The Road to Restored Trust with VA

Henry Ford once said, “If everyone is moving forward together, success takes care of itself.” That’s how I look at The American Legion’s relationship with the Department of Veterans Affairs. We are stakeholders, watchdogs, advocates, patients, partners, volunteers and, when necessary, critics. Our loyalty is to veterans first, and our obligation is to ensure that the federal government is fulfilling its duty to help them.

When the full extent of the VA scandal was revealed last spring, the Legion called for changes in top leadership and for needed reforms. We persuaded Congress and the White House to take urgent action or jeopardize a hard-won and fragile trust with America’s veterans.

As hard as the Legion has worked, the systemic problem caused by massive backlogs, cooked books and substandard care cannot be solved overnight. That is why I am so proud of the success we have seen at our Veterans Crisis Command Centers (VCCCs), which were recently renamed Veterans Benefits Centers (VBCs). The Legion’s initial crisis center opened June 9 in Phoenix, the epicenter of the VA scandals. Legion experts gathered at Post 1 and assisted nearly 600 veterans with system enrollment, outpatient appointments, benefit applications and appeals representation. The results over the five-day event were astounding.

Four veterans were granted 100 percent service-connected disability ratings on the spot, and one terminally ill veteran received a Chapter 35 benefit that will help his dependants pay for college. Another veteran – helped by the Legion – discovered he was eligible for $60,000 in retroactive disability compensation.

Similar results followed at VCCCs in other communities, including Fayetteville, N.C.; El Paso, Texas; Fort Collins, Colo.; St. Louis; Baltimore; Shinnston, W.Va.; Charlotte, N.C.; Honolulu; Harlingen, Texas; and White City and Medford, Ore.

By the end of September, the Legion had helped more than 3,000 veterans at these events and obtained nearly $1 million in on-the-spot retroactive benefits. In just a short period of time, these events have produced life-changing results for thousands.

Our work in Washington is important, but local communities are where we witness firsthand the fruits of our efforts. Ralph Bozella, chairman of The American Legion’s Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Commission, recently explained the evolution of the Veterans Crisis Command Centers to Veterans Benefits Centers this way: “By its very nature, a crisis can’t last forever. If it does, what’s the end result? A crisis has to end, and the scandal that took place from the spring up until late summer is over. But we’ve learned so much from that. We want to continue to offer the service to veterans because of the environment we create: the environment of friendliness, the environment that we are here, in fact, to help. We cannot do it alone. We have to work together.”

I couldn’t agree more.

National Commander Mike Helm
January 1, 2015
www.legion.org/magazine

Gray Post 86 Hosts Statewide Conference

This year’s conference was conducted at Gray Post 86 in Gray, Maine on January 16-18, 2015. The conference was well-attended by many who thought that the information presented was very good and informative.

The conference was under the direction of 2nd Vice Commander Peter Johnson and Commander Richard Graves. 2nd Vice Commander Johnson acted as the lead and M/C of the program. National Vice Commander Douglas C. Haggan representing the 2.4-million member American Legion was guest speaker as well as District Representative of the National Blind Camp Council John G. Lindquist.

Opening the ceremony was Department Commander Richard Graves followed by Past National Commander Anthony “Tony” Jordan welcoming the attendees and special guests. Next, the POW/MIA ceremony took place.

Speakers at the conference included Department 1st Vice Commander Ronald Rainfrette who reviewed a strategic membership plan as well as membership recruiting and retention. 1st Vice Commander Rainfrette proceeded by conducting a special 100% membership presentation to Posts who received 100% membership as of Dec. 31 2014. Department 2nd Vice Commander Johnson then led a panel discussion on selected commander’s perspective followed by District Representative John G. Lindquist of the National Blind Camp Council with an overview on Blind Camp and its function.

Subsequently following Mr. Lindquist’s presentation were brief reports given by the chairman of the following selected committees: Legislative Committee Chairman William “Chick” Cicotte, Boys State Committee Chairman and Department 2nd Vice Commander Peter Johnson, Oratorical Committee Chairman Don Chase, Athletic (Baseball) Committee Chairman George B. O’Connell, Americanism & Law and Order Committee Chairman and Americanism Officer Kirk Thurston, and Finance Committee Chairman and Department Finance Chairman and Department Finance

More on MID-WINTER, Page 2
Resolutions To Be Presented
By May 1st:

All resolutions to be presented for action at any Convention shall be presented to the office of the Department Adjutant on or before May 1 of the subject year. Said resolutions shall be published and printed in the official organ of the Department of Maine, The American Legion in the next issue following said date of May 1.

Candidates’ Deadline: May 20

Anyone wishing to run for a Department Office must submit a letter of intent and a copy of his or her discharge papers making them eligible for The American Legion to the Department Adjutant’s office on or before May 20, 2015 to be included on the official ballot at convention in June. If you wish to be included in The Maine Legionnaire, the above information, plus a photo of you must be at Department Headquarters by April 24, 2015.

Veteran of the Month
South Paris Veterans Home

Norman A. Lavigne was born on December 24, 1947 and raised in Lewiston, Maine. He graduated from Lewiston High School and then went to a Community College and completed two courses. He enlisted into the Marines on March 7, 1966 and at that time he served in the Vietnam War in Dai-loq Vietnam. He was stationed at Camp LeJeune and Camp Pendleton. He earned the rank E3/LCpl, and was a combat engineer/M60 machine gunner. Norman earned the Good Conduct Medal, National Defense Medal, The Presidential Unit Citation Ribbon, Vietnam Service Medal with 3 stars, and the Vietnam Campaign Medal with 60 Device. Norman enjoyed sharing stories with friends that he made while stationed from area to area. He was discharged on April 14, 1969.

After the service, Norman did some more schooling on plumbing and electrical. He went to work for Bath Iron Works for a year and then went to work for General Electric where he worked for 35 years. Norman also did some traveling. One of his favorite places to visit was Canada. He also went to Hawaii to see the USS Arizona Memorial cemetery.

Norman loves to watch old war and western movies and loves to listen to the Beach Boys. He has been married for 44 years to his wife Nancy and they have one son together and two grandchildren, one boy and one girl. Norman visited South Paris Maine Veterans’ Home in May of 2013 and enjoys talking to the Masons and other clubs. He also enjoys going for walks.

Thank You Norman for your service.

Remember: Patriot’s Day April 20th

Pre –Veteran’s Day Event: 94-year-old WWII Veteran Frank Flanders of the South Paris Maine Veterans’ Home wearing his original uniform during a pre-Veteran’s Day event held on Nov. 9 at the Veterans’ Home. Left to right, Department Sgt.-at-Arms Patricia Thurston, Frank Flanders, and Department Adjutant Paul L’Heureux.

Legionnaire of the Year Sought

If that exceptional Legionnaire, the one with unquestionable leadership ability, a member of your Post? Do you have that member within your post that seems to stand above the rest in all phases of your post activities? Does he or she aspire to higher positions within the American Legion? If your post has that member who would qualify for the honor and prestige for the Past Department Commanders Award, why not submit their name and resume? Being chosen for this award is indeed a great honor. When in doubt, ask those who were previously chosen. It is a title you will be known for during your entire Legion career.

Maybe your Post has previously sent a candidate for this award who was not chosen. Why not submit the name again? There are no rules stating how many times you can apply. Your candidate could be this year’s winner. Remember, everything in life is a gamble. The deadline for applications is May 1, 2015. Applications can be obtained through Department Headquarters or on-line at www.mainelegion.org

Send completed applications to The American Legion, State Headquarters, Attention: Past Department Commanders Award Chairman, P.O. Box 900, Waterville, ME 04903-0900.

Mid-Winter
Continued from Page 1

Officer Tommy Adkins.

After lunch was served by Gray Post 86, Department Service Officer Amedeo “Deo” Lauria gave a brief overview on the Department Service Office. The Children & Youth and Scholarship opportunities were then discussed by Department Historian Ron Caron and an update on Task Force for the Future was given by National Executive Committee-man John Hargreaves. Patrick Eisenhart proceeded with a brief presentation on the Public Relations Committee and Patricia Thurston reported on the Women Veterans’ Advisor/Action Committee. All presentations and reports were well received by all in attendance.

Following the speakers, candidate announcements were made and then Department Adjutant Paul L’Heureux conducted the sweepstakes drawings. The grand prize winner of $3,500 was J.P. Ouellette, Frenchville Post 145 - $1000; John H. Johnson, Topsham Post 202 - $500; Norman Fournier, Eagle Lake Post 176 - $200.

