The American Legion, Department of Colorado Officers and Staff want to wish you and your family a very Happy Holiday season and a blessed New Year.

Thank you for what you do to improve the lives of our veterans.

Greg Jackson, Commander; Charles “Pat” Smith, Adjutant; Tom Bock, Deputy Adjutant; Tom Florez NEC; Jay Bowen, ANEC; Elaine Bock, Office Manager; Susan Abeyta, Bookkeeper; Darrell Myers, Observer; Chip Kossow, Sr. Vice Commander; Dean Casey, Service Officer; Will Davis, Service Officer; Jr. Vice Commander’s: Annette Johnson; Shane Hasert; Anthony Jones; Mike Crow; Lee White; Marvin Weaver Jr., Finance Officer; Stan Hamamoto, Chaplain; Tony Abbott, Sgt-At-Arms; Joseph Schmidt & Darrell Stilwell, Asst. Sgt-At-Arms.
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Join The American Legion

Help Our Nation’s Veterans

The American Legion Internet Observer

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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 us will make it into The Observer. Please send to: Still Serving America, The American Legion, 7465 East 1st Ave. Ste D Denver, CO 80230.
A Message From National Commander Oxford

Invite newly eligible veterans to serve with us

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

On July 30, 2019, the LEGION Act was signed into law, which extended the ongoing declared period of war back to Dec. 7, 1941. The act paved the way to honor thousands of veterans who were killed or wounded on duty during periods not previously considered wartime.

Notably for The American Legion, the LEGION Act — Let Everyone Get Involved in Opportunities for National Service Act — filled in the gaps of membership eligibility. What that means for us is that any veteran with an honorable discharge who served since the day Pearl Harbor was attacked is now eligible to join The American Legion.

For these newly eligible members — roughly 4.2 million — it means they can now join the nation’s largest and most influential veterans service organization and enjoy the rewards of membership.

But many of these now-eligible members don’t yet realize they can join. They have tried to sign up in the past, only to learn they were not eligible due to the previous definitions of war periods.

So, it is up to us to spread the word and let these deserving veterans know that we are now allowed to welcome them into our family. As you reach out to these non-members, visit legion.org to search for and read the article “11 things you need to know about the LEGION Act.”

But communicating with these eligible members is not limited to just today or this week. Invite eligible members to your Thanksgiving or Christmas event at the post or elsewhere in your community.

What a wonderful opportunity to welcome them and demonstrate how we continue to serve our great nation, states and communities. And now, these newly eligible members are not only able to observe the great community service we provide, but they can serve with us.

Holiday cards needed for Fitzsimons & Post 2018

By: Annette Johnson, Department Jr. Vice Commander

Please consider adopting a veteran this year by sending a Christmas/Holiday card to our Fitzsimons veterans. Our veterans do not have an option to sit down to dinner, enjoy a classic movie, or visit with grandkids. The only way they can visit with family members is in the cold outdoors, distanced by 20 feet of bushes and fencing, and yell to each other through iron fencing. For people with hearing and speech projection issues this is not an easy task and the veterans are often observed as remaining silent because they either cannot hear or yell loud enough. Please take a few minutes to let them know they are not forgotten this year. If you do not know what to write, go to ‘Today is History’ in your browser and copy then paste some historical data into a word doc and print it out. This way the veterans can share their historical stories with their brothers and sisters lining in the center.

Carolining for Veterans - consider coming to Fitzsimons Living Center and joining us on December 5th - gathering at 10:00 am and we will start singing at 10:30, in the first courtyard. Please park in the lot across from the main entrance. Depending on COVID 19 restrictions in force on this date.

Address: 1919 QUENTIN STREET, Aurora, CO. 80045 (main cross streets Peoria and Colfax)

Thank You for taking a little time out of your life to spread some Holiday cheer to our veterans living at Fitzsimons.

I wish everyone a safe and healthy this Holiday season.
Happy Holidays to all!

How many of us look at a glass and think it is half full as opposed to being half empty? Opportunities are the same the way. Often, we look at them and say no, I do not want to take the chance or risk, but sometimes we jump at the chance and then great things happen. Opportunities are events or occurrences that give us a choice to make something good happen. Many times, an opportunity may be right before us to see and act upon, yet we miss it due to the distractions that everyday life presents us.

The dictionary defines opportunity as “a set of circumstances that makes it possible to do something,” and of course the Holiday season is nothing short of providing that opportunity. Since March 1, 2020 we have constantly been presented with many distractions that affect our everyday lives, both personally and professionally, but these distractions have also provided huge opportunities towards a better future.

Let us talk about our future as The American Legion. Discuss with friends, family and especially veterans from across your community and find what we can do better as an organization to engage them and to better serve our communities. Between social unrest, an epic pandemic, increased unemployment, increasing homelessness, increasing suicides, and still combating a 20-year war in Afghanistan, I am seeing nothing but increasing opportunities to do good things for a better tomorrow.

We (The American Legion) can help many ways, from helping with education and tutoring to providing comfort for our elderly. As the second wave of COVID-19 hits this country and with winter on the way, I ask that we come together especially during this holiday season and stand united in finding ways to make a difference in our community in providing support to those that are in need of comforting.

Remember JFK once said “Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country” As both veterans and American Legion members we have a duty to find ways to help strengthen and support our communities with our programs. This year our programs may mean more to our communities than you think. As our esteemed Adjutant coined a couple of years ago “Work the Programs” and we will grow both personally and as an organization.

How? You ask. Our lives evolve around the world of ever-changing technological advancements. We now have the ability to use our phones, tablets and computers to video conference with up to 1,000 members at a time. We have the ability to create “how-to” videos and find videos on how to do just about anything. We also have many forms of Social Media to promote, educate and inform what it is The American Legion does and is doing today. We can even do fund raisers and video chats (brings a whole new meaning to Buddy Checks).

Our technology allows us to reach a greater audience quickly and efficiently. When conducting Buddy checks we can send an email, or call and of course the older way of mailing, sometimes we still need to get out and knock on a door or two and make sure our veterans and their families know without doubt we are there to help them even if only a casual conversation over coffee. During this time of year many of our veterans and their families look forward to our Posts having holiday dinners, if COVID-19 restrictions are preventing this maybe consider a putting a dinner to-go or something similar to help bring everyone together.

Please reach out to your local posts if you need assistance or would like to volunteer and help “Keep the Flame of Patriotism Burning!”

Deb and I wish you a safe and happy holiday season.
A Message From Department Sr. Vice Commander Kossow

Buddy Checks

By: Chip Kossow, Department Sr. Vice Commander

The holiday season is back and there are so many things to enjoy this time of year. But how are your buddies doing? Not everyone is feeling the blessings of the season. Add in the social unrest, governmental dysfunction, and the social distancing isolation, it’s a wonder we’re all not sitting there with our head in our hands. One thing is certain; Hearing from a friend can help.

The Buddy Check program is designed for Legionnaires to make contact, engage in conversation, assess risks and direct veterans in need to the appropriate services. Buddy checks have been an official thing within The American Legion since the National Executive Committee passed the Buddy Check Resolution in the spring of 2019. It was originally designated for the week of The American Legion’s birthday, 15 March and Veteran’s Day, but should be used whenever it is needed – like now.

