American Legion supports bipartisan legislation extending VA health benefits

The American Legion

American Legion National Commander James W. “Bill” Oxford called on the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) last fall to open its health-care system to World War II veterans that are not already enrolled.

“The American Legion has confidence that you will not fail or forsake the heroes who literally saved the world three quarters of a century ago,” Oxford wrote in a letter urging VA Secretary Robert Wilkie to expand VA health care benefits to all World War II veterans.

Bipartisan legislation was introduced by U.S. Sens. Bob Menendez, D-N.J., and Kevin Cramer, R-N.D., on May 21, WWII Veterans Hospital and Medical Eligibility Act, that would ensure all World War II veterans are eligible for health care services provided by the VA. Due to current limitations in the law, there are World War II veterans who are currently prevented from receiving VA health care benefits. This legislation would change that statute to echo the Veterans Health Care Eligibility Act of 1996, which exempted all Spanish American War and World War I veterans from having to meet certain requirements in order to receive VA health care benefits.

“Those who made the Greatest Generation truly great are nearly gone,” wrote Oxford. “We can recognize these remaining heroes with actions far more meaningful than words. The American Legion delegates at the 2017 National Convention unanimously passed Resolution No. 3: WWII Veterans Hospital and Medical Eligibility. The resolution urges VA to extend the means test exemption to World War II veterans. The population of living veterans has declined dramatically since the resolution passed. VA estimates that of the original 16 million U.S. veterans who served in World War II, about 300,000 are alive.

“As we head into Memorial Day Weekend, let us remember the sacrifices of our fallen soldiers and honor those still living by providing them with the care and services they need and deserve,” Menendez said. “This bill will cut the red tape and ensure our World War II veterans have access to the benefits they’re entitled to. This is the least we can do to pay our respects to the Greatest Generation who put their lives on the line to defend our freedom.”

“The United States would not be a free country today without the sacrifice and service of those who fought for our country in World War II. We are obligated to provide them with the highest quality care available,” Cramer added.
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“VA helped me get back on my feet.”

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Send correspondence to the above address. Visit us at www.coloradolegion.org or e-mail to observer@coloradolegion.org
A Message From National Commander Oxford

Our future - renewals, membership

By: James W. "Bill" Oxford, National Commander

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted millions of lives across the nation. Home sheltering and social distancing requirements in nearly every state have affected the way American Legion posts do business, but they have not affected the way Legionnaires fulfill their duties to serve, as the organization's constitutional preamble declares, "through individual obligation to community, state and nation."

In recent weeks, we have all seen how important The American Legion is in a time of crisis. Blood drives, Buddy Checks, mask distributions, meal deliveries, school supplies for kids suddenly home-schooled by parents and hundreds of acts of gratitude to health-care workers and other unsung heroes have depended on our volunteers, as well as funds that come from membership dues.

This does not happen without an incredible membership of dedicated military veterans and their families who know what it takes to succeed in a life-and-death mission.

My sincere appreciation goes to all Legionnaires who have stepped up to serve in a myriad of ways through the crisis. And I ask that those who have not yet renewed their American Legion memberships to do so now, at this time of urgency. It will take time for our local posts to return to their normal business activities, so membership renewal is extremely important right now.

Renewals give us the privilege of keeping up our services functioning, no matter how circumstances change. While new members help us expand our outreach and allow us to serve more people who need our help.

Secure, convenient online membership renewal can be completed online at www.legion.org/renew. All honorably discharged veterans who have served since Dec. 7, 1941, are now eligible to join The American Legion and can do so safely and easily at www.legion.org/join.

CARES Act extends VA Home Loan Pre-Foreclosure options

By: Raleigh Contreras

You can request a forbearance for up to 180 days without paying late fees or other. On March 27, the President signed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, or CARES Act, into law to help Americans economically impacted by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic to help homeowners avoid home foreclosure.

As the country rallies together to prevent further spread of the coronavirus, VA's Loan Guaranty Service is working to assist Veterans. The service is specifically focused on ensuring our Veterans and their families facing temporary or more long-term difficulty paying their monthly mortgage understand their options.

How does this law affect my VA home loan?

If you experience financial hardship caused directly or indirectly by COVID-19, then – as with any financial hardship – you should immediately contact your loan servicer (the company that accepts your monthly mortgage payments). If you do lose income, you always have options to avoid foreclosure on your VA home loan. Your options include forbearance extension under the CARES Act. The CARES Act allows borrowers with government-backed loans (including VA loans) to request special forbearance – an agreement between you and your mortgage servicer – where your servicer agrees to either delay payments or to accept partial payments for one or more months. The details of any forbearance agreement are between you and your servicer, which means you don’t have to call VA for permission. The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) has a video summarizing the mortgage forbearance changes.

- penalties by simply stating you are affected financially by the COVID-19 national emergency. No extra documentation is required.
- If necessary, you can request up to 180 additional days of forbearance before the first forbearance period ends.
- Your servicer cannot report delinquency if you take

(Continued on Page 12 See Advantage)
As we prepare to move into the next phase from “safer at home” and our communities open up, I would like to remind you to stay safe and continue to conduct “BUDDY CHECKS” on our Veterans and Members. Just a simple phone call can make a world of difference to a Veteran. “Buddy Checks” are very important just as they were back in the early days of The American Legion after WWI, back then technology was not as advanced as it is today.

We have rescheduled our Training and Education Conference for November 6-8, 2020 at American Legion Neal Thomas Jr Centennial Post 209 in Colorado Springs. Our special guest will be National Vice Commander Rob Liebenow. After the Training and Education Conference is over, we will be traveling and visiting members and Posts in Districts 3, 4 and 5. Please plan on attending the annual training event in Colorado Springs. We are planning to have training on Post Dues Direct. Your Post Commander and Adjutant must attend training to be able to start the Dues Direct process.

We are on our final push for Membership for 2020, we are about 750 members away from our target of 100% AND WE NEED YOUR HELP! Please, don’t hold memberships, let’s get them turned into Department and get them processed.

The 2019-2020 Year has been exciting, we have accomplished a lot of great things and look forward to accomplishing many more things in 2020-2021. I would like to highlight a few accomplishments that have occurred. We have traveled over 40,000 miles visiting with Posts and Legionnaires in 8 months. We have moved up on the National Membership Ranks from 42nd to 6th, THANK YOU TO EVERYONE for your help with Membership. We are continuing to build a hardworking TEAM in Colorado, that is sure to be a force to reckon with. We have visited all 14 Districts on a Fall Conference Tour and met the great leaders in our Districts.

The 2020 Membership year we have submitted 3 District Commanders for the District Commander Race to The Top at National. Congratulations to District 6 Commander Annette Johnson, District 10 Commander Willard Leight and District 14 Commander Gaylon Kent on your hard work and nomination for this prestigious award. We will be awaiting the results from National on the RTTT winners and hope that Colorado will be bringing home the winners! Don’t forget that all GOLD AND SILVER Brigade recruiter forms need to be into Department by June 13, 2020 and Department Recruiter of The Year nominations need to be in at the same time.

The Post Consolidated Post Reports (CPR) are a vital piece of our mission. We need all Posts to complete these forms and get them turned in to Department. The deadline was June 1, 2020. IF you have not turned it in please do so now! Remember, this is a requirement to receive your 2021 membership cards. Please get them turned in. The National Commander and Officers utilize this information when talking with our legislative representatives and elected officials on the impact that we are doing as The American Legion.

It has been my honor to serve as your 100th Department Commander, I look forward to serving as your 101st Department Commander for 2020-2021. We have made some great strides in Colorado and we want to keep Colorado moving forward for 2021.

As always, if there is anything that we can do to assist you please reach out to me by email at d.noechel@coloradolegion.org. We are here to support you. We will be hitting the road here very shortly to get out and visit with you in your Posts and Districts and together we can make a difference as TEAM COLORADO!

We have RE-IGNITED PATRIOTISM IN COLORADO.
A Message From Department Sr. Vice Commander Jackson

CPR & Membership during Covid-19

By: Greg Jackson, Department Sr. Vice Commander

As we enter this summer, hopefully we are all emerging from Covid-19 closures smart, safe and responsible. Recently we have found ways to use our electronic and digital tools to stay in contact with each other. I have seen legionnaires accomplishing amazing things for our members, veterans and communities. I encourage everyone to stay the course and keep up the great job.

