Anyone with a current membership number can easily renew with a credit or debit card.

"Contact Us"- All three American Legion National Headquarters locations – Indianapolis, the Geiger Operations Center and 1608 K Street in Washington – are listed and mapped with contact phone numbers and website links.



Legion hoped for more from Obama's address

In his State of the Union address, the president pledged to help America's military community in several important ways; yet he remained mute on the military COLA cuts.

President Barack Obama, in his fifth State of the Union address on Jan. 29,



pledged to cut further the disability claims backlog, improve access to health care at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Defense (DoD) -- especially mental health care -- and continue to help veterans get jobs.

"The American Legion certainly appreciates President's Obama great concern for our military families," said Daniel M. Dellinger, the Legion's national commander. "We know he wants to do right by our men and women who have worn the uniform and defended America. The Legion will do everything it can to support his efforts to reduce the claims backlog, strengthen medical services at VA and DoD, and get more of our veterans back into the civilian workforce."

The president pledged to "keep slashing that backlog so our veterans receive the benefits they've earned," and ensure that "our wounded warriors receive the health care -- including the mental-health care -- that they need."

Mental-health care is an abiding concern of the Legion, which established a committee to study alternative treatments for traumatic brain injury (TBI) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Last September, the committee issued a report on its findings, "The War Within," which recommends that VA and DoD adopt several effective treatments that are currently not used in any standardized way.

The Legion has shared its TBI/PTSD report with the White House, members of Congress, and VA's senior leadership.

Additionally, The American Legion has been playing a key role in reducing the claims backlog, promoting VA's Fully Developed Claims initiative among its service officers at VA regional offices nationwide. This program enables claims to move through the VA system much faster, because they are more fully documented up-front than traditional claims.

Obama also addressed veterans unemployment, saying "We'll keep working to help all our veterans translate their skills and leadership into jobs here at home." The American Legion has been doing its part by co-sponsoring, with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, more than 200 career fairs per year for veterans nationwide (known as the "Hiring Our Heroes" program).

In addition to co-sponsoring career fairs, The American Legion has been working with DoD and the Department of Transportation to make private-sector licensing and credentialing easier for veterans. It has helped 35 state legislatures to pass credentialing laws that assist transitioning veterans with employment, and helped with the passage of 49 specific state credentialing laws for commercial drivers' licenses, that provide waivers and recognize military training in transportation.

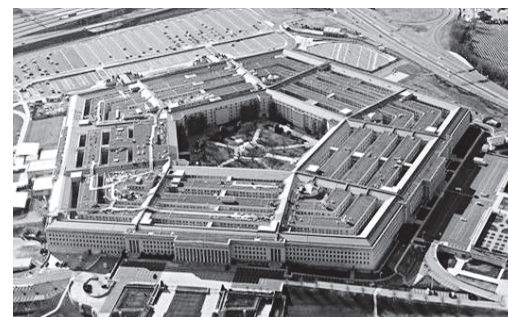
The Legion helped to write parts of the Troop Talent Act, provisions of which were included in the passage of the National Defense Authorization Act.

Yet the president failed to mention the looming cuts to pensions for military retirees 62 and younger: their benefits will be reduced by one percent per year for a full decade. The American Legion has protested those cuts since they were announced, and continues to urge Congress to repeal them.

"The American Legion is disappointed that President Obama did not show more leadership in dealing with the COLA issue," Dellinger said. "He promised us, back in August 2011 at our national convention, that he would not balance the federal budget on the backs of America's veterans. But that is exactly what he is allowing Congress to do."

Obama said the mission in Afghanistan will be completed by the end of 2014, "and America's longest war will finally be over." When he took office, 180,000 Americans were serving in Iraq and Afghanistan; since then, U.S. troops have left Iraq and about 35,000 remain in Afghanistan.

Dellinger said that, despite the troops draw-down, "our military's operational tempo is increasing while its strength is decreasing, because of force reductions being made as a result of sequestration. Although Congress has recently provided \$31 billion in military funding relief over the next two years, military readiness, research and development, and compensation continue to be eroded. Sequestration is not good for national security."



Annual Ride Benefitting Operation Comfort Warriors

The PA American Legion Riders are promoting their OCW ride that will cover 900 miles in 4 days. The dates set for the ride are May 15th through the 18th. You even have the opportunity to spend the night in a real caboose at the Caboose Motel in Titusville.

Mark your calendars and save the dates! The Pa American Legion Riders Annual Benefit Ride is scheduled with overnights in Levittown, Brownsville and Titusville. This year's ride provides an opportunity to explore Pennsylvania with fellow Legion Riders and contribute to The American Legion's Operation Comfort Warriors. For those unable to ride the 4 full days, the ride will be coming back through Harrisburg on May 16th to pick up additional riders.

You must make your own hotel reservations. May 15th Holiday Inn Levittown (Langhorne) 215-757-4500. May 16th Holiday Inn Uniontown 274-437-2816. May 17th Caboose Motel 814-827-5730 (2nd Hotel to be announced at a later date if needed.)

Highlights of the event are: May 15th: HQ to Levittown Post 960; May 16th: Levittown to Brownsville Post 940 (via Hbg) Lunch at New Cumberland Post 143; May 17th: Brownsville to Titusville Post 368. Lunch at Butler Post 117; May 18th: Titusville to HQ.

Registration will be at HQ at start of the ride. \$20 per Rider and \$10 per Passenger. If you have any questions or to insure you receive updates, hotel and registration information, please send an email to Charles Oakley at char11951@verion.net or Paul Owens at ucatchme1@gmail.com. Like us on facebook at American Legion Riders Pennsylvania to see what's happening around the Commonwealth.



JUNIOR SHOOTING SPORTS PROGRAM

John Hibner, Chairman

The National Americanism Commission developed the American Legion Junior Shooting Sports Program as a marksmanship program for youth that provides the basic elements of safety, education, enjoyment and competition. Firearm safety is the focal point of the American Legion Junior Shooting Sports Program. Our organized training and shooting competitions see virtually no accidents or inappropriate use of firearms.

Junior Shooting Sports activity has continued to increase in Pennsylvania as an inexpensive addition to the American Legion's Children and Youth Programs. Currently, thirty-nine teams are registered in the JSSP through local posts.

Recognition for sponsoring one or more youth teams go to Posts: 17, 32, 72, 89, 92, 100, 104, 109, 148, 159, 173, 175, 188, 192, 194, 223, 245, 281, 309, 341, 368, 397, 440, 446, 459, 460, 467, 470, 472, 520, 530, 602, 605, 779, 807, 880, 966, 996, and 1001.



An increasing number of youth sponsored by Pennsylvania Posts fired in the National American Legion 3-Position Air Rifle Tournament. Early this year, well over one thousand youth competed from across the United States in the qualifier of both Sporter and Precision Air Rifle postal competition. The youth were then further qualified, based on these scores, to a second round in both team

and individual standings. The Pennsylvania contingent again produced three of the top fifteen ranked individuals as best in the country in this year's 23rd annual Precision 3-Position Air Rifle Championships. Individual champions will be named after the finals that will be held at the Colorado Springs, USA Olympic Shooting Complex on August 6th thru 11th, 2013. A Pennsylvania State Air Rifle Championship was held on May 4th and 5th in Harrisburg for both the sporter class and precision rifles, which was won by North Harrisburg's own Post 1001 Capital Area Sharpshooters.

It should be noted that in the last twelve years Pennsylvania Posts have produced eight of the last twelve National Team Champions: DuBois, Post 17 (2005, 2006, and 2007); Palmyra, Post 72 (2002, 2003, 2011, 2012) and Longhorne, Post 440 (2001). Pennsylvania Posts also supplied two National Individual Champions in Thomas Santelli and Michael Kulbacki during this same twelve year period.

The 2013 State Police Youth Week, which benefited greatly from a grant from the National Rifle Association Foundation, enabling those cadets to receive the NRA Basic Rifle Handbook Training and related gun safety training using the WWII-vintage M1 Carbine. The Departments Junior Shooting Sports Program also carries out a live fire marksmanship training exercise at SPYW. This live rifle range training is conducted by American Legion members and volunteers who are certified by the NRA as Rifle Instructors and Range Safety Officers.