Veterans are more susceptible to depression and this time of year can exacerbate the problem. Veterans are more receptive to other veterans. Especially the veterans they know or at least from their own town. Posts should organize the effort for maximum effectiveness. Gather up a team, divvy up the list of members, and start making connections. The key is listening to the veteran. Be prepared to answer the many possible questions about healthcare, community functions, financial assistance, meetings, or membership renewal. You may need to research details and get back to them. When the call is complete, ensure you thank them for their time and leave contact info for future use. The American Legion has a free tool kit available for download at https://www.legion.org/publications/247460/buddy-check-event-toolkit.

The American Legion is also asking you to contact Congress in an effort to unanimously pass the Buddy Check Week bill. The legislation will require VA to establish a “Buddy Check Week,” as well as provide educational opportunities, materials and references for veterans to learn more about how to conduct personal wellness checks. The bill also compels VA to expand resources for the Veterans Crisis Line to handle any potential increased volume during the designated week. Go to https://www.votervoice.net/AmericanLegion/home to get contact information for your area.

God Bless our veterans, their families, and the United States of America!

Stay in touch!!

CALB Silver Bar raffle

Dan Reyez, Chairman, Colorado American Legion Baseball Committee

The Colorado Legion Baseball held their Silver Bar raffle at 2:00 pm on November 16th, at Department Headquarters.

Congratulations to the following winners:

1st place Winner of Silver bar was Beyza Cisar of Fort Collins

2nd Place Winner of $200.00 was Dave Roche of Greeley

3rd Place Winner of $100.00 was Don Armstrong of Johnstown

We thank you for your support. We look forward to hosting a successful 2021 Colorado American Legion Baseball season.

Valor Roof and Solar helps Veterans In need

Johno Skeeters, American Legion Post 1260 member and employee of Valor Roof and Solar, announced that on 15 October, the company is providing a free roof in Castle Rock for the father of a veteran who is a double purple heart recipient. This project is one of four free roofs that Valor provides each year to support veterans with limited resources. Valor is a veteran owned roofing business which operates up and down the front range. We thank Valor Roofing and their Valor Vets Care program for the fine work it does helping Vets in need.

If you, or someone you know, needs a new roof or solar panels, contact Johno at Valor Roof and Solar (720) 550-1614.
Toys for Tots needs your help

By: Annette Johnson, Department Jr. Vice Commander

Leo Buscaglia once said “Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, and listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around.”

Toys for Tots needs your help. The Marine Toys for Tots Program has been delivering a message of hope to children since 1947. With a 98:4 support ratio, 548 million toys distributed, and 256 million children supported today. In Arapahoe County: The local Impact for 2019 was 189,364 toys distributed and 99,800 children supported. (https://www.toysfortots.org/)

Most of us are aware many people have lost their jobs or have been laid off and these economic challenges will place undue stress on the number of children who will be in need this year, our kids need your help. Many families are learning how to navigate these changes; one of the largest will be how to provide Christmas for their children. With your help we can help ease the stress of the holidays.

Every Year Toys for Tots ensures as many children as possible receives a Christmas gift. This year with restrictions in place collections are being managed differently. Some retail centers are not allowing Toys for Tots to set up their collection boxes due to COVID-19 and Toys for Toys has developed a virtual donation page this year at (https://toysfortotsbox.com/).

Consider contacting Toys for Toys to pick up a collection bin for your Post and ask members to bring an unwrapped toy to your Post to volunteer your time to help sort and bag toys for distribution. Let us help ensure as many families as possible share in the Christmas holiday.

If you would like to volunteer helping sort toys for orders https://aurora-co.toysfortots.org/local-coordinator-sites/leo-sites/local-contact-us.aspx and click on Support the program and click on volunteer.

Volunteer hours: Monday-Friday 8am-11am or 12pm-4pm and Saturdays from 8am-12pm.
- special requests for volunteering will be accepted on a case by case basis.
- please provide a specific date and time that you would like volunteer, it is easier for us to schedule you.

“Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you react to it.” – Charles R. Swindoll.

Post 1980, Woodland Park, honors Homeless Veteran

On 14 August 2020, Private First Class Winston Randolph Hodges passed away. PFC Hodges was an Army Veteran and served at Fort Riley, KS as a Field Communications Lineman.

The American Legion Post 1980 conducted the Post Everlasting memorial service in his honor at Woodland Park Veterans hall.

Following that, taps was played and his ashes spread near Catamount Lake in the shadow of Pikes peak.

PFC Hodges was homeless and had no family or friends in this area. As there was no next of kin to receive the burial flag, it will be displayed at the Woodland Park Library.

Photos by Cindy Meyer

Post 1980 conducts Homeless Veteran Post Everlasting ceremony. No names of participant was provided.
I recently had the opportunity to have dinner with and listen to our National Commander, Bill Oxford, speak. One of his key points was about conducting Buddy Checks and checking in with ALL VETERANS, not just those we know. With current, and potential future, lockdown conditions due to COVID-19, mental health, substance abuse and suicide prevention are paramount in helping our Veteran brothers and sisters.

As I was gathering my thoughts on putting this article together, I was pleasantly surprised by the collateral available on our National website (www.legion.org), which is FREE to everyone. Specifically:

- **How to Perform a Buddy Check During the Coronavirus Pandemic** – a few brief pages that tell you how to organize a program, sample scripts, and key facts about who TAL is and what we do.
- **Event Toolkit – Buddy Check – A National Week of Calling** – emphasizing scripts for not yet renewed, current in good standing, recently expired and long expired for making calls during the week of the Legion birthday and Veterans day (but these scripts could easily be edited to ANY time of year).

One last point, which in my honest opinion goes hand-in-hand with mental health, as of November 11, 2020, veterans and gold star families will be able to get into national parks for free with valid forms of ID, which include: Department of Defense Identification Card, Veterans designation on a state-issued U.S. driver’s license or identification card, Veteran Health Identification Card or Veteran ID Card. These last two are both available from the VA. This gives us free access to approximately 2,000 public locations spread out across more than 400 million acres of public lands; and that is sure to do something positive for anyone’s mental health.

**More photographs of Post 1980 honoring Homeless Veteran**

Homeless Veteran's Ashes spread near Catamount Lake.

Taps played by Post Bugler for Homeless Veteran. Bugler's name not provided.
Department Chaplain's Corner - Merry Christmas

By: Stanley Hamamoto, Department Chaplain

Has God Been Good to You!!!!!!!

A
s we close the 2020 year, I think we have had enough problems with the Corona Virus. It has caused many problems for many people and business. Even many organizations like the Legion and other organizations had to close for a long while. I pray that some time in 2021 that a vaccine will come forth and make all of this go away, like the flu.

Here are a few words from my good friend Max Lucado. God Came Near. She looks into the face of the baby. Her son. Her Lord. His Majesty. At this point in history, the human being who best understands who God is and what HE is doing is a teenage girl in a small stable. She cannot take her eyes off HIM. Somehow, Mary knows she is holding God. So, this is HE. She remembers the words of the angel. “HIS kingdom will never end.” HE looks like anything but a king. HIS face is punish and red. HIS cry, though strong and healthy, is still the helpless and piercing cry of a baby. And HE is absolutely dependent upon Mary for his well-being. Majesty in the midst of the mundane Holiness in the filth manure and sweat. Divinity entering the world on the floor of a stable, through the womb of a teenager and in the presence of a carpenter. She touches the face of the infant God.