I have always talked about how members volunteer. As our membership has grown in last year, we have also increased the number of volunteers. I congratulate everyone for their efforts but let us not stop there. The American Legion is one of the best kept secrets and we do not always let people know who we are, or what we represent to our communities. How do we accomplish this you might ask? And, the answer is simple. Consolidated Post Reports (CPR).

I realize that this article is somewhat late for getting your CPR’s turned in by June 1st to the Department, but if you have not yet completed it, get it done, and turn it in to Department. If you have done it on-line print a copy and send it to the Department as well. CPR is the tool that Posts, and Districts use to document last years accomplishments, donations, and activities of each post and district. We can draw from that information for News Articles and blasts. It helps chronicle our history, and when we are asked, what The American Legion does. We can explain our programs and what we specifically do in supporting those programs in our communities. When we involve post membership in compiling the CPR, they see the benefits of working the programs and often see ways to increase, improve and strengthen the programs supporting all 4 pillars in their communities.

We have been doing great on Membership this year, Rocking the Rockies, but with the Covid-19 taking hold of our country our membership efforts have hit a stall. I would like to encourage everyone to keep your memberships coming in and start working towards membership into next year. As we start into the new membership year, please realize that many of our members will be struggling financially. I ask you to please look and see if there is, anyway, we can help offset those memberships thru fundraiser and other events.

The Commander and I will continue working on getting out to visit our membership, posts and districts as soon as travel is allowed. Currently, I am working on resuming Membership Roundups via Zoom. Many districts and posts are starting to use virtual meetings on-line more and more. Those posts that are struggling with using these platforms are encouraged to call nearby posts and districts and ask how to accomplish this, it is also encouraged for posts that are accomplishing these on-line activities reach out to posts you may know that are struggling and give them some help with tips and tricks. Working together we will keep all of Colorado united. Group and social distancing will be with us well into the fall and will need us to keep being creative and inventive in how we conduct business now and into the future. “Necessity is the mother of Invention” We have arrived at a time in our history that we need to focus on how to creatively improve our operations rising above the challenges that we have been presented today. I ask you to please record positive things that have worked bringing your posts and districts and communities together. Your CPR is more important than you know in this process.

Keep Rocking the Rockies

VA and Parkinson’s Foundation partner to help Veterans living with Parkinson’s disease

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Parkinson’s Foundation announced today they are teaming up to improve the health, well-being and quality of life of Veterans living with Parkinson’s disease.

“This collaboration ensures Veterans diagnosed with Parkinson’s have access to the information and resources they need to better manage their health,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “The joint effort enhances the multitude of services that care teams at the Veterans Health Administration provide to Veterans with Parkinson’s disease.”

“VA and the foundation are working to increase access to information about Parkinson’s disease,” said John L. Lehr, president and chief executive officer of the Parkinson’s Foundation. “Educating and training VA staff on disease management and therapies, along with improving Veterans’ access to direct health services related to the disease is a paramount objective”.

These efforts help to provide Veterans with needed resources and tools for coping with Parkinson’s. The foundation also offers online resources for individuals and their caregivers during the COVID-19 pandemic, to include Facebook Live Q&A events with subject matter experts.

Learn more about how the Parkinson’s Foundation improves care and advances research toward a cure.
Legislative stand still from COVID-19 pandemic

By: Gary Force, Department Jr. Vice Commander

The American Legion Legislative Commission continues to work on national veteran’s legislation that is listed in The American Legion Legislative Agenda. Refer to the Agenda issues by going to www.legion.org and selecting ‘Legislative’ under the ‘Programs’ tab. From there select the Legislative Agenda.


With the COVID-19 pandemic taking hold of the country there has been no additional actions taken on the federal bills I am tracking so the status from last month is unchanged. The Pay our Coast Guard Act (H.R. 367 & S. 21) continues to wait Congressional floor action. Veterans Burn Pit Act (S. 2950, S. 191, and HR 663) have been assigned to the Senate Veterans Affairs, House Health committees. The Deborah Sampson Act on women veterans’ health care (H.R. 3224) has passed the House and has been sent to the Senate and assigned to the Senate Veterans Affairs committee. Veteran’s mental bill (S. 785) has been reported out of the Senate Veterans Affairs committee and is waiting for Senate floor action. The Protect the GI Bill Act (H. R. 4625) passed the House and has been sent to the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee.

If you would like to be added to The American Legion Nation Legislative Committee Call to Action email, sign up at www.legion.org. To track the progress of any Congressional bill along with Colorado co-sponsors, go to www.congress.gov and enter the Bill number. Bill description, status, co-sponsors and other information is available.

Also, due to the COVID-19 pandemic the Colorado General Assembly 2020 session has been suspended probably into late-May. It is not expected to see any further action on veterans issues this year especially if there is any cost associated to the bill. This means we need to start looking at what issues we need to present to the UVC Legislative committee for next year. I hope you will take some time to put together a wish list for me to present to the UVC during the coming months. You may email your suggestion to me at 1gforce@prodigy.net. To find the current status of a bill go to https://leg.colorado.gov/bills and enter the bill number in the Search by Bill box.

United Veterans Coalition of Colorado—A Unified Voice for Veterans

By: Anthony Jones Sr, Department Jr. Vice Commander

Perhaps you have heard the abbreviation “UVC or UVCC” and know the Coalition works to help veterans and active duty military service members. According to their bylaws, their purpose is to be a proactive, state wide organization promoting legislative, humanitarian and educational activities for the best interest and welfare of veterans. The Coalition actively supports programs including, but not limited to, health care, community living centers, employment and training, education and rehabilitation, veteran homelessness, entitlements and benefits. Through the UVC, and with one unified voice in Colorado, the UVC works with public policy makers to ensure proper support for veteran issues and concerns and to inform/educate Colorado citizens about the needs and the high value contributions of veterans, active duty service members, National Guard, the Reserves, and their families.

Currently, the Coalition has about 120 veteran member organizations that participate in the “unified voice” alliance and thereby the members benefit from the work accomplished through legislative efforts, in the State of Colorado and Federal legislative forums.

During the 2020 Colorado Legislative sessions, the Coalition will work with legislative forums and representatives on legislation such as:

HB20-1051--Identification of Veteran Remains for Proper Military Burial. Concerning final disposition of the abandoned cremated remains of persons eligible for interment in a national cemetery.

HB20-1190--Disabled Veteran Registration Fees and Ownership Tax. Concerning clarifying whether a veteran with a disability needs to obtain a disabled veteran license plate to qualify for the current exemption from paying vehicle assessments.
A Message From Department Jr. Vice Commander Kossow

Keeping in Touch

By: Chip Kossow, Department Jr. Vice Commander

As legionnaires, we are used to meeting and talking with our brothers, sisters, family, and friends. Whether it is out in public, in our homes, at meetings, or events. The stay at home orders have mostly put an end to that. Today’s technologies give us many ways to stay connected. For your personal wellbeing and that of your comrades, you need to keep in touch!

The American Legion has called for buddy checks to friends, family, and post members you haven’t seen in a while. It’s a good opportunity to catch up with someone you haven’t spoken to in a while and you may even save a life. I think it is even more helpful than that.

Humans are generally social creatures. Granted, there are a few people that prefer to be alone, but the vast majority of us need social interaction.

Loneliness doesn’t sound like a serious condition, but it can be detrimental to our mental health and eventually lead to physical problems. Depression, alcoholism (relapse), dementia, and suicidal tendencies can result. Loneliness caused by not interacting can become hopelessness and losing the will to interact. This dark mental condition has been linked to suppressed immune system, high blood pressure, and cardiovascular disease. Shortening our life expectancy.

Conversely, when we do good deeds such as reaching out, it reduces stress, increases our mental wellbeing, and ultimately reduces our health risks. Our altruistic nature played a part in us joining the military and the Legion. Don’t suppress your need to be a social creature. Reaching out to others helps both sides of the interaction.

Between your interactions, keeping busy will help keep loneliness at bay. I’m not talking about social media as it can cause more isolation from reality. Do healthy activities for the mind and body. Simple exercise routines like walking and calisthenics will do wonders for the body. Keeping the brain exercised is also important like reading, puzzles, and music to keep stimulated. There are many hobbies that stimulate the body and mind simultaneously.

Remember that thing you always wanted to do – well – do it!

Don’t wait until you are feeling lonely, pick up the phone and break the negative cycle before it begins. Find a way to reconnect with others. Its good for you and the person at the other end of the connection. You may be saving both lives!