We look forward to another outstanding year as Pennsylvania again leads the way in National Junior Shooting Sports for the American Legion providing all of the elements of safety, education, training, enjoyment and competition to our Pennsylvania youth.

Pennsylvania American Legion Junior Shooting Sports State 3-Position Air Rifle Championships will be May 3rd & 4th, 2014 at the Harrisburg Hunters and Anglers Club, 6611 Hunters Run Rd., Harrisburg, PA 17111. The cost is \$40 a 4

person team or \$10 an individual shooter. Registration with payment is due from March 15th to April 15th payable PA American Legion Junior Shooting Sports. Medals will be awarded for Precision, Sporter Teams and Individuals. For more information contact John Hibner, Chairman PA American Legion Junior Shooting Sports, by mail at 1201 San Spur Road, DuBois, PA 15801 or phone (814) 590-1567 or email jkhilner@comcast.net.

Donating to the community

Recently, Wesleyville American Legion Carl Neff Post 571 presented checks totaling \$21,000.00 plus to various charitable organizations in the Erie area. The Carl Neff Post 571 has donated \$103,000 to charitable, educational and non-profit organizations during 2013. A few of those receiving donations for the Christmas season are pictured seated left to right. Post Officers are pictured standing.

Les Fetterman, Gannon Security Police	\$1628
Bruce Rugala, Wesleyville Food Pantry	\$3000
Karen Seggi, Second Harvest Food Bank	\$5000
Peggy Koenig, Co-Director, St. James Food Bank	\$3000
Karen Tuminello, Erie Homes for Children and Adults	\$2500
Rita Scrimenti, Emmaus Ministries	\$3000
Andrew Kerr, Erie City Mission	\$3000



Front Row Seated Left to Right Les Fetterman-Gannon Police, Bruce Rugala-Wesleyville Food Pantry, Karen Seggi-Second Harvest Food Band of NWPA, Peggy Koenig, Heddy Hellmann – Co-Directors St. James Food Pantry, Karen Tuminello – Erie Homes for Children & Adults, Rita Scrimenti-Emmaus Ministries, Andrew Kerr – Erie City Mission.

Back Row Standing Left to Right Ray Olson – Director, Richard T. Nowak – Commander Post 571, Ron Palmer – Judge Advocate, W.J. Sandy Sandell – Senior Vice Commander, Mike Abt – Finance Officer.

Iaia American Legion reaches out for membership

The Iaia American Legion is asking the veterans of Altoona to join the American Legion. The Iaia Post is the only American Legion in Altoona.

"Ten years ago, we almost lost the Veterans Administration. As the spokesman for the Iaia Post, we saved the V.A and all the jobs that went with it. Without members, we could lose the V.A and benefits as well," said Victor J. Raia, Past State Commander. "The Iaia Post has lost over 300 members in the past three years, through deaths and members not rejoining. We can't afford to lose members; if we do, we may have to lose our post," he said.

The annual dues per member are \$25, of which the post receives \$3. They asked prospective members of the community to write and join the American Legion through Victor J. Raia, 524 S. Terrace Drive, Altoona, PA 16602.

RENEW NOW!

**GHS senior Mercer Martin participates in statewide, national programs
By Mercer Martin
Greenville High School**

The American Legion Boys State program is a week-long leadership development program designed for rising high school seniors held every summer throughout the United States.

The program simulates the functions of government, business, civics and entrepreneurship at the local and state levels to give students a taste for American economic and political systems.

To attend the program applicants are required to apply for sponsorship through their local American Legion posts, making the program essentially free of charge to students in attendance.

The past summer, the Pennsylvania Boys State program was hosted by Shippensburg University with a total of 200 young men in attendance, including myself.

Participants were divided into seven cities – named for historical figures in the American Legion – each of which was modeled after existing Pennsylvania cities. The city is the primary functioning unit of the Boys State program, in that the

premise for much of the week is a friendly competition between cities for the title of “Honor City.” Each city chooses numerous leaders, including a mayor, to fulfill the variety of financial duties required of them. Outside of city functions, each Boys State citizen is assigned to one of two mock political parties with which they must create and defend a platform. Through these parties, citizens have opportunity to run for election to the Boys State Senate, House of Representatives or the highly coveted Gubernatorial Office, a position reserved for the Boys State citizen



who displays the highest levels of political prowess in all capacities, evidenced by a debate showcasing each party’s official nominee.

Aside from regular activities, 2013 Pennsylvania Boys State attendees had the distinct honor of touring the Pennsylvania Capital Building in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania and were treated to a personal visit by Pennsylvania’s governor and lieutenant governor.

To further the Boys State experience, the American Legion offers an extremely select number of Boys State alumni the opportunity to participate in the Boys Nation program; yet another government simulation adjusted to imitate the functions of the US Congressional government.

Each Boys State selects two delegates to act as Senators in the Boys Nation Senate, requiring of each senator a bill to be presented in session.

This summer, the Boys Nation Senate was hosted by Marymount College in Arlington, VA., just outside of Washington, D.C.

Multiple Senate sessions were held each day.

Actions taken during these sessions included dividing the Senate into various committees, holding elections for Senate officers such as a President Pro Tempore and debating on Bills created by Boys Nation Legislators.

Just as in the Boys State program, Boys Nation Senators are divided into parties whose main functions are to ensure the election of their candidates nominated to the office of Boys Nation president and vice-president.

To provide for the success of these candidates, party functions include the creation of a party platform and a slew of campaign preparation.

After a president and vice-president are elected, any bills passed by the Boys Nation Senate become law upon signage by the president.

Outside of regular congressional operations, Boys Nation Senators were provided with opportunities to tour Washington D.C. monuments, attend a

banquet with the American Legion National Staff, lay a wreath at the Tomb of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery, attend Congressional sessions on Capital Hill, meet United States governmental figures in person, hear a speech from a Holocaust survivor, receive a webcast from former President Bill Clinton and tour the White House, being further honored by a

personal visit from President Barach Obama himself.

As a participant in the Pennsylvania Boys State program, I was given the honor of election to the office of governor a week of intense political jockeying and many late nights.

At the same ceremony which the winner of the governor’s race

was announced, I was also beyond honored to be selected as one of two delegates to the American Legion Boys Nation Senate.

Each of these experiences were truly life-changing and especially profound for me personally because I learned so much about myself, and more importantly, culture as a whole in our state and nation.

Mercer Martin is currently a senior at Greenville High School (GHS). In addition to the participation at the American Legion Keystone Boys State program, Martin’s activities include Greenville High School Marching Band (drum major); GHS Steel Drum Band (lead pan); GHS Choir (bass II) District 5 Honors Choir; Regional Band; GHS Thespians; GHS varsity cross country; GHS Forensics Team (vice-president); a cadet captain with the Civil Air Patrol; and he is a member of Grace Chapel Community Church in Sharon. Upon graduating high school, Martin intends to pursue a military career.

Pictured to the left: During a recent meeting at the Greenville American Legion, Lt. Col. Larry Scheetz, director of veterans affairs for Mercer County, presented Mercer Martin a plaque for his participation in the Keystone Boys State program, as sponsored by the Greenville American Legion. Martin is planning to pursue an education at the military academy. He is a member of the Mercer County Civil Air Patrol, drum major a of the Greenville High School Marching Band and is involved in a number of school and community activities.

The Keystone Boys State program will be held June 22 – June 28, 2014 at Shippensburg University. High school students who have completed their junior year and residing in Pennsylvania are eligible. The cost is free to student citizens as long as The American Legion Post pays tuition - \$175.00 per student. KBS is non-partisan and non-military. Parliamentary procedure (“Robert’s Rules of Order”) and Sean Covey’s “Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens” are used throughout.

For the application please visit www.pa-legion.com.