NO ROOM FOR OUR LORD. “She brought forth her first born Son---and laid HIM in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.” No room for our Lord? No room for the King of Kings? NO! But room for others and for other things. There was no room for our Lord in the world that HE had made----imagine!!!!!! Things have not really changed since that Bethlehem night over two thousand years ago. God is still on the fringes of most of our lives. We fit HIM in when it is convenient for us, but we become irritated when HE makes demands on us. If God would only stay in HIS little box and come out when we pull the string! Our lives are so full. There is so much to be done. But in all our busy activities are we in danger of excluding from our hearts and lives the ONE who made us? Oh! Come to my heart dear Lord, there is room in my heart for you.

As we share gifts and food with family and friends, keep in mind that there are many who just wish that they could have even only a part of what you have. As you sit down at your table to eat your Christmas meal, pray for those veterans and their families that wish they could have ½ of what you have. Pray that they will find warm shelter and some warm food to eat. Think of the many who wish that they could have a comfortable place to sleep in and have a warm meal. We, I know, many times take what we have for granted and do not even think of those that are less fortunate. I would like to wish all of you and your families a very Merry Christmas and a Joyful New Years. Let us all remember that we are all of one family and God will lead us all and together we can do many great things. I pray that we will all have a great 2021 and that God will lead us all the way. We must all keep the faith. I have said this many times before; God many times will take something bad and make something good come out of it. I for one strongly believe that HE will make something good come out of this virus that has caused us too much problems this year. All of you take care of yourself and your family. Always wear your mask, keep your distance. If we all do this, maybe this whole mess will clear up faster. I know that there are many who do not want to wear a mask. These people I think are only thinking of themselves and have no regard for others. I call them selfish because they are only thinking of themselves. ENOUGH!!!!

God Bless you and your families and again, May God keep you all safe and may HE give you a good start for the New Year.

My last three words to all of you are: GO TO CHURCH!!!!!!
Our Mission Continues
By: Pat Smith, Department Adjutant

The year-end holidays are upon us. That means times with family, friends and celebrating our religious beliefs. Tis the season for gift giving. What better gift to give someone close to us than their membership in The American Legion!

During these troubled times we need to stay focused on the mission of The American Legion. To quote Robert H Schuller, “Tough Times Never Last, but Tough People do.” His message is to turn the negatives in our life into positive actions. That is what The American Legion has done for over 100 years. And that is what we need to do today.

We need to find the positive in all that surrounds us. As we enter the holiday season and prepare for a new year, we must continue with all of the good work that has made us who we are for the last century. We cannot abandon our mission because a silly pandemic gets in our way.

Because of government restrictions we are going virtual in just about everything we do. Our social interaction, which is vitally important in who we are, has been severely restricted. We are looking for new ways to stay connected. But stay connected, we must.

Our Buddy Check program is probably one of the best things to come out of this crisis. One of the best, and now the most important social media tools is the telephone. Say what you want about all of the other fancy social media platforms, you just can’t beat the tried and true telephone. It is the best! A soothing, compassionate, caring voice on the other end is just the right medicine for us to stay connected. Buddy Check is a two way street. If you feel you need someone to talk to just pick up the phone and conduct a buddy check on yourself. That is the positive way for us to weather this crisis.

Our Legion posts in Colorado, and throughout the nation, have stepped up big time to help their fellow veterans and the communities in which they live. Posts have conducted food drives. They have delivered groceries to families who could not make the trip to their local grocery store. Our own Post 209 in Colorado Springs got engaged with the military at Fort Carson and sent care packages to our troops in Honduras. These actions are exactly what we need to be doing to keep up the spirit and maintain a positive attitude of our members and our communities.

The future is uncertain with this pandemic. But the future of The American Legion is bright. We know our mission. Our mission must continue. We are tough people, we will survive!

My best wishes to you and your families during the Christmas and New Year’s holiday season. We know that 2021 will be a better year. With the right attitude we will look for all of the positive things that happened during this crisis and we will improve them and make them better as we prepare for another exceptional year serving our veterans, their families, our communities and our nation. Take care and stay safe.

The Veterans Coalition of San Luis Valley event

By: Richard Nagley, Veterans Coalition of the San Luis Valley

NOW HEAR THIS! The Veterans Coalition of the SLV Events have returned. Please help get the word out!

ON December 8th, 1000-1100, the VCSLV will once again hold a Veterans Health Care Event. SAVE THE DATE!!

This will be a ZOOM event and will be limited to the 1st 100 RSVP. Invitations will be forthcoming so don’t wait till the last minute to RSVP.

The topic for our 1st Open Event will be a presentation on VETERAN-DIRECTED CARE. The presenter for this event will be Marsha Unruh, Veteran in Charge, at The Independence Center. Veteran-Directed Care is a relative new VA Health Care Program that gives Veterans of all ages, the opportunity to receive the Home and Community Services they need in a consumer-directed way (https://www.va.gov/GERIATRIC/docs/Veteran-Directed_Care.pdf).

Please RSVP to info.vcslv@gojade.org or call Mary (719/992-4108)/Richard (719/496-7234) if you have any questions.
Good day Sons,

I hope everyone had a great Thanksgiving and found time to spend with family and friends safely. As we continue with the Holiday season 2020, please continue to reach out to our Veterans in need.

A few important dates this month, Monday December 7, Pearl Harbor Day 1941, Friday December 11, Hanukkah, and Friday December 25, Christmas.

As we close out this year 2020, take time to reflect on the positive things that you have accomplished. This past year has really been one for the books! We will continue to make a difference to those in need around us.

My prayer for you this Christmas Season is that you and your family enjoy your time together. Make the best of what might seem like difficult times. Focus on the positives in your life. Look forward to the new year with excitement. Start thinking about moving forward and “Continuing on for God and Country”.

We are all looking forward to 2021 and getting on with the business of The Sons of The American Legion. Let us move forward and keep in mind why each of us joined this great organization, Our Country, Our Family, Our Veterans.

“May the holiday season end the present year on a cheerful note and make way for a fresh and bright New Year. Merry Christmas to you and your family”

God Bless,

Nick Arceo
SAL Detachment Commander

$1,000 grants help posts affected by COVID

Eligibility for a Mission Blue Post Assistance Program grant requires posts to have:

- Filed an IRS 990 within the prescribed due date.
- Filed all other required forms and reports as prescribed by the department.
- Actively participated in one or more American Legion programs in the last 18 months.
- A financial need.
- A certificate of insurance naming The American Legion doing business as American Legion National Headquarters as an additional insured (See Resolution 35 memo below)
- Documentation indicating that the post is properly incorporated

The American Legion National Executive Committee approved Resolution No. 36 Oct. 14, during its annual Fall Meetings. Funds for the approved grants will be provided through The American Legion National Emergency Fund (NEF).

Public health mandates in response to COVID-19 included stay-at-home orders and business closures. Those mandates financially impacted American Legion posts nationwide as member and community outreach efforts were limited, resulting in a loss of revenue.

To provide some relief during these challenging times, financial grants are now available for eligible American Legion posts. Resolution No. 36, Mission Blue Post Assistance Program, will provide $1,000 grants to posts that are in good standing with their respective department. These funds must be used exclusively to pay current or past due rent, mortgage, utilities and insurance.

The American Legion National Executive Committee approved Resolution No. 36 Oct. 14, during its annual Fall Meetings. Funds for the approved grants will be provided through The American Legion National Emergency Fund (NEF).

