



For God And Country . . .

FREE STATE WARRIOR



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Spring 2024

Commander's Message

Ruth A. Higgins, Commander, Department of Maryland

Greetings, Spring is in the air, daffodils are beginning to bloom and the year is half over. I'm thrilled to announce that as of this writing, the Department of Maryland is in 5th place Nationally with membership. We're on target to reach 100%, I can't express enough the great team effort to make this happen. With Spring comes a time when membership starts to slow down. Remember why you joined? We are the largest veteran's organization who support fellow veterans, their families, and our communities. Our foundation is built on Four Pillars: Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation; National Security; Americanism; Children & Youth, take pride in your membership.

I want to thank Post 206 for hosting the Department Holiday party. We all had a great time and raised \$900 that was equally split into each Department Leaders project. The American Legion Family also participated in the Polar Bear Plunge for Special Olympics. The Chesapeake Bay was a chilly 36 degrees, but we raised over \$30,000 receiving a trophy for most amount raised in donations in a military category. Bill Ganz received an award also for raising the most individually. I want to thank everyone who participated and donated, it truly was a Legion Family event. Youth programs are underway, make sure to support them, Boys State and Girls State, Baseball, Oratorical and Junior Shooting to name a few. Our youth are our future.

I look forward to seeing you at one of the Region Receptions, I can't believe my year is winding down. I thank you all for your continued support and encouragement. Remember to "Preserve" the memories; "Protect" our benefits and "Promote" The American Legion and our Pillars.

Respectfully,

Ruth A. Higgins
Department Commander

It's Showtime! The 2024 Department Oratorical Contest is March 17

As you read this, the Post and District first round oratorical contests have been completed. Winning candidates are fine tuning and practicing for our State Contest scheduled for Sunday, March 17, 11:00, at Towson Post 22. We have the potential for 6 candidates this year, with 4 confirmed at this time for the competition: Districts 1, 4, 7 and 8. Districts 2 and 6 may also have a participant. Our winning candidate at Towson will represent Maryland and join 52 other candidates at the National Finals, May 16-19.

The National Contest is being held for the first time at Hillsdale College in Hillsdale, Michigan. This will be the first time away from

Indianapolis since 1996. The championship final will be available for viewing on Sunday Morning, May 19. Location, channel and provider will be provided as we get closer. You are invited to be a part of our audience at Towson on March 17. Please plan to arrive by 10:00. We start at 11:00 and no one is allowed in once we start to preclude interrupting our speakers. We look forward to seeing you there.

William Trotter
Chariman
Anita Trotter
Co-Chariman

Multi-Year Membership Now Available

The American Legion announced a new pilot program in December 2023 that gives members an option to pay three years' worth of dues in advance. This new option can assist members in avoiding dues increases during those three years. At the national convention in August the national organization voted to increase dues starting July 1, 2024 by \$5 per year. There is also a possible Department dues increase being voted on in July that would take effect in January 1, 2025.

The new multi-year program means members can put off the dues increases until 2027 or even 2028 for some members. But one has to act before July 1, 2024.

Members who have not renewed for 2024 can go onto legion.org/renew and pay for 2024, 2025, and 2026 at the current rate that is set to increase for most (but not all as this is based off of the local Post rate) on July 1, 2024. Members who have renewed for 2024 already can now go back to legion.org/renew and renew for 2025, 2026, and 2027.

This multi-year program is only available to individuals who go online themselves as Posts cannot renew a member for three years. National Customer Service, (800) 433-3318, may also be able to help, but the long wait times are to be expected when calling during peak hours. As an alternative we are encouraging Posts to set up computers at the Post to assist members with renewing themselves online as there are many who are not able to renew on a computer. This is a great opportunity for engagement with younger members to assist those without computer skills. The Post would still have to help the members set up an account and pay for the three-year renewal.

- Payment for the three-year membership will be upfront.
- There is not a discounted rate with the three-year membership.
- Membership cards will still be sent annually by Legion posts.
- Those who sign up for a multiyear membership will not receive a renewal notice during the time they have signed up for the multiyear membership

We are encouraging all annual members that can afford the multi-year to sign up before July 1, 2024 to secure the lower rate before a dues increase. We have 420 members who have signed up to date.

If one cannot afford the three-year payment another option could be to renew online and select automatic renewal at checkout. This would stop dues renewal notices to the member and the card would be charged each year for the membership rate of the Post currently in effect.

Russell W. Myers, Jr.
Department Adjutant



If you haven't given since the last Warrior, it is time to schedule an appointment. Please give if you are able. **THANK YOU!**

Reflections of an Adjutant

By Russell W. Myers, Jr.

The weather this winter has been a mix bag and Punxsutawney Phil says we are almost not Spring. That has us looking towards our annual trip to Ocean City for the 106th Department Convention. Our Department Convention is scheduled for July 16-19, 2024, at the Roland Powell Convention Center. The crowds at the convention were up again last year and the experience, along with the first contested election in nearly 30 years saw great attendance throughout the week. If you have not attended the convention, it is a worthwhile experience. It highlights the great works of our Posts and Programs. This year Legion College will be held on July 16th at 8:00am and one can bet this educational opportunity will remain a must for all Legionnaires. The online Legion College registration is open and available on the Department Website in the left-hand column under Web Letters/Mailings to access that link to the Eventbrite site to register.



