The amendment does not, in fact, protect the flag but simply allows the people to protect it if they so choose. The goal is not to punish flag burners, but to recapture our Constitution. Former Secretary of Defense James Mattis suggests an interesting penalty: “Forget jail if you burn the American flag. You’ll spend two years in the military. I promise you, you’ll be cured of the desire to burn our flag ever again. You’ll be waving it, saluting it, or … you’ll be lying under it.”

The American Legion and the Citizens Flag Alliance pushed this issue to within one vote in 2006. At that time, more than 75 percent of the American people, and every state in the union, supported the amendment.

Why is this important? The U.S. flag represents all that unites us as one nation under God. Never in my lifetime has our Constitution been so under assault as it is now. But those who burn our flag are not a threat to who we are. The threat comes from those who say desecrating the flag is speech, specifically the Supreme Court. Some of the founders, especially Thomas Jefferson, expressed concern that the judiciary, the only unelected life-tenured branch of government, might weaken the lust for power. They were right. In an effort to immunize the judiciary from the whims of the people, they immunized them from the will of the people, thus allowing usurpation of the governing power of the people.

Jefferson warned that “the germ of dissolution of our Federal Government is in the constitution of the Federal Judiciary – an irresponsible body (for impeachment is scarcely a scare-crow), working like gravity by night and by day, gaining a little today and a little tomorrow, advancing its noiseless step like a thief over the field of jurisdiction until all shall be usurped from the States and the government be consolidated into one.”

The flag amendment is about protecting our Constitution, heeding the warning of Jefferson and agreeing with President Abraham Lincoln: “If the policy of the government upon vital questions affecting the whole people is to be irrevocably fixed... (Continued on Page 3 See Supreme)
Still Serving America

Do you have an ongoing program or activity that serves your community? Do you have a friend or relative that goes above and beyond the call of duty to help others? Drop us a line and tell us what your story is or how you or this person is demonstrating that they are Still Serving America, but must be received by the 10th of the month, the month prior. In submitting your information, please be sure to include your full name, address and telephone number. There’s a good chance the information you send will make it into The Observer. Please send to: Still Serving America, The American Legion, 7465 East 1st Ave. Ste D Denver, CO 80230.
Take action against suicide prevention

By: Brett P. Reistad, National Commander

American Legion University of Akron Post 808 in Ohio recently participated in an Out of the Darkness Campus Walk. There were 20 sets of combat boots lined up near the walk start to represent the 20 veterans a day who die by suicide, according to the most recent statistics from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

Post 808, the Student Veterans of America chapter and the university’s Veterans and Military Service Center co-chaired the walk, one of some 150 suicide awareness walks taking place this spring across the country.

“I think one of the things we can do as individual posts is get into our CBOCs and our hospitals and get a presence known, show them, ‘Hey, we’re here for you. You need something, we’re here for you. You want my phone number, you want my email?’ Whatever we can do to help in our local communities, our local areas, that’s what we need to do,” said Post 808 Commander Daryll Mauder, who can speak firsthand on the dark emotions that can lead one to contemplate suicide.

“I struggle daily, and that’s my whole goal, because I’m in these boots, I’ve walked these boots and I can maybe help a fellow brother or sister out or even a civilian at this point, if they’re struggling, I just want to be there to help because I’ve been right there with them.”

May is National Mental Health Awareness Month. And with suicide being a nationwide health issue, especially among our veterans, The American Legion and the VA have teamed up to adopt a public health approach to suicide prevention.

Preventing veteran suicide is a top priority for VA, but they need help from dedicated partners like the American Legion Family to reach veterans outside the VA health-care system.

Last year the VA released a long-term strategy for preventing suicide among all veterans. Read the National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide at www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/strategy.asp. To take action, review the suicide prevention strategy, adopt and promote the principles, and contact your local VA Suicide Prevention Coordinator to collaborate and explore potential partnership, education and training opportunities. Even look into participating in a suicide awareness walk in your community.

By working together, we can save veterans’ lives.
As we come together in Colorado Springs at Convention, let us celebrate some great things about this last year!

Our 100 Year Centennial. We will come together on June 22nd at convention, as a Legion Family and proclaim, “We are 100 Years old”. Be prepared for something fun and educational as we conduct a centennial celebration event on Saturday morning that Department Historian Deb Davis has developed.

Many veteran organizations had the greatest intentions to stay relevant and last forever but faded away over time. They will never get the opportunity to see 100 years of success. However, The American Legion is still here and working. For God and Country; now striving for the next 100 years, together and strong! We have been blessed to have had seen more success than the original intent to only help in the aftermath of World I. The American Legion has now been the driving force advocating for veterans and children through a multitude of military conflicts for all these years.

This year we overcame some membership challenges. With the reality of decreasing membership in all veteran organizations, we have worked hard to reach out to our community of veterans to fill the ranks. We have had multiple posts that have struggled for years, not only get to 100% in membership, but this year exceed that quota to even new heights! We have proven that we are very relevant and active, and that veterans need to unite in strong posts throughout the state to work our 4 Pillars with the greatest programs we could ever imagine. By working a hearty membership recruiting program at the post level, we still stay the Largest Veterans Organization in Colorado. Commit to our success and help all increase membership.

We raised a significant amount of money for our fellow veteran; with our very own Colorado Veteran Assistance Fund. CVAF was created to give immediate assistance to Colorado veterans in need. It’s fast, fair and red tape free, thus getting the assistance to those in greatest need faster! We veterans are stubborn, we have a hard time ever asking for help, this gives the relief where it’s needed when the veteran finally asks for help. Together we made this program a success, but the battle is never done, we will always need funds to replenish into it and keep it alive for our brothers and sisters.

We all worked as a Team! Thank you for building groups that worked together. This is an organization where sole, independent efforts may barely move the needle, but as a unified team, we can move mountains, change lives and make this department stronger for the next 100 years. You are most important part of this success and it’s you that will continue to help us move forward into the future.

HOOAH!!

Spring meeting resolutions posted on Digital Archive

During Spring Meetings in Indianapolis last week, the American Legion National Executive Committee passed 30 resolutions. These are now available to view in the Legion’s Digital Archive; see the full collection by going to https://archive.legion.org/handle/20.500.12203/4/discover?query=2019s*

In addition to these most current resolutions, the Digital Archive contains all active Legion resolutions from 1950 to the present, as well as publications and other materials that go all the way back to 1919.

Photo on the right is our very own Legionnaires NEC Tom Florez and Alt NEC Jay Bowen are shown in attendance at the Spring Meeting of the National Executive Committee on Thursday, May 9, 2019. (Photo by Schelly Stone/The American Legion)
A Message From Department Sr. Vice Commander Noechel

Convention 2019
By: Dean Noechel, Department Sr. Vice Commander

Colorado Team 100,

Colorado American Legion Membership is rocking for 2019 and we don't want to stop now! You can help by asking your friends to renew or join your Post. Will you recruit one New Member today?

Now is the time to reach out to those members who have not renewed for 2019 as their membership and benefits in our great organization are expired. Our members are the backbone of our organization and we need each one of you. We need 1010 members to reach our 100% for our 100th Department Convention.

Are you planning to attend the 100th Department Convention, June 20-23, 2019 in Colorado Springs? Membership Awards will be presented on Saturday June 22, 2019 during the membership Luncheon, make sure you get your tickets early. This lunch is open to every member of The American Legion. I hope that you plan to attend and get the recognition that you all deserve for the hard work and dedication that you have put into working membership in 2019. We have over 55 Posts that achieved the Checkered Flag, and 30 Posts that will receive the 105% Limited Edition Team 100 Jacket. CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL.