Photo courtesy of The American Legion

By: The American Legion

By: Nick Arceo, Commander, SAL Detachment of Colorado
American Legion posts applying for a grant will be required to first submit the completed application to their respective department for approval before it can be sent to National Headquarters. This application procedure is the same as the NEF.

American Legion posts have until Dec. 31, 2021, to apply for a Mission Blue Post Assistance Program grant.

VA releases COVID-19 Response Report

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs today, November 9, 2020, announced publication of its Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Response Report detailing its efforts to address the pandemic from early January through June 30.

The report results are a continuation of VA’s pledge to share best practices and lessons learned with other government agencies and the private health care system while the country fights COVID-19.

“As the nation’s largest integrated health care system, VA’s COVID-19 response has been robust and far-reaching. This includes 24 current and 75 completed Fourth Mission assignments involving more than 2,000 VA employees helping to support non-Veteran patients and non-VA health care systems,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “This report reflects VA’s agility throughout the pandemic to adapt based on lessons learned in order to continue providing safe, quality health care to Veterans as we continue to battle the pandemic.”

The COVID-19 Response Report provides an extensive look at VA’s complex COVID-19 response, including the department’s planning and preparation ahead of the pandemic; the initial crisis response; key COVID-19 policies and directives; interactions and interdependencies with federal and state agencies; and adaptations to health care operations. It provides a forthright view of challenges and issues that VA needed to address in order to effectively respond to the pandemic, such as exchanging supplies, Personal Protective Equipment and deploying health care personnel across the enterprise to meet critical needs in certain areas.

The department implemented a wide range of actions to ensure the safety of its patients and employees while never closing its doors. As of November 6, VA has tested 879,457 Veterans and employees for COVID-19 and diagnosed 67,905 Veterans with COVID-19, 14,168 of whom were admitted to a VA medical center for care. VA has hired more than 59,095 new employees since March 29 in response to the surge in demand for care during the pandemic. In addition, VA moved many appointments to telehealth meetings to keep Veterans and employees safe and has seen a 1,525% increase in home or offsite telehealth visits.

As of June 29, VA participated in more than 90 and led 28 multiple-site COVID-19 research studies. Notably, VA participated in research on 3D-printed respirator masks and convalescent plasma to treat COVID-19 patients, as well as other promising therapeutics, and laid the groundwork for participation in COVID-19 vaccine clinical trials.

(Continued on Page 13 See 90 Interviews )
2020 Media Awards Criteria

By: Darrell Myers, Public Relations Committee Chairman

The Media Awards will be presented during the Mid-Year Conference.

Print Media Awards: Nominations can be made for Small, Medium and Large newspapers. The definitions of small, medium and large newspapers are as follows:

   Major Market Print Media Awards: Large city newspapers with populations of 100,000 or more
   Medium Market Print Media Awards: Medium city newspapers with populations of 25,000 to 99,999
   Small Market Print Media Awards: Small city newspapers with a population of 1,000 to 24,999

Television and Radio Station Awards: There is only one award presented to a Television Station and one award presented for a Radio Station - there are no categories.

Media Award Nominations must come from a post through the use of a nomination letter. The nomination letter must contain the below listed headings and the correct information supplied by your post so that the committee members don’t have to spend their time finding that information and can spend their time judging.

To make your nomination for the media awards follow the instructions as listed:

Nomination Letter: Name of Media being nominated, Name of Article/Newscast, Name of Author, Name of Editor, Award Category, Name of Contact Person, Address and Phone Number of Contact Person, Reason for Nomination, Post Number, Name of Nominator, Nominator’s Address and Phone Number.

For the Market Print Media Award (newspapers) a post must gather the original article or articles in sufficient quantity to provide a packet for each of the three members of the Public Relations Committee. Copies of the articles are not permitted.

For TV nominations, a link (s) to the story (s) must be included in the nominating letter so that the members of the Public Relations committee can go and review the story (s) and the letter must be mailed to each of the three members of the Public Relations Committee.

For Radio Station Nominations, there must be a written narrative of what the radio station programming was and what they did to help the veterans of your community, and if possible, a link should be included that would allow the committee to hear the programs in the nomination letter and then sent to each of the three members of the Public Relations Committee.

Deadline for nominations is January 1, 2021

Department Public Relations Committee Members are:
Darrell Myers – 7465 East 1st Ave, Suite D, Denver, CO 80230
E-mail observer@coloradolegion.org
The report was compiled through more than 90 interviews with health care leaders and stakeholders as well as a variety of documents and data pertaining to the Veterans Integrated Service Networks and health care enterprise. It cites conclusions, findings and recommendations across several categories, including recognition of the threat and planning; national and interagency coordination; emergency management and readiness; data and analytics; capacity, supply chain and testing; clinical operations; research; and moving forward.

VA expects to develop further reports to document the evolution of VA’s response to the pandemic and consider additional strategic follow-up actions informed by the ongoing experience.

A synopsis of VA’s COVID-19 Response Report and the full report are available on the VA website. VA also released its COVID-19 Response Plan in March and its Charting the Course Plan for how VA facilities would resume services temporarily halted by the crisis in May.

**Buddy Checks to focus on mental health well-being**

*By: The American Legion*

As COVID-19 cases rise and the holidays approach, The American Legion is encouraging posts and members to shift their Buddy Check programs to assist veterans coping with mental health and well-being challenges.

The nation’s largest veterans organization is also urging Congress to pass the Buddy Check Week bill which will make wellness checks a national priority for the Department of Veterans Affairs. With military suicides up 20 percent over this time last year, Legionnaires are urged to make check-in calls to at-risk veterans across the nation and offer support and access to wellness programs in the week surrounding Veterans Day and into the winter months ahead.

Veterans can be at particular risk for depression and suicide around the holidays, and many are disproportionately hard-hit by the pandemic due to age, chronic health issues, post-traumatic stress disorder and isolation. The Buddy Check program is designed to give Legionnaires the tools to make contact, engage in conversation, assess risks and direct veterans in need to the appropriate services.

“The American Legion knows from 100 years of experience that it’s veteran-to-veteran contact that can make the difference for someone in a crisis situation,” says James W. “Bill” Oxford, national commander of The American Legion. “So, we’re putting some muscle behind this effort and giving our members the tools they need to reach out to fellow veterans in their hometowns who may be hard hit by the triple whammy of the pandemic, isolation and the holidays.”

Resources and toolkits for Buddy Check teams are available at legion.org/buddycheck on the web. Also posted on the platform are American Legion Buddy Check success stories.

The American Legion is calling on its nearly 2 million members to contact Congress to unanimously pass the Buddy Check Week bill introduced with bipartisan support from U.S. Sens. Joni Ernst, R-Iowa; Doug Jones, D-Ala.; and Maggie Hassan, D-N.H. The legislation will require VA to establish a “Buddy Check Week,” as well as provide educational opportunities, materials and references for veterans to learn more about how to conduct personal wellness checks. The bill also compels VA to expand resources for the Veterans Crisis Line to handle any potential increased volume during the designated week.

“Veterans are in crisis, and we need Congress’ help to take this program to the next level and stem the tide of suicide among our nation’s veterans,” Oxford said. “We need all hands on deck and all boots on the ground to fight for our nation’s veterans, just like they fought for us.”