Make your travel plans now and save if you book your room by March 31st. The convention and the things to do outside the convention floor have been increasing in recent years. The Fish Fry has settled into the bayfront location, and the crowds keep getting larger every year with many families enjoying the food and activities. The Opening Reception on Tuesday evening was also well attended and features a keynote address from the leading candidate for National Commander. This year Jim LaCoursiere is the leading candidate and will share his vision for the organization after the social part of the reception. His campaign website can be found at <https://teamjim2024.com/>. For attendees, these events offer great social events for the family to share on Monday afternoon and Tuesday evening respectfully. If all you take part in is business meetings, then you are missing a lot of fun and comradeship. Through more participation and activities, it is our hope to continue to grow the event for the whole family. The Department Convention Corporation is always looking for ways to make the Convention a better experience for the whole family. Bring your family to the many events and share some good times with all the attendees.

On Monday afternoon July 15th at 4:00pm the Southern MD Region Fish Fry is held at the Convention Center. This year the location will remain the Southwest corner of the Center in the Dockside Hall. This is the side closest to Thunder Island and for those more experienced Convention attendees it is where the Fish Fry was held for many years, just instead of outside the loading docks, it is now an air-conditioned hall. Come over and grab a bite to eat, enjoy the music by the DJ, and share good times with everyone. The hall is large enough to accommodate everyone, and the location puts us right against the board walkway behind the center and a view of the Bay. I suspect there will be more to do for everyone. The SAL will surely have their games and items for sale nearby. We are working on more activities for the kids to share in the experience. This event is a highlight every year, and the Southern MD Region asks for donations to help support this event. There is now an online donation option for the Fish Fry at mdlegionconvention.org so please support them in the effort.

The Joint Opening Ceremony and Reception (See Schedule of times in this edition) are being sponsored by Diamond Games, and the evening is a wonderful way to kick off the Convention and everyone is invited. There is light fare and drinks provided.

A somber and moving tribute to those members that have answered the Last Roll Call is held during our Post Everlasting Ceremony on Wednesday evening at 7:00pm. This program takes a lot of work from a dedicated group of members, and if you have not ever visited this service make this the year to help fill the hall. It is a fitting tribute to our departed, and everyone should plan to attend. The remembrance of those transferred to Post Everlasting is a duty of those of us still living, and this program is the finest service one can witness.

There are so many things to see and do during our week in Ocean City, invite a fellow Veteran and family to come join us. The town has events throughout the week and they can be found on <https://www.ococean.com/events/> and include Sundaes in the Park (July 14th), OC Beach Dance Party (July 15th), Movies on the Beach (July 17th), and Sunset Park Party Night (July 18th). Also this year Synepuxent Post 166's renovation and addition of the open air lounge will offer more space to share in camaraderie. The local Post always hosts events in the evenings of the convention so check out their calendar as well.

Posts again this year CAN submit ads, boosters, and sponsor golf tournament holes online. All these things can still be done the same way as previous years; however, we now have a Convention Webstore where Posts and supporters can do all the things that before could only be done by mail. All the links and downloadable forms are available on our Dept website at www.mdlegion.org. To submit ads, boosters, or golf tournament items (including registering for golf foursome, and individuals) just go to Convention Corporation website at www.mdlegionconvention.org. The ability to order a Convention Polo Shirt online is available again this year. Cutoff for the shirts is May 1, 2024. On the Convention website one can upload an ad, booster list, or do about everything that used to be mailed. Payment methods include all major credit cards and PayPal.

Again, this year Posts CAN register delegates and alternates using the webstore at www.mdlegionconvention.org. Post Adjutants will receive the Tally Sheets and registrations forms about 33 days (by about June 13th) before the Convention, and they can complete the forms and mail back the traditional way, or they can pay for the delegates online, and upload the registration forms to the item before adding to the cart.

Vendor registration can also be done on this website, and if you are aware of someone that would like to set up in our vendor area, please spread the word. Vendors will make the convention a better time for the entire Legion Family and provide needed products and services.

In closing, I pass along well wishes from myself and my family for a Happy Easter, and please do not forget to encourage all Veterans to join the Posts in commemorating Memorial Day. Take the time to invite Post 297 members and all Veterans living in your area to visit the Post or services on these special days.

Russell W. Myers, Jr.
Department Adjutant

Department Sgt-at-Arms

By G. Douglas Willey

Comrades, I bring you greetings from the Department SGT AT ARMS Bunker. It is in a very secure and secret location on the Eastern Shore. All communication to the membership will be very forthcoming in future articles.

Since our last transmission the holidays have come and gone a little weather has come our way now it is time to get back to work working our programs and supporting this fantastic organization. Our membership is going very well so let's keep up the great work.

Again, uniform of the day at all official meetings of the American Legion. Meaning uniform cap, they are purchased through emblem sales. The cost is approximately \$60.00 with shipping. For male veteran they come it 2 styles Ft Knox and regular. For female veterans there is specific style for female. If you are an officer at any level, this is a requirement being in uniform of the day. This should not even be up for discussion. No ball caps, cowboy hats, fishing caps are allowed to be worn at meetings. When you are at Post meetings and wish to speak to the membership u should rise and speak clearly for the benefit of the membership as well as the adj taking

minutes.

Many forms and reports will be coming due in the next few months so I am reminding everyone lets get them in we all know what needs to be completed and lets make in a timely matter so your Region and Dept officers will not have to call the Post commander the day before and ask where is your Post Data report or your Consolidated Post Report. Remember, Dept Convention is right around the corner start making plans to come to Ocean City. Start looking for rooms, travel etc great time to be had by all.