Are you planning to attend the 100th Department Convention, June 20-23, 2019 in Colorado Springs? Membership Awards will be presented on Saturday June 22, 2019 during the membership Luncheon, make sure you get your tickets early. This lunch is open to every member of The American Legion. I hope that you plan to attend and get the recognition that you all deserve for the hard work and dedication that you have put into working membership in 2019. We have over 55 Posts that achieved the Checkered Flag, and 30 Posts that will receive the 105% Limited Edition Team 100 Jacket. CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL.

PAID UP FOR LIFE MEMBERSHIP DRAWING, Recruit 5 new members into The American Legion and have your name entered into a drawing for a PUFL Membership in 2019. Please get those names submitted to PNC Bock at pncbock@coloradolegion.org

DMS 211 Members need to be transferred into a local Post, please contact PNC Bock to get your list today. Let's get these members engaged into your Post. Just call them up or email the members and ask them to transfer to your Post.

Membership in the Largest Veterans Service Organization, The American Legion, is the best value to our Veterans and our local Community. We need to just ask. Just Ask if they are a member of The American Legion. Share your WHY……. WHY are you a member of this great organization? There are other Veterans that believe the same that you and I do. JUST ASK THEM TO JOIN!

In closing I would like to ask each of you for your support as I seek the office of Department Commander for 2019-2020. Let’s join forces and RE-IGNITE PATRIOTISM IN COLORADO, because together we can make a difference in the lives of our fellow brothers and sisters. I look forward to getting out and traveling our great state and to visit all 14 Districts and many of the Posts. I would like to ask for your support to serve as your 100th Department Commander.

Please join me on Friday June 21, 2019 at the Hotel Elegante from 7-9pm in room 2523 for some refreshments and snacks, Let's RE-IGNITE PATRIOTISM together.

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White House VA Hotline surpasses 250,000 calls from Veteran community

Pledged by President Donald J. Trump as part of his administration’s commitment to reforming the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), as of May 14, the White House VA Hotline has answered more than 250,195 calls since it went live June 1, 2017.

The hotline, 855-948-2311, serves Veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors by giving them a direct, nonemergency, contact line available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year with agents — the majority of whom are Veterans or from a Veteran family — who are trained to address general and common VA inquiries.

“The White House VA Hotline is quickly becoming VA's front door for questions or concerns about VA and community resources,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “This milestone is a testament to VA’s commitment to improving the Veteran experience.”

While Veterans are encouraged to use existing VA contact centers, the hotline offers an alternative “always the right number” approach, transferring calls when needed to VA subject matter experts, such as the Veterans Crisis Line. The hotline serves as VA's front door to listen to Veterans’ experiences, identify trends in Veteran feedback and resolve Veterans health, benefits and services concerns anywhere in the department.

More than half the calls to the hotline are general inquiries about VA's care, benefits and memorial services. Concerns that cannot be resolved immediately are entered as cases, accessible to VA Offices of Client Relations. To date, 94% of the total 157,346 cases created have been resolved.

According to recent data from April, the average wait time to speak to a live agent was nine seconds, with calls typically lasting about 15 minutes. About 1% of all calls were compliments.

For more information about the hotline, visit https://www.va.gov/ve/whvahotline.asp. Veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors can call the White House VA Hotline at 855-948-2311.
A Message From Department Adjutant Smith

100 Years of Success

By: Pat Smith, Department Adjutant

In the month of June we once again assemble for our annual department convention. This year we will convene in Colorado Springs Elegante Convention Center June 20-23, 2019. This is an historic year. We will elect the 100th Department of Colorado Commander. Who will that be? You need to attend to cast your vote and find out.

Our opening session on Saturday June 22 will feature our 100 year history of The American Legion of Colorado. Our Department Historian, Deb Davis, has assembled an impressive program highlighting many of the major accomplishments over our 100 years. Our National Commander, Brett Reistad, will be present to witness this event. He will be our keynote speaker at our banquet that evening. His message will not only focus on our accomplishments but will look forward to our future.

The convention will elect new officers. These men and women will be charged with upholding our beliefs and carrying out the mandates of the delegates to this convention for the next year. It is a big job. They answer to over 21,000 members in this state. They must look for, encourage and motivate, volunteers who believe as they do to carry out the multitude of tasks necessary to achieve all of our objectives. Are you one of those volunteers?

What’s on our mind? Well until we get there we will not know what is on the mind of the delegates that will assemble. They should be considering resolutions to take positions on the state of the Veterans Administration lack of ability to provide timely care to our veterans. They should also be concerned about the state of our military readiness. They should be concerned about our declining membership in this organization. They should be concerned about veteran homelessness in the state of Colorado and the nation. They should be concerned about the eroding values of our young people, particularly when it comes to the values we express in our preamble to our constitution, “For God and Country”.

That is an aggressive agenda. For 100 years The American Legion has stood up for all of these things. We believe in a strong national defense. We believe in our youth. We believe in waving the American flag proudly. But most of all we believe that this nation owes a debt of gratitude to those who fought to keep this nation free of tyranny and oppression.

One of the keys to success is for our posts to be actively involved in our programs. The chairman of our major committees will be in attendance. They will have information about how to participate in our successful youth programs, Boys State, Baseball, Oratorical contest, Jr shooting program, Boys Scouts. If any of these get your interest be sure to become a delegate and learn how you can make a difference.

Membership will be high on the agenda at this convention. Our membership base in Colorado has not eroded over the last ten years. We face a challenge every year in that we need to replace over 3,000 members who have left us for some reason. Keeping our membership strong is a team effort. The challenge is how to attract new members, young and old, and get them involved. If they are involved they tend to stay longer. Bring your new ideas to the convention on how to improve our membership.

Finally let me congratulate your department commander this last twelve months, Robb Smith. He has risen to the occasion with his excellent leadership skills. Robb served in the Army during the Persian Gulf War. He retired as an E-8 First Sgt. He traveled the state extensively this year. He knows the value of our volunteers. Our volunteers at all levels have rallied around him because he knows how to say THANKS. He has been, and will be for a long time to come, a valuable asset to this organization. If you see Robb at the convention, say thanks Robb.

Put June 20-23 on your calendar. Details of the convention can be found elsewhere in this publication. Don’t miss it. It will be fun an exciting. See you there.

Are you a homeless Veteran? At risk or know someone who is?

The words homeless and Veteran should never be used together.

Call VA's toll-free hotline: 1-877-424-3838 (1-877-4AID-VET) or visit our website.
A Message From Department Jr. Vice Commander DuMosch

You only have one chance to make a great first impression

By: Tony DuMosch, Department Jr. Vice Commander

The Internet and Social Media is a great way to instantaneously reach out to your community and potential new members. Have you or your Post had the opportunity to get your scheduled Post events out to your members, on Facebook, or on the website? Have you reached out to other organizations, clubs, or event organizers in the community? This is a time when you can bring The American Legion to the people. Do you know your material and have you reviewed the American Legion program & pamphlets so you are well informed? Have you visited your local VA for materials to hand out so you are well prepared? Have you stocked up on pamphlets relating to The American Legion benefits and discounts so you are up to date with all The American Legion has to offer? You only have one chance to make a great first impression for The American Legion. Being prepared and knowing your material sets the precedence for your Post and increases the opportunity to recruit new members and reflects well on you and your Post.

It would behoove you to know your materials before putting them out. There is nothing more embarrassing than being asked a question and you struggle for the answer or stumble in search of the correct materials only to find you do not have anything to offer. Do you have a Department directory with you? Why a directory? Imagine a new visitor comes to your booth from another city and they want to know where is the closet American Legion post is to them? You now have the opportunity to provide them an answer with the Department directory as well who the Post commander is. Meeting the public, making new friends and networking with others in your surrounding communities will be nothing less than beneficial to you and your Post. You will discover new talents and yes even potential new members and expand your Post. To me, there is no better way to let your community know The American Legion is in their community than to be seen as a part of the community, not just during holidays and parades. A Post needs to get involved and stay involved because service is not seasonal, it’s ongoing. This is something I have remained vigilant about since my arrival from Hawaii to my new Post in Colorado in the year 2000.