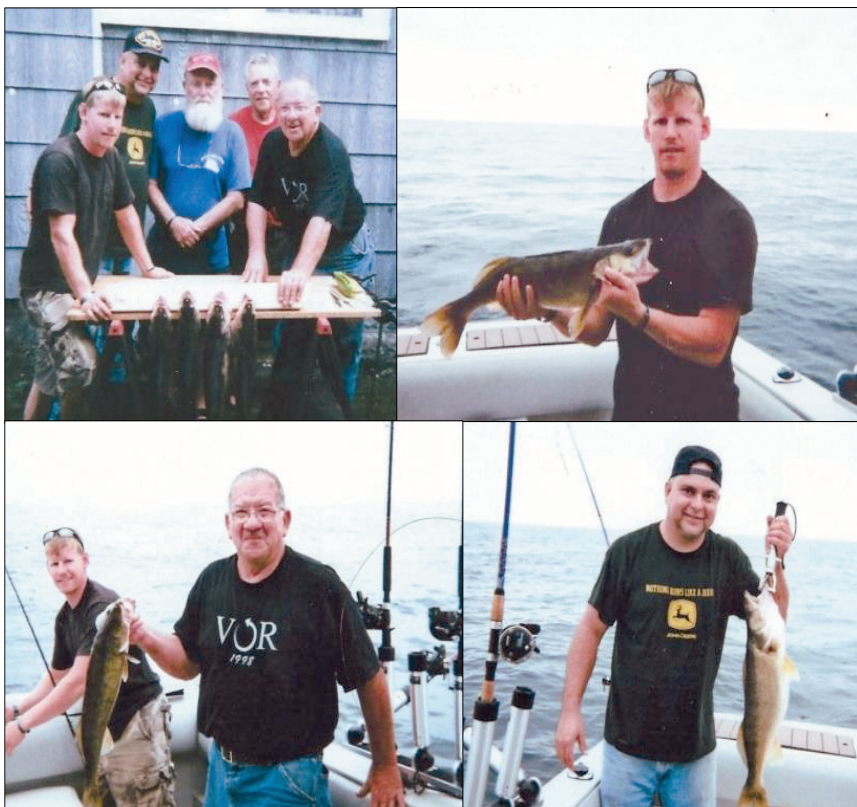
The week that shapes a lifetime.

State Police Youth Week

Another exceptional week long program the PA American Legion offers is State Police Youth Week. We sponsor this program alongside the Pennsylvania State Police. This program will run June 8 – 14, 2014 at York College of Pennsylvania. SPYW was established to increase understanding among the state’s youth and its law enforcement. The objective is to give the cadets the chance to see and experience firsthand many areas of law enforcement, which includes leadership, discipline, and self-esteem.

This is a six day camp used to introduce students interested in going into law enforcement or a branch of the armed forces. Cadets march in platoon formation and participate in a drill competition. The program includes physical training, forensics, canine, crime codes, SERT team, rock climbing, drug laws, radar, marksman course, and familiarity with weapons. You should be physically fit, in good health, and have a good academic record to be able to participate. Any student who is between the ages of 15-17 prior to entering the camp on June 9th is eligible to participate. The fee is \$150 includes meals and lodging. The fee is paid by a sponsoring American Legion Post or Unit and is non-refundable.

A day of Fun for Deserving Veterans



On August 31st, 2013, four veterans drove to Lake Erie for a well-deserved fishing trip. They left all the stress and problems of everyday living on the shore. They boarded the fishing charter boat of Captain Wayne Fleming and began their day of fishing and fellowship, remembering both war and fish stories. This project was the idea of the Charleroi Legion Riders Chapter 12. Immediately, Charleroi Post 22, American Legion Auxiliary Unit 22 and Squadron 22 of Charleroi offered their assistance. The Post and Squadron paid for the gas for the trip and the Auxiliary supplied the lunch for the day. The Riders covered the cost of all the licenses and the charter costs.

John Cooper is Desert Storm US Navy man, Chris Neiswonger served in both Iraq and Afghanistan with the US Army, Herbert L J Springer served with the USMC (7), US Army (12), USAF (7) in Korea. Kenneth Buyanowski served in the US Army in Vietnam.

Riders President William Brounce wants it to be an annual project.

The goal of this project was to provide an alternate means of therapy for veterans. Give them a stress free environment to interact with others who have had combat experience to increase moral and form a kinship. Fishing is the most relaxing sport and is a very good way to build a person's confidence and morale.

Top left picture Left to Right: Chris Neiswonger, John cooper, Herb Springer, Captain Wayne Fleming, Ken Bujanowski.

Top right picture: Chris Neiswonger.

Bottom left picture: Ken Bujanowski

Bottom right picture: John Cooper

This is the Legion Family working as a TEAM. It proves that TEAM actually means Together Everyone Accomplishes More.

DEC Reservations and Department Commander's dinner

It's that time to make your reservations for the April 25-27, 2014 DEC Meeting at the Holiday Inn in Grantville, PA. Contact Debbie Watson at Headquarters to make your reservations before March 7, 2014.

This weekend is also the weekend for Department Commander William Cleveland's Testimonial Dinner on Saturday, April 26th. Deadline for the dinner tickets is March 15, 2014. You can also buy an ad for the booklet. For more information check department's website.

Christmas tour

Members of the Department of Pennsylvania American Legion and American Legion Auxiliary family had a week of touring throughout Pennsylvania, visiting 15 Veterans Homes and hospitals and giving Christmas greetings, Christmas cards and monetary gifts to 3600 veterans.



Pictured are some who helped give Christmas greetings, singing and "Thanking Veterans for serving our country!" at the Hollidaysburg Veterans Home and the Altoona Veterans Medical Center. Front row-William Cleveland, 2014 Department of Pennsylvania American Legion Commander; Shirley Peck, Commander of the Lock Haven American Legion Post # 131; Kit Watson, Department of Pennsylvania Adjutant; George Flasiński, Commander of the Sons of The American Legion of the Pennsylvania Detachment.

Back row: Delilah Heverly, Junior member of the American Legion Auxiliary (ALA) Unit # 131 of Lock Haven; Wayne Walker, Asst. Sgt. @Arms for the Department of Pennsylvania American Legion and POW/MIA State Chairman and a member of American Legion Post # 36 of Jersey Shore; Dori Schenck, President of ALA Unit # 131 of Lock Haven; Ruth Bowmaster, Sgt. @Arms of ALA Unit # 131 of Lock Haven; Jon Hosfeld, State President of the American Legion Riders; Carol Wert Walker, Department of Pennsylvania ALA Historian and treasurer of ALA Unit # 131 of Lock Haven; Althea Watkins, 1st Vice President of ALA Unit # 131 of Lock Haven; BJ Lysic (aka Mrs. Santa Claus) and National Executive Committee woman and ALA Deputy at Hollidaysburg Veterans Home; Uncle Sammy Claus (aka Jim Hales, Past State Department Commander and a past National Eastern Vice Commander); and Joe Shyrock, Hollidaysburg Veterans Home Chairman.

WWII veteran addresses crowd of 300

Henry Steiger, 90 year old WWII Veteran, Past Commander of American Legion Post 517, Mercersburg, addresses a crowd of over 300 at 11:00 A.M. on Veterans Day, Nov 11, 2013, at formal dedication ceremonies of the Mercersburg Area Veterans Memorial.



Veterans Day 2013 was a special day for The Harry Lackhove American Legion Post 517 of Mercersburg. After over five years of hard work in raising funds, Dale Thatcher past post commander (2009-2012) chaired the committee to design, construct, and fund a Veterans Memorial. The memorial features a bronze statue of a generic member of the military. The base reads "In honor of all men and women of this community who served our country in the armed forces to defend America's freedom. Memorial dedicated by American Legion Post 517, Mercersburg, PA, November 11, 2013." Thatcher actually designed the memorial which is now situated at the North End Branch of The First National Bank of Mercersburg and only a hundred feet from the entrance to the Mercersburg Legion. Keynote speaker, Henry Steiger, served on the committee as well as being a former mayor of Mercersburg. A reception was held at the post home following the formal dedication. Deputy Adjutant General for the State of Pennsylvania, BGen George M. Schwartz, provided remarks to some 200 attending the reception. It was a proud day for American Legion Post 517 and the community. All are encouraged to stop by and preview the Memorial located on Keefer Drive, Mercersburg,

Giving

At the November American Legion post #354 Walter W. Craig meeting two checks were presented. Commander Sid Emhoff presented a check to Gwen College representing the Helping Hands ministry of the Redbank Valley. Adjutant Ted Minich presented a second check to Todd Bish representing Youth Football for the Redbank Valley. Gwen College told the legion members how the Helping Hands benefits residents of the area in need. Mr. Bish informed us of the football leagues need to constantly update their equipment to meet new safety standards.