No matter if your an old breed or new breed you are a Legionnaire breed, be proud of that be proud of what we do. For over 100 years of serving America, veterans and their families. Always remember,
100% Americanism.
In comradeship,



G. Douglas Willey
Department of Maryland
Sergeant AT-Arms

Sr. Vice Commander

By David Heredia, Jr.

"Building a Legion for the Future, One MEMBER at a Time!"

Greetings, Department of Maryland Legion Family! What a great start to a membership year for any organization, including The American Legion Department of Maryland, which involves engaging members, fostering camaraderie, and actively promoting the organization's mission. This can include organizing events, reaching out to new and existing members, and highlighting the impact of the organization's efforts. Communication and collaboration within the community can contribute to a successful and fulfilling membership year.

This success has been proven each week, as our Regions and Districts membership teams continue to move the Maryland Express down the tracks at a rapid rate of speed! Their dedication has us closing in on our April membership goal of 95% and the magic number to STOP the SLIDE and keeping us on pace to hit that magic number of 100% this year! GREAT JOB TEAM!

Because of this, The Department of Maryland has remained in the top 10 in membership among all 55 Departments reaching as high as 5th overall, since the beginning of January. To help ensure we continue this successful path, we encourage our members to "Lock in a three-year membership".

To date, more than 420 Maryland American Legion members have taken advantage of the new multiyear membership option for renewals and new joins. The multiyear membership option saves members from receiving renewal notices every year, and it's another great benefit to being an American Legion member. To guarantee our members take advantage of this program, we are asking all Posts to urge their members to sign up for the multi-year membership program. However, they must do so online via MyLegion.org. If a member doesn't have an account or needs assistance with this program, we're encouraging our Posts to set up a computer to assist members that do not have the ability to do so at home. By helping them and encouraging our members to sign up, we will not only save them money, but it will also help with retention over the next few years!

Another great tool we can use when it comes to retention and recruitment is recited at the begin of every Legion, Auxiliary, or Sons of The American Legion meeting, it is the Preamble.

The Preamble provides a clear and concise statement of the organization's purpose, ensuring that members share a common understanding of our mission. Understanding and embracing the Preamble is essential for American Legion members as it defines the purpose and principles that guide their membership. It emphasizes

service to community, state, and nation, as well as the commitment to uphold the principles of justice, freedom, and democracy.

By recognizing the importance of the Preamble, members align themselves with the shared values that bind the American Legion community. It serves as a reminder of their commitment to veterans, their families, and the broader community. Embracing the Preamble fosters a sense of unity and purpose among members, reinforcing the organization's dedication to the well-being of veterans and the ideals of Americanism.

Remember, building a Legion for the future is a gradual process that involves cultivating a strong sense of community, fostering personal connections, and ensuring that each member feels valued and engaged in the organization's mission.

We can reach this goal through our involvement in working the programs and by being visible in our local communities. We will be successful. Now, together, let's all "Build a Legion for the Future - One MEMBER at a Time!"

David Heredia, Jr.
Department Sr. Vice Commander

#BeTheOne
#VeteransStrengtheningAmerica



NEC Report

Melvin G. Smullen, National Executive Committeeman

I bring you greetings once again from our National American Legion Commander, Daniel J. Seehafer from Wisconsin. We are looking forward to the National Commander's visit on March 16, 2024, as we sponsor the National Commander's Banquet.

On December 12, 2023, at 1pm, a Virtual National Executive Committee Meeting was held by zoom. The primary purpose of the meeting was to discuss Resolution NO.1 (Oppose claims filing by unaccredited parties). The veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Commission (Autrey B. James from California is the chairperson) reported on Resolution No. 1 to the NEC. The American Legion supports existing Title 38 that prohibits any party from assisting a veteran in the preparation, presentation or prosecution of a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Claim unless they are accredited through VA for such purpose and charging a fee to file, help or otherwise consult, in filing an initial application for VA Benefits is illegal and the American Legion has deep concerns regarding the protection and security of sensitive personal data and medical information of Military Veterans. The Flag Amendment will always be priority of concern of the American Legion until approved. As you recall, the U.S Supreme Court ruled that flag desecration is protected speech after a self-proclaimed communist was charged with desecrating the US Flag. The American Legion and all veterans were outraged that the court, in 5-4 ruling, took away the fundamental right for the people to protect their flag.

On January 31st, 2024, the Military Quality

of life Panel of the House Armed Services Committee hosted a public hearing with the Senior Enlisted Advisors to the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the services to discuss the serious issues facing service members and their families. The hearing followed a series of round tables held last year by the panel with pentagon Officials, Military Advocates, and Military Families. During these meetings, lawmakers developed strategic legislation to address the complaints of service members and support senior leaders' efforts to improve quality of life.

The American Legion Winter Conference will be held in Washington, D.C on February 26, 27 and 28th of this year. I do plan to attend.

Melvin G. Smullen
National Executive Committee



From the

Chaplain's Desk

Greetings, By the time you read this message, Valentine's Day has passed, and we have saluted our hospitalized veterans at Loch Raven. March has arrived and we may be celebrating Psalm Sunday, Good Friday, and Easter.