The conference was closed by Department Commander Graves with proper form with announcement that the Department Executive Committee would meet Sunday at Gray Post 86 at 8:30 a.m.

After adjournment, the Past Post Commanders Club held its annual election with President Debra Couture, Litchfield Post 181, Vice President Patricia Thurston, Rumford Post 24 and Secretary/Treasurer Catherine Merrill, Naples Post 155.

The evening was closed with a banquet prepared by Gray Post 86.
**Commander’s Comments**

This article is being republished from the December 14th Smile for the purpose of reaching the multitude of Legionnaires that do not view the Smile articles on a weekly basis. One of the goals for 2014-2015 was to increase education and training at Department, District and Post levels. A sub-goal was to provide training and guidance on the proper meeting protocol as it has been proven that a properly run meeting increases attendance and increased attendance means better programs. Unfortunately, some of the feedback was negative in that you were being told what not to do rather than what you should do. That in itself creates negativity. Hopefully the process will become better with time.

The following protocol should be followed:
- The Commander is responsible to insure the protocol outlined in the manual are followed. You will not find the phrase “Commander’s prerogative” within the guide.
- The American Legion Cap is the only Official uniform for the meetings.
- The Sgt. at Arms should control the membership sign in roster and guest register, having it ready for the commander when the meeting begins.
- The following protocol should be followed: Salute to the colors properly in place, prayer, POW/MIA installing of the cover on an empty chair, Pledge of Allegiance, Reciting of the Preamble and declaration that the meeting is in session.
- A meeting agenda will assist in the even flow of the meeting.
- Upon completion of the meeting, the POW/MIA chair cover is removed, closing prayer, and final salute to the colors followed by the declaration of the closing of the meeting.

These are just the basic protocols, but should be done at each meeting as other members will learn as they watch and participate. There are many other events that can happen at a meeting such as Initiation of new members, Post everlasting ceremony and other awards. All can be found in the Officer’s Guide. If you need help or assistance, please just ask, we are here for you.

**On the Agenda**

**FEBRUARY DISTRICT MEETINGS**
- District 5 — Oxford: Feb. 17, Dixfield Post 100, nominations, 6 p.m. light supper, 7 p.m. mtg.
- District 9 — Kennebec: Feb. 11, Maine Veterans Home, 7 p.m.
- District 14 — Piscataquis: Feb. 21, Dexter Post 53, 6:30 p.m. supper, 7:30 p.m. mtg.

**MARCH DISTRICT MEETINGS**
- District 2 — Cumberland: Mar. 15, Portland Post 161, 7 a.m., joint meeting with Auxiliary
- District 3 — Androscoggin: Mar. 8, Sabattus Post 135, 2 p.m.
- District 5 — Oxford: Mar. 18, Norway Post 82, election of officers, 7 p.m., refreshments
- District 9 — Kennebec: Mar. 11, Waterville Post 5, 7 p.m.
- District 11 — Waldo: Mar. 15, Stockton Springs Post 157, 2 p.m.
- District 12 — Hancock: Mar. 10, Blue Hill Post 85, 6:30 p.m. dinner, 7:30 p.m. mtg.
- District 13 — Penobscot: Mar. 1, Hermon Post 200, 12 noon lunch, 1 p.m. mtg.
- District 14 — Piscataquis: Mar. 21, Sangerville Post 165, 6:30 p.m. supper, 7:30 p.m. mtg.
- District 15 — Washington: Mar. 8, Cherryfield Post 8, 2 p.m.
- District 16 — S. Aroostook: Mar. 7, Presque Isle Post 88, 1 p.m. dinner followed by mtg.

**APRIL DISTRICT MEETINGS**
- District 2 — Cumberland: Apr. 14, Gray Post 86, 5 p.m. Past President’s & Commander’s dinner. Nomination of officers.
- District 3 — Androscoggin: Apr. 12, Lewiston Post 22, 2 p.m.
- District 5 — Oxford: Apr. 15, Rumford Post 24, installation of officers, 6 p.m. light supper, 7 p.m. mtg.
- District 9 — Kennebec: Apr. 8, Richmond Post 132, 7 p.m.
- District 11 — Waldo: Apr. 19, Unity Post 50, 2 p.m.
- District 12 — Hancock: Apr. 13, Ellsworth Post 63, 6:30 p.m. dinner, 7:30 p.m. mtg.
- District 13 — Penobscot: Apr. 12, Brewer Post 98, 12 noon lunch, 1 p.m. mtg., District 13 elections
- District 14 — Piscataquis: Apr. 18, Dover-Foxcroft Post 29, 6:30 p.m. supper, 7:30 p.m. mtg.
- District 17 — N. Aroostook: Apr. 12, Eagle Lake Post 176, 1 p.m. dinner, 2 p.m. mtg., nominations

**MAY DISTRICT MEETINGS**
- District 2 — Cumberland: May 17, Westbrook Post 197, 12 noon. Memorial service & election of officers.
- District 3 — Androscoggin: Discretion of incoming commander
- District 5 — Oxford: May 19, Locke Mills Post 68, 7 p.m. speaker and refreshments
- District 9 — Kennebec: TBA, incoming Commander’s choice
- District 11 — Waldo: May 17, Unity Post 50, 2 p.m.
- District 12 — Hancock: May 12, Stonington Post 102, 6 p.m.

Let’s Talk Membership: Department 1st Vice Commander Ronald Rainfrette reviewed his strategic membership plan to those in attendance at Mid-Winter Conference Jan. 17

**A ‘First’ Look**

Keep up with the pace!

As Membership Chairmen, we have an obligation to continue improving each and every post in Maine.

This week, I contacted Post Adjutants that had single unpaid dues. One to nine. We need to continue working together to make them current on 100 percent membership.

We have stopped the losses with some positive gains. Three year growth is in place to guide us to a brighter future.

It’s an honor to present 100 percent membership to each that are willing to commit the time on the membership team.

District Commanders, this is a lesson, I took it right to the post, one on one. I know where we stand, together as one.

Now, District Commanders, it’s up to you to keep the membership flowing.

These next few weeks will and should advance us to a higher state-wide membership.

**Brand Awareness:** Let them know who we are, wear your Legion cover at functions in the towns.

**Communication:** Use e-mail, Facebook, newspapers and write letters. Get the word out.

**Training/Education/Leadership Development:** Very important, get your training; take the American Legion Extension Course. It’s the right thing to do.

**Past Creation, Development & Revitalization:** None to date, but we have six or seven on revitalization, a positive goal.

**Membership Recruiting and Retention:** Eighty plus membership recruiting and retention 97.3 percent.

**OVERALL A JOB WELL DONE!**
A ‘Second’ Look

One of the American Legion “Signature Programs” is Dirigo Boys State. Maine is fortunate to have one of the best Boys State programs in the country and this summer we will conduct the 68th session at Thomas College.

The elements that make Boys State so special are the students that participate, the world class staff that conducts the program, and the program of instruction.

Last year, about 205 students from 86 different high schools attended Boys State. These students are some of the best students in the State. They are talented, motivated and they are student leaders in their individual schools.

The effectiveness of the program is demonstrated by the success of the graduates when we see them serving as leaders in key business, government and educational institutions after they complete their education.

The staff at Dirigo Boys State is exceptional; they are led by experienced directors and advisors that have dedicated decades to organizing and leading the Dirigo Boys State program. This experienced staff hand selects the best of the students to become future councilors. Visit dirigoboysstate.org to read a summary of the experience of the directors, advisors and other staff.

The program inculcates the values and processes of our republic. The students spend four days from 6:15 AM until 10:30 PM using experiential education techniques to learn many things. They are immersed in respect for their host, their staff and importantly each other and they live flag etiquette for the entire week.

After the opening ceremony they will learn by doing the key aspects and processes of Maine’s local, county and state government. These are lessons they will remember for the rest of their lives and make them better citizens and community leaders.

This year, we would like more Legionnaires to visit Boys State. We would like you to bring your son or grandson who may be eligible to attend next year so you and he can see this unique experience in citizenship. Once you (or he) witness the Boys State experience, you will understand the power of the program.

I look forward to seeing many of you at Thomas College for this year’s Dirigo Boys State program from June 21 to June 25.
Americanism Report

In the November issue of the Maine Legionnaire’s Americanism article, I omitted recognizing an important component of the P O W / M I A Ceremony in Jay, held Sept. 19, 2014. The Lane-Dube Amvets Post 33 members were the other participants with the firing squad and in playing taps.