Veterans Parade

On January 30th a Donation of \$10,000.00 was made to help insure the continuation of the Annual 4th of July Veterans Parade. Lewisburg's American Legion Commander Richard Chalmers presents a check to the new Parade Committee President, Sergeant Major Kevin Bittenbender. Assisting was the outgoing President Graham C. Showalter, who served on the Committee for 19 years.



Corporate jobs initiative meets 100,000 vet hiring goal

A coalition of companies that vowed in 2011 to hire 100,000 veterans within a decade has made its goal seven years early, announcing today that 117,439 former service members have since been provided jobs.

The group, calling itself the 100,000 Jobs Mission, has now promised to double its target to 200,000 veterans job by 2020, according to the announcement.

"We have been able to make a difference in the lives of so many of our nation's veterans, and those veterans bring tremendous skills and experience to the workplace," says Maureen Casey, director of military and veterans affairs at JPMorgan Chase, one of initial 11 companies to form the coalition. It has since grown to 131 companies.

Veterans particularly of the Iraq- and Afghanistan-war eras struggle to find work. While unemployment rates among all veterans have been tracking lower than the overall jobless percentage, younger veterans have remained mainly about 10% unemployment.

In addition to being part of the jobs initiative, JPMorgan says it will invest \$1 million in higher education efforts for veterans, including grants to Florida State College at Jacksonville, University of South Florida, The University of Texas at Arlington and San Diego State University.

Vets get online system to report GI Bill problems

Veterans' organizations are lauding a new, online system to quickly let the government know when veterans or their family members encounter problems with their education benefits, including predatory student loan programs, questionable school academic credentials and misleading ads.

Since the creation of the Post-9/11 GI Bill in 2008 there have been a growing number of incidents of schools targeting vets for the guaranteed tuition payments they represent while offering the veteran or family member little support and useless or impractical degrees or certificates, veterans groups and Congress have found.

The new centralized reporting system, which brings into play the Department of Veterans Affairs and Defense Department, as well as the Justice and Education departments, Federal Trade Commission and Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, will be "a game-changer for student veterans," according to the head of the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

VFW National Commander William A. Thien said student vets, or eligible family members and dependents, going to school on the GI Bill "didn't [previously] have a standardized secure system for reporting alleged abuses."

The VFW, along with **The American Legion** and other veterans groups have been calling for several years for greater transparency regarding schools' recruiting and accepting veterans.

[Learn more at our GI Bill Center](#)

For-profit schools have been specifically eyed by veterans' groups and lawmakers. During a Senate hearing in 2013, an Iraq War vet who went to work for a for-profit school said officials considered tuition assistance for servicemembers "the military gravy train."

Steve Gonzalez, assistant director of The American Legion's Veterans Employment and Education Division, said the online reporting system "will now give the [agencies] responsible for its creation the tools needed to identify and address unfair, deceptive, and misleading practices performed by institutions of higher learning."

Allison A. Hickey, under secretary for benefits at the VA, said the feedback the VA will get from veterans, service members and their families will enable it to strengthen enforcement of the "Principles of Excellence" it requires for schools serving veterans.

These principles include providing students with a personalized form detailing the complete costs of the education program, as well as educational plans for all veteran and military education beneficiaries, designating a point of contact to aid with academic and financial advice, ensuring accreditation of all new programs before enrolling students and having in place refund policies that are in line with federal laws governing federal student financial aid programs.

In cases where the student is still on active duty or has a reserve commitment, the school is required to accommodate the servicemember.

In its announcement Thursday, the VA said students can submit a complaint when they believe their school is falling short in any of these areas.

"When feedback is received, agencies will contact the school on behalf of the student and work toward a resolution," according to the statement. "Complaints and their resolution will be forwarded to the Federal Trade Commission Consumer Sentinel Network, accessible by over 650 federal, state and local law enforcement agencies for use in enhancing and coordinating law enforcement investigations."

Wayne Robinson, president and chief executive officer for Student Veterans of America, said it's important that the government ensure veterans "receive a positive educational experience and that we hold higher education institutions to the same high bar we hold our nation's servicemembers."

"This online complaint system is designed to do just that. It empowers student veterans and gives the 'Principles of Excellence' a significant backbone on which to rest," he said.





SYSTEM WORTH SAVING

VA PITTSBURGH HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

(UNIVERSITY DRIVE CAMPUS)

PITTSBURGH, PA

Date: November 5-6, 2013

National Task Force Member: Chairman, Ralph P. Bozella

Deputy Director of Healthcare: Jacob B. Gadd

National Senior Field Service Representative: Edward G. Lilley

Overview

The University Drive campus of VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System (VAPHS) is located in Oakland, adjacent to the University of Pittsburgh's Petersen Events Center, and was built in 1954. With 146 beds, University Drive provides medical, neurological and surgical care, in addition to receiving the most outpatient visits of all VAPHS facilities.

University Drive's surgical program is always on the forefront of the latest advances in surgical techniques. For example, it was first in the country to perform open-heart surgery on a patient who was awake and talking (2000); first in VA to have radio frequency cardioblation for atrial fibrillation with Medtronic cardioblate RF ablation surgical handpiece (2001); and the first in the state to have cardiac mapping/ablation, a procedure performed using Hansen Sensei Robotic System (2008). University Drive also is home to national, independent liver and renal transplant centers, along with a regional cardiac surgery center and an oncology referral center. The University Drive's Women Veterans Health and Renal Dialysis programs have earned recognition as National Centers of Clinical Excellence. For the future veterans, VAPHS will continue to leverage technology through utilization of Telehealth, MyHealtheVet and other interactive care modalities. VAPHS will offer veterans expanded choices regarding the health care they receive and remain a competitive force in the community health-care market by offering the same, if not enhanced, treatment alternatives.

Legionella

In April 2013, VAPHS was investigated by the VA Office of Inspector General (OIG) in order to evaluate whether VAPHS was adequately maintaining its system for preventing Legionnaires' Disease (LD). VAPHS has a long history of comprehensive mitigation efforts for LD. Following the recent outbreak, VAPHS instituted numerous additional measures. However, OIG found that while employing copper-silver ionization systems during 2011-12, VAPHS allowed ion levels inadequate for Legionella control to persist. There was a lack of documentation of system monitoring for substantial periods of time and inconsistent communication and coordination between the Infection Prevention Team and Facility Management Service staff. After conducting a Root Cause Analysis (RCA) on Legionella, the report found that not everyone understood their roles and responsibilities with Legionella, which led to the establishment of a Water Safety Committee in January 2013. The Water Safety Committee provides oversight on all issues related to the ongoing mitigation of Legionella in the water distribution system. The committee meets twice a month and reviews ongoing remediation efforts, assures policy adherence, testing schedule adherence and records maintenance, with the goal of assuring that VAPHS water supply is safe for the consumer. While VAPHS now claims it is the "safest medical center in the country" when it comes to testing for Legionella, the System Worth Saving Task Force discussed the medical center's challenges with transparency and public relations, and recommended that the medical center make better use of getting the word out to veterans service organizations and communicate its aggressive approach taken to test the water.

Facility Challenges & Recommendations

Challenge 1:

VAPHS needs better communication with The Department of Veterans Affairs Central Office (VACO), as well as the local veterans' service organizations (VSO) in an effort to increase transparency and to let the veterans know of the progress made to prevent future Legionella outbreaks.

Recommendations:

The American Legion recommends significant improvement with communication at VA Central Office with local VA medical center responses to crises, such as the closure of Ft. Wayne's inpatient programs and the communication crisis with Legionella Disease at Pittsburgh. According to VAPHS, and in anonymous discussions with VA Central Office staff afterwards, VAPHS facility staff had a press release and response to the crisis prepared, but VA Central Office's review process takes several weeks to a month, and the release was never approved by VA Central Office leadership. VA Central Office should examine its communication structure and policies to look at opportunities to reduce time in responding to crises, along with delegation of authority, responsibility and accountability to local VA facility leadership to more effectively and efficiently respond during a crisis. The American Legion also recommends significant improvement with VA's communication locally with veteran service organizations. First, VAPHS should establish monthly VSO meetings to share information regarding new initiatives and concerns to veterans in the community so VSOs can distribute to their members in the hospital's catchment area. Second, the facility should mail a letter to all enrolled veterans explaining when the hospital knew of dangerous levels of Legionella, what Legionella is, what actions the facility has taken to make the hospital safer for current and future veterans, and a hotline to answer questions or concerns. Third, the facility should routinely conduct town hall meetings to share information with the community, especially during times of crisis, to let veterans know what improvements are being taken and to restore confidence of veterans in the area.