Please contact a member that you have not seen for a while and ask them to go to church or a Post meeting with you. The Department is losing members, and we are personally losing our comrades, friends, and family members. Please pray for our sick and distressed members. Send a get-well card, birthday card, thinking of you card or make a telephone call to someone in your Post or the confidential book; let them know that they were on your mind.

I received this prayer from a friend:

Today's Prayer

Father, thank You for Your grace to stand strong no matter what I am facing. I choose to stay in faith. I choose to keep believing, knowing that victory is on the way for me in Jesus' name. Amen

Spiritually submitted,

Marian C. James
Department of Maryland Chaplain

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THE FREE STATE WARRIOR Subscription: \$3.00 per year to non-members of The American Legion. Members of the Department of Maryland, \$1.50 of the yearly dues pay for publication.

You are eligible to belong to The American Legion if you served honorably in the Armed Forces of the United States during these periods:
April 6, 1917 to November 11, 1918; December 7, 1941 to the cessation of hostilities as determined by the U.S. Congress.



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CALL FOR THE 106TH ANNUAL CONVENTION THE

The One-Hundred-Sixth Annual Convention of The American Legion, Department of Maryland, Inc., is hereby called, and in conformity with the action of the One-Hundredth-Fifth Annual Convention and the Department Executive Committee, will be held in Ocean City, Maryland, **Tuesday, July 16 through Friday, July 19, 2024.**

PURPOSE

The Convention is called for the purpose of electing officers for the ensuing year, hearing and considering resolutions, and for the transaction of such other business as may be deemed necessary to come before the Convention.

REPRESENTATION

The Department Convention shall be comprised of representatives from each Post who shall be members in good standing of the Post by which they are elected, and all Past Department Commanders while in good standing in their respective Posts. Each Post having 15 members in good standing shall be entitled to two Delegates. Each Post having 26 members in good standing shall be entitled to three Delegates and to an additional Delegate for each additional fifty members after the first twenty-six. Each Post shall be entitled to an Alternate for each Delegate. Membership strength of the Post, for determining Delegate strength, shall be computed as of paid-up membership in Department Headquarters at the close of business on June 11, 2024. All Department and all National Officers listed in ARTICLE VI, Section 1 of the Department Constitution in the year in which they serve (excluding the Department Adjutant if serving as an employee of the Department), and all Past Department Commanders, shall be Delegates-at-large to Department Convention, with right to vote thereat, to be exercised by them with their respective Posts. Every Post shall file the name and number of the Delegates and Alternates to the Department Convention at least twenty days prior to the convening of the Convention, **(no later than June 26th this year)**, and at the same time pay the registration fee of \$20.00* for each and every Delegate, in the case of an Alternate taking the place of a Delegate such Alternate shall be required to pay the registration fee of \$20.00* which shall be done when the substitution takes place or sooner; unless and until such registration fees of the Delegates have been paid, the Delegation is disqualified to act for any purpose, and no individual Delegate will be allowed to vote, provided, however, that the mere non-payment of registration shall not deprive a Delegate otherwise duly qualified, of the right to vote in any Region or District Caucus, on any matter (including election of officers) which thereafter is subject to ratification by the Department Convention. Post Commanders are urgently requested to have at least one member of their Delegation on the Convention floor at all times.

**Cost of Delegates will be \$30.00 on or after June 27th.*

VOTING

Department Constitution, ARTICLE V, Section 3

- (a) On all matters of business except the election of Department Officers, members of the DEC and Delegates and Alternates to the National Convention, and except amendments to this Constitution or the By-Laws, voting shall be by voice. The decision of the chair thereon shall be final unless a vote by roll call be demanded; and upon demand of any person having proper voice, such other manner of voting shall be employed.
- (b) The election of all Department Officers, and National Officers, shall be by roll call except where, in the case of individual offices, the necessity of a roll call is dispensed with by unanimous consent.
- (c) The election of members of the DEC, and Delegates and Alternates to the National Convention, shall be in accordance with such rule as adopted by the Caucus in and for the Region from which such members, delegates and alternates are elected, but in no case, shall any such rule prevent the nomination of any member from the floor of such Caucus by any person having proper voice thereat. Voting at Caucuses shall conform to the provisions of Subsection (d) hereof.
- (d) In all voting, the vote of each Post shall be equal to the total number of delegates to which such post may be entitled. Each delegate shall be entitled to one vote. The vote of any delegate who may be absent shall be cast by the delegate's alternate, and the vote of any delegate absent and not represented by an alternate shall be cast by the majority of the present delegates from the member's post. An alternate whose delegate is present may nevertheless move into the place of an absent alternate whose delegate also is absent, and thereby acquire the right to vote, provided said alternate delegate is the senior alternate present at the time. Alternates shall have all the privileges of delegates but may only vote as herein set forth; provided the alternate's registration fee is paid. At the conclusion of all roll call voting, for each individual election required to be conducted by the Department Convention, the Department Officer conducting such elections shall ask if any Post desires to amend or change its vote;

or ask does any Post, which has not cast its vote during the roll call vote, now wish to cast its vote. No Post shall be allowed to pass more than one time. After the Department Officer conducting the election has made the aforesaid announcement and taken due note of any changes in voting and has recorded the vote of any Post which originally passed, then the conducting officer shall announce that the voting is closed and direct that the tally be taken, and the results announced.