My past 20 years of experience in the American Legion has allowed me to grow and experience new opportunities and prospects. As a result, I feel ready for new challenges in the American Legion. If you attended our Mid-year conference, I have officially announced my candidacy for the position of Department SR. Vice Commander and I am seeking your full support and together we will help our organization grow. I have held nearly every position of office at the Post, District levels as well some Department levels of office. I understand the importance of membership and the role it plays in our Post and our community. I also believe in service first with the power of networking and providing the opportunity for our programs of the American Legion to reach the public. I am a strong advocate for Legion awareness tables at public events in order to keep the community apprised of all we do and have to offer. Knowing the programs and benefits in the American Legion allows us to better serve and help our veterans and our community. I have provided personalized training to individual members and various Posts in several Districts and will continue and share the lesson learned with each of you. Your Post votes at this year’s convention in June is your support to join me as we continue to thrive and drive, bringing the American Legion to the people and the success of the Department of Colorado. As your Department Sr. Vice Commander 2019-2020 I will continue to do as I have in the past, “Do my best for You, your Post, District and Department”. Thank you for your support and continued dedication to the Veteran and their families through the American Legion. Together we will continue to expand the American Legion by reaching out to help our veterans and those in need with our benefits and services.

Tony DuMosch
Department Jr. Vice Commander

Department Convention
June 20-23, 2019
Hotel Reservation Info on Page 25
Shortened Convention Agenda on Page 24-25
A Message From Department Jr. Vice Commander Jackson

Convention Season is Here
By: Greg Jackson, Department Jr. Vice Commander

Well it is that time of year again when we will make our journey to the Depart of Colorado Convention. This is always a great time to meet other legionnaires and exchange ideas as well as get up to date on what is happening in the The American Legion. Many events and things happen here. This is when the Executive Committee meets and recommends any changes to our Department Constitution as well as when Resolutions are brought forward for voting on. This is also when we elect our Department Officers for the year.

I personally encourage each and every American Legion Post in the Department of Colorado and Each of the 14 districts to have at least one member attend and represent your post and district. The most important days are Friday and Saturday. Saturday being without a doubt the most significant as far as resolutions and elections go.

By attending you can gain a big understanding on how we are doing with our many programs. You will learn things that could make your post operate better. You may learn things to avoid as well.

Did I mention the Camaraderie that you will experience by association with members from other posts from all over the state. These relationships will aid in developing a unified Department. We all know the Saying “United we Stand, Divided we fall”. This is one of a few opportunities that we have to help strengthen that unity year after year. I think we all should make every effort to attend in order to make a stronger department and propel The American Legion into the Next 100% thru engagement, involvement, participation and respect for what we do.

I have kept this short but feel the message is nonetheless very important. Again I am campaigning to be your next Senior Vice Commander and would appreciate your support and Votes.

A Message From Department Jr. Vice Commander Kossow

The American Legion Blood Donor Program
By: Chip Kossow, Department Jr. Vice Commander

Work the programs said Department Adjutant Pat Smith when I asked him several years ago on how to make a Post better. It is great (and simple) advice. Post programs that positively affect your community will encourage people to want to be part of your organization. The challenge is to figure out what program(s) work best with your Post membership and your community.

A lifesaving program that has been part of The American Legion since 1942 is The American Legion Blood Donor Program. This program can fill a vital need within your community. Besides local notoriety, your Post can receive recognition by Department and National when the donations are reported on the Consolidated Post Report each year.

You can donate individually or organize a Post Blood Drive. Some larger communities may have blood banks with mobile donation centers that can support an event at your Post or a convenient location. In more rural areas, you may need to travel to a blood bank to donate. Either way coordinate the event with the blood bank and invite your community to participate.

Blood can be donated every 8 weeks for healthy people. Most blood banks have some basic rules for donors, such as:

- Be at least 18 years old (or 17 with a parent’s permission) and show a photo identification.
- Weigh at least 120 pounds and be in good health (If you’ve donated blood in the past, you must weigh at least 110 pounds).

The regional American Red Cross no longer supports blood drives in Colorado (check local listings to be sure). I found UCHealth (www.uchealth.org/services/blood-disorders-disease-care/blood-donations) has approximately 576 sites throughout Colorado and there were several other blood banks listed. A google search of your area can find a location for your Post.

As of the writing of this article, The American Red Cross did report a critical shortage of type O blood and urges type O donors to give now to ensure blood is available for patients facing trauma and other life-threatening situations. All other blood types are also needed at this time.

Work the programs!
Walgreens HERO program to hire 5,000 Veterans
Career program Veterans can take advantage of

By: Brett Robbins

Walgreens recently announced a commitment to hire 5,000 Veterans over the course of five years through their Helping Veterans with Educational and Retail Opportunities Program (HERO). Walgreens established the HERO program for Veterans to transition the leadership skills learned through military service into a retail management career such as assistant store manager trainee and shift lead.

Participants in the program will have the opportunity to work towards a bachelor’s degree with tuition assistance and discounts available. Also, the GI Bill paired through Southern New Hampshire University provides a guaranteed 80-90% coverage of tuition costs to achieve a bachelor’s degree.

Benefits to the program include:

- On the job mentorship
- New team member and program support
- New student support through Southern New Hampshire University
- LEAP Program Retail Management Training – Plus more!

Walgreens is an Employer Support of Guard and Reserve (ESGR) and has pledged to recognize, honor and enforce the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act, and to ensure Walgreens managers and supervisors have the tools they need to effectively manage team members who serve in the National Guard and Reserve. Walgreens’ is also proud to offer Military Leave and Military Bridge Pay to eligible team members and employee store discounts are extended to spouses and eligible dependents.

To search for a career in the HERO program visit https://jobs.walgreens.com/search-jobs/HERO/1242-19097/1

About the Author: Brett Robbins is an Army Veteran serving as a communications specialist detailed to Department of Veterans Affairs’ Veterans Experience Office.
A Message From Department Chaplain Hamamoto

Rejection

By: Stanley Hamamoto, Department Chaplain

HAS GOD BEEN GOOD TO YOU???

Think about it before you answer. Now that June is here, all but one of our districts have met. And this one will meet on the first Sunday in June. I hope that many of you got a chance to attend your district meeting. This is one of the important one to attend. This is when you elect new officers for the coming year. It is also a great time to meet others from your district that you do not have a chance to see often.

I need to have one thing made clear. That is that the worship service on June 23rd is a nondenominational service and not a memorial service. We had our memorial services at Mid-year in January. I know that many of you do not like attending memorial services and that is why I changed the format of our services. Instead of having two memorial services, I combined them into one at Mid-year. I hope that we have a good turnout to confirm what I did was the right thing to do.

Here are a few Scriptures first: 1 Samuel 16: 7: “God does not see the same way people see. People look at the outside of a person, but God looks at the heart.” 1 Chronicles 28: 9 “And you my son Solomon, accept the God of your father. Serve him completely and willingly, because the Lord knows what is in everyone’s mind. HE understands everything you think. If you go to him for help, you will get an answer. But if you turn away from Him, He will leave you.” Psalm 34:18: “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted, and he saves those whose spirits have been broken.”

There is no pain in the world quite like it: the awful pain of feeling rejected. It hurts! It crushes the spirit and breaks the heart. The feeling of rejection can do many different things to us. As an example: some say that divorces sometimes can be more wrenching and devastating, than would be the actual death of a mate.