The foregoing is an extremely abbreviated list of bills the UVC hopes to help pass and without the unified voice approach of the Coalition, the legislation may not be passed. The American Legion is part of the Coalition and we will continue our support and maintain a sense of gratitude for all they do for all veterans.

The numerous list of the bills before the legislative committees will be posted on our bulletin board.

HB20-1222—Veterans Hiring Preference. Concerning the authority of a private employer to adopt a veteran’s preference employment policy when hiring new employees.

SB20-091—Minimum Pay for State Military Forces. Concerning increasing the minimum pay for state military forces called into service by the governor.

SB20-148—Property Tax Exemption Value Adjustments. Concerning the amount of actual value of residential real property owned and occupied by a qualifying senior or a qualifying disabled veteran that is partly exempt from property taxation.

The American Legion

And, Help Our Nation's Veterans
Chaplain's Corner - God Loves Us All
By: Stanley Hamamoto, Department Chaplain

Has God been good to you!!!!!!!

Last month I told you about me being selected to be your next National Chaplain; well it will have to wait for one more year. Because of coronavirus the National Convention which was to be held in August was canceled. That means that the current officers will stay in office for one more year. I will not be installed until the National Convention in August 2021 and it will be in Phoenix, Arizona. I was so excited to being your National Chaplain for Colorado has not had a National Chaplain for over 100 years. This makes me feel real proud to represent our great state of Colorado as the National Chaplain, but it will not be till 2021 – 2022. I have waited for four years so I guess one more year is not that bad.

God does HIS thing according to HIS way and not the way we many times want it to be. PATIENCE!!! That is the one thing that is my biggest fault. My wife knew this and she bought me a sign that I have in my home office “PATIENCE”. I see it all the time I get on my computer and that is every day.

The coronavirus that has hit the world has really changed many people’s lives. I know that it really changed my life. But on the other hand, maybe this is God’s way of saying to us all, you are not doing what I want you to do. If you will recall, once God flooded the world. This was because the world was not doing what HE wanted them to do and not according to HIS way. HE made us all start all over again, with a clean start. But HE said that HE would not do this again. So, to me this could one way for HIM telling us all to STOP and take a good look at what you are doing to my world. The world that I love so much, that I gave my only SON to die for all of your sins. Now tell me, if God did not love us so much would HE have done that, would you do that?

I feel that many times, God takes something bad and HE makes something good come out of it. I pray that our world leaders will take a good look at what they have done and make some changes to make our world a better place to live in. Maybe we should all take good look at what we do and what we have done. Maybe when this is all over, many of us will make changes in our lives for the betterment of our neighbors and our families. After all, God loves us so much he made a very large sacrifice. I always wonder that if I had to do this, would I or could I have done the same thing. CAN YOU!!! That is how much HE loves us all. Now we should all take time out and make changes in our lives to conform to what God wants us to do for HIM. Think about this and look back at what you have done and make sure that your future plans will be according to HIS way. I know that I plan to make some changes in my life to that hopefully will be according to HIS way. I know that one of the biggest things that I have to have is more compassion on my brothers and sisters. Not to pass judgment on them when I do not know all the facts and to wait and allow them to have their say. I know that many times we do not fully understand the situation, but we make judgment based on what we feel without knowing the actual facts.

In conclusion, remember that God always loves you, no matter what you have done. I think that we should all be thankful that we do have a loving God. Can you imagine what it would be like if HE was not a loving God? Just stop and think about that. God Bless you all and keep praying.

My last three words to all of you are: GO TO CHURCH!!!!!

A Message From Department Historian Davis

Post Historians, Good News
By: Deb Davis, Department Historian

Since we are not having a Convention this month; you have more time to submit your Post History Book for competition. If you are wanting to submit a book, please have it to Department no later than 1 July 2020. History Books going to National for competition will be sent from Department to National by the end of August. National judging will be the middle of October. Again, send in your History Books for competition and the winner will be announced at Mid-Year Conference.
The American Legion Internet Observer

June 2020

The New Normal!

By: Pat Smith, Department Adjutant

June is normally an exciting time of year for the American Legion in Colorado. Normal is not a word that we can use to describe this June.

The exciting part of June is our Department Convention. For 100 years we have met in our annual convention. What a fun time. Several hundred Legionnaires, Auxiliary and SAL members get together to chart the course of our great organization for the coming year. In addition to the camaraderie that exists, greeting old friends, meeting new friends and just enjoying a great time, there is actually some business that occurs. New officers are elected, resolutions are passed and individuals, posts and districts are recognized for their accomplishments during the past year. Meals become a part of the whole process of binding us together for the work ahead. The past commanders always meet in a business lunch; to share ideas, poke fun at each other, make financial contributions to our programs, all to make us feel good about the important work we do as an organization.

We always invite our partners from the VA and the State who provide services to our veterans to visit with us. Their work is important and their presence at our convention cements our relationships as we, together, carry out our main mission of serving veterans and their families.

On Saturday afternoon our convention delegates elect a new slate of officers for the coming year. This is an exciting event for those who have the courage and determination to take on a leadership role to make a difference in the lives of our veterans and families. Our convention is normally capped off with a testimonial banquet on Saturday evening honoring the accomplishments of our leadership team as they conclude their year of service. It is just a small way to say thanks to those who volunteered their time to make this a better organization. On Sunday morning our chaplains lead us in memorial service and prayer to remember those who have passed from our ranks.

June, again, normally is the month when our Boys State and Girls State programs take place. Over 200 junior high school boys and over 150 junior high school girls attend these impressive sessions, teaching lessons in civics. It is our way of educating our youth about the freedoms they enjoy because of the sacrifices of our young men and women who raise their right hand to pledge to defend our country and protect our constitution and our form of government. June is when our American Legion baseball program begins its summer season. Over 100 baseball teams with over 2,000 boys, sponsored by Legion posts throughout the state, would be preparing to take the field to showcase their skills, some with the hope of a future in professional baseball.

While the normal has been shattered by COVID-19 none of these exciting June activities will take place. Our existing officers will remain in place. Boys State and Girls State have been canceled. Baseball will be absent from our playgrounds. We are left to our own devices to remember those who have passed. Prayer and memorials are not the same without Pastor Stan. Nothing normal will take place this June.

But there are brighter days ahead. This organization has always weathered the storm during challenging times. Our members have always found ways to deal with any adversity thrown their way. Our children and youth programs will become bigger, stronger and better next year. Our service to veterans will take on a new urgency. Our members will continue to provide the strong leadership needed to move the organization into the future. It will be up to them to define the “new normal”. We are strong. We are The American Legion. We will carry on the vision of our founders. Take care, stay active.

“VA helped me get back on my feet.”

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CHECK IT OUT
My fellow Sons,

I bring you greetings from the Detachment of Colorado. I hope you and your family are in good health during this time.

Our National Chaplain, Rodney Tolbert, has sent out a word of prayer I would like to share with you. “Heavenly Father, we come before you to ask for healing for everyone affected with COVID-19. God, we ask that you be with them and eradicate all sickness from their bodies. Bless the families of those who have lost a love one to this terrible virus, please give them comfort. Lord we pray for blessings not only for the sick but those who are caring for the sick. comfort the family and friends of anyone currently suffering from this terrible illness. Father bless America and our leaders as they lead us of this time of healing. Father we ask you protect our troops and keep them from harm’s way. In your holy name. Amen”

As we start to move back into some state of “normal” let us not forgot to continue to reach out to those in need and assist in any way we can. Continue your “Buddy Checks”. Stay in touch with family and friends. Are you staying in touch with your Post Commander?

We will all get through this, there is a bright light at the end of the tunnel! Continue to support your local officials’ guidelines and continue to make a difference.

June has some particularly important dates to remember. The 14th is Flag day. Please do what you can to honor or Flag. June 21st is Father’s Day. This day has a special added meaning for me and others in our organization. My eligibility into The Sons is through my Father, a WWII Army Veteran. I pray a special blessing on all the Fathers out there this month.

As you contact members this month do not forget to mention membership. Our membership is suffering during this pandemic. I want to personally thank each of you for your work on behalf of The Detachment of Colorado and everything you do for our Veterans, well done Sons, keep up the great work!

Please join the Detachment conference call, 2nd Thursday of each month @ 7 p.m. (605) 313-5111 access code 526-231. As always, if I can assist you in any way, do not hesitate to contact me. For now, stay safe and healthy, take care of each other. I look forward to seeing everyone in the future.