- (e) All Past Department Commanders, while in good standing in their respective Post, shall be delegates for life to all Department Conventions with voice and vote, to be exercised by them with their respective Post and all Region or District Caucuses at which any election provided for in this Constitution shall be held, and at which their respective Post may be entitled to vote. The failure of such Post to properly register its delegation shall not deprive such Past Department Commander of their right to vote, provided the Past Department Commander is properly registered as a delegate.
- (f) All Department Officers as set forth in Article VI of this Constitution, with the exception of Department Officers concurrently serving as a paid employee of the Department, and National Officers of this Department shall be Delegates-at-large to Department Conventions, with the right to vote thereat, in the year in which they serve, to be exercised by them with their respective Post; provided, however, that nothing contained herein shall give any person the right to more than one vote.

ELECTION

The following Officers are to be elected. A majority of the authorized vote of the Convention shall elect: (Per ARTICLE V, Department Convention Section 4)

Section 4 (a) The Department Convention shall elect a Department Commander, a Department Senior Vice-Commander, a Department Judge Advocate, and a Department Treasurer, a National Executive Committee member and an Alternate National Executive Committee member for the respective terms for each office as specified in Section 4b hereof. The Department Convention shall elect such other offices as may be authorized by the Department Convention for such terms appointed by the Department Convention.

Section 4 (b) The Officers positions listed in Section 4 (a), elected by the Department Convention shall be nominated and elected for office in the following sequence and for the term of office, as listed:

Department Treasurer – 1 Year.

Department Judge Advocate - 1 Year.
Department Senior Vice-Commander – 1 Year.
Department Commander – 1 Year

REGION CAUCUSES (ARTICLE V, Sections 6-7-8-9)

A caucus shall be held by each Region during, or not more than twenty days prior to, the convening of each Department Convention, at which caucus the election of the Region Commander, (serves concurrently as Department Vice-Commander for said Region), Region Vice-Commander, District Commanders, District Vice-Commanders such Department Executive Committee members, and Delegates and Alternates to the National Convention of The American Legion to which such Region may be entitled by this Constitution shall be held. It shall be the responsibility of the Region Commander in and for each Region to see that at least fifteen days prior notice of any Region Caucus convened for the above purposes shall be given by mail to the Commander of each Post in the Region, and no such Caucus shall be deemed legally convened in the absence of such notice; provided, however, that any Region may caucus at any Department Convention upon three hours notice by announcement from the Rostrum, and all the purposes of this section may thereafter be fulfilled just as though prior written notice had been given. The action of such Region Caucus as to the election of any of the officials named in this section shall not be final until ratified by the Department Convention.

Section 7. A quorum shall exist at a Department Convention or at a Region Caucus when one third of the Posts in the Department or Region, as the case may be, are represented by duly elected Delegates or Alternates.

Section 8. Delegates to National Convention. Each Region in Caucus not more than twenty days prior to the convening of the Department Convention shall elect one delegate and one alternate delegate to the National Convention, this delegate and alternate delegate is to represent the first thousand members of their respective Region; there shall also be elected a delegate and alternate delegate for each succeeding thousand members.

The five Department Delegates shall consist of the Department Commander, the Department Commander for the immediate prior year, the Department Adjutant, the Alternate National Executive Committeeman and the Department Senior Vice-Commander who hold office at the convening of the next succeeding National Convention. The alternates for these delegates shall be appointed by the Department Commander.

Any additional delegates and alternate delegates are to be elected by the Region with

AMERICAN LEGION, DEPARTMENT OF MARYLAND, INC.

the highest percentage of their previous year's membership as of the day that determines the Department Convention membership strength for the Region.

Section 9. Region Election of DEC Members. Each Region in Caucus not more than twenty days prior to the convening of the Department Convention shall elect one representative to the Department Executive Committee for each unit of 500 members or major fraction thereof in the said Region.

The membership strength of said Region for this purpose shall be computed as paid up membership in the Department Headquarters at the close of business on the 35th day prior to the convening of the Department Convention or as of July 1st, in each year, which ever date shall first occur.

In the event any Region shall have less than its first and only unit of 500 members, it shall nevertheless be entitled to elect one representative to the Department Executive Committee.

The distribution of the Regions' representatives to the DEC shall be divided in an equitable manner between the Districts of the Region utilizing the membership strength of each District.

The Region shall submit the names of all elected as above for ratification to the Department Convention such ratification constituting election. At such Caucus each Post shall be entitled to the same number of votes as for the Department Convention. No Region Caucus for the purpose of such election shall be convened sooner than **June 26th, 2024.**

MEETINGS

The opening Joint Session will begin at 8:00 PM, Tuesday July 16, 2024. All business sessions of The American Legion, Department of Maryland, will be held in the Convention Hall (Location to be determined) and will start promptly at 8:00 AM on Wednesday, **July 17th**, Thursday, **July 18th** and Friday, **July 19th**, unless changed by the Convention or Department Executive Committee. A quorum shall exist at the Department Convention when one-third of the Posts in the Department are represented by a duly elected Delegate or Alternate.