Challenge 2:

The lack of a director in the Emergency Department has caused several mismanagement issues, as well as a lack of communication between the Emergency Department and other departments in the medical center.

Recommendation:

The American Legion recommends that VAPHS immediately hire for this critical position.

Challenge 3:

VAPHS is currently understaffed with plumbers, engineers, medical support assistants and housekeepers.

Recommendation:

In an effort to assist the medical center in areas that it is understaffed and improving veteran hiring at the facility, The American Legion recommended that the medical center install kiosks that will allow veterans to apply for positions within the medical center and, during VA outreach activities with The American Legion, invite VAPHS Human Resources to recruit veterans for jobs.

Challenge 4:

VAPHS continues to struggle with the time lag offered with the Survey of Healthcare Experiences of Patients (SHEP) program.

Recommendation:

To conquer the time lag offered with the SHEP Program, The American Legion recommended that VAPHS implement the use of Truth Point, Press Ganey or another short-term patient satisfaction measure, which will help support health-care providers in understanding and improving the entire patient experience. The VISN director, Gary Devansky, stated that he would review the request and see what assistance he can provide.

To see the entire report on the Pittsburgh VAMC visit the National website at http://www.legion.org/sites/legion.org/files/legion/publications/2013_sws_report1_pittsburgh_1.pdf

Legislative Committee

Bryce Nothstein, Chairman

In November, Governor Corbett signed an update to the PA Small Games of Chance laws (HB1098 & HB290). This update brings much needed relief to many American Legion Posts across the state. The resulting changes become effective in late January, shortly after our DEC meetings conclude. All Posts must still comply with the laws of 2013 and ensure that any undistributed funds from the 70% proceeds earned in 2013 are distributed appropriately.

The Department of Revenue also recently delayed the online filing requirement until next year (Feb. 1, 2015). While no online filing is required for 2013, all Posts are still required to have Complete & Factual record keeping on site, in the event the Post is audited.

The American Legion and other prominent veteran groups in the state were able to successfully open our legislators eyes to the many great things the veteran groups do for the community. So much so, that Veterans Groups have been re-classified as Public Interest groups in the latest SGOC update. This removes all doubt whether donations to our Legion programs qualify as Public Interest.

There are many positive changes to the SGOC update and Department is busy working to develop a bullet list of the changes to help encapsulate the changes and make them easier to understand. Some of the highlights are: 1) Veteran Groups clearly identified as Public Interest groups, 2) Ability to use more of the Proceeds of Post operation (40%), 3) Increase in Prize limits (to \$2000), 4) Increase in the Weekly Payout amounts (\$35,000), and many others.

The changes, however, also come with some new challenges. Tavern owners are now able to become officially licensed to offer Small Games of Chance to their patrons. This could bring some increased competition with taverns. However, I am confident that as long as our posts remain active in the community and do their part, there will only be positive gain from these changes. Taverns cannot offer the same level of camaraderie and sense of inclusion that the members of our Post and clubs receive.

Please go back and encourage your Posts and District to continue to support the Legion programs and their communities. HB1098 & HB290 should help, but the Four Pillars of the American Legion still cannot flourish without a devoted and omitted effort.



Copies of both bills, HB 290 and HB 1098, are available to view and download in their entirety on Department's website in the forms section.

Sears Hiring 6,500 Veterans, Military Spouses in 2014

It currently employs about 30,000 veterans

Sears is increasing its commitment to hire more military veterans. The discount retail chain says that it will recruit 6,500 veterans and military spouses this year. That's 3,000 more veterans and military spouses than Sears hired in 2012. Last year, Sears fully met its goal to hire 6,000 veterans and military spouses. Veterans and military spouses are being recruited to fill positions ranging from category managers to store managers.

More than 30,000 current Sears employees are veterans or current National Guard and National Reserve members. In November, Sears held its first "Invite a Veteran to Work Day" to help boost the hiring of veterans. The event was held at both its Sears and Kmart stores. Sears has struggled in recent years to lure consumers back into its stores. The company has reportedly been selling off high-performing locations to raise cash.



Legion Task force hears veterans' concerns

Veterans expressed both concerns and compliments recently about VA Butler Healthcare to a national American Legion task force.

The legion's System Worth Saving Task Force collects data and monitors quality of health care at VA medical facilities to be submitted to Congress, the White House and VA administrative leadership.

The intent is to assist the VA in improving its system of care, said Ralph Bozella, a national chairman with the task force.

About 20 veterans, several VA Butler Healthcare staff members, and U.S. Rep. Mike Kelly, R-3rd, of Butler met with the task force at the American Legion Post 778 in Lyndora.

Members of the task force asked the group for anecdotes about VA staff, mental health programs, construction, long-term care and outpatient care.

Issues such as new construction, homelessness and programming were all discussed during the hour-long meeting.



"Every time they build something, it's a mess," said Arthur Greathead, a Special Forces veteran who is with the Military Veterans Advocates group of the 3rd Congressional District. "Incompetence reigns."

Greathead also cited a VA community center that was projected to open in 2010, but still hasn't opened. Construction of the buildings themselves was even questionable, he said, with structural and drainage problems.

"We're seeing VA construction problems all over," Bozella said, in response.

He said the task force is looking at ways the VA can improve its role in the construction process.

Bob Veselich, with the same advocate group, expressed his concerns about off-campus facilities, and whether they'll be given the same standards as current facilities at the New Castle Road location. Veterans are often given "a leg up" in employment at VA facilities. Could the same be said for the new outpatient center?

Meanwhile, VA Butler Healthcare Director John Gennaro responded to many of the veterans' comments. He said the new outpatient building, with the exception of maintenance employees, will have all VA staff members.

Youth Achievement Dinner

Your support is requested for the 17th Annual Youth Achievement Dinner (YAD) to honor the youth of Allegheny County and our community. This event will be held at Soldiers and Sailors National Military Museum and Memorial, in the Oakland section of Pittsburgh on April 6, 2014.

The dinner honors young people who have achieved excellence in programs such as those at the American Legion and American Legion Auxiliary, their local schools' scholars or music programs, or outstanding work in their local community. The James P. Comiskey scholarship is awarded to an exceptional student for all-around achievement in academics, extracurricular and community service.

These talented high school students will receive a meal, medal and certificate. In addition, they will be given an opportunity to describe their achievements to those assembled, if they so desire.

Please help sponsor this event by placing an ad in the YAD Program Book, adding your name to the list of patrons, and/or giving a monetary contribution. Donations, ads & tickets are tax deductible. Make check payable to **PA American Legion – Allegheny County**.

If you have any questions, please call Anne Manly at 412-389-2626.

American Legion Riders Committee

Bill Carr, Chairman

Accomplishments of the American Legion Riders since September DEC.

After the Legion Riders escorted the remains of Private 2nd Class Garrett Conn from Pittsburgh Airport to Erie, PA, Hookstown Legion Riders recognized the need for a specialized cart for transporting the remains of the Fallen Soldiers. Hookstown Riders and other Veterans groups designed and developed a cart dedicated for this purpose and are now in use at Pittsburgh Airport. Other airports are following their lead in making special carts.

Region 2 Riders hosted the PA American Family Reunion visiting Chapters in Erie and Crawford Counties.

On Veterans Day, Hookstown Legion Riders Chapter 952 participated in an escort of a Robert Foringer, a Korean War marine veteran to his final resting place. Hookstown Riders also served Thanksgiving dinner, delivered baskets of food to the needy for Thanksgiving, and held a tailgate party at the VA Hospital for its residents.

On December 8, Butler County Legion Riders served lunch to the 301st Army Reserve Unit and their families upon their return home from Kuwait. Butler County Riders also participated in Butler's Veterans Day parade.