The three units that have been involved with this event for years are the Frank L. Mitchell, VFW Post 3335, members of the United Bikers of Maine and the Lane-Dube Amvets Post 33. I hope that they continue to do this very important ceremony for many years to come.

Well the holidays are over along with the Mid-Winter Conference and the Oratorical Contests. Hopefully everyone had a joyful holiday season enjoyed the great information provided at the Conference and was able to attend, and if possible, help with the many Oratorical contests held throughout this wonderful state of ours.

Now the time for Posts to prepare for Boys State. The purpose of Boys State is to provide Maine high school juniors with the opportunity to participate in a program that supplements their high school courses in government and its functions. Posts are encouraged to solicit sponsorship from local Veteran Service Organizations, financial institutions, businesses, civic and fraternal groups (i.e. Eagles, Elks). It is acceptable for a candidate to be co-sponsored by more than one sponsor. Remember, the only requirements for selection is the candidate must be a high school junior and have a desire to attend. Last year 205 juniors attended; of course the Commander would like these years’ numbers to be higher. Boys State will be held once again at Thomas College in Waterville from June 21-25, 2015. If you have any questions, please contact Boys State Chairman Pete Johnson or Department Headquarters.

It is also time for those Posts that have Legion Baseball teams to start planning for the upcoming season. One of the Americanism Pillar Message Points for 2014-2015 is the ‘American Legion Baseball World Series’ as follows: Resolution 14, National Executive Committee, May 2012, designated Shelby, North Carolina as the permanent site for The American Legion Baseball World Series (ALBWS). Future dates for ALBWS Series are: August 13-18, 2015 and August 11-16, 2016. New ALBWS attendance record of 110,036 set at the 2014 World Series eclipsed the 2013 record of 104,726. The championship game of the 2014 ALBWS was telecast live on ESPNU. The other 14 games were again webcast live on ESPN3.com. The 2015 ALBWS championship game will be telecast live on ESPNU.

Since 1925, American Legion Baseball has taught hundreds of thousands of young Americans the importance of sportsmanship, good health and active citizenship. Approximately 74,000 players, participate annually in American Legion baseball with over 3,700 teams registering. On average 55 percent of players are high school juniors. Twenty percent of college players played American Legion baseball, nearly 72 percent of college players played American Legion Baseball. Sixty-three American Legion Baseball graduates have been inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York. Hall of Famers includes Johnny Bench, Ryne Sandberg, Wade Boggs, Whitey Herzog, Yogi Berra, and Reggie Jackson. Current stars such as Chipper Jones, Pujols and Darin Erstad played American Legion Baseball. Until we meet again.

Historical Bulletin

The American Legion plays a very large role in supporting education for our youth by offering many different scholarships at both the state and national level. I know there are many posts, like my own, who offer their own individual scholarships within their own communities. Sponsoring these scholarships not only helps in promoting our own individual posts, but at the same time it gives us a chance to explain to them what other scholarships are also available through The American Legion.

Many times while recruiting new members, we are asked “what’s in it for me”. Besides explaining the many benefits the Legion offers to its own members, we should also note that there are many other programs we offer other than scholarships for their children, grandchildren, etc.

This is the time of year when students begin applying for scholarships as they prepare for their continued educational goals in the fall. The school guidance office plays a large role in explaining to the students what scholarships are available so they should be the main contact.

We have three scholarships at the department level. Our Children and Youth Scholarship offers seven $500 scholarships; one student is selected from each legion “area”. There is also the Daniel E. Lambert Memorial Scholarship consisting of two $1000 scholarships and the James V. Day Scholarship which offers two $500 scholarships. Other scholarships are also available at the national level that are offered through our other Legion youth programs. Last year the American Legion awarded $16,500 in Legion Baseball scholarships, a $500 scholarship is awarded to each legion department winner. Those attending Boys State or Girls State are also eligible to apply for the Samsung American Legion Scholarship. In 2014, nine $20,000 scholarships and eighty-nine $1,000 scholarships were awarded. Our Eagle Scout of the Year is also eligible for the national Eagle Scout of the Year $10,000 scholarship, and three runner-up scholarship awards in the amounts of $2,500 each. There are also the Oratorical Contest Scholarships. The American Legion Legacy Scholarship, for children who have lost a parent/legal guardian on active duty after September 11, 2001.

Information and applications for all scholarships can be found on our Department of Maine web page www.mainelegion.org or by contacting department headquarters.

A very important note to make in promoting the scholarships is to make sure they are filled out completely, all requested information that is required is included, and that they are submitted by the appropriate deadline.

Remember today’s youth are tomorrow’s leaders; let us all work hard in helping to provide for them the best education possible. “Education is simply the soul of a society as it passes from one generation to another.” —G.K. Chesterton

RENUE YOUR MEMBERSHIP ONLINE TODAY:

PLEASE VISIT WWW.LEGION.ORG/RENEW

Did you renew your membership online and lost or forgot to print your Temporary Membership Card?

If so, please follow these instructions:

1. Go to http://www.legion.org/renew
2. Click on I’ve already renewed online and need to reprint my temporary membership card.
3. Enter your 9-digit Member ID#
4. Enter your Last Name and press “Continue”

Please note: Only current paid members of The American Legion can print their membership card from this page.
Service Office Update

First off, I would like to wish all our members a happy and prosperous New Year.

The Department Service Office has made contact with our membership and other veterans regarding claims benefits, and other assistance, with over 5,005 contacts so far this fiscal year!

I would also like to recognize all the Legionnaires at the Area, District and Post level who are reaching out to our membership and letting them know about the Department Service Office and how we can help them with their claims for VA benefits!

Really enjoyed being at the Mid-Winter Conference in Gray, Maine and putting faces with the voices on the telephone; it was great to meet all of you. Attendance at the Mid-Winter was amazing and at the DEC on Sunday as well. The Legionnaires of Maine can be justifiably proud of their beautiful post; they were excellent hosts. I hope those of you who came had a chance to see the handcrafted chairs downstairs; they are a must see!

MEMBERSHIP. Please remember that your membership dollars keep the DSO open and available to our membership and veterans. Please encourage your eligible friends and family to use the DSO and to become members of the American Legion. There is power in numbers!

STAFFING. We are now fully staffed here at the DSO; two service officers, Dean and me, as well as Eileen our Administrative Assistant. You can reach us by phone, but sometimes the phones are jammed, so a quick email to us will result in a quicker response; especially if it is a general question about the status of your claim and appeal.

Here are some topics that may be of interest to our membership:

TRICARE INFORMATION AND YOUR TAX RETURN. Reprinted from DOD News by Terri Moon Cronk.

WASHINGTON, Jan. 15, 2015 – As tax season begins, Defense Department officials want to remind TRICARE beneficiaries of changes in the tax laws, which require all Americans to have health care insurance or potentially pay a tax penalty.

For the first time since the Affordable Care Act passed in 2010, all U.S. citizens, including service members, military retirees and their family members, must report health care coverage on their 2014 taxes, and their family members, must report health care operations program analyst.

For this year only, taxpayers will “self-attest” on their 2014 tax forms to each month in which they had health care coverage, he said.

Meets Minimal Essential Coverage

The act mandates that health care must meet minimum essential coverage, and TRICARE coverage meets that criteria for the majority of service members and their families, Ellis said.

TRICARE Prime, TRICARE Standard, TRICARE for Life, TRICARE Overseas, TRICARE Remote and the Uniformed Services Family Health Plan meet the minimum essential coverage, he added. When purchased, premium-based plan such as TRICARE Reserve Select or TRICARE Retired Reserve also fulfill the act’s requirements.

Uniformed service members who have questions about TRICARE, the act and the individual coverage mandate can visit the TRICARE website to download a fact sheet on TRICARE and the act, with TRICARE plans compared to minimum essential coverage, Ellis said.

Military beneficiaries that are solely eligible for care in military hospitals and clinics, for example, parents and parents-in-law, have an automatic exemption from the tax penalty for tax year 2014 only.

NOTE: The TRICARE and ACA fact sheet is available at: http://www.tricare.mil/~/media/Files/TRICARE/Publications/FactSheets/ACA_FS.pdf

The site also has suggestions for those who need to purchase coverage to meet the act’s minimum requirements, he noted. That could include retired reservists, Selected Reserve members, young adults up to age 26 and those who leave military service but need transitional coverage, Ellis said.

TRICARE beneficiaries with tax questions should contact the Internal Revenue Service or their tax advisers, he emphasized. “The experts there can help them,” Ellis said.

Editor’s Note: An earlier version of this story stated that TRICARE would send tax forms to its customers in January 2015. That was incorrect. TRICARE customers, like all filers, will self-attest on their 2014 tax returns, no health care coverage forms will be mailed.