Because, while death brings feelings of deep loss and loneliness, divorce can create overtones of rejection, of feeling thrown away, of being unneeded, discarded. We are told that this same thing also counts heavily in the trauma of a prison experience. The whole aura of being confined, caged, out of touch, out of sight, cut off, rejected. And this is why old age is so depressing to some people, because our youth oriented culture, make some older folks feel rejected. And sometimes when tragedy comes, people may feel that God has rejected them. I know this for a fact for I have been there myself. The awful pain of feeling rejected. It can crush us emotionally, physically and spiritually. But the Christian faith has good news for those who feel rejected, the good news of healing and wholeness. Remember that God accepts you. HE is with you. This is of course important most of all: it’s the key message of the Gospel. It’s the real good news for those who feel rejected. God loves you. HE is saying, there is nothing in the world you can do, that will ever stop me from loving you. When you feel rejected, remember that Gods never rejects you. He accepts you---You are important to Him. You are valuable to HIM.

If you want to hear more about rejection, my sermon for Sunday June 23rd is titled, “DEALING WITH THE PAIN OF REJECTION.” Come to the worship service and hear more about rejection. SEE YOU THERE!!!!!!

My last three words to all of you are: GO TO CHURCH!!!!!!
Why did you join the SAL?
By: Ron Noakes, Commander, SAL Detachment of Colorado

Here it is June 2019 already. Damn how time flies. It has been a long road but what a road. Met lots of great individuals and had loads of fun. One of the main things covered in our travel was the importance of the local membership. We, the Detachment, are nothing without the members of the squadrons. We need to ask our self “Why did I join The Sons of the American Legion”.

I, for one, did not know what the Sons of the American Legion was or stood for. After 20 plus years as the 4-H/NRA Training Counselors, I was asked by a very dear friend to start a Junior Shooting Sports Program for Post 2. As my grandfather served in WW1, I qualified to be a member of the SAL Squadron 2 so I joined. We started the program after about a year or 2, and attending meetings, I started to learn more about the American Legion and what it stood for. I knew I wanted to be more involved. It did not take long and I became a squadron officer.

This is when I really begin to realize what the Sons and the Legion did. By becoming involved I also realized that I was honoring not only my grandfather, but also every veteran who served and gave me the ability to do what I do. I continue to pay my membership every year and continue to honor them.

Why did you join? You joined to be part of something bigger then yourself. You joined to honor your father, grandfather, or great grandfather. Do not let what you have done go away by not renewing your membership, pay your dues.

Get involved with your Squadron and /or the Detachment. Find what you can do to honor your fore fathers and continue the legacy. What better way to honor them, then by helping other veterans.

The first thing in the morning, ask yourself this,” What can I do to make today better”.

We are the proud processors of a priceless heritage. Show your pride.

Thank you.

We Get Letters Too!!
By: Gary Lazuk, Commander, Walter Rhoades Post 111 Louisville, Colo

In response to Commander Smiths’ April 2019 Observer column, and his plea that, “One small act can make a difference.” The members of Walter Rhoades Post 111 in Louisville have placed this delicate and serious issue of Veteran suicide at the fore front of our fiscal year objective. On February 12th, Post 111 Commander Gary Lazuk and the membership of Walter Rhoades Post 111 Louisville, invited Heather Trish from Jefferson Center to address the members. The intent of the invitation was to present the services that they provide revolving around mental health and suicide prevention for Veterans.

With the information that was provided, The Post 111 Membership that was in attendance, through the process of a vote, decided to provide financial support to Jefferson Center. The monies donated will be used specifically for Veteran services with an emphasis on Veteran suicide prevention. The motion was for a potential total donation of $12,000 paid through quarterly $3,000 installments. These installments will be evaluated every quarter prior to by the Post 111 Executive Committee. As of 13MAY2019, Post 111 has contributed $6000 toward Jefferson Center’s Veteran services.

To further demonstrate Jefferson Center’s and Post 111’s commitment to the Veteran community, Heather Trish provided the Executive Board members of Post 111 with Q.P.R. Gatekeeper training on the evening of 08MAY2019. For those that have questions. One, the purpose of Q.P.R is to learn how to recognize the warning signs of a suicide crisis and how to question, persuade, and refer someone to help. Second, as gatekeepers, the members that completed the training are now in a position to recognize a crisis. And, after recognizing the warning signs, know how to get the proper help with the hope of saving a life.

Thank you for the opportunity to address our contribution.
VA comes out against bills on medical marijuana for veterans

By: Patricia Kime, article was taken from Task & Purpose May 02, 2019

Editor’s Note: This article by Patricia Kime originally appeared on Military.com, a leading source of news for the military and veteran community.

The Department of Veterans Affairs opposes three legislative proposals that would expand research on medical marijuana at the VA and give veterans access to the drug in states where it is legal.

During a hearing Tuesday on eight VA health-related bills under consideration by Congress, VA officials told House lawmakers that as long as marijuana is illegal under federal law, the department cannot support legislation that promotes its role at the VA.

“The House Veterans Affairs Committee] can make strong proposals for us to move forward with recommendations of filling out forms and such but, in the end, we need to go back to the [Drug Enforcement Agency] and [Justice Department] for their opinion,” said Larry Mole, chief consultant for population health at the VA.

Three of the bills before the House Veterans Affairs health subcommittee relate to medical marijuana. One, the Veterans Equal Access Act, H.R. 1647, sponsored by Rep. Earl Blumenauer, D-Oregon, would allow VA health providers to recommend medical marijuana to their veteran patients and fill out the necessary paperwork for them to enroll in state marijuana programs.

Blumenauer, who has introduced the bill in every Congress since 2014, said that, for some veterans, marijuana and cannabis derivatives are lifesavers that keep them from using addictive medications such as opioids to treat post-traumatic stress disorder, chronic pain, seizures and glaucoma. Yet VA health care providers are not allowed to recommend it.

“Opioids steal the lives of 115 Americans every day ... as veterans with PTSD, chronic pain and any number of ailments are looking for relief, lethal opioid overdoses among VA patients are almost twice the national average. We are doing something wrong,” he said.

Another bill, the VA Medicinal Cannabis Research Act, H.R. 712, would direct the VA to conduct a large-scale clinical trial on the effects of cannabis on conditions such as PTSD and chronic pain.

Bill sponsor Rep. Lou Correa, D-California, said the research would examine the effectiveness of cannabis on various health conditions, as well as delivery methods.

“It’s time to do research. It’s time for veterans to know what cannabis is good for and what cannabis is not good for,” Correa said.

A third, the Veterans Cannabis Use for Safe Healing Act, H.R. 2192, would protect veterans’ benefits by prohibiting the VA from denying health care and compensation for veterans participating in a state medical marijuana program.

Keita Franklin, the VA’s national director of suicide prevention, said that while the department supports medical marijuana research and is currently involved in a trial for treating PTSD, it opposes the bills.

According to Franklin, VA doctors would be subject to criminal prosecution if they recommended medical marijuana or made referrals to state agencies, as specified by DEA guidance.

And Correa’s bill, she said, would not follow standard practice in medical research.

“Typically, a smaller early-phase trial would advance our knowledge and the benefits and risks regarding cannabis before moving to the expansive approach described in this legislation,” she said. “Any trial involving human subjects must include an evaluation on the risks and the safety, and include the smallest number of participants to avoid putting the subjects at increased risk unnecessarily. For these reasons, we don’t support this legislation.”

She added that the third piece of legislation is unnecessary because VA policy states that the department cannot deny benefits based on marijuana use, although VA physicians are allowed to tailor a patient’s prescription medications based on whether they are using cannabis.

Veterans advocates who testified expressed varying levels of support for the bills.