Easton Pa Chapter 9 participated in the Fallen Hero's Run in Easton, PA.

East Greenville Chapter 184 hosted a cookout for the Coatesville VA Hospital residents.

Chapters 976, 397, 9 & 255 escorted World War II Veterans from Delaware to Philadelphia for the Honor Flight where these Veterans will see the WWII and other memorials in Washington DC.

Upcoming Riders for 2014

The Western PA Families of Fallen Hero's 9th annual Memorial Ceremony will be in Rochester, PA (Beaver County). This event is held in a different County in Western PA every year. An American Legion Riders Chapter in that area is asked to take charge of the Ride of Honor kicking off the Ceremony. This year Zelenople Chapter 474 will take charge and lead the Parade of Bikes.

American Legion Riders Annual Benefit Ride is scheduled for May 15-18, 2014 with overnights in Levittown, Brownsville and Titusville. Proceeds support Operation Comfort Warriors.

Sons of The American Legion Committee

John A. Eisler, Jr., Chairman

The Sons of the American Legion Detachment of Pennsylvania is an honor to our Department. They are the largest detachment in the world excelling in recruiting new members, fund raising, education and motivating upcoming leaders. The proposed 2014 fiscal year budget is itemized and presented for your approval. It sorrows me to report the passing of committee member Manny Mirailh who gave so much of his life to this organization.

Pennsylvania holds the honor of the largest Sons of The American Legion Detachment with 58,638 members last year. The proposed 2014 budget was calculated with this final membership total at two dollars per member and is once again expected to end up with a surplus.

Being a program of the American Legion gives the Sons an advantage over other organizations because the overhead is mostly handled by the parent organization. They raise enough money at the state level to support their needs and the support other programs as well as post activities across our state. Their motivation is driven from the sacrifices of their loved ones during war so we can enjoy or freedom.

I would like to thank The American Legion Department of Pennsylvania's Commander William A. Cleveland for giving me the opportunity to serve on this distinguished committee. I would also like to thank Department Adjutant Kit Watson who also serves as the SAL Advisor and everyone who helps support this program.

Requirements of Veterans' Organizations

This memorandum revises examination guidelines for tax-exempt veterans' organizations described in section 501(c)(19) of the Internal Revenue Code (IRC) by eliminating an agent's discretion to request DD Forms 214 at the outset of examinations for the purpose of determining whether the organization meets statutory membership requirements.

IRC sections 501(c)(19) and 170(c)(3) provide statutory membership requirements for certain tax-exempt veterans' organizations. Compliance with these requirements has a direct effect on the qualification for tax-exempt status and the deductibility of contributions.

In order to confirm whether a veterans' organization meets statutory membership requirements, IRM 4.76.26.12(1) provides that examining agents may request, among other documents, DD Forms 214, Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty, of veterans' organizations. DD Form 214 is a military service discharge certificate issued to veterans, providing proof of military service. However, DD Form 214 also contains private information, such as medical information.

Effective immediately, If an agent needs to determine the composition of membership of a veterans organization, the agent shall initially request and collect from the organization four sets of documents, as follows:

1. Membership list(s) that contain the names of the members, the military service dates, and the status of each individual member. This status information is to indicate whether the member is active duty, veteran, cadet, or spouse. The organization may provide list(s) from its affiliated parent organization.
2. A document that shows the dues structure and classes of memberships.
3. The documentary information used by the organization to create the membership list(s) noted above. Organizations should be informed that to satisfy this request they may provide membership applications, membership cards, or other similar documents, other than DD Form 214.
4. Documents showing the organization's policies and procedures on how it decides an Individual is eligible for membership, including documents which show the means by which it enforces its membership requirements.

If an agent possesses information that contradicts documentary information provided or if the organization fails to satisfy a reasonable request, agents may then request DD Forms 214 or other discharge documents from the organization in order to ascertain compliance with the federal tax laws cited herein. DD Forms 214 must include the name, department, component and branch of service, and record of service dates. All other personal information may be redacted. The contents of this memorandum will be incorporated in IRM 4.76.26.

You can find this memorandum in full on department's website.

Do you remember your resolutions you made in January?

Now it's time to evaluate and achieve them. If you're looking to set new membership goals for 2014, it's critical that you set yourself up for success. And part of that means freeing yourself from this all-or-nothing, once-a-year framework. Don't worry that it's the beginning of 2014, you can set goals for your membership at any time of the year. Set attainable goals. You need to be realistic. Nothing can sap your momentum faster than trying to bite off more than you can chew. Set specific goals. Common problems are wishes, such as "We need more membership." This goal is too vague and provides no guidance on how to proceed actionably. More effective goals are "I'm going to personally call all my members that haven't renewed." "I'm going to ask 5 people this week, who are wearing military hats/clothing if they're members of the American Legion." Focus on the actions you can control.

VA PITTSBURGH VOWS THAT NONE SHALL DIE ALONE

No Veteran Dies Alone Program Shows Ultimate Care at Time of Passing

President Abraham Lincoln challenged citizens to “care for him who bore the battle and his widow and his orphan.” Now VA volunteers take Lincoln’s promise to the bedside of the dying Veteran.

As part of the recently launched No Veteran Dies Alone (NVDA) Program, volunteers give “the most precious gift,” according to VA Pittsburgh Chaplain



Alan Morris –their presence to Veterans who may not have anyone to be with them in their final hour.

Volunteers can speak, read or hold the hand of a Veteran and be a comfort to them. They are on call when needed and often stay longer than required – because they want to.

Susan Rogers of O’Hara and George Coppola of Collier are two volunteers who graduated from the first class of NVDA training in August. Since then, they have been on two vigils each with dying patients.

Coppola, a Vietnam Veteran, has extensive hospice experience with his mother and other loved ones in his life. He’s also known other Veterans who died alone and wants to prevent that from happening to anyone else.

Rogers has a 92-year-old World War Two Veteran father who lives in Ft. Wayne, Indiana. She knows that if unable to be at his bedside should the time come, she’d like somebody to be there.

Coppola remembers one particular Veteran who he provided comfort only a fellow soldier could know. “I told him he had done a good job with his family and it was time for this old soldier to go home,” said Coppola. “I asked him if he heard me and he squeezed my hand.”

Those who want to be on the NVDA team must first become registered VA Pittsburgh volunteers and train in the hospice or palliative care functions at the hospital before receiving additional NVDA training.

Rogers, Coppola and NVDA staff are available for interviews. Please contact Keith Gottschalk for assistance.

No Veteran Dies Alone (NVDA) is a one-of-a-kind program in which volunteers provide companionship and assistance to Veterans who are entering the final stages of life. NVDA volunteers “fill in” and provide comfort at the bedside at times when family and friends are unable to be present. NVDA helps ensure that no one should have to stand alone in the challenges brought on by illness, isolation or traumatic life experience.

As end of life is imminent, volunteers are contacted to initiate a “Vigil” at the patient’s bedside. These Vigil volunteers receive comprehensive training and are part of a team that works in shifts throughout the day and night to be there to serve Veterans in their final hour.

Responsibilities include: holding the Veteran’s hand, talking to the Veteran, assisting family by giving them rest breaks, reading to the Veteran, playing music, notifying the nursing staff of any concerns or changes in the Veteran’s condition, and assisting in making the Veteran comfortable.

A family member had this to say about NVDA volunteers: “When I’d leave a few minutes before 1:00 am, utterly exhausted and feeling guilty about not staying, I’d realize that one of you would be here at 1:00 am, and it was such a relief.”

These dedicated individuals allow each Veteran to die with respect, comfort and dignity. We invite you to spread the word about this program and support the mission “No Veteran Dies Alone” at VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System.

“No Veteran Dies Alone is about being there when what a Veteran needs most is a relationship, because at the end that’s all that matters,” said Morris.



“When you’re in a room with a Veteran, it’s very calming for both of you,” said Coppola. “You really get a sense of being with him or her.”

“I can serve others in the way I hope he is comforted at the end of his life,” Rogers said.

Dr. Sandra Blakowski, chief of hospice and palliative care, explains that just the touch of another human being is enough to bring great comfort to dying Veterans.

“You don’t need to be the smartest person in the world or have great talent,” she said.