FULLY DEVELOPED CLAIMS (FDC). Our focus is filing fully developed claims (FDC), here in the DSO that means submitting claims with as much supporting evidence as possible. You don’t have to be concerned with getting documents from government agencies, i.e. service records, service medical treatment records and VA treatment records, however, to file an FDC you must obtain any records for treatment outside the government it will make the processing of your claim go a lot faster! If you are in an FDC status DO NOT submit any additional evidence or you will lose that status and possible lose one year’s retroactive compensation. (The retro-active compensation will expire soon; and is available to first time filers)

VA CLAIM APPEALS. If your claim is denied by the VA, it is in your best interest to schedule an appointment with the DSO, so that we can review the reasons for denial and to see if we have sufficient evidence to appeal the decision. We will not submit a Notice of Disagreement (NODs) and VAF 9, Appeals to the Board of Veteran’s Appeals without talking with you and reviewing. If you receive notice to file a

More SERVICE OFFICE UPDATE, Page 7

DSOA Delivers a Successful Presentation
At Maine Veterans Home in Caribou

A presentation was given by Department Assistant Service Officer Orville “Dean” Shelton at the Maine Veterans Home in Caribou on Saturday, Nov. 8, 2014 to 26 attendees including representatives from the congressional offices of Sen. Collins, Sen. Michaud, and Rep. King.

A wide array of subjects was covered and a Q&A portion of the talk was well-utilized and well-received.

The overall presentation covered subjects ranging from the new “Credit Card Care,” “How to’s” on claims, and Survivor benefits.

Later that evening, Dean represented The American Legion at a Post 47 ceremony for USMC Cpl. Schools.

VA Health Benefits for Veterans & Family Members

Veterans and their families who lived at Camp Lejeune for 30 days or more between Aug. 1, 1953 and Dec. 31, 1987 may be eligible for VA health benefits. A Dec. 12 law changed the eligibility date from Jan. 1, 1957 to Aug. 1, 1953.

Veterans: Enroll online or call 1-877-222-8387 for help.

Family members: You may be eligible for reimbursement of out-of-pocket medical expenses for 15 conditions. Apply online or call 1-866-372-1144 for help.

Visit www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/camp-lejeune to learn more.

Post Service Officer Training Seminar
Completed for 2014: Thanks to those who attended the Post Service Officers Training on Nov. 25, especially the Commander and PSO from Post 147 all the way up in Madawaska! Left to right, (back row) Madison Post 39 Paul R. Connelly, Newport Post 105 Earl Beaulieu, (front row) Post 147 Commander Greg Morin, and Post 147 Service Officer Jimmy Pelletier. For more information on Post Service Officer Training, please call 207-623-5726.
Service Office Update (Continued from Page 6)

VAF 9, notify the DSO immediately so we can assist you, otherwise you may lose your ability to have your claim heard by the Board of Veteran’s Appeals in Washington D.C.

TOGUS VA WOMEN’S CLINIC. If you haven’t already heard, there is a Women Veterans Clinic here at Togus. I specialize in women’s health issues. Please keep in mind that there are medical conditions that may be claimable for the children of women veterans who served in areas and on certain ships that are presumptive for Agent Orange. If you are a woman veteran, it is a good idea to give us a call or look for more information on www.va.gov.

SURVIVING SPOUSES. We offer veterans the service of sitting down, along with your spouse, to fill out the documentation required to apply for Survivor Benefits; Accrual, Widow’s Pension and Dependent Indemnity Compensation (DIC). How does this assist you? We do a preliminary review of your Service Connected illnesses and injuries and attempt to determine what entitlement may result from the passing of the veteran. We scan in the required documents and create a “draft” claim. At the time of the passing of the veteran, the spouse would be able to sit down and fill out the paperwork. How does this help? Please call the Department Service Office Newsletter. We put you on our email list to receive the Department Service Office Newsletter. The newsletter contains active links to a variety of resources of value to our veterans. The newsletter will contain active links to a variety of resources for veterans as well as links to you, so you can better serve the members of your post. We are not doing mailings at this time.

KOREA REBORN BOOK. We have on hand at the DSO at Togus a limited supply of hard bound books “Korea Reborn – A grateful nation honors veterans for 60 years of growth” that were given to us to recognize and present to those that served in the Korean War. They are a gift from the people of South Korea to those who served. If you are a veteran who served in Korea during the period June 27, 1950 – Jan 31st 1955 we will be happy to provide you with a copy!

PSO TRAINING SEMINAR. We are again sending out a call to all Post Service Officers! If you contact the DSO, we will put you on our email list to receive the Department Service Office Newsletter. We now have three Post Service Officer training seminars under our belt and the response has been very positive. The next class is on Saturday February 28th, to accommodate those who work, and the following month the seminar will be on March 31st. You can request a reservation for the seminar by emailing the DSO at amedeo.lauria@va.gov; email sooner than later, as we only have 6 students per class. The classes are conducted at the Department Headquarters, 1000 hours to 1400 hours with a light breakfast and lunch included. There is no cost to attend.

PSO CONTACT INFORMATION: Please remember, if you are a Post Service Officer, as a minimum, please send me your full name, Post, telephone number (your phone number will not be released) and email address. The purpose is so that members of your post can contact you for local assistance and also so that I can contact you, by phone or email, if we hear from a member in your post that needs assistance.

CONSOLIDATED POST REPORT AND PSD OF THE YEAR AWARD. If you are a Post Service Officer, please make sure that your accomplishments and assistance to your members are recorded in the Consolidated Post Report that is submitted to Department in April by your Commander. The information is normally submitted by the Post Adjutant in paper, or by using “MyLegion” online at www.mylegion.org. This information will be used to select the “Post Service Officer of the Year” for the award presentation at the Department of Maine Annual Convention.

PSO CONTACT INFORMATION.

Legionnaires Receiving Non-SERVICE Connected Pension & Compensation

Attention Legionnaires receiving a Non-SERVICE Connected Pension and Compensation!

We are seeing a rash of overpayments by the VA, which then leads to a debt to the government.

NON-SERVICE CONNECTED PENSION: Please remember, if you are receiving a Non-SERVICE Connected pension you must notify the VA immediately of any increase in “FAMILY” income; this includes Social Security Benefits. If you do not, you run the risk of collection. Some have been quite significant.

NOTE: This does not apply to veterans receiving compensation for service connected injuries or illnesses.

SERVICE CONNECTED COMPENSATION: If you are rated at 30% or above and receiving additional compensation for dependents, you must notify the VA of any decreases or increases in number of dependents (i.e. divorce, graduation, adoption or marriage) or risk overpayment and collection or underpayment! Once you are rated 30% or over you MUST file for dependents to receive that additional compensation. READ THE VA LETTERS: Be sure to read your award letters, they tell you of your reporting responsibilities when receiving VA compensation and pension!

If you have any questions or concerns, please call the Department Service Officer Amedeo “Deo” Lauria at (207) 623-5726.

Veterans Can Apply to Upgrade Discharge for PTSD

A special webpage has been launched to assist veterans seeking to upgrade punitive discharges related to behavior problems caused by post-traumatic stress. The webpage provides information and applications to seek an upgrade to discharge from service. The page can be found at:

http://arba.army.mil/adrb PTS.html

It follows a recent directive to the Army’s Review Boards Agency (ARBA) to give liberal consideration to requests for discharge upgrades from veterans that are presumptive for Agent Orange. Some have been quite significant.

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PSO NEWSLETTER. To sign up for the newsletter, please email your contact information to amedeo.lauria@va.gov and state in the body of your email if you would like your name listed in the newsletter as well as permission to link to your email address through the newsletter. The newsletter is emailed out monthly. The newsletter was developed as a way to stay in touch with Post Service Officers and to keep them up to date on changes and sources of information that is of value to our veterans. The newsletter will contain active links to a variety of resources for veterans as well as links to you, so you can better serve the members of your post.

We are located at Togus VA Medical Center, Building 205, Room 318. You can contact us by telephone at 207-623-5726, Fax at 207-621-8421, or by email at amedeo.lauria@va.gov or orville.shelton@va.gov or eileen.krawczyk@va.gov. We are here to assist you Monday through Friday, 0730 – 1500 hours, closed on Federal Holidays and Patriot’s Day. Just a reminder, it is always a good idea to make an appointment rather than drop in, as we may be seeing other veterans and would hate to miss you. That said, you are always welcome to stop in the DSO Office, say hello, and have a cup of coffee and talk about the status of your claim or seek other assistance.