The Buddy Check program encourages Legionnaires to make contact, lend a listening ear, and direct veterans to critical services. For Buddy Check information, visit legion.org/buddycheck. For urgent help, contact the Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255.
American Legion announces plans for 2021 National Oratorical Contest

The American Legion
Oct 14, 2020

The American Legion canceled its 2020 National Oratorical Contest that was scheduled in April in an effort to keep all competitors, volunteers, judges and others safe amid the pandemic. Although the pandemic is ongoing, the 2021 National Oratorical Contest will be held as scheduled April 9-11 in Indianapolis and conducted in its traditional manner of live and in-person ... "Trusting that conditions will trend to allow," said Americanism Chairman Richard Anderson in a letter issued to department leadership.

"The American Legion’s Americanism Commission recognizes that it must still set a course for conducting its National Oratorical Contest next April so that oratorical chairmen at all levels, as well as department leadership and national staff, may plan accordingly now."

Anderson went on to share that arrangements for contests leading up to department finals is the responsibility of each department according to oratorical rules. For levels of competition prior to the department finals contest, the rules and regulations set forth in the oratorical rules are not mandatory – they are offered as a guideline and your respective department headquarters should be consulted.

However, it is important to note that if a department plans to send its department oratorical finalist to Indianapolis to compete in the 2021 National Oratorical Contest, rules state that the department finals contest shall conform with national contest procedures, rules and regulations. As mentioned above, the 2021 National Oratorical Contest will be held live and in person.

Anderson said the decision to have a traditional National Oratorical Contest was made for a few reasons.

"First, the Americanism Commission takes pride in The American Legion’s stellar reputation for upholding the utmost in contest integrity. A live event provides a level of oversight for which the reliability of the contest leaves very little question that The American Legion and its volunteers, staff and contestants have adhered to the highest competitive values and standards of honor.

"Second, it’s also about the experience. As with all American Legion national level youth programs, whether it’s the American Legion World Series, the Junior Shooting Sports shoulder-to-shoulder national championship, Boys Nation or the National Oratorical Contest, the Americanism Commission takes pride in the overall experience provided to youth beyond simply competing or attending an event. When 53 oratorical contestants come to Indianapolis, they are enthusiastically celebrated and honored by American Legion Family members who recognize their achievement for rising to the national competition. The Legion Family actively role models
AMERICAN HEROES IN ACTION

BANQUET
Saturday, April 24th, 2021

Join us at the Stapleton North DoubleTree Hotel
4040 Quebec St. (Just south of I-70)

Plenty of FREE parking

Dinner includes your choice of tender beef steak or grilled salmon. FREE COORS AND COORS LIGHT while it lasts. With a live auction, silent auction and multiple raffles, you’ll have lots of chance to buy or win guns, art work, jewelry, hunting trips, fishing trips and so much more.

Get your tickets early and you could win a new pistol. Buy your tickets before Friday, February 5th, 2021, and you could win a Smith & Wesson, M&P 9 Shield in the Early Bird Drawing.

Tickets
Tickets are $60 per person or $100 per couple.
Buy your tickets online at www.AmericanHeroesInAction.org
Reserved tables are also available.
2 killed in Connecticut VA hospital explosion

By The American Legion

A suspected steam pipe explosion in a maintenance area of a Connecticut VA hospital killed a VA employee and a contractor, and left a third person missing on Friday, officials said.

“We received a report this morning that an explosion occurred at the West Haven campus of the VA Connecticut Healthcare System that resulted in two deaths in a non-patient care area,” VA Secretary Robert Wilkie said in a statement.

The secretary added that patient care was not impacted by the explosion, which occurred at the West Haven campus of the VA Connecticut Healthcare System.

“No one was injured. Emergency personnel are on the scene,” the statement said. “Our prayers are with the families of the victims of this explosion.”

Ralph Bozella, chairman of The American Legion’s National Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Commission, offered his condolences and urged a full investigation into the explosion.

“We offer our sincerest condolences to those impacted by today’s tragic events,” he said. “The American Legion works closely with the Veterans Health Administration and we urge VA and Congress to thoroughly investigate the cause of the explosion.”

Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., a member of the Senate Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, said the explosion may have been the result of a mechanical failure or human error by someone at the VA.

“We have no firm facts as yet,” he said. “I will be taking a personal interest in the investigation and there may well be an investigation by our committee depending on how well we’re satisfied that the VA itself is investigating properly.”

“This is a heartbreaking tragedy,” said Connecticut Gov. Ned Lamont. “I have instructed our state agencies to provide full resources as the response and investigation continues.”

New myLegion coming in December

By: The American Legion

In mid-December, a new mylegion.org will be released for American Legion members and officers. This release involves change to access and security.

Current administrative officers for myLegion include:
- Post and squadron adjutants
- County commanders
- District commanders

MyLegion users are probably familiar with the current architecture where one online profile exists for access to your personal member information, as well as another one for access to your post membership and electronic roster, and being able to process membership, print lists/labels, etc.

The new myLegion will be driven by one account profile associated with the email address on the administrative officer’s personal membership record. Once logged into the new myLegion, administrative officers will see options to update their personal membership record and work with online post membership tools. Those select officers will also be able to grant authority to others that need access to online rosters and reports.

An email address will be required on the administrative officer’s membership record to access the new myLegion, and all existing accounts will need to be registered. The registration process will send a one-time password (OTP) code to your email address. The OTP code will be required to complete the registration process.

To make sure the most up-to-date email address is on file for your personal membership record, visit mylegion.org and choose “Members Click Here.” You can also call American Legion customer service at (833) 253-9995 to update your information or email us at mylegion@legion.org.
Contemporary Anthology of Fundraising Cookbooks
Aims to SERVE Veterans and Honor a Legacy

Fort Collins, CO—The American Legion Auxiliary’s only campus-affiliated unit has put a contemporary twist on 100 years of the community cookbook fundraiser. Their modern anthology revisits an archive of 86 vintage and recent TALA cookbooks from across the U.S., with recipes re-created and photographed in 75 test kitchens across the country.

SerVe: Revisiting a Century of American Legion Auxiliary Cookbooks is now available for purchase at www.ALAservecookbook.com.

Our mission is three-fold:

1. **HONOR A LEGACY**: Celebrate the role of food during 100 years of service in TALA

2. **INSPIRE CONVERSATION & SERVICE**: Share military histories and food stories to increase understanding of the diverse veteran experience

3. **SUPPORT MENTAL WELLNESS PROGRAMS FOR VETERANS**: Donate proceeds to mental wellness programs for veterans, including the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival and the Veterans Writing Project at CSU

More than two years in the making, SerVe features a fresh look at classic recipes curated from 100 years of cookbooks from The American Legion Auxiliary, the world’s largest women’s service organization, and stories of those who served, together in a commemorative coffee-table book. (Click for Sample Pages.)

This limited-edition book includes:

- 220+ timeless recipes
- Full-color food photographs
- Interesting household anecdotes
- Veteran-submitted food stories
- Histories of America’s military involvement since WWI

**Price**: $42 plus applicable tax and shipping. Purchase at www.ALAservecookbook.com

Case Discount available for American Legion Departments, Units, Posts, Squadrons. Contact PDP Karen Boehler at karenboehler@msn.com, 970-215-6497

The American Legion Auxiliary is one of the nation’s most prominent supporters of veterans, military, and their families, with nearly three-quarters of a million members. TALA members volunteer millions of hours annually, averaging a value of $2 billion each year. To learn more, visit www.ALForVeterans.org.
Inspired by your service.