CREDENTIALS CERTIFICATES

For Credentials Certificates for Delegates and Alternates. A check made out to The American Legion, Department of Maryland, at \$20.00* per Delegate, and MUST accompany the Credentials Certificate. All Constitutional Delegates (ART. VI) and Past Department Commanders must also pay the \$20.00* Delegate Fee or they can not vote. It is extremely important that the certificates be

forwarded to Department Headquarters as soon as possible after June 11, 2024 (35th Day before the Department Convention). District Commanders should personally check each Post under their supervision to see that the above is complied with. All Post Adjutants are charged with the responsibility of returning the Credentials Certificates to us at the earliest possible moment. **The delegate fee shall be *\$30.00 per delegate on or after June 27th.**

AMENDMENTS

Amendments to the Department Constitution and By Laws must be submitted in typewritten form to Department Headquarters by **June 7th, 2024** in time for the Department Adjutant to forward copies to each Post in the Department at least 30 days prior to the convening of the Convention. These amendments require a two-thirds majority of votes of the representation casting votes on the amendment at the Convention. However, the Constitution may be amended without notice by unanimous vote at any Department Convention. (ARTICLE XV, Section 1).

RESOLUTIONS

Resolutions shall be submitted typewritten, in triplicate, to the Resolutions Committee at the Convention, or prior to June 7th to Department Headquarters. By order of the Department Executive Committee, each resolution MUST have supporting documents and authority attached to each copy. Resolutions submitted to Department Headquarters prior to **June 7th** will receive preferred attention. Those submitted after that date will be considered only if the Convention Resolution Committee considers them to be of paramount importance to the Legion.

SPECIAL NOTICE

The thirty-fourth Annual Department Convention, 1952, unanimously resolved no one should be allowed on the main portion of the Convention floor on election day except Officers, Delegates, Alternates and working press. (Ref: Resolution #13)

POST OFFICERS

ARTICLE VIII, Sec. 6 of the Department Constitution states, "All Post Officers for the ensuing year shall be elected, or appointed as prescribed in the Post Constitution and Post Standing Rules, at least twenty days prior to the opening of the Department Convention and they shall assume their duties as such within twenty days after the closing date of the Department Convention." **YOU MAY HOLD YOUR INSTALLATION PARTY ANY TIME YOU WISH; YOUR POST OFFICERS MUST TAKE OFFICE DURING THE TIME ABOVE STATED. THE DEPARTMENT EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE HAS REQUESTED**

THAT EACH POST FILE A COPY OF MEMBERSHIP ELIGIBILITY DOCUMENTS FOR EACH POST COMMANDER AND ADJUTANT WITH DEPARTMENT HEADQUARTERS. THE DOCUMENTS WILL NOT BE RETURNED BUT RETAINED IN DEPARTMENT FILES.

REPORTS

1. You are urged to promptly file your Certificate of Elections of Post Officers which **MUST be signed by both the Post Commander and Adjutant.** The Certificate on the bottom of this form means exactly what it says. You **MUST EXAMINE** the service record of each of your Post Officers to certify their eligibility.
2. Consolidated Post Report Form should be filed promptly, but NLT June 1, 2024.
3. All other Report Forms. If you have lost or misplaced any of these report forms, send an e-mail or call Department Headquarters and ask for a duplicate.

REGISTRATION

For Tuesday the Registration Desk will be open at the Convention Hall beginning at 7:30 AM, **July 16th. DO NOT SHOW UP BEFORE THEN AND EXPECT US TO ACCOMMODATE YOU. IT IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR US TO OPEN EARLIER THAN 7:30AM ON TUESDAY.**

NO CREDENTIALS ARE REQUIRED FOR ATTENDANCE AT DEPARTMENT LEGION COLLEGE. EVERYONE WILL BE GRANTED ACCESS TO THESE COURSES WITHOUT CREDENTIALS.

On Wednesday, Thursday and Friday the registration office will open at 7:30 AM. You are urged to pick up your Delegate's Credentials and badges as soon as possible in order to facilitate the business of the Convention. A POST COMMANDER OR ADJUTANT MAY PICK UP THEIR POST DELEGATION REGISTRATION PACKET. ANY OTHER DELEGATE PICKING UP THE POST DELEGATION PACKET MUST PRESENT A WRITTEN AUTHORIZATION FROM THE POST COMMANDER OR ADJUTANT LISTING THEM AS THE AUTHORIZED DELEGATE TO SIGN FOR THE PACKET. ARTICLE IX, Section 2 of the Department Constitution provides that the amount of annual Department dues shall be determined by the Department Convention. Consequently, we hereby notify you that dues will be set and voted upon as usual by the Department Convention.

Russell W. Myers Jr.
Department Adjutant

Ruth A. Higgins
Department Commander

NOTE: DEPARTMENT OFFICERS, COMMISSION, COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN AND DISTRICT COMMANDERS MUST HAVE THEIR WRITTEN REPORTS IN DEPARTMENT HEADQUARTERS ON OR BEFORE JUNE 1ST OR THEY WILL NOT BE DUPLICATED FOR THE CONVENTION. REPORTS SHOULD BE TYPED AND DOUBLE SPACED. BE SURE TO HAVE AT LEAST ONE MEMBER OF YOUR POST DELEGATION ON THE CONVENTION FLOOR AT ALL TIMES. PLEASE WEAR YOUR LEGION CAP AT ALL TIMES IN OCEAN CITY SO EVERYONE KNOWS WE ARE THERE. REMEMBER TO TREAT OTHERS AS YOU WANT TO BE TREATED YOURSELF. WE WANT TO MAKE A GOOD IMPRESSION ON THE PERMANENT RESIDENTS AND THE THOUSANDS OF VISITORS. EACH POST DELEGATION CHAIRMAN SHOULD LIST HIS OCEAN CITY ADDRESS AND TELEPHONE NUMBER AT THE DEPARTMENT REGISTRATION DESK IN THE OCEAN CITY CONVENTION HALL. PLEASE DO THIS AS SOON AS YOU ARRIVE IN OCEAN CITY, BUT NOT BEFORE 7:30 AM ON TUESDAY, JULY 16TH. A POST COMMANDER OR ADJUTANT MAY PICK UP THEIR POST DELEGATION REGISTRATION PACKET. ANY OTHER DELEGATE PICKING UP THE POST DELEGATION PACKET MUST PRESENT A WRITTEN AUTHORIZATION FROM THE POST COMMANDER OR ADJUTANT LISTING THEM AS THE AUTHORIZED DELEGATE TO SIGN FOR THE PACKET. ALL DELEGATES MUST BE PAID.