Quick Facts About Your Veterans Choice Card

Visit www.va.gov/vpa/choicecard for more information.

Before your Veterans Choice Card can be used, you must first meet the following test of eligibility for Choice Card benefits. If, after following Step 1 of the test you are not eligible for benefits, just hold on to your Card - you do not need to call us.

To Find Out If You’re Eligible:

Step 1

1. PERSONALLY ASSESS YOUR ELIGIBILITY FOR CHOICE CARD BENEFITS. Before you call us, ask yourself these four questions:
   1. Have you been told by your local VA medical facility that you will need to wait more than 30 days from your preferred date or the date medically determined by your physician?
   2. Is your current residence more than 40 miles from the closest VA health care facility?
   3. Do you need to travel by plane or boat to the VA medical facility closest to your home?
   4. Does a geographic challenge, such as extensive distances around water or other geographic formations, such as mountains, present a significant travel hardship?

Step 2

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you may be eligible to use your Choice Card. Verify your eligibility by calling 866-606-8198.

If you are not eligible to use the Choice Card right now, keep your card in a safe and convenient location. There is no need to call us.

More on UPGRADE, Page 8
Upgrades (Continued from Page 7)

Vet-erans who say they were kicked out of service because of problems related to PTSD.

Thousands of Vietnam-era soldiers may have been given punitive discharges because they suffered from PTSD before it was recognized as a debilitating medical condition. Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel acknowledged in September.

The ARBA is the Army’s highest level of administrative review for personal actions taken by lower level organizations, and is comprised of several boards for considering the claims of soldiers and former soldiers who appeal unfavorable information in their personnel records. Discharge upgrades are important because they are linked to benefits available through Veterans Affairs, such as treating PTSD-related symptoms, according to information provided by the Army.

The Army could not provide an estimate of how many applications it will receive as a result of the outreach campaign. However, a class action suit brought by veterans groups, including the Vietnam Veterans of America, estimates that one third of the 250,000 other-than-honorable discharges issued to Vietnam-era veterans may have been PTSD-related.

Veterans who previously were denied an upgrade can re-apply under the new guidance, and the Army Board for Corrections of Military Records will consider the application a new case, according to the Army. The new guidance only applies to veterans who received “other than honorable” discharges. It does not apply to veterans who received less than honorable or dishonorable discharges because of serious infractions.

Components of the Review Boards Agency include the Army Board for Correction of Military Records, the Army Discharge Review Board and the Army Grade Determination Review Board.

December 17, 2014—Staff report

Army Times: www.armytimes.com/story/military/careers/army/2014/12/17/veterans-can-apply-to-upgrade-discharge-for-ptsd/2052495/

Money Matters

Money Matters and because it matters so does membership. But membership is about more than money. Membership is about comrades uniting to achieve a mutually purpose, namely the welfare of our comrades and their families. Those of us who came back from Vietnam know well the sting of rejection when a grateful nation isn’t so grateful any longer and is quick to turn its back on those who faithfully served.

Like the angry word given in the heat of an argument or the mean deed unjustly delivered, some things can never be forgiven or forgotten. We can let those old wounds fester and destroy us as caring human beings, or we can band together and move on to insure that no future generation of veterans has the backs of its citizens turned on them again.

Through The American Legion’s four pillar programs, we strive every day to improve the lives of our comrades, their families, our communities, states and nation. We make every effort to insure that the memories of all our fallen comrades are remembered and honored. But, lastly, we want to remind our citizens that the privileges and freedoms that they now enjoy have come, and will continue to come at great sacrifice to the shrinking few and their families who serve in the armed forces.

The cost of conflict doesn’t end with a pullout, treaty, or armistice, it ends when those we send forward to protect our values, and our friends are returned to their rightful place in our society as fully functioning citizens.

Asking a wartime era veteran to join our organizations should never be a task, but should always be an honor extended from one comrade to another.
President’s Message

The American Legion Auxiliary is striving to make each member ONE IN A MILLION by 2019. To achieve this goal, good communication throughout the organization is a must. Just what is Communication? It is the act of conveying message through any number of means: telephone, E-Mail, newspapers, and the old fashion way—just sitting down and talking with each other. This organization is very large, yet broken into separate groups. We need to continue working to convey our ideas, one group to the other, by talking together across the table. When we work together we can reach the goals of The Legion, SAL, and Auxiliary alike. In order to keep our organization alive, and to grow, we all need to maintain good communication with our members and ourselves. As we, the American Legion Auxiliary, strive for ONE IN A MILLION MEMBERS by 2019, we ask that The Legion and SAL join us as advocates for good communication between all groups, striving to increase our joint membership.

NANCY RONCO

A New Year to Stay on Course

As another year comes to a close, I look forward to what the new year has in store for The American Legion Family and their efforts in raising a combined $4 million for the various American Legion Charities. When I was elected as your national commander, I knew I wanted to involve the Legion Family in everything that The American Legion does, including being rewarded for helping to meet my fundraising goal for Legion programs.

A "Stay On Course" fundraising pin will be awarded to any individual who donates $100 or more to American Legion Charities. And three pins will be awarded to any Legion post, Auxiliary unit, Sons of The American Legion squadron or Legion Riders chapter that donates $500 or more to American Legion Charities.

The pin is just a small incentive. What’s more important is that for every donation that you or your post, squadron or unit give to American Legion Charities, you are being rewarded with the knowledge that you are helping our veterans, servicemembers and their families.

MICHAEL D. HELM
National Commander

Through the Endowment Fund you are providing funds for veterans affairs and rehabilitation programs and helping a family in need pay a bill or keep food on the table for their children; through Operation Comfort Warriors you are helping wounded warriors recover quicker with the comfort items that they need; through the National Emergency Fund you are helping a post or Legionnaire rebuild their life after a natural disaster; through the Child Welfare Foundation you are helping other nonprofits address the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual needs of children; through the Legacy Scholarship Fund you are giving youth of a fallen servicemember a chance to achieve higher education; and through Soldier’s Wish you are making a wish come true. I know $4 million may seem like a lofty goal to achieve, but it’s almost a new year and with that comes new aspirations. Our veterans, servicemembers and their families are counting on The American Legion.


Law & Order

My name is Kirk Thurston, Chairman of the Department Law and Order Committee. This year’s committee members are Gil Ormsby from Harpswell, Roderick Collins from Bridgewater, Shawn Coffin from West Paris, Daniel Lindsey from Brunswick, Randall Kluj from Orneville and Curtis Merrill from Naples.

The time has come for all Legionnaires to press our local area First Responder organizations, i.e. Police Officers, Firefighters, EMTs and Game Wardens, for information regarding the outstanding heroes in our communities. Contact the leadership of these groups and ask how you can help them honor their people.

The forms are simple and easy to prepare. Add a few newspaper articles on an individual and a supervisor’s letter of recommendation and you have a package for submittal. I am willing to assist any Post in the preparation of their applications. Remember, May 1st is the deadline for packages to be at Department Headquarters.

If you have any questions on form or content of the applications, packages or other ideas, please do not hesitate to contact me at 369-0831, e-mail fuzzy3@roadrunner.com or call upon any of the committee members in your area. Refer to this year’s Department State Directory for their phone numbers or check with Department for the information.

Last year’s number of entries can be greatly improved, so let’s get out there and get some deserving people recommended and recognized.

Thank you in advance for your assistance.

KIRK THURSTON
Law & Order Committee Chairman

Membership Is Our Future

The success of our organization’s membership has a lot to do with leadership at all levels but particularly at the post level. Success at the Post depends on a commander maintaining an atmosphere which motivates its membership with interesting and new ideas to promote existing programs. We should continue to do what has been successful but not be afraid to make changes. What has worked in the past may need a complete overhaul or just a few tweaks to bring it into our new generation.

Next on the list to generate success is communication—a giving and receiving of information. The post commander must communicate with all of the members. Communication can be achieved through newsletters, telephone, e-mail, and post meetings. You must listen to your membership... this is where good leadership stands out, then make a decision which will motivate members to act on the desired approach to a problem or project.

Members need to hear that their work is appreciated. Thank you! Do you use that term often enough? Instituting these ideas along with a positive and energetic approach by the commander helps lead to an active and successful membership.

A mentor is a wise and loyal advisor. With over 800 to 900 new members each year, these new members could benefit from your guidance. Please help educate and guide our new members to become our future leaders.

All of the above will help to encourage new membership and retain the membership that we currently have.