God Bless

Repainted American Legion Post 13 - Patriotic Red White and Blue

Submitted by: CDC Tim Grabin

Shown from left to right: Commander Bill Hartless; Legionnaires Michael, Kayleb and Sundee Shelest; Finance Officer Al Augustine; and Adjutant Tim Grabin.
New American Legion Post ‘first of its kind’

Provided By: The American Legion

While the COVID-19 pandemic forced the cancellation of an April 21 groundbreaking ceremony, the construction process of a new American Legion Post 139 in Arlington, Va., is underway this week.

“They are knocking the building down as you and I are speaking right now,” Post 139 Commander Bob Romano said in a phone interview May 12.

The new Post 139, expected to be completed in 2022, has been touted by developers as the first of its kind in the country. APAH, the Arlington Partnership for Affordable Housing, bought the 1.4-acre Post 139 property for about $9 million in 2016 with plans to demolish the 60-year-old post building and replace it with a 6,000-square-foot facility and 160 affordable housing units. Half of those apartments will be made available to homeless veterans, and Post 139 will reopen on the new building’s first floor.

In a press release, APAH CEO Nina Janopaul said the partnership was “thrilled to pioneer this model with American Legion Post 139.”

“Thousands of veteran-serving organizations across the nation face similar challenges: they own land with aging facilities and are experiencing declining membership,” Janopaul said. “This partnership will bring a new, accessible post, attractive to younger vets and co-located with a mix of housing options.”

The development will be named Lucille and Bruce Terwilliger Place in honor of the parents of real estate developer Ron Terwilliger, who donated $1.5 million to the project.

“I was pleased to fund this innovative project because Arlington is my hometown and I attended the Naval Academy. I want to support those who have served in our military and now need an affordable home,” Terwilliger said in the press release.

“As the first project of its kind in the country, Terwilliger Place offers a blueprint for veteran service organizations like The American Legion to partner with nonprofit developers to put their land to use on behalf of vulnerable veterans — men and women who have ably served our country but now find themselves struggling with significant health and housing challenges,” said Debbie Burkart, national vice president of supportive housing at National Equity Fund, Inc.

The $80 million project also included $33.8 million in low-income housing tax credits awarded by the Virginia Housing and Development Authority, and a loan of $11.5 million from Arlington County. Amazon also donated $1 million through the Arlington Community Foundation; all told, more than $4 million was raised through a capital campaign to support construction, enable more units serving extremely low-income households, and support programming once the building is complete.

Part of that programming at Post 139 will include legal support for veterans from nearby George Mason University’s law school. That help will be available eight hours a day, five days a week, Romano said.

Romano acknowledged that the cancellation of the groundbreaking ceremony was “disappointing,” as he had planned to thank post membership, the executive committee, and others who had helped the long process, including former National American Legion Advisory Committee Chairman Bob Sussan and former District 17 Commander Glenn Yarborough.

“It was a huge compliment to us to have (Yarborough) involved as we moved forward,” Romano said. “… They were huge supporters of the project.”

Romano said it has “been a long process” since the project began in 2016.

“We’re all tired. It’s just been meetings and documents and signatures, just the repetition of it all.

“But we’re there; it’s a great feeling. … It’s a bright future for Post 139,” he added.

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• advantage of relief related to COVID-19 throughout the current emergency and 120 days afterward.

What does “up to 180 days” mean?
Not all borrowers need 180 days. Your financial situation and ability to repay after the forbearance ends will help determine the length and terms of your forbearance agreement.

What do you need to know about forbearance?
It is important to understand that all delayed payments covered in a forbearance period are still owed. For example:

Your Monthly Mortgage Payment is $1,100 and you request a forbearance for three months. After the three-month forbearance, you’ll owe your mortgage servicer the $3,300 of missed payments in addition to resuming your monthly mortgage payment of $1,100.

Your servicer will try to help you reach affordability, so you must be honest about your income, savings and expenses. VA encourages you to be realistic about what you can afford and how much time you will need. We don’t want you to experience a worse financial situation in the future.

If you attempt to overreport your income to keep your home, you could face an insurmountable debt and raise your risk of foreclosure. Your servicer does not have to accept partial payments unless that was part of the agreement. If you underreport your expected income to try to save money, your servicer may determine that you can’t afford your loan and may raise your risk of foreclosure.

Your servicer will try to verify that you can afford your mortgage. Building trust will go a long way to help you avoid foreclosure and negative effects on your credit.

When are my missed payments due?
This depends on your forbearance agreement. Your repayment plan could be that you:

• Make the payments all at once, if you are financially able, or
• Spread payments out over an agreed upon time period.

What if I can’t afford the higher monthly payments?
In this case, VA allows loan modifications. This can offset the size of your monthly payments by extending your loan out beyond your 360-month (30-year) loan, as long as your loan does not exceed 480 months from origination date. Instead of 30 years, your loan term could be 30 years plus 1-month or up to 40 years. Keep in mind, your mortgage note is a legal document that specifically states the date of first payment. Those payments are due on the first of each month, and the maturity date or paid-in-full date of the loan.

A VA loan can be repaid early without penalty, but your mortgage note must be legally modified to adjust any of the terms mentioned above.

What if I don’t have a government-backed home loan?

• All homeowners can use the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau’s (CFPB) “Find a Housing Counselor” tool to find counseling agencies approved by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in your area.
• You can also call the HOPE™ Hotline, open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, at (888) 995-HOPE (4673).
• If your loan is owned by Fannie Mae or Freddie Mac, other programs may be available. As a homeowner, you can find out if your loan is owned by Fannie Mae by going to https://www.knowyouroptions.com/covid19assistance and by Freddie Mac by going to https://myhome.freddiemac.com/getting-help/relief-for-homeowners.html

More information
Visit the VA Home loan CARES Act webpage for more information. Check out VA’s coronavirus frequently asked questions page for all VA-related issues. Also, visit CFPB’s coronavirus website for mortgage relief options, tips to keep up on your finances, and more. And if you experience any issues with your home loan, you can call a VA Regional Loan Center at 1-877-827-3702. We may have additional call volume, so please be patient with us.

Veteran trust in VA health care rises above 90%

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) today, April 30, 2020, released survey results showing Veteran trust in VA health care outpatient services has increased more than 5% since 2017, reaching 90.1% as of April 12.

VA received surveys from 4,030,438 Veterans since June 2017 to the present via the Veterans Signals customer feedback program which asks Veterans about their care experience and to rate their trust in VA.

“These improvements are a testament to not only VA’s investment in patient experience programs but also the dedication of our employees.” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “Even during a pandemic, our VA team has continued its steadfast commitment to delivering the highest quality care for our nation’s Veterans.”

This delivery of quality care reflects VA’s priority mission of customer service and its goal to ensure a positive patient experience. In the past three years, more than 95,000 Veterans Health Administration employees have been trained on VA’s customer experience training program called Own the Moment. VA has also implemented programs like Red Coat Ambassadors.
nationwide to improve the Veteran’s navigation of care facilities across the country. Initiatives such as VA Patient Experience Week (April 27-May 1) share best practices in culture changing patient experience tools, technology and training with institutions and providers across the country.

According to the Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (HCAHPS), the results of these and other improvements, has been an increase in the VA patient experience by 4% in the past four years while private sector’s national average has increased by only 1%.

Since the VA began offering Veterans the option to respond to Veteran Signals surveys with free-text feedback, 68% (918,873) of their comments have been complimentary, 18.9% (255,351) have been concerns and 13.3% (179,902) are recommendations. VA uses this feedback at the national, regional and local levels to make improvements in the way VA provides care and services.

100 walks before his 100th birthday

Editor’s Note: Permission to republish this article was granted by Paul J. Goetz, Managing Editor, The Mountain Mail, Salida, CO, in an e-mail sent to the Observer. "You have our permission" Paul stated, "please credit The Mountain Mail and Arlene Shovald."

As published in The Mountain Mail in Salida, May 7, 2020, as the original source of publication, author - Arlene Shovald, Ph.D, Fresh Start Therapies LLC

At age 99, Sgt. George Blake a member of Ray Lines Post 64 of the American Legion in Salida, is serving his community once again. The World War II veteran and Pearl Harbor survivor recently took up the cause of raising money for the Chaffee County Community Foundation Emergency Response Fund by pledging to take 100 walks before his 100th birthday on January 29. The money will help individuals, families and non-profit organizations during the current COVID-19 crisis and in future times of need.