Carlos Fuentes, director of national legislative service for the Veterans of Foreign Wars, said the VFW does not support the Veterans Equal Access bill because it doesn’t think the VA should recommend unproven medical treatments, nor should it authorize a treatment for a veteran that would require the former service member to get it outside the VA, where they would be responsible for finding a quality product and paying for it.

The VFW does, however, support VA research on cannabis.

“VA’s overreliance on opioids to treat chronic pain and other conditions has led to addiction and even deaths. To its credit ... VA has reduced the number of patients to whom it has prescribed opioids by 22 percent. Now, VA must expand
research on the efficacy of nontraditional alternatives to opioids,” Fuentes said.

Joy Ilam, national legislative director for Disabled American Veterans, agreed.

“We want to make sure there is no harm done. Research is the first step in doing that,” Ilam said.

Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America research director Stephanie Mullen said the IAVA supports cannabis research and access to it.

“It’s past time for VA to catch up,” Mullen said. “Veterans are suffering from their injuries today.”

Among the other bills and draft bills discussed at the hearing was one that seeks to expand complementary and alternative therapies and treatments at VA medical facilities, and another that would require the VA to report suicides and attempts that occur on VA campuses within a week of them happening.

Franklin said the VA supports both proposals.

This article originally appeared on Military.com

VA now transplanting kidneys that are positive for hepatitis C

Some Veterans on waiting list may be eligible for procedure

U nderscoring its mission of improving the quality of life for Veterans, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recently began offering a new option to patients awaiting kidney transplants: organs that are positive for hepatitis (hep) C.

In early March, a team from the Iowa City VA (ICVA) Health Care System (HCS) successfully transplanted hep C positive kidneys into four Veteran patients, then immediately began the treatment process to cure the viral infection that causes liver inflammation.

“At VA, we have the ability to quickly adopt medical advancements almost as soon as they are reported in medical literature,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “Providing high quality procedures, such as innovative organ transplants, illustrates the good stewardship of our resources and VA’s commitment to Veterans and the American people.”

Dr. Daniel Katz, transplant surgery director for the ICVAHCS, said VA was quick to understand the bigger picture and the long-term, cost-savings potential of the new procedure.

“The high cost of hep C treatment may hinder rapid adoption of this practice in the private sector, where the transplant center may not be reimbursed for the hep C treatment,” Katz said. “Even with the hep C treatment, though, there will be cost savings over time by removing patients from dialysis.”

The ICVAHCS transplant team has successfully conducted more than 475 organ transplants and is on track to reach 500 in 2020. The hepatitis C virus (HCV) is the most common bloodborne disease in the United States. VA has treated and cured more HCV patients than any other HCS in the country, and is on track to eliminate the HCV in about a month in all Veterans willing and able to be treated. As of March 3, nearly 116,000 Veterans started all-oral hep C medications in VA, of which 96,654 Veterans completed treatment and have been cured.

Part of a VA treatment program, U.S. Navy Veteran Jack Jones was cured of hep C more than two years ago. But Jones still needed a new kidney.

On March 8, the ICVAHCS offered to transplant his kidney, then cure the hep C that it carried through a similar process that had cured him before. Jones jumped at the chance, and his transplant was successfully completed the next day.

“I would recommend this [procedure], and the VA, to anyone,” said Jones, who is now back to his regular life at home in Asheville, North Carolina.

Other VA Transplant Centers also provide Veterans the opportunity to choose to receive hep C positive donor organs with post-transplant treatment. Participating centers include William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans Hospital in Madison, Wisconsin (liver and heart); Hunter Holmes McGuire VA Medical Center in Richmond, Virginia (heart); VA Portland Health Care System in Portland, Oregon (liver); Tennessee Valley Healthcare System in Nashville, Tennessee (liver and heart); and VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System (liver).

Visit www.iowacity.va.gov for more information about the hep C organ transplant team.

VA leads the country in hepatitis screening, testing, treatment, research and prevention. For more information about VA’s research in this area, visit https://www.hepatitis.va.gov/.
Other-than-honorable discharge?
You’re still eligible for VA mental health care

By: Hans Petersen

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has made mental health care treatment available to former service members with other-than-honorable (OTH) administrative discharges through two new programs.

One service, initiated in 2017, is specifically focused on expanding access to assist former OTH service members who are in mental health distress and may be at risk for suicide or other adverse behaviors.

The department’s Veterans Health Administration (VHA) medical centers are prepared to offer emergency stabilization care for former service members who arrive at the facility with a mental health need.

Former service members with an OTH administrative discharge may receive care for their mental health emergency for an initial period of up to 90 days, which can include inpatient, residential or outpatient care.

During this time, VHA and the Veterans Benefits Administration will work together to determine if the mental health condition is a result of a service-related injury, making the service member eligible for ongoing coverage for that condition.

A second initiative focuses on the implementation of Public Law 115-141. With this implementation, VA notified former service members of the mental and behavioral health care they may now be eligible for and sent out over 475,000 letters to inform former service members about this care.

The letters (sample follows) explained what they may be eligible for, how long they may be able to receive care and how they can get started.

“You are receiving this notification because you may be eligible for services from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

Congress recently passed legislation that allows VA to provide ongoing mental and behavioral health care to certain former service members with Other Than Honorable (OTH) discharges, including those who

1. Were on active duty for more than 100 days and served in a combat role, or

2. Experienced sexual harassment or sexual assault while serving.

The rate of death by suicide among Veterans who do not use VA care is increasing at a greater rate than Veterans who use VA care; according to agency mental health officials. This is a national emergency that requires bold action. VA will do all that we can to help former service members who may be at risk. When we say even one Veteran suicide is one too many, we mean it.

In 2018, 1,818 individuals with an OTH discharge received mental health treatment, three times more than the 648 treated in 2017.

There was a total of 2,580 former servicemembers with an OTH discharge that received care in 2018 in VHA. Of these, 1,818 received treatment in Mental Health Services. Of the 2,580 servicemembers with OTH discharge, 1,076 had a mental health diagnosis.

Additionally, VA may be able to treat a mental illness presumed to be related to military service. When VA is unable to provide care, VA will work with partner agencies and will assist in making referrals for additional care as needed.

You can call or visit a VA medical center or Vet Center and let them know that you are a former service member with an OTH discharge who is interested in receiving mental health care.

Veterans in crisis should call the Veterans Crisis Line at 800-273-8255 (press 1), or text 838255.

About the Author: Hans Petersen is senior writer-editor for Digital Media, VHA Office of Communications. An Air Force Veteran, Hans also served two years in the Peace Corps and worked for 20 years in broadcasting before joining VA.

Photograph provided with the story. Photographer is unknown.
VA recognizes elementary school students for role in ending Veteran homelessness

In conjunction with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs’ (VA) community partnership efforts to combat Veteran homelessness, VA recently recognized Henry Zarrow International School in Tulsa, Oklahoma, for winning the 2018 End Veteran Homelessness Challenge.

Mark E. Morgan, director of the Eastern Oklahoma VA Health Care System, presented a certificate of appreciation to the school on April 26 for winning the friendly elementary school competition, which collected household and personal care items for Veterans transitioning from being homeless.

VA began the challenge in October 2018 in partnership with the National Association of Elementary School Principals and the American Student Council Association, with plans to make it a yearly event.

“It’s thrilling to see our nation’s youth volunteer their time for this great cause,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “The generous donations collected by the students will help provide Veterans with basic household necessities as they settle into their new housing.”

The goals of the challenge are to encourage civic engagement among school-age children and help fill critical needs of Veterans transitioning from being homeless. Six elementary schools in six states participated in the 2018 challenge. In total, participating schools collected nearly $7,000 worth of personal care items and household goods to help Veterans transition to stable housing.

In winning the event, Henry Zarrow International School collected more than $2,000 worth of items. Together, the six schools collected 881 toothbrushes, 746 pairs of socks, 557 containers of soap and body wash, and 428 tubes of toothpaste.