“You just need to be a human being.”

Rogers said that VA hospice staff often thank NVDA volunteers for providing the end-of-life companionship that they sometimes can’t due to time and workload constraints.

“The hospice staff show so much compassion and care for these Veterans,” Rogers said. “It’s good to be a part of a team that makes the last hours of Veterans so comfortable and dignified.”

NVDA volunteers must become registered VA Pittsburgh volunteers and train in the hospice or palliative care functions before receiving additional NVDA training. For more information, contact Maria Gibb at 412-822-3084 or maria.gibb@va.gov.



Veterans assistance available

Reaching out to area veterans and their families, Rep. Mike Peifer (R-Monroe/Pike/Wayne) again hosted the American Legion Service Officer Outreach program at his Honesdale office on Monday, Jan. 13. A service representative was at the office from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Appointments were required and were made by calling Peifer’s office at. “Our veterans have given so much to our country and our Commonwealth. The benefits we provide to them are a small token of recognition and appreciation for their service,” Peifer said.

“I encourage any veteran, regardless of whether he or she is a member of the American Legion, to take advantage of this opportunity.”

Typically, the service representative is available in Peifer’s office on the second Monday of the month.

The American Legion program offers veterans assistance with compensation, education, pension, health care and death benefits.

Veterans need not be a member of the American Legion to use the service.

Internal Organization Committee

Mike Miskell, Chairman

The American Legion is the largest and most influential network of US wartime veterans, families and communities. With nearly 2.4 million members and over 13,000 posts, the American Legion is truly a grass roots organization guided by resolutions that spring from local Legionnaires and are advanced to the state and national levels. From there, The American Legion resolutions help shape US policy on many fronts including veterans’ health care, national security, foreign relations and the economy.

The varied and noble programs of The American Legion make up the four pillars of Children and Youth, National Security, Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation, and Americanism.

The American Legion is controlled by a Constitution and By-Laws at the local, state and national levels. It can be said that the Constitution and By-Laws are the heart that drives the lifeblood of the organization.

The Internal Organization committee was honored with the task of reviewing the Department constitution and By-Laws for typographical errors, wording and omissions and making suggestions for correcting and problems found.

The Committee was aided by the expertise of Department Adjutant Kit Watson and his very able staff.

Commander, thank you for the prestigious appointment of Chairman to this very important Committee.

Honor our two commanders

It's that time of year again when we get to show our National Commander how awesome Pennsylvania is! The three dinners to celebrate our Department Commander Bill Cleveland and the National Commander Dan Dellinger will be held this March in each section of our state.

The first event will be in the East on Monday, March 17th at the American Legion Post 34 in Lancaster PA. Dinner ticket deadline is March 7th and the donation for each ticket is \$35. You have the opportunity to purchase an ad for the book and the deadline for that is February 28th. Please send Camera Ready ads and make your checks payable to Eastern Sectional Testimonial and mail to Joe Cocco, Jr. at 115 Oak Street, Ringtown PA 17967.



The second stop will be in the Central Section to honor both commanders on Tuesday, March 18th at the American Legion Post 594 in Middletown, PA. You can send dinner ticket requests with a check payable to The American Legion Post 594 Attn: Paul Carnes at 137 E High Street, Middletown PA 17057. The tickets are \$30 each. Deadline for the tickets is February 28th. You can purchase an ad in the book to

send to the same address with a deadline also for February 28th.

The third dinner will be held in the western side of our state on Wednesday, March 19th at the American Legion Post 474 in Zelenople. The cost of each dinner is \$25 and the checks can be mailed to American Legion Post 474 Attention Frank Frederick 308 W New Castle Street, Zelenople, PA 16063. Make all checks payable to American Legion Post 474. The ad booklet deadline is also February 28th.

You can see more information about the dinners on our website at www.pa-legion.com.

Students research veterans

Radnor Township Area students (all former St Katharines students) participated in the savings hallowed ground project. They have gone to the towns War Memorial, selected a name to research. The students worked hard as they brought the soldiers' lives and identities back to our town. The photograph was taken at Municipal Building in Radnor Township. "It's not what's under the Christmas tree that is important its who's around the Christmas tree" The students held pictures of the Vietnam fallen from the township. There were nine names who never returned. The commissioners recognized their work as Post 668 participates and thanked them for their service.



ESSAY WINNERS

Brady's Bend American Legion Post 488 Bishop-Madden Veteran's Day essay Contest Winners. Chicora elementary 6th grade students were ask to write an essay about three things they could do to show a veteran that they are thankful for their service. 1st, 2nd and 3rd place winner were awarded with a certificate and a check. 3rd place received \$50.00, 2nd place received \$75.00 and 1st place



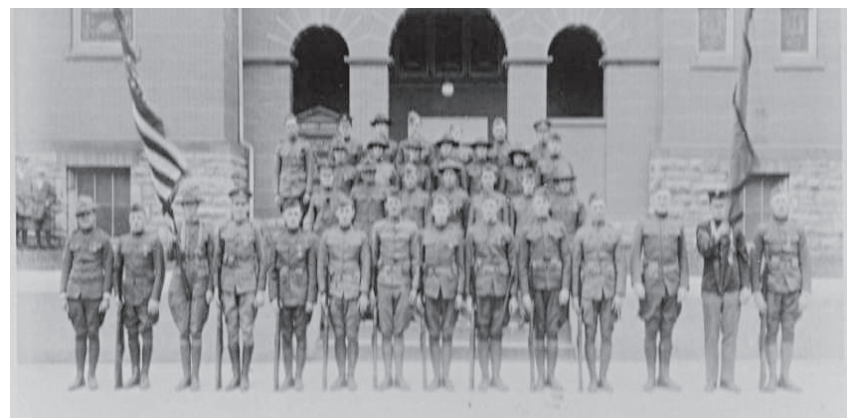
received \$125.00. Winners were announced and presented their awards at the elementary school veteran's day program. The 3rd place winner was Lindsey Karenbauer, daughter of Denny and Amy Karenbauer of Fenelton. The 2nd place



winner was Logan Byers, daughter of Roy and Tracy Ellenberger and Mick Milochik of Petrolia. And 1st place winner was Lexie Livengood, daughter of Matthew and Deanna Livengood of East Brady.

We asked the same thing from Sugar Creek Elementary 6th grade students. These winners were also announced and presented their awards at the elementary school during the veteran's day program. The 3rd place winner was Olivia Jo Schill, daughter of Daniel and Lisa Schill of Cowansville. The 2nd place winner was Rozina McCanna, daughter of Brent and Monica McCanna of East Brady. And the 1st place winner was Kate Slausenhoup, daughter of Dan and Megan Slausenhoup of East Brady. The Legionnaires were proud of all the students that participated in the Essay program. Bob Loose and Larry Hogan were proud to hand out the awards and the checks for the winning essay. As a whole, we were proud of all the essays from students.

Below is a photo of the American Legion Post 223 members of Shippensburg, PA circa 1921. The men are standing in front of the Methodist Church East King St. in Shippensburg, Pa. This photo was given to Post 223 by Peggy Shank Kachon in memory of her father Harry Shank a Charter member of the Post. This was submitted by Post Commander Dick Guyer, Shippensburg Post 223.



Second Chance - TBI (Traumatic Brain Injury) survivor hopes to inspire

If you had a second chance at life, what would you do with it?

Randy Davis, a recently honorably discharged soldier of the U.S. Army Reserve, is living proof of triumphing over tragedy. He is a survivor of a traumatic

brain injury (TBI) that almost claimed his life. He survived being shot in the head.

Randy recently completed an eight-year term of service in the U.S. Army Reserve. He enlisted at 37, going through basic training at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. Davis' journey of being a survivor

doesn't begin here, however. Prior to enlisting as a U.S. soldier, he has been in and out of law enforcement and private security since the early 1990s. He has served as a deputy sheriff in Richmond, Va., as a police officer in Norfolk, Va., and then served as a federal police officer in Colorado shortly after 9/11. The unusual thing about this career is that it has unfolded after he cheated death.

Going back to 1984, Randy was a high school junior living in San Diego. He had recently left his native Virginia to live with his father and stepmother in California. Growing up in rural Virginia had Randy hunting and target shooting, and planning on a military career after high school. But fate stepped in to redirect him.