The project originated with Tom Syzek, Blake’s friend who volunteers with Ark Valley Helping Hands, a local non-profit that assists seniors in maintaining independence in their own homes.

“I got the idea from a story on British television,” Syzek said. “Capt. Tom Moore, a 99 year-old World War II veteran, challenged himself to walk 100 laps in his garden before his 100th birthday to raise money for the National Health Service. He set a modest goal to raise 1000 pounds, but his challenge went viral in Britain and at last count he had raised nearly 32 million pounds by his April 30 birthday. I asked George if he might be willing to do something similar and he agreed as long as I took care of the logistics like managing the fund and promoting it.”

Capt. Moore’s 32 million pounds equates to $40,006,400 in American dollars.

Blake agreed to the challenge. For him it was really “business as usual.” He’s always been there to serve his country and his community, first in the U.S. Army and later, in Salida for many years as an EMT first responder.

“I walk just about every day anyway and I have plenty of time between now and my 100th birthday to take 100 walks,” Blake said. “I’ll get most of it done in the warm months. I don’t walk in the cold weather.”

Syzek is promoting the “Sgt. Blake Challenge” to keep Blake “stepping forward” on Facebook and Instagram. Donations can be made at coloradogives.org/georgeblakechallenge. He’s filmed Blake on some of his first walks and continue with updates to see how much money can be made for Chaffee County Community Foundations.

Joe Beakey, commander of Post 64, asked for this article to be passed along to the Observer for publication.
Letter to The American Legion National Commander and Membership

To the National Commander & National Membership.

I am a 35-year-old, Iraqi Freedom Veteran and the Commander of Post 11 in Mankato, Minnesota. Recently, I have been having some discussions with Veterans who are about the same age as I am. They are in their thirties or early forties. Several of them are active members of the VFW and various other Veteran Service Organizations. Some of them are even Legion members but are not active or involved with their Posts. They have given me, what I believe to be, some good insight in to why “younger” Vets are not joining or are not active in the American Legion.

This conversation began after the National Commander visited Mankato and there were several younger Vets there who were asked to ask questions of the National Commander and the other American Legion Officers who were in attendance. When asked about issues facing Veterans, no one seemed to be able to give any real answers, but when asked about Children and Youth programs and statistics, all the answers were right there.

The main reason why younger Vets are not joining is because the four pillars of the American Legion do not seem to be equal. Children and Youth Programs take the vast majority of the spotlight when Legion business is discussed or marketed. On the National website, under the “Programs” tab, there are seven programs listed under “Family and Youth” section. There are only two programs under the “Community” section that even mention Veterans. The Temporary Financial Assistance Program should be listed under “Family and Youth” as well because it requires there to be a minor in the household of an eligible Legion member to qualify for the assistance. As a Veteran who may be thinking about joining the Legion, what would you think of a Veterans Service Organization that barely looks at Veterans issues on their own National website?

Another reason comes from several County Veterans Service Officers that I have spoken to about the American Legion Posts in their respective counties and the financial assistance that they receive from their local Posts when they have a Veteran in need of short term direct financial assistance. I have been told by these CVSOs, and I have no reason to doubt them, that they do not bother to contact Legion Posts because they are tired of being told “No.” The CVSOs have better luck with the VFW or DAV to help with stop gap or emergency financial assistance until they can get the Veteran up and running with organizations like MAC-V for longer term help. While this may not be true statewide, it is alarming to me to hear these stories at all.

Every one of these Veterans, whether they are members or potential members, agreed that the Children and Youth Programs of the American Legion are important and vital to the future of our Country and they should continue wherever and however possible. On the other hand, why do the other three pillars seem to be disregarded or downplayed?

A few years ago, when I was cleaning out Post 11’s former club building, I came across all of the old Post minutes dating back to the early 1920s. In the early days of Post 11, it seems that the focus was more on helping the members of the Post through turbulent times in their lives. The old doughboys helped their fellow Legionnaires when they were injured in work accidents or sick; when they had sick spouses or children; when ovens or other things broke down in their homes. While the Post was not able to fully fund every issue that arose, they were able to give some type of direct aid/emergency aid to the members of the Post. In short, they consecrated and sanctified their comradeship through devotion to mutual helpfulness.

Over the years that I have been a member of the American Legion, I have spoken to many veterans of the recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan about joining the Legion. When they ask me what the Legion does or can do for them, I have a difficult time giving an answer to them. I can tell them about the lobbying that the Legion does in Washington D.C. and St. Paul. I can tell them about the reforms that the Legion supports regarding the Veterans Administration and Veteran Rights. I can tell them about the Children and Youth programs at the National and Department levels. While these issues are important to all veterans, very little of that matters in their day to day life. The wheels of the government bureaucracy turn slowly. So, their original question remains. What can the American Legion do for me? What happens at the Post level that makes a difference in the lives of their members? How can the Post help their members and how can the members help the Post and their fellow veterans?

The American Legion is a grassroots organization. If the American Legion is to have a future and attract new members, we must have strong Posts. I do not believe that a strong Post necessarily has a huge membership. I believe that a strong Post has members who care about the mission of the American Legion and are willing to carry out that mission. There are very few Posts that can cover every program of the American Legion every year, but a Post needs to have a good assortment of programs that cover the Four Pillars of the American Legion in our communities. At the Post level, we must be able to provide emergency aid to our members. It seems to me, from the reading that I have done, that many of the early members of the American Legion joined for some insurance in case something adverse happened in their life. The purpose of belonging to many fraternal organizations was to assist their members in these cases. We must also do what we can as situations or requests arise from county veterans service officers. A Post will not be able to cover every request that comes from a CVSO, but we must do what we can, where we can. If Posts want to attract more members, POSTS (not District, Department or National) need to make their programs of the American Legion more Veteran-centric and active. Give aid to those Veterans in need when possible. Bring back the spirit of the doughboy. Make the Four Pillars of the American Legion equal and strong.

Editor’s Note: There may be a lot of truths written in the above letter to the national commander, but throughout this Observer are stories of veterans stepping up and helping veterans. You can read the same thing in just about every issue of your department publication. The stories may not always be about Colorado post and that may be the fault of the post leadership for not getting the information in for publication. Remember, this is a publication meant to information the membership about what it is “you” are doing?
Georgia post saves fellow Legionnaire from homelessness

Provided By: The American Legion

More than 20 years ago, William Bolton lost his wife to breast cancer. Since that time, the Vietnam Air Force veteran has been paying off medical bills, surviving on a limited income, and living wherever he can find shelter. A small Volkswagen was about to be Bolton’s new living arrangements, a space that would have been “awfully uncomfortable at the age of 71,” he said. Thankfully, Thomas M. Brady Inc. American Legion Post 45 in Canton, Ga., stepped in “and made a difference in my life.”

Bolton will have permanent shelter in his new tiny home.

Post 45 recently gifted Bolton – a Paid Up for Life member of Post 316 in nearby Woodstock, Ga. – with the tiny home that was made possible by the efforts of Legionnaires, Blessed Trinity Christian High School in Roswell, a Home Depot Foundation grant and community support.

Bolton “was the perfect recipient for us to give it to,” said Jim Lindenmayer, service officer for Post 45 and director of the Cherokee County Homeless Veterans Program (an affiliated nonprofit of Post 45 made up of 100 percent volunteers).

Last summer Lindenmayer was notified that students from Blessed Trinity Christian High School were in the process of building a tiny house and wanted to donate it to a homeless veteran through the CCHVP. However, the students needed funds to complete the project.

CCHVP works closely with Habitat for Humanity and the Home Depot Foundation, fulfilling about 10 projects a year for veterans in need of home repairs with grants from the Home Depot Foundation – in 2019 alone the program received about $100,000 in grants. So CCHVP was able to secure a Home Depot grant and other financial assistance from the community for Post 45 to build the tiny house that features a loft for a bed, bathroom, living area, and a kitchen with appliances such as a stove and refrigerator.

When it came time to gift the tiny home to a homeless veteran, one could not be identified due to restrictions in place – the home was not permitted to be in Cherokee County. “We were trying to find the right veteran to get it,” Lindenmayer said. And that is when Post 45 learned that Bolton, who owned an acre of land in a county north of Cherokee, was getting evicted from his current residence. CCHVP went through Bolton’s qualifications and said, “This is the guy we want to give it to. It’s perfect for him,” Lindenmayer said.