THERE WILL BE A MEETING OF THE 2024-2025 DEPARTMENT EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE. THIS IS TO BE HELD IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE CLOSE OF THE DEPARTMENT CONVENTION.

THERE WILL BE NO FEE FOR LEGION COLLEGE THIS YEAR. PLANNING IS UNDERWAY TO OFFER COURSES, THE EXACT FORMAT IS STILL UNDER DISCUSSION. (But note there will be no pins or Certificates given out this year.) There is a link to the registration website for the Department Legion College on the Department website at www.mdlegion.org in the left-hand column under Web Letters/Mailings.

The American Legion, Department of Maryland

Black History Month – Honoring our African American Veterans, Historically Black Posts, and Department Leaders

By: Russell W. Myers Jr, Department Adjutant, February 28, 2024

This is our fifth anniversary of publishing an article highlighting the achievements of Black Veterans and Historically Black Posts in Maryland. Again, this year an exploration of the history of service within these communities and the deep pride that exists is illustrative of the patriotism that exists in the hearts of all Americans.

This year the Department continues to pay honor and tribute to these deserving Veterans and hopes that the information shared highlights and educates our members about the deep history and record of service of the Posts and Veterans in/from Maryland, the Black communities, and at the Department level within The American Legion. The space available for this article is limited and all efforts are being made to include as much detail as possible, the extensive histories are far deeper than we could cover in a few pages. All are encouraged to continue to investigate and expand their knowledge of the stories. This year the article will explore the history of the founding of Randolph Furey Post 170 in Pomonkey, then we will highlight the life and career of Medal of Honor recipient Augustus Walley, and finally updates on Waverly Woodson and on the “Six Triple Eight” from previous years.

In previous year’s editions we highlighted the founding and history of Post 14, Post 19, Post 55, and Post 77. This year we will look at the founding and history of Randolph Furey Post 170 in Pomonkey. Recounting the history of Post 170 leads back to the end of World War II and underscores their success at providing leaders to the Department over the last half century.

In Southern Maryland’s history after the Civil War many communities of freedmen developed among the freed slaves and free blacks in the area. The segregation of the Jim Crow era persisted into mid-20th century and strong community associations served these communities. African American Churches and separate fraternal orders like the Prince Hall Masonic Lodges served the communities where other organizations did not permit membership to



*Navy Chief
Randolph Furey*

minorities. Although The American Legion had no formal segregation by race in its organization, the practices of segregation during this period saw the formation of Posts predominantly segregated throughout the Department through much of the first 50 years of the organization. In the Charles County community of Pomonkey (named for the Pamunkey tribe of Native Americans from the area) a group of fifteen veterans organized a small Post in 1946. Post 170 was commanded from 1951 to 1955 by a retired U.S. Navy Chief named Randolph Furey. Commander Furey passed away in 1960 and the Post was renamed in his honor in 1961. The Post served the community and met at the Elk’s Lodge until they moved to the current location on Livingston Road in Indian Head. They first rented the facility that consisted of a building and fourteen acres of land. In 1976 the Post was able to purchase the property that now boasts the Post home, baseball field, and outdoor venue. The Post is active in programs supporting the four pillars and has demonstrated an ability to develop leaders that have risen to serve the Department over many years, including leadership after our recent reorganization.



*PNCV
Robert Johnson*

The Post has been the home Post to several Southern Maryland District Commanders, two Department Vice Commanders, and a Department Commander, who went on to serve as a National Vice Commander. Robert Johnson, our Department’s first African American Department Commander in 1995, was a distinguished member of the Post and Department. Bob also served as the first African American elected as a National Vice Commander of The American Legion in Charlotte, NC at the 84th National Convention held in August 2002. While the Post had numerous District Commanders over their history in Southern MD, after the reorganization in 2021 the Post has been the home to both leaders who have served as the Department Vice Commander from the Southern MD Region. John R. Countryman Jr. served from 2021-2023 as the Department Vice

Commander from Southern MD and Billy Hill is the incumbent Department Vice Commander elected in July 2023. There are several other leaders from the Post leading commissions and committees in the Department. These current officers and chairpersons carry on the traditions of leadership for our Department reflected by Post 170 leaders over the years. Communities around Maryland have leaders working hard and many go unnoticed for their dedication.