To date, more than 65 communities and three states — Connecticut, Delaware and Virginia — have effectively ended Veteran homelessness. Nationally, homelessness among Veterans has decreased nearly 50% since 2010. Since 2010, more than 700,000 Veterans and their family members have been permanently housed or prevented from becoming homeless nationwide because of interventions by VA and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Veterans who are homeless or at imminent risk of becoming homeless can contact their local VA medical center, where VA staff are ready to assist, or they can call 877-4AID-VET (877-424-3838).

Visit www.va.gov/homeless to find out how to help prevent and end homelessness among Veterans and subscribe to the online newsletter to be notified when the 2019 challenge begins.

Other schools that participated in the 2018 challenge include:

- Eastman Avenue Elementary School in Los Angeles; Carrollwood Day School in Tampa, Florida; The Main Street Academy in College Park, Georgia; P.S. 54 in New York City; and Little Cypress Intermediate School in Orange, Texas. The collection drive ended in December.

VA’s Home Loan Guaranty program notifies Veterans of potential loan fee waivers

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced May 13 that Veterans who qualify for a VA Home Loan funding fee waiver are now being notified in their home loan eligibility certificate and disability compensation award letter.

The recent change to the Home Loan Guaranty program aims to improve benefits delivery to Veteran homebuyers.

“Through an internal quality improvement effort, VA has put a plan in place to better inform Veterans through key communications when the law allows VA to waive the fee for a Veteran,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie.

VA also modified the “home loan welcome” letter to make sure Veterans know they may qualify for a loan fee waiver, should they later obtain a VA disability compensation award.

Historically, VA tasked lenders with verifying the “exempt” status of Veteran homebuyers and the department would identify waiver cases using its own internal loan audit process or by relying on Veterans contacting VA directly. Further internal procedural changes will provide a more regular review of program data and VA will soon issue policy and procedural changes to ensure a Veteran’s up-to-date status for the fee waiver is correctly identified.

A major issue under review is how VA credits borrowers who, after loan closing, were awarded disability compensation with retroactive effective dates. The department is working to determine how far VA can go to provide relief, given the current restrictions of applicable laws.

VA’s ongoing quality review looked at millions of loans dating back to 1998 originations. Since the initiative is ongoing, VA has not totaled how many borrowers might be helped by the new efforts. VA notes that it routinely returns funding fees when appropriate. Since 2014, the department has provided an average total of $75-$100 million to roughly 5,000 Veterans each year.

More information about the VA funding fees and refunds is available in VA’s Lenders Handbook. Veterans who think they may be eligible for a refund should visit VA’s website at: https://www.benefits.va.gov/homeloans/purchaseco_loan_fee.asp.
The purpose of life is not to be happy. It is to be useful, to be honorable, to be compassionate, to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well. -- Ralph Waldo Emerson

What an impactful and powerful quote. Think about the meaning, Make some Difference.

As a volunteer our mission should be clear, it is “service not self.” In what we do is make a difference, even if it is just to one. We touch a life with a smile, handshake, donation, etc. We must stay focused on our mission to stand tall and contribute to others.

There are times when we get frustrated with those we work with. However, there is a time and place to address the issues. It is not a public forum where we put out laundry out to dry for everyone to see it. There are so many great programs to focus energy on.

Did you know that American Legion Baseball touches the lives of more kids each year than Girls and Boys State combined? Each of these programs deserves a focus, energy, time, and donations to make them a success. Touch the lives of our country’s future. Make a difference to them.

There are so many great things our units and families do to support our children and youth, active duty military, and veterans. It might be a fundraiser at the post, but then that money raised supports a troop, a scholarship, a children’s event, many different things. How many people has this made a difference to?

A visit to a VA, ice cream social, bingo, cookies, blanket distribution, or even just a visit to chat. Make a difference to them.

Sending letters, care packages, prayers to deployed soldiers. Make a difference to them.

Remember our mission. Remember WHY you are a member and who you honor. Would it be an honor to them if you lost sight of the mission.

There are benefits to yourself as well. Be kind, be aware, and be flexible to those around you. Commander Robb and I have said several times, play nice in the sand box. It is to the benefit of your units and yourself.

Convention promises to have some adventure and new things. We will have a “mini-mission training” Thursday June 20 in the morning with Past National President Linda Boone. Friday we will have some workshop training and open forum. You ask the questions. Instead of doing our normal awards during the meeting we will be hosting an awards night on Friday June 21 at Post 209. This allowed us the free time for the training and to celebrate the American Legions 100th Birthday. Mission accomplishments are to be celebrated. Come to the Friday night dinner and enjoy great company.

See you at convention.
DRAWING
GIVEAWAY

American Legion Auxiliary
Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

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Drawn June 2019

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Legionnaires help raise suicide awareness with campus walk

By Andy Proffet

More so than most, Daryll Mauder can speak firsthand on the dark emotions that can lead one to contemplate suicide.

“I’ve actually had four attempts from the span of 2010 to 2019. Recently I was just in the hospital — not as an attempt, but had some really dark thoughts, and I just needed to get myself checked in to get a mental break,” said Mauder, the commander of American Legion University of Akron Post 808 in Ohio.

“I struggle daily, and that’s my whole goal, because I’m in these boots, I’ve walked these boots and I can maybe help a fellow brother or sister out or even a civilian at this point, if they’re struggling, I just want to be there to help because I’ve been right there with them.”

Mauder spoke about his struggles before the Out of the Darkness Campus Walk on April 28 at the University of Akron, one of some 150 such suicide awareness walks taking place this spring across the country. This was the fifth year for the event at Akron, where the Legion post, Student Veterans of America (SVA) and the university’s Veterans and Military Service Center are co-chairs of the walk.

“As a community advocate, our main goal is to reach out and build bridges, not barriers,” said Past Post Commander Ashley Gorbulja-Maldonado. “So when it comes to suicide awareness and prevention, and changing the language, this was a no-brainer. Especially having a post commander who is actively working through the struggles.”

Sunday’s walk took place a day before a veteran died by suicide outside Cleveland VA Medical Center, the latest in a series of such incidents.

“I think one of the things we can do as individual posts is get into our CBOCs and our hospitals and get a presence known, show them, ‘Hey, we’re here for you. You need something, we’re here for you. You want my phone number, you want my email?’ Whatever we can do to help in our local communities, our local areas, that’s what we need to do,” Mauder said.

The mile walk around the University of Akron campus included students, student veterans and others hoping to raise awareness. In the opening ceremony, Miss Ohio 2018 Matti-Lynn Chrisman talked about choosing mental health awareness and suicide prevention as her cause as Miss Ohio, noting that “depression has controlled 90 percent of my life.”

Mauder pointed to the 20 sets of combat boots lined up nearby to represent the 20 veterans a day who die by suicide, according to the most recent statistics from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

“We need to get that number down further, we need to bring that down to zero,” Mauder said.

Maurice Pelkey, veteran engagement director for Team RWB, attended the walk because he’s known people who have tried to kill themselves.

“I know as a veteran that it is an epidemic in our society. We need to let other veterans know that we are there for them, and there’s always a reason to fight,” Pelkey said.

Post 808 and SVA member Timothy Jones echoed that sentiment, saying, “We all struggle with things differently, and it’s good to know that there’s always a brother or sister you can talk to, and committing that act does not have to be the answer that resolves your situation. There’s always other ways to resolve it.”

SVA chapter president Nick Peterson said the event “lets people know that they’re not alone, especially veterans. I know when I got out of the service on a medical discharge, I was skeptical about reaching out, I didn’t think anything was wrong. It took a hospitalization before I was like, ‘Okay, I need to do this.’”