Bolton is waiting on the permit so the tiny home can be placed on his land, along with water and sewer hookup. When Bolton learned that he was going to be able to live on his own land, which he had on the market to sell for a few years, “I thought that was wonderful. It will make for my old age to live comfortable,” said Bolton, who is currently living with some friends. “This means everything. I will be able to enjoy life again.”

Bolton said he’s appreciative of Post 45’s generosity and the efforts of Lindenmayer in making the tiny home possible for him. For Lindenmayer, it was about giving Bolton “a house of his own.”

The tiny home is just one of the many ways that Post 45 and CCHVP supports veterans in the community.

Post 45 provides transportation and housing needs

Two years ago, Lindenmayer met a 100-percent service-connected disabled veteran, with a wife and two kids, whose 20-year-old car quit running and he could not afford a new one. By fate Lindenmayer received a call from a veteran who had a 1995 car with 195,000 miles that he and his wife were no longer using and wanted to donate it to a veteran in need of one. The opportunity to provide reliable transportation sparked the idea for Post 45 to implement a vehicle donation program for veterans that need it most. Since that time Post 45 has donated 16 vehicles to qualified veterans – those who are honorably discharged and at least 70 percent VA service-connected disabled or former homeless veterans who have overcome their situation and are now back on their feet.

Last month, the program gave two cars to veterans. One was given to Darius Roy, a Navy veteran who recently transitioned out of the military and has been without a car for years. But he needed transportation to get to work and take his daughter to school. “When you have somebody like The American Legion who comes and steps in and helps you make that transition once you get out of the service it’s definitely a blessing,” Roy said.

Lindenmayer said about 80 percent of the used vehicles given to the program – which are retitled to Post 45 through the DMV – are from other veterans. All vehicles received by the post for donation are sent to a local mechanic, who is a veteran, for inspection and repairs if needed. Then, the vehicles are sold to veterans for $1.

(Continued on Page 18 See Lindenmayer)
We realize you may be dealing with difficulties during the COVID-19 crisis. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) may be able to help.

WHAT WE’RE DOING

If you have...

- **New VA debt,**
  - We will temporarily stop debt payment collections.
  - You don’t have to act.

- **Existing VA debt,**
  - You can request a temporary collection suspension or an extended repayment plan. Call 1-800-827-0648.

After the national emergency ends, we will resume debt collection activities.

OTHER VA DEBT-RELATED EFFORTS

- VA will **not** refer delinquent debts to credit reporting agencies during the crisis.
- VA Home Loan applications will continue for Veterans with unresolved debt payment issues.

For help or to confirm whether this information applies to your VA benefit debt, contact the Debt Management Center at **1-800-827-0648.**

WHAT ELSE WE’RE DOING

When possible, we’re moving in-person services to virtual platforms. We’re also granting extension requests for late-filed forms, when the extension request is based on COVID-19.

For assistance with benefit-related claim support, please contact **1-800-827-1000** or visit benefits.va.gov.

We’re working to find additional ways to serve you during this crisis. Please follow national and local guidelines to stay healthy and safe.
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(Lindenmayer Continued from Page 15)

“We know that if they have a need they call us, and we do it for them,” Lindenmayer said. “This is what we do about giving back … this is what we’re supposed to do is take care of veterans and the Legion should be in front of this and that’s what we’re doing.”

Lindenmayer said most vehicle donations have been to formerly homeless veterans, including one to a homeless Navy veteran who was walking to and from his Walmart job nightly for over a year.

Lindenmayer said the veteran has to have a valid driver’s license, pay for the car tax, insurance, and basic needs.

Post 45 and CCHVP’s furniture donation program is similar to the vehicle donation program where veterans and non-veterans donate unused furniture to other veterans in need. The moving company Two Men and a Truck heard what the post was doing and wanted to provide moving fees for free.

The program has been underway for only four months but in that short amount of time they have already moved 20 families and provided furniture to house the homes.

Furniture donated is dropped off at Post 45 or it is picked up from the donor and given to the veteran family that needs it. Lindenmayer said furniture donated is veterans giving to veterans. “That’s what they want to do. They want to donate it to another veteran, and we are happy to make sure it gets to another veteran.

“We do a lot here in the community. And we’re making life-changing donations.”

American Legion Family members continue to assist others during difficult time

Estes Park American Legion Post 119 and the Estes Park Nonprofit Resource Center have teamed up to provide to-go meals every Tuesday and Thursday for those in need. Each meal feeds up to two persons. Funding from the Town’s Community Relief Fund supports the Community Hot Meals program, which has served more than 2,000 meals so far.

Legion Family filling key roles in veteran alliance’s efforts in small Texas town

In Buda, Texas, American Legion Post 213 shares office space in the Central Texas Veterans Center with Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 12161. Last January, the two organizations joined together with AMVETS Post 115 to form the Buda VSO Alliance, with the goal being – according to Alliance Executive Director and American Legion Riders Chapter 213 Treasurer Bruce White – “to get all three of the posts in our small town working together instead of competing against each other.”

Accomplishment of that goal has never been more evident than what the Alliance has been able to produce during the COVID-19 pandemic. With members of Post 213’s American Legion Family filling in key roles, the three posts have produced more than 10,000 masks and surgical mask straps for health-care workers, local veterans, first responders and other members of the community.

The Alliance also has been responsible for providing food and supplies for 26 local families. The three-organization effort has been a realization of the Alliance’s original goal.

“We knew we had to step up and do something (when the pandemic broke out),” White said. “We’re in a small south of Austin, and we needed to do something. This was why we exist. This was why the Alliance came into existence.”

Realizing there was a need for both masks and mask straps, as well as a need for food assistance for some families, the Alliance made fulfilling those needs as the priority. Members of the Alliance with certain skillsets or areas of expertise were given specific responsibilities.

Some veterans began sewing masks, while others provided delivery of the masks, straps and food. Members of the community stepped up with financial donations.

Even members of Post 213 considered to be in the high-risk group for the coronavirus have assisted the effort “from home,” White said. “They can’t come down and physically assist, but they look at (requests for help), they say ‘OK’ and they start calling volunteers.”

On the Legion side of the Alliance, White said several members of the post’s Legion Family have played critical roles in the
coronavirus relief efforts. Legionnaire Cassandra Melgar C’DeBaca – who serves on the Alliance’s board of directors as a Legion representative – runs the mask-making operation, while 82-year-old Post 213 Adjutant Kerman Hammond coordinates the delivery operation. And ALR Chapter 213 Director Jay Gonzales, also an Alliance board member, handles the back-end administrative and scheduling operation for the project.

White, who works in the IT field, handles 3D printing of the surgical mask straps. Austin’s Spectrum News, a 24-hour news channel, allowed the Alliance to use its 3D printer to help produce mask straps.

Through mid-May and close to 4,000-man hours, the Alliance’s efforts have produced 6,252 masks distributed and another 3,962 surgical mask straps given for free to health-care facilities and nursing homes. And the food bank the Alliance set up during the pandemic will become a permanent service for the community.

The responses from those assisted by the Alliance have been that of thanks and relief. One health-care worker wrote that “The (mask straps) have been great for our masks. It is made it much easier to bear to keep on for 8+ hours daily. It has made a tremendous difference in our workday. Thank you for all you do. Now and previously. God bless you and all our VETS. Would not be here without all of you. Thank you again.”

Another health-care worker wrote “We recently received our order of 900 (mask straps). Staff have been extremely grateful for them and have said how much a regular mask was previously hurting their ears. They could not believe someone would be gracious enough to donate them to us! Thank you so much for helping us to stay safe and protect our clients - and each other!”

The Alliance also heard from an individual who received masks for he and his family, who wrote, “My family cannot thank you all enough. I can now go to work and not stress a lot about working without a mask in downtown Austin.”

White said that as demand has started to ease back, the Alliance has been able to slow down its production efforts. But if the pandemic creates a need for assistance, the Alliance will be there for the community,

“When we started this, we thought, ‘Oh, we’ll probably do 300 or 400 masks, a few hundred surgical mask straps, and two or three people are going to need some food,’” White said. “What we thought was going to happen was not even the tip of the iceberg.

“Buda veterans are dedicated to being good citizens, and we will leave no one behind. Together, we will overcome this crisis.”