Nov. 3, 1984, began as many warm autumn Southern California days do: beautiful. Randy had gone target shooting with some schoolmates in the afternoon, not knowing what was about to transpire. He had been roaming the forests, thickets and woods of his native Virginia for years. He had already been in California for a few months and this was an opportunity for him to go target shooting and have fun. He didn't know his new schoolmates were novices when it came to firearms.

Randy and several new schoolmates went to a canyon area in northern San Diego, set up some targets and plinked until sundown. After firing several rounds into targets, the lads called it a night. Randy wanted to enjoy the wooded night air for a few moments, separating from the group briefly. The other teens had returned to the pickup truck that had ferried them out to the desert. About 100 yards away, Randy was climbing out of the canyon when one of the lads pulled the trigger on his .22 rifle several times.

Randy describes what happened next, "I heard the gunshot and a fraction of a second later my head snapped back. The pain was excruciating and I tumbled over an embankment. I was howling in pain as I cradled my broken face, feeling blood pouring between my fingers."

Randy remembers looking up in the moonlight and seeing blood spurt from a hole somewhere on the right side of his face. It turns out the first bullet entered 1/4" from the right corner of his right eye, burrowing through bone, tissue, and brain matter. It came to rest in the right temporal lobe of his brain. A second bullet grazed the left side of his head, just taking a chunk of flesh with it as it sped by at 1,300 feet per second.

Randy remained conscious and crawled his way up the embankment, as he describes, like something out of an old Western. He staggered toward the headlights and found four other scared teenagers who rushed him to the local trauma center in Escondido, Calif. The battle to survive continued on that mad dash to the emergency room.

"I had been reading survival manuals and military history, planning on a military career. Suddenly I find myself in the back of a pickup, one arm wrapped around the roll bar and the other hand held against my gushing head wound. I had a moment of clarity going through First Aid stuff I'd learned over my short 16 years. I realized I needed a bandage to control the external bleeding and pulled an old handkerchief from my back pocket. Then I remember thinking, 'OK, I'm going

into shock, what do I do for that? Oh yeah, elevate feet, head and stay warm.' I staggered into the trauma center at Palomar Memorial Hospital fully conscious, covered in mud and blood, with a bullet in my brain, but ALIVE."

The survival ordeals of traumatic brain injury are not limited to what happens at the scene of the injury, but also continues once the patient is in medical care. Randy had stopped the external bleeding but was still bleeding inside the skull - intracranial - which puts pressure on the brain with nowhere for fluids to go. Emergency brain surgery was performed to remove the bullet and damaged brain matter. No one knew what the outcome would be and at 16, Randy had to go into oblivion, not knowing if he would survive the surgery or not. However, several hours later, God allowed him to return and begin starting a second chance at life.

Randy had a depressed skull fracture from the impact of the bullet, and now has a large dent and a question-mark-shaped scar on the right side of his head from surgery. The psychological and emotional aftermath of this incident was off the scales. As for the rate of the severity of his injuries, one doctor described his injury as "catastrophic." At 16, Randy was dealing with PTSD ranked off the charts as well. It would consume many years of his post-injury existence.

According to Randy, "I did my own research years later and came across a published study by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) into TBI. The study said 'Firearm related Traumatic Brain Injuries, TBI, result in a 9:10 death ratio.' So I'm 1:10 that survived; pretty slim odds of survival."

When he turned 18, Randy went to Army recruiters, still wishing to serve his country. After telling the recruiters about his shooting, he was told, "YOU CAN'T EVEN BE DRAFTED!" So he wandered, lost for years, not being able to do what he wanted to do since he was a child: serve his country. He worked many dead-end jobs over the years, still dealing with PTSD and not having any resources. Until he found the National Head Injury Foundation, now the Brain Injury Association of America, www.BIAUSA.ORG, and found people who understood TBI.

With proper therapy and resources, Randy moved forward in life, going back to college, earning an associate's degree in Administration of Justice, magna cum laude. He took a job doing security at a Nabisco factory in Richmond, Va.

Randy pursued a career in law enforcement, seeing it as a way to still serve his country. This was several years after the shooting and his relentless pursuit of normalcy. He had to teach his brain to work harder, and had to fail in some things in life as well in his recovery from an almost fatal shooting.

Randy spent almost 10 years actively wearing a law enforcement uniform of some kind, both in Virginia and Colorado. But it wasn't enough, and he wouldn't stop until he finished something he'd started years before.

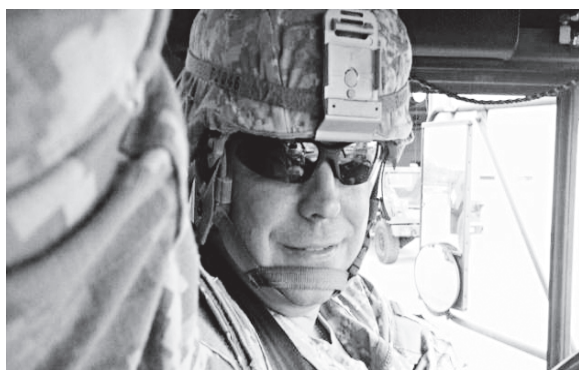
In 2005 Randy enlisted, and was accepted, into the U.S. Army Reserve. "I was 16 years old when I got shot, then 20 years later, I'm shipping off for Basic Training!!" He went through basic training and the Army Engineer Heavy Equipment Operator School at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, to do something other than security/police work. He drove trucks and heavy equipment, and managed to complete eight years of service in the Army without being shot again.

November 2013 marked Randy's 29th anniversary of surviving being shot in the head. He spent the day at his Army unit in Denver, being grateful. "I have to look at each day as a grace from God. Every day I'm still here, I've been given a second chance at life."

Now Randy works in industrial security in northern Colorado. "I read a story in a local paper in the early 1990s about another TBI survivor. That led me to find the support and resources I needed to move forward in life. I want to return the favor," he says. "The incidents and statistics of TBI are staggering, yet public awareness is virtually nil. I want to be a face for traumatic brain injury, TBI. For other TBI survivors, don't let anyone tell you you can't do something. It just takes time and hard work. NEVER QUIT!"

Branch of Service: Army

Submitted by: Randall Davis, Post 32, Longmont, Colo.



KEYSTONE NEWS



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A wagon of honor

Several months ago, Legion Rider John Wakeley and other Riders from American Legion Post 952 in Georgetown, Pa., were waiting at the Pittsburgh International Airport to escort the dignified remains of a fallen soldier back to his hometown of Erie. Wakeley, who works in airfield operations at the airport, watched as the casket was unloaded from the plane, placed on a "dirty" baggage cart "like a set of golf clubs," he said, and driven to the cargo area where it was then transferred to a hearse. The careless treatment of the fallen soldier's remains didn't sit well with Wakeley.



"We felt it was disrespectful that the remains weren't being honorably treated," he said. "The carts are dirty, the carts are rusty."

Wakeley spoke to co-worker Mark Chamoditz about what he witnessed and his desire to honor America's fallen war heroes with respect.

Chamoditz helped Wakeley's desire become possible by asking the airport authority office to donate a baggage cart for Wakeley to refurbish. The airport donated an unused baggage cart, and Wakeley watched his vision of the honor wagon come to life.

Wakeley, first vice commander of American Legion Post 952, is also a Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) Chapter 862 member. He recruited Legion and VVA members alike to help him refurbish the luggage cart and many local businesses received word about the project and donated material and labor for free.

To refurbish the cart, the middle shelf was removed, it was repainted, a roller system was installed to accommodate a casket and a glass/plastic composite was

installed on the sides of the cart. Each side of the wagon features the insignia of the five U.S. military branches of service, the Pennsylvania National Guard emblem and VVA's motto, "Never again will one generation of veterans abandon another."

Now, when a plane lands with the remains of a fallen war hero, the casket will be respectfully transferred to the honor wagon.

The honor wagon was unveiled during a special ceremony at the Pittsburgh airport that involved the family of the fallen soldier, as he was the inspiration behind the wagon.

"I gave ideas on how it should look, but I was overwhelmed when I saw it complete," Wakeley said. "Now, men and women will be honored all the way home."