As a veteran who has received an Honorable discharge, you’re eligible for membership in USAA. With advice, tools and products to aid you with insurance, banking, investments and retirement, USAA is committed to stand alongside you wherever life takes you.

Explore the benefits of USAA membership now.

1-877-699-2654 | usaa.com/legion

Investments/Insurance: Not FDIC Insured • Not Bank Issued, Guaranteed or Underwritten • May Lose Value
USAA products are available only in those jurisdictions where USAA is authorized to sell them.
Purchase of a product other than USAA auto or property insurance, or purchase of an insurance policy offered through the USAA Insurance Agency, does not establish eligibility for or membership in USAA property and casualty insurance companies. Use of the term “member” or “membership” does not convey any eligibility rights for auto and property insurance products, or legal or ownership rights in USAA. Membership eligibility and product restrictions apply and are subject to change. To be eligible for auto and property insurance, separated military personnel must have received a discharge type of Honorable. Eligible former dependents of USAA members may purchase auto or property insurance if the member obtained USAA auto or property insurance. USAA means United Services Automobile Association and its Insurance, banking, investment and other companies. Banks Member FDIC. Investments provided by USAA Investment Management Company and USAA Financial Advisors Inc., both registered broker dealers. Financial planning services and financial advice provided by USAA Financial Planning Services Insurance Agency, Inc. (known as USAA Financial Insurance Agency in California, License # 0E36312), a registered investment adviser and insurance agency and its wholly owned subsidiary, USAA Financial Advisors, Inc., a registered broker dealer. The American Legion receives financial support from USAA for its sponsorship.
Preventing veteran suicide is more than just a goal for Department of Maine Legionnaire Don Mulcahy. It’s a very personal mission for the Vietnam War Navy veteran and commander of Lopeman-Potts Post 67 in Bridgton.

Mulcahy’s brother-in-law died by suicide, while the Legionnaire’s daughter attempted suicide. Both were veterans. And Mulcahy himself contemplated suicide during a serious illness years ago.

“So I know what these people are going through firsthand,” Mulcahy said. “I know what happens to a family – the dynamics, the anger. I know how (my daughter’s suicide attempt) affected her brothers and the anger. To them, she tried to murder their sister. I saw what happened in the family.”

Those experiences have driven Mulcahy to reach other veterans before they get to the point of contemplating suicide. A renovation at Post 67’s 161-year-old building that took place over the past 18 months is part of that mission.

But the renovation has gone beyond physical. Post 67 has refocused its mission to assisting the community – veterans and non-veterans alike – through a variety of services.

The post had been down to eight members before its revitalization. On the physical side, Mulcahy said the post was looking at an $85,000-$95,000 price tag just to make habitable a facility that he called the “largest eyesore in the town”. The inside of the building “looked like the worst episode of ‘Hoarders you’d ever seen,’” Mulcahy said. “We filled a 40-yard roll-off dumpster in three hours.”

But through donated labor, fundraising and the generosity of others who donated supplies – including a new roof, new furnace and new driveway – it completed the renovation project while leaving the post with no debt. A garden dedicated to veteran suicide awareness was planted in front of the post by local high-school students.

The post recently had a grand opening ceremony attended by American Legion National Commander James “Bill” Oxford, who was making his official visit to Maine.

The improved facility helped expand the post’s role in its community. At one time having trouble getting his Department of Veterans Affairs and Social Security benefits before getting assistance from former Department of Maine service officer Amedeo Lauria made Mulcahy ask “Why is a resource like (Post 67) not being utilized for this purpose? If that’s not No. 1 in the Four Pillars, I don’t know what is. So that started the drive.”

“We’ve got a computer at the office at the post dedicated to taking care of these people in town and the surrounding communities,” Mulcahy said. “They can come to the post, they can sit down with one of our people who can get them on. They can do a virtual appointment. Once their appointment starts, we walk away. They’ve got the cubicle to themselves. We’ve got a special laptop that has no memory base. Everybody has their own thumb drive, and when they leave, they just take the thumb drive with them.

“This is a service we need. To me, this is the job of The American Legion. We’re helping veterans.”

Post 67’s service officers also visit area veteran food banks to perform outreach for veterans that may not otherwise seek American Legion assistance. A special effort has been made to reach post-9/11 veterans. “We have younger Legionnaires working with these people,” Mulcahy said. “They understand them.”

The post also will host support groups for post-traumatic stress disorder and addiction, while a joint effort with the Togus and Portland Vet Centers will provide mental health services. Amidst the pandemic Post 67 delivered food to veterans who couldn’t risk leaving their homes.

And involvement with youth has returned, including post members going into the schools to read chapters of “Sgt. Stubby” and inviting those same youth to a showing of the “Sgt. Stubby” movie, complete with free popcorn.

(Continued on Page 22 See Flag Etiquette)
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 its prompt, personal, responsive service.

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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 18.7 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 U.S., 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

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 1,679 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 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.
(Flag Etiquette Continued from Page 19)

“We teach the flag etiquette. We teach Americanism,” Mulcahy said. “It boosts our membership. People see this. The kids all go home and talk about it. You’re making a difference, and it’s such a positive difference for the Legion itself.”

Post membership currently stands at 203 percent. Mulcahy said it’s because it’s an American Legion “based on the Four Pillars. We have so many services to offer here at the Legion. We’re in the schools. We’re working with the children. We’re working with the veterans. (The post) is constantly in the newspaper.

“People see what we’re doing. They’re anxious to be a part of it. It just works.”

### VA and PGA bring golf to disabled Veterans

**Fourteen Veterans graduate from PGA HOPE program**

You don’t have to play like Arnold Palmer or Jack Nicklaus to appreciate a round of golf. Veterans of all ages with many types of disabilities can enjoy playing the game. That was certainly true of Veteran graduates who completed a six-week program through their local VA Recreational Therapy service in October.

With the help of the VA Sierra Nevada Health Care System in Reno, Nevada, the Professional Golf Association’s “Helping Our Patriots Everywhere” (HOPE) program introduced, and in some cases reintroduced, the game of golf to 14 Veterans with disabilities to enhance their physical, mental, social and emotional well-being.

Seven professional golfers donated their time to share their love of the game. “Golf is a game that can be played for life. There are so many benefits for Veterans who want to learn,” said Mike “Mazz” Mazzaferri, PGA golf pro at Sierra Sage Golf Course.

“What other game do you know where four family generations can play together?”

Mazz remembered the day when he, his father, his grandfather and his son played a round of golf together.

**PGA helping to prevent Veteran suicides**

“This program is all about Veteran suicide prevention. If a Veteran suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome or a traumatic brain injury, is blind, or even an amputee, we can make adaptations to still enjoy playing golf. PGA wanted to join VA to eliminate Veteran suicide,” said Bob Epperly, PGA HOPE lead instructor. The HOPE Program is free to Veterans who participate.

Three of the 14 Veterans who participated are blind. Dennis, a Vietnam Veteran, can see very little in one eye and is completely blind in the other. But his limitation never bothered him on the golf course. “I just love being outside with other Veterans,” he said, laughing.

“I know I need practice, but it feels good to be active. To do something different than sit at home and listen to the news.” After graduation, Dennis was presented with a new set of golf clubs. He was surprised and grateful to VA and PGA for making this day possible.