RANDALL Kluj
14th District Commander

Emblem Sales

‘Request a Catalog’

Anyone who purchased a Legion, Auxiliary or Sons item from Emblem Sales in the last three years will automatically receive a catalog, as will commanders and adjutants on all levels.

Anyone who needs to obtain a catalog can request one by contacting Emblem Sales. Call: (888) 453-4667, visit online: www.emblemsales.legion.org

Michael M. Helm
National Commander

2014 Governor’s Inauguration held at the Augusta Civic Center on Jan. 7. Winslow State Representative Cathy M. Nadeau is seen here with The American Legion, Department of Maine Service Officer Amedeo “Deo” Laura.
Thank You for Attending
Sgt. Towne’s
Award Presentation

Col. Lauria,

Just a note to thank you for putting up with the snow and rain to be there at the State House last week for the Awards Presentation for Sgt. Towne. I have enclosed a local newspaper article, again thanks for showing up. The family and I appreciate it.

With deep respect,
Tony C. (Anthony J. Cincotta)

Scholarship Money
Well Received

To the Maine American Legion,

My name is Arrabine Dunn, and I have received the Daniel E. Lambert Memorial Scholarship from you at class night last June. I would like to say thank you for choosing me to receive it.

I have completed my first semester at the University of Maine at Fort Kent and I’m fully enrolled and am starting my second semester today.

I would like to take a moment to acknowledge your kind and courteous decision for choosing me to receive this scholarship. It will be a big help in paying for my tuition and books for my second semester.

I will not make you regret awarding this scholarship to me. I will continue to do my best work and put everything I have into my classes, so I can continue to have your support in my career choice of becoming a nurse.

Again, I say thank you for this scholarship.

North Berwick
Vet Waits 61
Years for Medals:
Friends and family of North Berwick Veteran Ted Towne gather at the statehouse in Augusta as he receives his medals after 61 years. Left to right, Gil Ormsby, friend and fellow veteran; Ted Towne, medal recipient; Tim Towne, Berwick Chief of Police and Ted’s son; Tony Cincotta, friend and fellow veteran; William Ciciotti, American Legion Legislative Committee Chair; and Amedeo J. Lauria, Department Service Officer.

More on TOWNE, Page 24

Announcing the 68th Annual
American Legion Boys State

The American Legion, Department of Maine is proud to announce the 68th Annual American Legion Dirigo Boys State program. This year’s program will again be held at Thomas College in Waterville during the week of June 21-25, 2015. Every American Legion Post and all subordinate bodies should alert their membership to one of the finest youth programs in the nation.

The American Legion sponsors the Boys State program and we encourage all other groups and organizations to join in promoting the program through sponsorship of candidates to American Legion Dirigo Boys State.

We ask that the officers of your Post contact school principals or guidance counselors for assistance in this program. Make sure that your school officials are knowledgeable of The American Legion Boys State program.

The tuition fee for the program for 2015 will be $275 per student. Contact The American Legion Dirigo Boys State, P.O. Box 900, Waterville, Maine 04903-0900, Tel: (207) 873-3229, or go online to www.mainelegion.org or www.dirigoboysstate.org for application materials.

Thank you for your assistance in making the 68th Annual American Legion Dirigo Boys State Program a success.

Honoring Dirigo
Boys and Girls
State Delegates:

Rumford Post 24 held a supper on Nov. 2 in honor of its delegates who had attended the Boys and Girls State programs in June of 2014. It was a very impressive turnout; all of Post 24’s chosen delegates, along with their families, were able to attend the supper. The delegates had the opportunity to speak on their experiences during their attendance at the Boys and Girls State programs and were each presented with a Good Citizenship Citation Award. If you are a high school junior this year, you may be eligible to attend the Boys or Girls State program, held in June of each year. Left to right (front row), Post 24 Commander/Detachment Chairman Donald Morton; John Grace; Devin Belanger; James Endresen; and Tyler Dole. Left to right (back row), Post 24 Commander/Department Sgt.-at-Arms Tricia Thurston, Adelle Oswald, Sarah Klein, Abby Parent, Leah Perry, and Unit 24 President Barbara Arsenault. Left to right (back row), Thomas Marshall, Dalton Milledge, Caleb Gauvin, Department Americanism Officer Kirk Thurston, Andrew Cote, Logan Benedix, Bradley Marshall, and Corbin Arsenault.

Photo by Marie Gauvin

2015 HS Oratorical Contest

The Department of Maine High School Oratorical Scholarship Program contest will once again be held at Thomas College in Waterville, Maine on February 14, 2015 at 9:00 a.m. Snow Date: February 21, 2015 at 9:00 a.m.

The main purpose of the High School Oratorical Scholarship Program is to develop a deeper knowledge and appreciation of the Constitution of the United States on the part of high school students. Other objectives of the contest include the development of leadership qualities, the ability to think and speak clearly and intelligently, and the preparation for acceptance of the duties and responsibilities, the rights and privileges of American citizenship.

This contest is for students who welcome learning... For the student who looks for an academic challenge and an opportunity to gain scholarship monies, The American Legion’s High School Oratorical Scholarship Program is a natural fit. Students learn valuable information about our country’s Constitution in a contest that has been held by The American Legion for more than 75 years.

National Finals: The 2015 National Finals is April 10-12 in Indianapolis, at the Wyndham Indianapolis West. Quarterfinal and semifinal contests are scheduled for Saturday, April 11, with the finals scheduled for Sunday, April 12. Certification of Department winners is due to National by March 12, 2015.

More Information
For more information about the Oratorical Contest in Maine, please contact The American Legion Department Headquarters at 873-3229, or e-mail Oratorical Chairman Donald Chase at ddcascadej@roadrunner.com. Also, please check out the State and Local Oratorical Contests of National’s website at www legion org/oratorical or the Department of Maine’s website at www.mainelegion.org.

Testimonial Dinner
Planned for May 9th in Bangor

The Department Testimonial for Department Commander Richard Graves, Department President Nancy Ronco, and SAL Detachment Commander Scott Morton will be held Saturday, May 9, 2015 at the Spectacular Event Center, Bangor, Maine from 5:00 p.m. – 10:00 p.m.

More information on meal arrangements and hotel information will be made available soon and will be published on www.mainelegion.org and in our department newsletter or Smile.

Hotel reservations will be your own responsibility.

— Your Letters —
American Legion Riders of Maine

ALR ‘The Beginning’

In the fall of 1993, a Veteran shared a dream with his American Legion Post Commander. The dream was to start a motorcycle association that would operate within the American Legion. The idea was to provide an atmosphere where the members of the Legion Auxiliary, Sons of the American Legion, and the Legionnaires who shared an enthusiasm for motorcycles, could come together in a family oriented group. The enthusiasm of riding together with the desire to help those Veterans who may need a helping hand is why the Legion Riders were formed and continue stronger today!

ALR ‘Today’

Today the American Legion Rider Program which was once a dream, can be found all over the world. Currently, there are over 110,000 American Legion Riders across the nation and in at least three foreign countries. A diverse group of men and women, themselves members of the American Legion family, gather together in the American Legion Rider program, where they share their love of motorcycle riding and demonstrate their support for their communities, state and nation.

In 2005, the first Legion Rider chapter was formed in the State of Maine. Today ALR chapters can be found from Kittery to Madawaska. The American Legion Riders are a family oriented organization. In addition to promoting their love of motorcycle riding, they also sponsor and support a number of annual fundraisers which support not only charities in their communities, but charities at a State and National level. The charities they support are diverse, but are always focused towards veterans, their families and those in need.

Since 2006, ALR nationwide have participated in the Legion Legacy Run to annually raise money for the Legacy Scholarship Fund, established to provide scholarships to children who have lost a parent in a combat theater since September 11, 2001.

Since 2010, The Legion Riders of Maine have worked with the Homeless Veteran Program of Maine making annual donations in an effort to make veteran homelessness a thing of the past. The American Legion Riders of the Maine proudly raised over $14,000 in 2014 for the Homeless Veterans Program of Maine.

THANK YOU AMERICAN LEGION RIDERS FOR YOUR GENEROUS CONTRIBUTIONS!!!

Gifts, Laughs and Tears Shared: Chapter 15 and Chapter 80 American Legion Riders visited with the seven Veterans at the Presque Isle Rehab and Nursing Center on Veteran’s Day 2014. Individual gift bags and $100 toward personal accounts were given to each veteran. There were laughs and tears shared over coffee and cookies. Chapter 15 has been helping with the expenses for the veterans there for three years. Left to right (front row), Jerry Joles, Lloyd Thibodeau, Phyllis Robichaud, Ginny Joles, and Gary St. Peter. Left to right (back row), Mark Chamberlain, Lisa Van Pelt, and Randy Rasmussen.