Army veteran Jonathan Davis agreed. The vice president of the university’s rocket design team, the Akronauts, Davis walked with fellow team members Matthew Stanko, the team’s president, and Matthew Reppa, the team’s chief engineer.

“For me, when I got out of the Army in February 2018, I was going crazy,” Davis said. “Didn’t know what it was I was supposed to be doing, I couldn’t figure out what was wrong. So I went to the VA and sat down with a therapist and talked through it, and the issue was that I had lived the past six years of my life with a mission. And now there was no mission. So the flowerbed was my mission. Painting the living room was my mission. Housework became the mission, and that wasn’t fulfilling. And so it took a lot of introspection to really think about and not be in that dark place that I was in my mind, because it just felt like everything was pointless. And that can spiral out of control quickly. It came to kind of defining purpose and accepting responsibility and trying to give back to the community, getting involved in rocketry, coming here to the University of Akron to pursue a degree in aerospace engineering so I can be involved in rocketry, kind of rekindle that flame of purpose in my life. So I want to reach out and help other people who are in similar situations, other veterans that need that and show them there are resources, there are things you can be doing, you don’t have to be in that dark space. There are other missions,” Davis said.

The walk raised $11,885 and included 130 participants.
Veterans in Burn Pit Registry helping fellow Vets

Helping researchers understand the effects of exposure to burn pits

By: Dore Mobley

(Note: The Burn Pits registry web site has experienced increased traffic from Veterans signing up and may be down for maintenance. Please try again when the site is back up. Thank You.)

An overall goal of scientific research on groups such as Veterans is generalizability—the measure of how well the research findings and conclusions from a sample population can be extended to the larger population.

It is always dependent on studying an ideal number of participants and the “correct” number of individuals representing relevant groups from the larger population such as race, gender or age.

In setting the eligibility criteria for the Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry, VA researchers used generalizability as an important consideration.

Simply put, they want as many Veterans and active-duty service members who had deployed to specific locations to join the registry. Participants could have been exposed to burn pits or not. They could be experiencing symptoms or not. Or, they could receive care from VA or not.

Helping to improve the care of your fellow Veterans

For researchers, everyone eligible to join the registry has a unique experience critical in establishing empirical evidence. By signing up and answering brief questions about their health, Veterans and active-duty service members are helping researchers understand the potential effects of exposure to burn pits and ultimately helping improve the care of their fellow Veterans.

It is estimated that 3 million Veterans and active-duty service members are eligible to join the registry. However, just over 173,000 have joined as of April 1, 2019, and 10 out of 100 have had the free, medical evaluation, which is important to confirm the self-reported data in the registry.

See what questions are asked

In hopes of encouraging more participation in the registry, VA is sharing a partial list of registry data can be view at https://www.publichealth.va.gov/docs/exposures/va-ahobp-registry-data-report-may2019.pdf collected from June 2014 through December 2018. This snapshot will give you a sense of the type of questions on the questionnaire as well as how the data is reported when shared with researchers and VA staff.

As a reminder, the registry is open to active-duty service members and most Veterans who deployed after 1990 to Southwest Asia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Djibouti and Africa, among other places.

Check your eligibility at https://veteran.mobilehealth.va.gov/AHBurnPitRegistry/#page/home and sign up.

About the Author: Dore Mobley is a communications specialist with Patient Care Services in the Veterans Health Administration.
The American Legion,  
Department of Colorado  
2019 Convention Agenda  
June 20 - 23, 2019  
Hotel Elegante’  
Colorado Springs, Colorado

Thursday June 20, 2019

9:00 am    VA&R Workshop and Reception – Chairman Tom Florez
4:30 pm    Committee Meetings - Resolutions, Constitution and By-Laws, Apportionment, Credentials, Rules & Order
7:00 pm    DEC Meeting
8:30 pm    Opening Session

Friday, June 21, 2019

9:00 am    Reconvene – Commander Robb Smith
9:15 am    Reports.
            American Legion Programs Reports
            Report of Officers

12:00 NOON  Past Commander Club Lunch
1:30 pm    Report of Officers and Committees
4:30 pm    Benediction - Department Chaplain - Stan Hamamoto

Saturday, June 22, 2019

7:00 am    Americanism/Children and Youth Breakfast
8:30 am    Processional – Past Department Commanders, Presidents and SAL Detachment
8:45 am    Call to Order - Commander Smith, President Kuntz, Commander Noakes
            Introductions of guests for greetings
            Post 209 Commander Marsilino Calica, President Cathy Barger
            District Commander, Mike Barger; District President Jackie Bowen

9:00 am    Introduction of SAL Officers - SAL Detachment Commander Ron Noakes
            Introduction of American Legion Auxiliary Officers President Laurie Kuntz
            Introduction of American Legion Officers - Commander Robb Smith

9:15 am    Centennial Celebration
            WWI Video presentation
            American Legion and Auxiliary history presentation
            Employment Awards - Chairman Darrell Myers
            Key Note Speech - National Commander Brett Reistad

10:45 am   Break for separate sessions
11:00 am   Resolutions Committee Report
            Constitution and By-Laws Report
            NEC Report – Tom Florez

12:00 NOON Membership Awards Lunch
1:30 pm    Reconvene - Commander Robb Smith
            Final Report of Credentials Committee
            Nominations & Elections of Department Officers
            Apportionment Committee Report
            District Caucuses - Elect Nat’l Convention Delegates
            Ratification of Delegates & Alternates to National Convention
            Installation of Newly Elected Department Officers – Unfinished Business
            Good of the Legion
            Announcements
            Benediction - Department Chaplain Stan Hamamoto

6:30 pm    Cocktail Reception - Lobby
7:00 pm    Testimonial Banquet
            Commander Smith, President Kuntz, Commander Noakes

8:15 pm    Installation of new Legion Commander, Auxiliary President, SAL Detachment Commander
VA partners with Microsoft to improve how rural Veterans access VA’s online services and benefits

VHA Office of Community Engagement

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Microsoft Corp., recently formed a partnership that aims to improve how Veterans living in rural areas can access VA’s online services and benefits.

The agreement, which was formalized in mid-April, allows VA and Microsoft to work together to advance and improve the quality of life for Veterans by identifying opportunities to extend broadband internet connectivity to underserved rural Veteran communities.

“This partnership will serve a particularly vulnerable population of Veterans,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “Millions of people in the U.S., including many of the 4.7 million Veterans living in rural areas, lack the broadband internet connection necessary to access opportunities to learn, work, access information and communicate.”

The Veterans Health Administration’s offices of Community Engagement, Connected Care, Telehealth Services, Rural Health, and VA’s office of Information and Technology aim to improve access to online VA services and benefits, such as telemedicine. Telemedicine and access to online services and benefits are forms of digital inclusion that support Veterans, their families and VA staff. Digital inclusion can increase access to continuous health care services — enhance the workflow, reach and efficiency of VA staff — and support Veterans’ participation in their own health care.

The partnership with Microsoft is another step toward achieving VA’s strategic goals of providing excellent customer service and business transformation.
Anthony Barreras - 2019 Fellowship Fund Awardee

By: Natalie Monroe

For Anthony Barreras, it was the long childhood hours spent on his grandparents’ cattle ranch in northeastern Arizona that planted the first seed in his heart and grew into a lifelong dream of becoming a farmer. Just when he thought that school, ROTC, and the Army were starting to re-route the course of his dreams, fate intervened.

While stationed at Fort Wainwright, Alaska, Anthony met his wife, Mariel, who was attending college locally. An adventuresome duo, their first dates were spent riding ATV’s, fishing, and bear hunting – the inspiration behind the bear company logo boast (as a tribute to their beginning). These early outdoor escapades served as the platform on which they shared their dreams of having a big family and a place to leave a lasting legacy for their children, a place to share their joys and experiences with the community around them. Fortuitously, meeting Mariel brought the unexpected final piece of the puzzle to Anthony’s dream of farming.