VA Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry reaches major milestone

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs’ (VA) May 5, 2020, announced the Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry now exceeds 200,000 registrants.

The registry, which began in June 2014, allows Veterans and service members to self-report their exposures and health concerns in an online questionnaire that can be used to initiate discussions of health concerns with a provider.

“Concerns about the long-term effects of exposure to burn pits remain a priority,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “By joining the registry, Veterans, service members and the department will further understand the impact of deployment-related exposures on health.”

The Department of Defense encouraged registry participation in a letter to more than 700,000 active-duty, Guard, and Reserve members, which ultimately helped push participation beyond the 200,000 mark.

In addition to completing a questionnaire, registry participation involves an in-person exam by a provider. However, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, most VA facilities are deferring exams to protect registry participants, medical staff and other patients.

Learn more about this registry, including eligibility by going to https://veteran.mobilehealth.va.gov/AHBurnPitRegistry/#page/home.
How will you pay for expenses that Medicare doesn’t cover?

With the high cost of healthcare today, Medicare Supplement insurance is becoming a necessity for more and more Americans. That’s why it’s good to know that you now have a choice of Standardized Medicare Supplement plans at affordable group rates, offered to members like you. And, all plans are underwritten by a company known for it’s prompt, personal, responsive service.

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P. O. Box 1341
Valley Forge, PA 19482-9946
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.thelit.com/IDResolve

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 50 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.
OPERATION RECALL of all 2019 Members

Now is the time to contact all of our members that have not rejoined our ranks for 2020, personally reach out to them by phone or email.

Have them renew online at www.legion.org/renew or pay your Post

OPERATION RECALL May 13, 2020 – June 13, 2020

100% Target Date is June 17, 2020
VA and Parkinson’s Foundation partner to help Veterans living with Parkinson’s disease

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Parkinson’s Foundation announced today they are teaming up to improve the health, well-being and quality of life of Veterans living with Parkinson’s disease.

“This collaboration ensures Veterans diagnosed with Parkinson’s have access to the information and resources they need to better manage their health,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “The joint effort enhances the multitude of services that care teams at the Veterans Health Administration provide to Veterans with Parkinson’s disease.”

“VA and the foundation are working to increase access to information about Parkinson’s disease,” said John L. Lehr, president and chief executive officer of the Parkinson’s Foundation. “Educating and training VA staff on disease management and therapies, along with improving Veterans’ access to direct health services related to the disease is a paramount objective.”

These efforts help to provide Veterans with needed resources and tools for coping with Parkinson’s. The foundation also offers online resources at https://www.parkinson.org/blog/tips/Coronavirus for individuals and their caregivers during the COVID-19 pandemic, to include Facebook Live Q&A events with subject matter experts.

Learn more about how the Parkinson’s Foundation improves care and advances research toward a cure by going to https://www.parkinson.org/Living-with-Parkinsons/Managing-Parkinsons/Veterans.

VA multiple agencies launch Joint Mortgage and Housing Assistance website for Americans impacted by COVID-19

To ensure homeowners and renters have current and accurate housing assistance information during the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) today, along with several other agencies, launched a new unified mortgage and housing assistance website.

Veterans and service members with a VA home loan, other homeowners with a federally backed mortgage and tenants living in properties with a federally backed mortgage have relief options if they have been financially impacted by COVID-19.

“VA is committed to ensuring Veterans and service members have the financial tools available to make decisions that work for their unique situations,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “This collaboration provides an invaluable resource, enabling all homeowners and renters to access up-to-date information regarding their housing needs during the COVID-19 pandemic.”

The joint website with the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, Federal Housing Finance Agency and the Department of Housing and Urban Development consolidates: mortgage relief options, protections for renters, resources for additional help and information on how to avoid COVID-19 related scams can be found at https://www.consumerfinance.gov/coronavirus/mortgage-and-housing-assistance/. It also provides tools for homeowners to determine if their mortgage is federally backed and for renters to find out if their rental unit is financed by Fannie Mae or Freddie Mac.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, VA continues providing home loan services to Veterans and service members who have earned those benefits, working with lenders, servicers and appraisers on temporary measures to assist in processing and servicing VA home loans.

These measures include offering alternatives for appraisers to determine property value in lieu of interior inspections and providing lenders with additional information to close loans remotely. Such alternative procedures help ensure VA borrowers can close on a home even during this pandemic and prevent foreclosures when possible.

VA borrowers experiencing financial hardship due to COVID-19 can review VA guidance for borrowers and either request forbearance through the mortgage loan servicer collecting their monthly payments or call 877-827-3702 to speak with a VA Home Loan Representative.
Supporting our communities like only The American Legion can

By Bill Oxford, National Commander

Dear American Legion Family Members and Friends,

When a crisis develops, American Legion Family members are there to help their community overcome it. When disaster strikes, American Legion Family members are there to comfort the afflicted. When a veteran needs assistance, Legionnaires are there to prop up their brother or sister.

That’s the way it has been for a century of service to communities, states and nation. While The American Legion has responded to disasters and other setbacks over our organization’s lifespan, we have never experienced such a unique challenge that we face now with the coronavirus outbreak.

If this was a normal year, this morning I would have presented my report to the National Executive Committee as part of The American Legion’s Spring Meetings. Those were wisely cancelled due to the pandemic. Instead I wanted to share with you this message of how we are leading the way during this tumultuous time.

As I stay sheltered in place in North Carolina, I am so inspired by how our American Legion Family is continuing to serve its communities — from a safe distance. From coast to coast, American Legion members are providing food to healthcare workers, securing personal protection equipment for first responders, and solving problems for the betterment of veterans, servicemembers and youth in their communities.

If you have not already, please reference the new Buddy Check kit, which has been enhanced to better serve senior members of our veteran community, who are at the highest risk of COVID-19. Posts can carry on the Legion’s mission by putting together a Buddy Check on the older veterans in the community. At the same time, don’t forget families of deployed troops, veterans’ widows, youths and others in your community who may need assistance, or just a friendly call.

There are many other ways that Legionnaires can contribute while adhering to social distancing guidelines. Among them:

• Remember to submit your Consolidated Post Report to help us gauge the impact our organization is having worldwide. You can easily log into MyLegion.org and submit the CPR for your post electronically. Or download the form at the national website. They are due to departments by June 1 and national by July 1.

• Work with your local American Red Cross chapter on sponsoring a blood drive to help fill the urgent need at this time.

• Take a few minutes to fill out our COVID-19 impact survey. The American Legion is using this survey to track trends in response to the pandemic. Your identity will remain anonymous unless you choose to be contacted for assistance.

Stay safe, my friends and comrades.

‘We’re happy to do this for our comrades’

Provided By: The American Legion

Since March 26, George P. Vanderveer American Legion Post 129 in Toms River, N.J., has been teaming up with another local nonprofit and a food pantry to provide hundreds of hot meals and critical supplies weekly to those in need, including local veterans.

For Post 129 Finance Officer Ralph Wolff, it was evident early on during the coronavirus pandemic there would be a need for the effort. And Wolff and others in the post’s American Legion Family wanted to be the ones that filled the need.

“Knowing that unemployment (benefits) were going to be held up for some individuals (and) the stimulus checks were going to be held up, I knew that our veterans would be without funds,” Wolff said. “We started this a little bit ahead of the curve. We did not want our veterans to experience food insecurity. We wanted them to come to a place where if they had to ask for food, they could do it with honor and dignity. We all know each other (at Post 129).”

The state’s largest post at around 1,700 Legionnaires and 2,500 American Legion Family members, Post 129 has been working with the organization A Need We Feed, which works with area restaurants to provide meals for veterans, children and families who are in need. The meals are picked by I Need We Feed volunteers and delivered to the post, which in turn donates money back to I Need We Feed to pay the restaurants.

“It’s a cycle,” Wolff said. “The other benefit is it keeps the restaurants in business and gives them a cash flow.”

Working with the food bank

Cars lope through the parking lot at the George P. Vanderveer American Legion Post 129 in Toms River, NJ, on Tuesday, May 12, 2020. Photo by Thomas P. Costello/The American Legion
Fulfill, the post also is able to distribute crisis boxes consisting of enough non-perishable foods to sustain someone for three to four days. The post also gets fresh fruit and vegetables to distribute as well, along with paper products.

Members of the Legion Family pack up all of the supplies and food, and the post conducts two meal and supply distributions a week, following strict social distancing guidelines. Post 129 Legion Family members wear masks and load the meals and supplies into the cars that line up at the post.