Homeless Veterans Program: ALR State Director Kaye Bouchard, left, presents a check in the amount of $14,054 for the Homeless Veterans Program to Lorna Hatch, Chief, Voluntary Service from VA Maine Healthcare Systems-Togus. Riders from throughout the state are to thank for their generous donations.

Money Donated To Department Of Maine Veterans Assistance Fund: Dixfield Chapter 100 ALR Director Charlie Green, right, presents ALR State Director Kaye Bouchard with a check for $1,154 for the Department of Maine Veterans Assistance Fund.

Dixfield Chapter 100 Members the night in which donations were presented to Homeless Veterans, the South Paris Maine Veterans Home, and the Department of Maine State Headquarters.
‘Wreaths Across America’ for AL Riders

ALR Chapter 40 Continues WAA Ceremony: American Legion Rider Chapter 40 has been doing the “Wreaths Across America Ceremony” for years. “PGR” Patriot Guard Riders head up the entire event working of course with “Wreaths Across America.” PGR state leader Mike Edgecomb organizes the event. Pictured is 3rd Maine Regiment at the Mt. Vernon Cemetery as “Wreaths Across America” wreaths were laid on Dec. 13.

Mt. Vernon Cemetery: American Legion Rider Chapter 40 member Carl Smith at Mt. Vernon Cemetery.

ALR Chapter 40 members Lee and Betty Norton at the Mt. Vernon Cemetery.

AL Rider Chapter 205 Director Doug Cunning places a wreath at Mt. Vernon Cemetery.

Wreath Laying Begins: American Legion Rider Chapter 40 Director Colin Hewitt at Mt. Vernon Cemetery placing a wreath after performing at the ceremony.

Laying Wreaths at Mt. Vernon Cemetery: State Road Captain George Draper at Mt. Vernon Cemetery as “Wreaths Across America” wreaths were laid.

Wreaths Across America Laying Complete: Togus West Cemetery after “Wreathes Across America” wreaths were laid at the Dec. 13 ceremony.

“RIDERS LEAD THE WAY”

Interested in information about the Legion Riders?

Please contact:
Kaye Bouchard, State Director
725-5245 or kayeemb@comcast.net

Or
Paul L’Heureux, Executive Director
873-3229 or paul@mainelegion.org

LOUD & PROUD
By DAN WARREN

**Special to The Maine Legionnaire**

Q: Coach, you had a rich history in Legion ball. Tell us what you did, as a player, and coach, what years, and states, etc.

A: Playing and coaching American Legion baseball was a terrific experience both in terms of being fun and beneficial in my development as a player and as a coach. I thoroughly enjoyed playing American Legion baseball in Eastern Massachusetts in ’74–’76. My last summer playing was after my freshman year at Maine because I was still young enough. I coached the Orono – Old Town Twins in Maine for four or five summers in the mid to late 80’s and really enjoyed it.

Q: What did you get out of Legion ball as a player?

A: I received an opportunity to continue to play and develop. As we all know the high school seasons in New England are short and baseball is a sport you need to play to get better. You don’t improve by training all the time, lifting, etc. you need to play a high number of games and American Legion provided that.

Q: What did you get out of Legion ball as a coach?

A: It was my first real opportunity to be a head coach and learn all of the things that go along with being a leader and fully responsible for all aspects of the team. I talk with many D-1 assistant coaches that have applied for a job here at Dartmouth and I ask them if they have ever been a head coach at any level? Most of them haven’t. Their career path goes directly from being a player, into being an assistant somewhere. I have always put a premium on guys that have a basic understanding of knowing what goes into being responsible for the development of the players on the field and know what it’s like to be willing to take responsibility for the result, along with all the other aspects off the field (scheduling, raising money, field and facility preparation, building relationships with players, dealing with over involved parents, etc.) that go into being a head coach.

Q: How about personal memories as a player? Stay in touch with any teammates?

A: I have great memories as a player. Our coach, Rocky Ferrara, was a store owner in town and was a wonderful man. We had really good teams and made the state tournament each year. One of the best parts of American Legion was that you could draw from other towns in the area so our team included the best players from several towns and high school programs and not just your own.

Ronnie Perry was one of those players. He was a college basketball and baseball star at Holy Cross that attended Catholic memorial in West Roxbury, the town next to Needham, Ma. and played professional baseball in the White Sox organization and tried out for the Celtics. His father was a star at Holy Cross in his own right and later became the Athletic Director. Mr. Perry played for my dad in Somerville, Ma. after Korea so Ronnie and I were always friends. We come across each other from time to time and he has attended some Holy Cross games when I have taken my Dartmouth teams there to play. Almost all of the guys on our team played college baseball, with several playing at the D-1 level and a few played professionally. Many of these guys have sons now that are in high school and looking to be recruited by academic schools and attend some of our games if we play near their home. It’s great to see them after all these years and meet their sons.

Q: Same question as coach?

A: I remember having really great kids from interesting backgrounds that came from all over to play American Legion Baseball for Orono-Old Town. One took the Swain’s Island Ferry over to SW Harbor, and drove another hour to Orono every day for practices and games. If DH’s ran late on Sunday he would need to leave during the game (he was our starting catcher) to catch the last ferry back to his home! I had one kid that drove down several hours each way from the County to play. His dad was a woodsman and ran a skidder. The parents were so proud that their son got to play our home games at Mahaney Diamond, they brought me a cord of wood to say thank you and dumped it in the parking lot near the entrance to the field! It impressed me how much it meant to so many to have the opportunity to play American Legion Baseball.

I also had several kids whose parents worked at Maine, some in the Athletic Department. I have heard in the last few years from Greg Rogerson, whose father Ron Rogerson, was the Head Football coach at Maine. Greg is an attorney in Delaware and coaches a youth organization on the side. He sent me the nicest note last year after all these years about the impact playing American Legion had on him. It reminds you of how important everything you do, and say, is to the kids you coach even if you don’t realize it at the time. Frankie Hackett was a catcher on our teams and was in the Maine Baseball program as well. His father Al Hackett, was a wonderful man and worked in admissions at Maine. Al travelled with our team on trips to do the radio. Frank is a Superintendent of Schools in a town in eastern Massachusetts and calls me about players from time to time. These kinds of kids remind you why you get into coaching and make it all worthwhile.

Q: You have been at Dartmouth now 25 years. First congratulations! That is rare in your business. Second, before that, you were at your alma mater, UMaine. Tell us about contact you had with Legion ball while an assistant to Coach John Winkin at Maine.

A: As I’m sure you know, Coach Winkin was incredibly supportive of American Legion baseball having been a veteran and never missed the state Legion tournament in Augusta. My contact was mostly out of state. Every summer I covered the American Legion tournaments in Ma., Ct., N.H., Rhode Island, N.Y. and N.J. and sometimes in Pa.

Q: How about at Dartmouth? Have you scouted at Legion games? In NH? Maine? All New England? Other states?

A: When I first came to Dartmouth I continued to recruit at Legion tournaments in New England, N.Y. and N.J. although some of that has changed now. However, I always look for an excuse to run up to Maine to evaluate players during American Legion games. I’ve had some very good players out of the State of Maine here at Dartmouth (Scott Pett, was a wonderful man and worked in admissions at Maine. Al travelled with our team on trips to do the radio. Frank is a Superintendent of Schools in a town in eastern Massachusetts and calls me about players from time to time. These kinds of kids remind you why you get into coaching and make it all worthwhile.

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Q: What do you see as the future of Legion baseball? What are limits? What are potential values?

A: It’s hard to say, and I think it varies region to region and state to state. Certain parts of the country (California and Arizona in the west, Georgia and Florida in the south, and New Jersey in the east) have built huge complexes where you can host 300 plus teams. Coaches will attend because you can see so many teams and players over a week period. More than likely this will drain some of the better kids that used to play American Legion teams. However, for me there are two things really in its favor. One is that coaches complain that kids are all in "showcase" mode and have lost the aspect of playing with your
friends towards a common goal and winning a championship. Most travel teams the kids may not even know each other. Also, it will allow more kids locally to make these American Legion teams and offer more opportunity.

Q: If you were made Commissioner of Legion baseball for a day—either in NH or Maine or elsewhere or nationally—what changes would you make, or propose?

A: 1. I would try to tighten the restrictions, and attempt to minimize having kids miss a large percentage of the games because they are at camps, clinics, showcase tournaments etc. because they are playing on other teams at showcase events. Try to eliminate the "free agent" mentality. Try to have them focus on their Legion teams.