In March 2016, Barreras Family Farm was born. Primarily a free-range, pasture raised poultry operation just outside of Omaha, Nebraska, they produce the only uniquely colored eggs in the area – dark brown, blue, green, brown, pink, and speckled.

Anthony is one of 110 veterans awarded a combined total of $276,000 so far this year through the Farmer Veteran Fellowship Fund. The Barreras’ are using their $5,000 award to construct a poultry barn for raising laying hens on their new property. Started by Farmer Veteran Coalition, the Fellowship Fund provides direct assistance to veterans in their beginning years of farming or ranching, with funds going toward items identified by the veteran as making a crucial difference in the launch of their farm business. Now in its ninth year, the Fund has awarded more than $2.3 million so far this year through generous support by Newman’s Own Foundation, means more to the Barreras’ than just increased production. As Anthony reflects, “We want to build a facility to allow people to tour and assess what we’re doing, to be an educational tool. When I think about our greatest pride in the farm, it’s more about the education than the production – allowing people to experience the farm, see where food comes from and how it’s raised, and to be a part of something.” He is hopeful this barn will do just that.

The Barreras Family - Anthony, Mariel and their 7 children. Photograph courtesy of the Farmer Veterans Coalition and the story can be found by going to https://www.farmvetco.org/stories/anthony-barreras/.

It’s not only their high quality product that has customers coming back; the eye-catching teal color of the egg cartons themselves, adorned with the Homegrown By Heroes label, pop on store shelves. With Mariel’s touch for marketing and an unwavering commitment to caring for each and every customer, success has come quickly. Sales demand through local grocers, food co-ops, farmers markets, and farm-direct has exceeded supply, prompting the Barreras’ to sell the original 10 acres and purchase a new 69 acre property in late 2018.

With her husband still actively serving, Mariel passionately heads up the daily business operations and customer relations. But she doesn’t go at it alone. Having just welcomed their eighth child earlier this year, a second baby girl to complement six hardworking boys, it’s an all-hands-on-deck family operation. “Our kids are a huge aspect of our farm, they all pitch in. They are constantly at markets and educational events with us,” beams Anthony.

He and Mariel will tap into these extra sets of hands as they break ground on the new barn, while simultaneously enlisting the help of local farmer veteran friends. “Military experience has taught me the importance of advocacy and collaboration – meeting others, learning from them, and supporting those who may not have a voice. Service is at the heart of our farm mission,” relayed Anthony who shares trials and triumphs, and provides guidance and mentorship to beginning and veteran farmers. A huge proponent of the Homegrown By Heroes label and designation, he firmly believes in its positive value on their marketing efforts: “The logo

The timeliness of this funding for the Barreras family is particular-ly impactful, with both military retirement on the horizon and the recent devastating farm loss they have suffered from the dual impact of this winter’s Polar Vortex and the historic flooding across Nebraska. “This will be a lasting impact on the health of the flock and relieve some of our personal financial investment as I look to retire from the Army in the next year.”

Now up to 750 free range chickens from their initial 200, and with the anticipation of expanding to 2,500 over the next few years, the barn and its square footage are key to limiting parasites and maintaining high egg production. Yet receiving this grant, thanks to generous support by Newman’s Own Foundation, means more to the Barreras’ than just increased production. As Anthony reflects, “We want to build a facility to allow people to tour and assess what we’re doing, to be an educational tool. When I think about our greatest pride in the farm, it’s more about the education than the production – allowing people to experience the farm, see where food comes from and how it’s raised, and to be a part of something.” He is hopeful this barn will do just that.
definitely attracts attention, and is an instrumental piece to our branding. I try to encourage our veteran friends and farmers to also show their customers they are supporting a veteran.”

With open doors, Anthony and Mariel take pride in building a relationship with each customer and sharing with local agricultural organizations the seven Army values to which the Barreras Family Farm vision is dedicated – loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, personal courage. “My wife and I never hesitate to have families out to the farm, to share our experiences, and to listen as they share their dreams.” One of their most popular educational programs, coined ‘Rent-a-Chick’, attracts smiling faces to their property every Easter season. A clever approach to allowing students and schools the opportunity to raise a pair of chicks for two weeks, it teaches families about farm life. In exchange, the baby chicks learn how to interact with humans before being returned to the safety of the Barreras Family Farm and grown into pastured egg layer hens.

During summer months, even the youngest Barreras children are leading the way. Local kids strap on boots and enthusiastically stomp out to the farm to engage in weeklong camps. Designed to educate on animal care, each session highlights a distinct themed focus ranging from feeding/milking cows and goats to farm predators and farm protection. “Our kids are now teaching the younger kids. We had a group of high school juniors out for a class on goats; our eleven-year old taught the class. They love the interaction,” exclaimed Anthony, marveling at the different perspective – the youthful perspective – the kids offer when the Barreras family is brainstorming future business plans.

Still in its early stages, Barreras Family Farm continues to diversify their product offerings and community reach. Their growing grass-fed, grass-finished beef herd of 11 cows frequently sells out due to high demand. Raw goats milk, pasture raised pork, broiler poultry, local Nebraska honey, and paw paw fruit round out their bounty. “We made it a point to visit farmers markets, u-pick orchards, and family farms to get ideas of what animals, activities, and food were most profitable. We were able to bring all these experiences and knowledge to Nebraska,” explains Anthony, looking back on their time stationed in Tennessee, California, and Kansas.

Regardless of position as staff officer or commander, Anthony’s leadership approach has always included three aspects: take care of each other, always do the hard right instead of the easy wrong, and lead by example. “We are working to instill these in our children and into the daily operations of our farm,” he conveyed. “Our end goal is to provide a successful business legacy for our children.” As Anthony turns his sights toward retiring from the Army in the next year, he finally will be able to move into full time farming and live out his childhood dream that, together, he and Mariel have turned into a reality.
ID RESOLVE
A New Program to Help Legionnaires Fight Back Against Identity Theft

Identity theft is the fastest growing crime in America and has affected more than 16.7 million victims, with veterans being especially vulnerable targets. Data breaches are becoming more frequent and, when an identity thief strikes, most victims are left to clean up the mess themselves, unsure of where to turn to first. We’ve heard Legionnaire’s concerns around the growing threats of identity theft and are proud to provide a new service to address this concern.

ID Resolve focuses solely on the aftermath of identity theft and resolving the issue. With call centers located in the US, Legionnaires can activate an important set of services to fix the situation and restore their name. ID Resolve’s Identity Resolution Specialists are certified in identifying and repairing any type of identity theft such as medical fraud, Social Security identity theft, and financial theft.

ID Resolve is available to Legionnaires at a special member-only rate and provides resolution services for a full year. Plus, Legionnaires can take up to 30 days to review ID Resolve and decide if it’s right for them; if not, a full refund is available as long as the services have not been used.

There are two annual memberships available:

Member: $79/year
Couple: $99/year

To learn more or enroll in ID Resolve, visit www.thelt.com/IDResolve

ID Theft by the numbers
Claims a new victim every 2 seconds
16+ mill. victims targeted in the U.S.
$16 billion in losses
Veterans are 50% more likely to be the victim of identity theft
There were 1,579 data breaches last year
40+ hours spent resolving an identity theft case

Services provided by Generali Global Assistance. Generali Global Assistance has been a leading provider of identity and digital protection solutions, travel insurance, and other assistance services for more than 35 years. Generali Global Assistance is part of the multinational Generali Group, which for over 185 years has created a presence in 60 countries with over 74,000 employees. Generali’s success has been built on the foundation of trust that clients have placed in their ability to provide assistance in the most difficult of circumstances.