**Veterans from the Cold War to Iraqi Freedom**

The camaraderie between the Veteran golfers was evident by the smiles and banter. Their military service spanned from the Cold War in the late 1950s to serving in Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2010, and represented most military branches of service.

One OIF combat Army Veteran, Daniel, brought his family. Daniel suffered severe injuries due to an IED blast that ultimately led to the amputation of his left lower leg. The HOPE Program has put on smile on Daniel’s face and now he is aspiring to go pro. That’s him in the top photo, teeing off, and with his family in the golf cart.

For more information of how to bring the HOPE program to your community, contact your local VA Medical Center or reach out to the PGA Foundation.

Glenna E. Smith is a public affairs officer for the VA Sierra Nevada Health Care System, Reno, NV.
Department Mid-Year Conference
Eleganté Hotel
January 29-31, 2021
Colorado Springs, Colorado

Conference Depends on COVID 19 Code Restrictions
Conference Agenda
“Draft”

Friday January 29, 2021
2:00 pm  Legion DEC Meeting
2:00 pm  Auxiliary DEC Meeting
7:00 pm - 10 pm  American Legion Auxiliary Family Fun Night

Saturday January 30, 2021
7:00 am – 8:00 am  Children & Youth Breakfast
7:30 am – 8:00 am  Registration – Lobby
8:30 am  OPENING SESSION – Eleganté Hotel
Call to Order
Commander Greg Jackson
Guest introductions
National Commander Bill Oxford
Law Enforcement Officer and Firefighter of the Year Awards
Children and Youth Awards

10:15 am - 11:15 am  Vice Commander Reports
12:00 pm - 1:15 pm  Past Commanders Club Lunch
1:30 pm  Legion Riders Meeting
1:30 pm - 2:00 pm  Membership Awards/Report – Chip Kossow
2:15 pm - 4:30 pm  Boys State Training
2:15 pm - 4:45 pm  Program Reports
Americanism, Children and Youth, Baseball
Boy Scouts, Jr Shooting, Oratorical, VA&R, Legion Riders, Legislative

5:00 pm  Recess
7:00 pm – 9:00 pm  Jeff Luginbuel Media Awards Banquet

Sunday January 31, 2021
8:30 am – 8:50 am  Keep the Flame Burning - Commander Jackson
9:00 am - 10:00 am  Four Chaplain’s and Department Memorial service
63,000 Veterans benefit from VA’s Compensated Work Therapy
Saluting the 1,000 team members who make it happen

Compensated Work Therapy Vocational Rehabilitation Week is a time when we acknowledge the more than 63,000 Veterans who benefit from the program each year. We salute the approximately 1,000 VA Compensated Work Therapy (CWT) vocational rehabilitation counselors, managers and peer support specialists who make their participation possible.

VA’s CWT services are integral to helping Veterans overcome employment barriers and return to meaningful employment. CWT programs are located at all VA medical facilities and focus on each Veteran’s strengths, abilities, needs, and preferences rather than on illness and symptoms.

“The Compensated Work Therapy (CWT) program taught me how to retrain my mind to doing the right thing, how to be a team player, and how to be accountable,” said Jerry Weaver, a CWT graduate and VA employee. “The CWT staff didn’t give up on me and kept welcoming me back with open arms.”

Weaver credits CWT with helping Veterans finding their way back from mental health, substance abuse, and other employment challenges.

Keith LaFlamme used TW to become an Environmental Health Technician for VA, and later a Maintenance Mechanic.

LaFlamme’s HUD-VASH case manager referred him to the CWT Transitional Work (TW) program. His case manager placed him in a TW position at the main clinic in Anchorage, Alaska. His success in the TW position landed him a job with VA in 2017 as an environmental health technician. In a short time, he exceeded income limits for the VASH program. His continued success has landed him another promotion as maintenance mechanic. During his time as a VA employee, he has been a mentor and a resource to other TW Veterans.

Focus on strengths, rather than illness

Weaver’s journey with CWT began in spring 2017 after completion of the Substance Treatment and Recovery (STAR) program at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center. Two years later, he was a full-time VA employee.

He says his current success contributes to the self-esteem, self-confidence and determination he gained through showing up for work each day. He is the perfect example of how important CWT can be for a Veteran’s wellness and recovery.

“They believed I could be a valuable commodity. Hopefully, I have proved myself to my teammates.” CWT has really helped me discover new things about myself. It helps Veterans find their way back from mental health and substance use issues.”

Weaver celebrated his one-year work anniversary in May 2020.

Doré Mobley is a communications specialist for the Veterans Health Administration.

Custom knee replacement option for Veterans

By Terri Rorke

Since the 1970s, standard knee replacements have helped countless patients get back on their feet. But what if there was a customized option using implants specifically designed for your body and a faster recovery time?

Some patients, like Air Force Veteran Darin Levstik, are choosing custom total knee replacements now offered at the Rocky Mountain Regional VA Medical Center (RMR) because it’s “one unique to my person.”

After experiencing years of pain, progressive cartilage wear and lack of mobility caused by an injury in 2004, Levstik found minimal relief with the aid of a knee brace, periodic steroid shots and synthetic knee joint fluid injections. Later in 2019, he explored potential solutions for his everyday symptoms with RMR’s orthopedic team and ultimately decided the benefits of a custom knee replacement would far outweigh the standard option.

“I chose the custom fit over the standard replacement care due to the reduced bone loss that the custom unit provided, as well as the fact that the custom fit was just that, a custom fit.” Dr. Ian Dickey

This revolutionary technology was first brought to VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System (ECHCS) in 2019 by Dr. Ian Dickey—one of only two surgeons in the Denver-metro area offering this custom procedure to patients.

Instead of using “off-the-shelf” implants that can only guarantee
a “close fit”, Dickey takes images from a CT scan to 3D print a custom piece of hardware that’s specific to a patient’s anatomy.

According to Dickey, “It’s a 3D solution for a 3D problem.” Not only does a custom total knee replacement provide improved alignment and mobility for patients, but they can also expect to recover faster with overall satisfaction increased by 25-40 percent.

While two-thirds of patients are reportedly happy with standard knee replacements, Dickey challenges the narrative for some 790,000 Americans who undergo knee replacements each year. He asks, «Why would you want to have to fit a knee replacement; why wouldn’t the knee replacement fit you?»

Finally, in June 2020, Levstik underwent his custom total knee replacement and woke up with a new left knee that aligns with his hip and ankle—something that a standard knee replacement doesn’t guarantee.

“Within 24 hours I was already moving around the corridors with a walker and had been instructed on home care procedures,” he said.

Veterans eligible for a knee replacement can now elect for a customized 3D procedure at Rocky Mountain Regional VA Medical Center in Aurora, Colorado.

Over the course of the next four weeks, Levstik worked with Golden VA Clinic’s Physical Therapy team and continues to stay active at a local recreation center, following his physical therapist’s recommendations for strength-building and stretching exercises.

While the entire treatment process has been a learning experience for Levstik, he is up for the challenge.

“The goal is to be able to confidently run once my knee structures tighten up from the original injuries.”

There are no special candidates for custom total knee replacement surgery. Regardless of age, if you are eligible for a standard knee replacement, you can elect for a custom total knee replacement.

Ask your Patient Aligned Care Team today about how this customized technology can improve your life.