In a month and a half, Post 129 has distributed 1,284 meals, 992 rolls of paper towel, 4,048 rolls of toilet paper, 295 crisis boxes, 1,000 oranges, and hundreds of pounds of additional fruits and vegetables.

In addition to veterans, the post has provided food and supplies to anyone else in need, first responders and health-care professionals. If there are leftovers meals, they don’t stay unused for long.

“‘We send them off to the fire department or the police department,’” Wolff said. “‘Last Thursday we had 200 meals. We took 30 of them over to the emergency room at the (Community Medical Center). We took another to the police department. Anything left doesn’t go to waste.’”

The reactions from those who have benefited from the post’s efforts have been that of thanks. “They are so grateful that we were able to take even the smallest burden off of them, even cooking their own meal,” Wolff said. “The thing about it is these are nutritious meals. The nutrition in these meals will help sustain their immunity systems. People with weak immunity systems are the most likely to get the virus.

“Most of our veterans are of the Vietnam era. They’re older,” Wolff said. “If I can keep just one of them from going to the grocery store … and keep them safe. That’s what I want to do. That’s what we’re here for. We’re happy to do this for our comrades.”

Over $667,000 awarded to American Legion Legacy Scholarship recipients

Provided By: The American Legion

In the fourth year of its eligibility expansion, The American Legion Legacy Scholarship has awarded over $667,000 in financial aid to 35 children of post-9/11 veterans.

The 2020 Legacy Scholarship application deadline was April 15, and the awardees were determined by the Americanism Commission on May 9.

The 35 recipients met the scholarship’s eligibility requirements, which is for children of veterans who died on active duty since Sept. 11, 2001, or children of post-9/11 veterans who have a combined VA disability rating of 50 percent or higher. Up to $20,000 will be awarded to the recipients for the expense of graduate or post-graduate tuition, books, room and board, meal plans and other supplies. The grant amount each scholarship recipient receives is based on his or her financial need after all federal and state aid is exhausted.

Legacy Scholarship recipients have a year to use the grant and those eligible can reapply up to six times.

Since the Legacy Scholarship’s first grant in 2004, 401 military children of the fallen and disabled have received over $3.6 million in aid. Read testimonials from American Legion Legacy Scholarship recipients and how thanks to the scholarship they are able to achieve their dreams of going to the college of their choice, pursue their studies without having to get a job or have the opportunity to study abroad.

The number of scholarships awarded and the amount of financial aid granted to each awardee (this includes returning applicants) is determined on donations to the scholarship fund and one’s financial needs. The American Legion Riders have been the most dedicated fundraiser and supporter of the Legacy Scholarship through their annual Legacy Run. The Run has raised over or near $1 million for the Legacy Scholarship Fund since 2015.

For more information about the Legacy Scholarship or to make a donation to the Legacy Scholarship Fund, visit www.legion.org/scholarships/legacy.
VA’s Center for Women Veterans is advancing a cultural transformation throughout VA and aims to serve as a portal – monitoring and coordinating VA’s benefit services, outreach and programs – for women Veterans. One advocate is Ashley Gorbulja-Maldonado, a VBA employee and Army National Guard Veteran, who empowers other women Veterans with her mantra, “I can, I will… watch me.”

While Gorbulja-Maldonado found a purpose raising money for homeless women Veterans and their children by participating in Ms. Veteran American, advocating for business resources through Veterati, working with the American Legion, and presenting at workshops and conferences and more, she’s also worked to get her own women Veteran peers to actively engage with VA’s Women’s Health Services, the Center for Women Veterans, and the Office of Suicide Prevention.

Since the suicide rate for women Veterans is approximately twice that of non-Veteran women, and recent studies have shown the rate of suicide to be higher among women who report having experienced military sexual trauma (MST), Gorbulja-Maldonado’s mantra stresses setting the example for others to follow – including coming to VA.

“For women feeling alone, I want them to remember that their feelings are just as important as their male counterparts, and that there are many people and resources who are there for them,” she said.

VA has enhanced the provision of care to staffing Women’s Health Primary Care Providers (WH-PCP) at every site of VA care. VA has implemented care delivery models that ensure women Veterans receive equitable, timely, high-quality primary health care from a single primary care provider.

“We know that national VA satisfaction and quality data indicate women who are assigned to a Women’s Health Primary Care Provider have higher satisfaction and higher quality of gender-specific care than those assigned to other providers,” said Dr. Patricia Hayes, VA Chief Consultant for Women’s Health Services. “And they are twice as likely to choose to stay in VA care over time. That is why we are concentrating our efforts on training staff and actively recruiting additional providers with experience in women’s health care.

Dr. Lisa Kearney, Acting Deputy Director of VA’s Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, says that women Veterans have choices with their health care. They can choose a provider’s gender, gender-sensitive treatment options, women-specific residential treatment programs, and more.

“Women Veterans are encouraged to voice their request,” Kearney said. “We empower them to voice their concerns, talk with their mental health champions and state what they need so they are heard.”

“Remember, the VA is your home,” Hayes-Byrd added. “You earned it and you deserve it, so use it!”

Women Veterans can connect with VA services by calling or texting the Women Veteran Call Center at 855-VA-Women (855-829-6636).

Angela Abel is a Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment Counselor and a VetSuccess on Campus Counselor.

In defense of Cripple Creek’s donkeys

By: Henry Howard

In Cripple Creek, Colo., American Legion members are rallying for the ambassadors of their community, a herd of donkeys.

Up until the late 1920s in Cripple Creek, the gold rush was on. Donkeys played crucial roles, ferrying heavy loads of supplies through narrow trails and up challenging slopes.

But as production in the gold mines came to a halt, employees and the donkeys lost their jobs. The miners looked for work elsewhere. The donkeys headed to the hills.

As a way to bring revenue into Cripple Creek and its neighboring town of Victor, Derby Donkey Days were launched in 1931. The annual fundraising event supports the Two Mile High Club, which is charged with overseeing care for the donkeys.

“They are considered wild animals,” said Curt Sorenson, a former senior vice commander of American Legion Post 171 and president of the Two Mile High Club. “However, we provide shelter, food, veterinary care and all the incidentals that go with that. We’re a small town and we all do double duty. Many members of the Two Mile High Club are also members of The American Legion.”
The club — named after the town’s elevation, which is 9,494 feet — now is trying to replace the funds that would normally be raised in June during Derby Donkey Days. The two-day festival features donkey races, a parade, musical performers, and more entertainment that usually draws thousands of people. It has been condensed and tentatively rescheduled for Labor Day Weekend due to the coronavirus.

Sorenson estimates that it takes between $18,000 and $20,000 annually to take care of the 13-donkey herd. “We make most of that during the Derby Donkey Days festival. We are trying to be creative in finding ways to make up for that loss in funding.”

One aspect is a virtual concert, which was recorded last week and has been published on YouTube. The idea is to raise donations when viewers check out the concert.

Among the performers are Legionnaires Larry Meyer and Mark Green, the post historian and club vice president.

“All of us play a role in different civic organizations and we play a role in helping each other out,” Sorenson explained. “The American Legion is a leader in terms of community service, as well as patriotism. The Legion does a lot in terms of community service. The Two Mile High Club is all about community service because the donkeys are the ambassadors for Cripple Creek.”

Bayfield Post 143

Bayfield Post 143 honoring our Fallen Veterans on Memorial Day 2020!

We know that coronavirus canceled a lot of Memorial Day festivities, including the Post 143 plans. But we did not ignore the event. A couple days before Memorial Day some post members and some 4H volunteers put over 200 flags on every veteran grave in the Bayfield cemetery. Then on Memorial Day morning the post color guard team went ahead and took the flags to half-staff and our bugler played taps at our cemetery memorial built and maintained by our post.

Some post members attended since event was NOT publicized.

We did not and could not forget!

Tony Schrier Post 143 Commander

June 1 marks the start of PTSD Awareness Month, a full month dedicated to raising awareness about the treatment options available for posttraumatic stress disorder. The National Center for PTSD focuses on this cause throughout the year, and we call on Veterans, families, and friends in June to pledge to raise awareness and spread the word about the many different effective PTSD treatment options.

There are many ways you can get involved during PTSD Awareness Month. You can visit the Center's website to learn more about PTSD and get ideas on how to raise awareness or find support for you or someone you care about who may benefit from treatment.
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