2. I would name Dan Warren Commissioner Emeritus!

3. Ban parents from talking to the coach about playing time.

Q: Why?

A: Ask a college coach now about #3 and you will know why J!!!

Q: What changes might be embraced, do you think?

A: Anything to promote kids playing more should be looked at seriously.

Q: Any of your proposed changes face opposition?

A: I think #2 would get serious opposition J, but #3 would pass!!

Q: If changes are made, what value might the "new" Legion baseball have?

A: If you can get kids to make Legion a priority, it will prosper.

A: The top players are going to continue to have other options. That will have somewhat of a negative impact on Legion baseball.

Coach, thank you for your time! Good luck this upcoming season for The Big Green.

Register Now For 2015 Legion Baseball Season

Team registration for the 2015 season of American Legion Baseball is now underway online at www.baseball.legion.org.

Background screening checks are conducted annually prior to any meetings, events, practices or games that involve youth participants.

For questions or concerns, please email baseball@legion.org.

2015 AL Baseball World Series in Shelby, N.C.

In preparation for the 2015 American Legion Baseball World Series in Shelby, N.C., Aug. 13-18, a blind drawing was recently conducted for the division pairings and game times. Please visit: www.legion.org/documents/legion/pdf/2015_alws.pdf to see the 2015 ALWS tournament schedule.

Once again, the 14 games leading up to the championship game will be streamed live on ESPN3 and the championship game will be televised live on ESPNU.

Celebrating 70 Years Allied Victory in Europe

Pictures are World War II veterans who celebrated the 70th D-Day Anniversary in Normandy, France last June. The French have not forgotten our men’s harrowing deeds and are still celebrating their country’s liberation each year on June 6. Witnessing the appreciation shown towards our veterans is truly a sight to see—they are treated like movie stars!

These veterans were part of a group that traveled on a WWII Battlefields Tour of Europe. They were accompanied by family and friends, and many other persons interested in the history of World War II. The group visited Paris, walked on Omaha and Utah Beach, continued on to Reims in France, paid respect at General Patton’s grave in Luxemburg, and explored the Battle of the Bulge area in Belgium. In Germany they visited the Remagen Bridge, Nuremberg, the former Dachau Concentration Camp, and Hitler’s Eagles Nest in the beautiful Bavarian Alps.

The tour was designed by WWII veteran and historian Dr. Brooks Ranney of Yankton, SD and was conducted by Rupiper Tours. This tour was immensely enjoyed by all 112 tour participants. Visiting these places where our veterans fought is a great way to grasp the significance of the Allied Victory in Europe!

2015 tours are scheduled for June and August. For more information you may contact Mrs. Brooks Ranney at (605) 665-3596 or toll free at (888) 414-4177.
Legionnaire Insurance Trust

Your valued status as a Legionnaire entitles you to LegionCare, up to $5,000 in NO COST benefits. But confirmation is required for full activation. $5,000 NO COST To You Accidental Death Protection if traveling on official American Legion business. $1,000 Accident Protection for all covered accidents. There are no strings attached and you pay nothing for this benefit.

Legionnaires can sign up for the "No Cost" AD&D by visiting www.theLIT.com/no-cost-legioncare or by calling the toll free number 1-800-235-6943.

For more information please contact The American Legion, Department of Maine’s LIT chairman Ramona Naragon at (207) 407-1019 or via email at mainelitdirector@gmail.com. Also, if you provide your DOB when calling Mona, she will help you to enroll into this No Cost Program.

Scholarships Available

Applications are now available for the Department of Maine Children and Youth Scholarships, the Daniel E. Lambert Memorial Scholarship and the James V. Day Scholarship. Any Post, individual or school who would like to receive a copy may obtain one by going online to legionnaire.org or mail at The American Legion, Department of Maine, P.O. Box 900, Waterville, Me 04903-0900, email: legion-me@mainelegion.org, or Tel: (207) 873-3229.

The American Legion

The American Legion USAA Rewards World MasterCard

USAA is The American Legion’s preferred provider of financial services. Offering a range of top-rated financial and insurance products and services. USAA welcomes honorably discharged U.S. military veterans, active-duty troops and qualified family members and descendants of those who have served. USAA contributes funds to American Legion programs when members join through a dedicated channel: usaa.com/legion or by calling toll-free at 1-877-699-2654.

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Give back, get rewards.

- Redeem your USAA Rewards™ points for cash, gift cards or travel discounts.
- No annual fee or membership fee.
- With USAA Rewards: Get 2,500 Bonus Points after your first purchase.
- Start earning 1 point for every $1 spent for all your everyday purchases.
- Redeem your rewards points anytime on usaa.com or from your mobile phone — with no redemption fee.
- Enjoy no cap or expiration date on points.
- Redeem your points for cash on mobile device that can be applied to your checking, savings or credit card account.
- Redeem your points on usaa.com for travel, gift cards, cash or merchandise.
- To Apply for The American Legion USAA Rewards World MasterCard, please visit: https://www.usaa.com/inet/pages/bank_credit_cards_military_affinity_deepdive?add=off&tal_bnk_cc_web&affid=010&cardType=ALL.

Legion Seeks Eagle Scouts

The American Legion, Department of Maine is seeking nominations for the 2015 Eagle Scout of the Year. The state winner will receive a $500 scholarship and is automatically entered in the national competition.

Scouts applying must be an Eagle Scout, who will be at least 15 years of age and enrolled in high school. Applicants must also be a registered, active member of a Boy Scout Troop, Varsity Scout Team, or Venturing Crew, chartered to an American Legion Post, Auxiliary Unit or SAL Squadron; or be the son or grandson of a Legionnaire or Auxiliary member.

Applications are available through The American Legion, P.O. Box 900, Waterville, Maine 04903-0900, by calling (207) 873-3229 or on-line at www.mainelegion.org. Applications must be received at Department Headquarters by March 1, 2015. For further information, contact Headquarters. The national winner receives a $10,000 scholarship. Three-second place scholarship awards of $2,500 are also awarded at the national level.

Special Olympics Maine

Special Olympics Maine 27th Annual Lobster Dip

Special Olympics Maine 27th Annual Lobster Dip held at Old Orchard Beach on Jan. 1. This is the largest fundraiser for Special Olympics Maine.


USAA Rewards World MasterCard

Largest Fundraiser: Those in attendance at the 27th Annual Lobster Dip held at Old Orchard Beach on Jan. 1. This is the largest fundraiser for Special Olympics Maine.

Special Olympics Maine

Special Olympics Maine CEO and dipper Phil Geelhoed at Old Orchard Beach, Maine Jan. 1.
Mid-Winter Conference Yields Productivity & High Turnout
Jan. 16-18, 2015 at Gray Post 86

Past National Commander Anthony G. Jordan gives his welcoming remarks and introduction of guests to those in attendance at the Annual Mid-Winter Conference Jan. 17. Left to right, Department 2nd Vice Commander Peter Johnson, Past National Commander Anthony G. Jordan, and Department Commander Richard Graves.

Excellent Presentation Delivered: Department of Maine Legislative Committee Chairman William “Chick” Ciciotte delivers an excellent presentation on the topic of Legislation to those in attendance.

Dept. Executive Committee Meeting: The American Legion, Department of Maine officers at the Department Executive Committee meeting Jan. 18 at Gray Post 86. Left to right, Department 1st Vice Commander Ronald Rainfrette, Department Adjutant Paul L’Heureux, Department Commander Richard Graves, Department 2nd Vice Commander Peter Johnson, and Department Judge Advocate Scott Paradis.

100% Membership: Department Commander Richard Graves presents Litchfield Post 181 Commander Debra Couture with a Certificate of Appreciation for attaining 100% Membership as of Dec. 31, 2014. Left to right, Department Commander Richard Graves, Post 181 Commander Debra Couture, and Department 2nd Vice Commander Peter Johnson.

A Great Turnout:
Department of Maine National Executive Committeeman John Hargreaves, seated, front with many of those in attendance at the Department Executive Committee meeting Jan. 18.

Topsham Post 202 Commander Nicolas Hamlin, left, meets National Vice Commander Douglas Haggan who was Guest Speaker at Mid-Winter Conference in Gray on Jan. 17.

Auburn Post 153 Commander Dan St. Pierre shows his support by attending the Mid-Winter Conference in Gray, Maine, while Department Finance Officer Tommy Adkins, pictured here in the back, prepares to talk about the budget process on committees.