**Insomnia disorder common in post 9/11 Veterans**

*By: Tristan Horrom*

Post-9/11 Veterans have “alarmingly high rates” of insomnia disorder, according to a VA San Diego Healthcare System study. More than half of the Veterans studied had the disorder. Insomnia rates were even higher in Veterans with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury (TBI), and chronic pain.

The results appeared in the June 12, 2020, issue of the journal *Sleep*.

Insomnia is defined as difficulty falling or staying asleep, waking up earlier than desired, or significant sleep-related problems during the daytime.

**Veterans have much higher insomnia rates than non-Veterans**

Doctors have long known that Veterans often have sleep problems. Past research has suggested that Veterans may have double or even triple the rates of insomnia, compared with non-Veterans. This issue could stem from several aspects of military life, such as irregular sleep schedules during active duty and harsh living conditions. Physical and psychological injury and post-deployment trouble reintegrating into civilian life may also play a part.

While insomnia is a well-known problem for Veterans, accurate numbers of how many Veterans have the condition are hard to come by. One problem with collecting data on insomnia is that the terms used are inconsistent. Many patients may have insomnia symptoms or report sleep problems. But a clinical diagnosis of insomnia disorder requires a weekly sleep diary and in-depth clinical review.

(Continued on Page 26 See Data)
Data from more than 5,500 Veterans

To get a clearer picture of the issue, researchers collected data on more than 5,500 post-9/11 Veterans at a single VA health care system over a period of seven years. They evaluated each patient for insomnia disorder, along with other conditions and characteristics.

The researchers found that 57% of Veterans in the study had insomnia disorder. This rate was fairly consistent regardless of age, sex, race, and military branch. Interestingly, the number of military deployments and history of alcohol misuse did not affect the risk of insomnia. By way of comparison, studies of the general adult population, in the U.S. and other countries, show an insomnia prevalence of around 30%.

Insomnia disorder rates were even higher in Veterans with certain conditions. More than 93% of Veterans with PTSD had insomnia disorder. About 78% of Veterans with TBI had the disorder. And 70% of Veterans with chronic pain also had insomnia.

More insomnia screening and treatment needed

The results reveal a need to screen all Veterans for insomnia, says Dr. Peter Colvonen of the VA San Diego Healthcare System and University of California San Diego, lead researcher of the study. Previous studies of medical records found insomnia rates of only 3% in Veterans. The Sleep study shows that the numbers are actually much higher, and that insomnia disorder often goes unscreened and untreated in VA, say the researchers.

One reason for this, explain the researchers, could be that many clinicians do not see insomnia as a separate condition. Rather, they regard it as a symptom of something else—like PTSD or pain—and therefore do not screen for insomnia directly. Insomnia often is not listed as a separate diagnosis in a patient’s health record.

Pointing out the discrepancy between actual prevalence rates and what clinicians in VA are reporting, explains Colvonen, “can highlight the need to increase awareness of insomnia and insomnia treatment within VA. Offering more and better evidence-based treatments ultimately increases the client-centered care of the VA.”

TRICARE Select recipients must pay new fee or lose coverage

By: The American Legion

Starting Jan. 1, 2021, TRICARE Select Group A retirees must begin paying enrollment fees to maintain health coverage, according to Defense Health Agency (DHA) officials. Hundreds of thousands of retirees will no longer be enrolled if they don’t set up a payment plan by this date.

The change in coverage for Group A retired beneficiaries will affect those whose initial enlistment, or appointment or that of their uniformed services sponsor, began before Jan. 1, 2018.

The new TRICARE Select enrollment fees for Group A retired beneficiaries are $12.50 per month or $150 annually for an individual plan. And $25 per month or $300 annually for a family plan. Additionally, the catastrophic cap will increase from $3,000 to $3,500.

Enrollment fees will be waived for those who are an active duty family member, a medically retired retiree or family member or a survivor of an active duty sponsor or medically retired retiree.

This change will not affect those who are enrolled in TRICARE For Life, TRICARE Prime, TRICARE Reserve Select, TRICARE Retired Reserve or TRICARE Young Adult. These beneficiaries do not need to take any action to keep their current coverage.

DHA is urging Group A retired beneficiaries to take action to set up a payment plan by contacting their regional TRICARE contractor immediately.

Join The American Legion

Help Our Nation’s Veterans
A Veteran Farmer, Christ Reynolds' Gobblers Ridge

Christ Reynolds is an Army veteran, trained chef, second-generation poultry farmer, and father of three young children. He served four years in the Army, during which time he deployed on a 16 month tour in the Middle East. He completed a two-year culinary program while still in high school, went on to earn an Associate’s degree in Culinary Arts, and worked as a food service specialist during his military career. Upon returning to civilian life, Christ put his cooking skills to use in the restaurant industry. Ultimately, his passion is to be the producer of high quality and sustainably raised protein.

Gobblers Ridge is a small-scale organic poultry operation outside of Buffalo, New York. Christ grew up raising chickens, pheasants, and quail in Wyoming County, not far from where he now farms with his wife and children. Still in the start-up phase, his flock is small, but he has invested in the infrastructure needed for his plans of expansion this year. In addition to doubling his turkey flock, Christ plans to add quail and chicken to his rotation.

During the transition to farming, Christ and his wife explored organizations and programs available to assist folks in their situation, and were happy to find Farmer Veteran Coalition (FVC). FVC offers a broad spectrum of help to veterans looking to begin or sustain their careers in agriculture, from providing information about opportunities for grants, government programs, education, and making connections…the list goes on. Through FVC, they found the Homegrown By Heroes program. Christ notes that consumer response to both the organic turkey farming and Homegrown By Heroes certification has been overwhelming. He tells us that people he never expected to frequent his offerings are now regular customers.

Christ was awarded a 2015 Farmer Veteran Fellowship, supported by Prairie Grove Farms, which enabled him to invest in fencing for his pastured poultry operation. Christ also used the Fellowship funds to purchase a bulk grain storage bin. With the capacity to store grain, he is able to buy in bulk, save money, and source local feed.

Christ serves as the Deputy Director of Veteran Services for Wyoming County, NY. He demonstrates both business savvy and community involvement in many ways. In 2014, Christ sponsored a 5K “Turkey Trot” to raise money for cystic fibrosis research. This was not only a philanthropic act, but also promoted his turkey business within the local community.

Department Service Officers taking care of our veterans

On November 19 & 20, your Department Service Officers, Dean Casey and Will Davis took part in a VA Veterans Experience Action Center Virtual event. The American Legions and the DAV were involved with the Department of Colorado Veterans Affairs (CVA). No other Service Offices (VFW, PVA, etc.) took part in this event. Dean and Will each had 17 Veterans to call in the two days. They used Ring Central which indicated to the recipient that the call was coming from the Washington D.C. VA office. They started the calling at 9 am each day and had a list to contact each hour until 2 pm which was their last call.

Their goal was to call two veterans each hour with the call lasting about 30 minutes each. Out of the 34 contact names they were able to contact all but 6 veterans. Three were already American Legion claimants and the rest either did not have representation or were represented by DAV or CVA.

They gained about six new American Legion Power of Attorneys out of the event. The intent of the calls was to ascertain what the issues were and what service the veteran needed. They were then transferred to the Washington D.C. VA and referred to either Benefits, Health Care or Cemetery to complete the call. Thanks to Dean and Will for taking care of our veterans with this important event.