Another unnoticed and mostly hidden story involves a soldier from Maryland who received our nation’s highest award for bravery in combat yet largely goes unknown. Augustus Walley was born in Reisterstown, MD in 1856. At the time of his birth Augustus was an enslaved person, yet just 25 years later he would show courage in battle against hostile Apaches that would lead to the awarding of the Medal of Honor in 1890, 9 years after his actions. He was freed at age 9 and worked as a laborer



*Mannequin representing
Private Augustus Walley
at the MD Military
Museum Baltimore.
Photo Credit: MDNG
PAO Office*

for over a decade before joining the 9th U.S. Cavalry in November 1878. The 9th U.S. Cavalry was one of the Army’s segregated Regiments nicknamed “Buffalo Soldiers” during their campaigns against the Native American tribes during the Indian Wars. The Buffalo Soldier units were established by Congress in 1866 as the first peacetime all-black Regiments in the Army. Private Walley’s actions leading to the award of the Medal of Honor were described in a Baltimore Sun article from February 12, 2018 by Chris Kaltenbach:

“Walley earned his Medal of Honor during an August 1881 engagement with

Apaches in the Cuchillo Negro Mountains (known today as the Sierra Cuchillo), in what is now southwestern New Mexico. Sent after a band of Apaches had attacked a nearby ranch, Walley was among a troop called upon to provide cover for a group of trapped soldiers. Although many were able to escape, one was too badly injured and remained behind.

“Walley grasped the situation,” reads a plaque hanging inside the armory, “and in the greatest tradition of the cavalry mounted his horse and galloped to the fallen soldier, rescuing him and withdrawing under enemy fire to the rest of his unit.”

Discharged from the 9th Cavalry in November 1883, he re-enlisted the next day in the 10th Cavalry, another Buffalo Soldier regiment. While fighting in Cuba during the 1898 Spanish-American War, he helped rescue a squadron commander, Maj. James Bell, under similar circumstances. Nominated for a second Medal of Honor, he was awarded instead a “certificate for gallantry in the preservation of human life” from his regimental commander.”

Walley served in both the Spanish American War and Philippine-American War before retiring from the Army in 1907. Later, in 1918 he volunteered for service at Camp Beauregard in Louisiana but was turned away because of his advanced age at 61. He did, however, stay and work at the camp for the remainder of WWI. He returned to Baltimore, settling on Etting St., after the war rising to the rank of First Sergeant and serving for over 31 years in uniform. His family recounted that he rarely talked about his service or his actions in the wars. Augustus passed away in 1938 and is buried in Saint Luke’s Cemetery in Reisterstown. The Indian Wars and their history are not as studied as other period of conflicts, and this leads to the loss to time of the memories of these great warriors. Augustus Walley’s service and deeds rank among the highest of anyone who has served our great nation. Rising from his birth in slavery, to battling with segregation and the ill will many African American pioneers faced, he forged a legacy of bravery and patriotism that serves as a model for all to follow in life. While First Sergeant Walley was awarded our nation’s highest honor for a soldier, ensuring recognition of heroic actions among African Americans serving during our nations earlier war periods has gained momentum over the

last decades, however it remains an unfinished task.

In previous articles several service members and units have been highlighted. These articles also championed the push to give proper recognition. There have been some updates on the efforts and successes on this front.

The 2020 article highlighted the heroic actions of Corporal Waverly B. Woodson Jr. on Omaha Beach during D-Day when assigned as a medic for the segregated 320th Barrage Balloon Battalion. The 320th was the only African American unit to land on Omaha Beach on June, 1944. While several elected leaders, including Senator Chris Van Hollen, are seeking the Medal of Honor for Cpl. Woodson's bravery and actions that day. Cpl. Woodson was wounded and continued to treat as many as 200 wounded comrades over a thirty-hour period before he collapsed himself. Woodson, promoted to Staff Sergeant during his service during Korean War era, passed away in Gaithersburg in 2005 was interred at Arlington National Cemetery. In October of 2023 a ceremony was held to present his widow Joann with the Bronze Star and Combat Medical Badge earned by her husband decades ago on the beaches of Normandy.

Finally, an update on the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion who were awarded the Congressional Gold Medal in 2022. The Department of Maryland and The American Legion passed resolutions commending their service and urging Congress to award the unit the Gold Medal for their service during WWII. Two members of the Department, Edna Cummings and Elizabeth Helm-Frazier have continued to work tirelessly for the recognition of these exceptional women. In 2023 the Department of Defense honored the Battalion Commander of the 6888th Lt. Col. Charity Adams Early by renaming Fort Lee in Petersburg, Va to Fort Gregg-Adams. Lt. Gen. Arthur J. Gregg was the first African American to be promoted to the rank of Lt. Gen. in 1977. Lt. Col Adams led the 6888th throughout the service in the European Theater and was the highest ranking African American women in the Army by the end of WWII. In April 2024 an exhibit featuring the 6888th will open at the United States Army Women's Museum on Ft. Gregg-Adams. This museum showcases female



SSGT
Waverly Woodson

veterans of United States and is a wonderful museum to tour of in the Petersburg area. The continuing efforts for recognition previously denied is a valiant and needed endeavor. Those individuals, families, and organizations maintaining the drive for these efforts are to be commended and encouraged.

Over the last five years the process to highlight a few personal stories and deeds of Veterans has started many conversations. The continuation of these conversations and the development of a better understanding of the impacts these men and women had on the world around them is still far from complete. There are many more personal stories, and Post histories, one could highlight in these articles. It is tough to not only fit the stories in the brief space available but then to pick which stories to highlight. There are so many stories to tell, and next year we will surely recount more of these deeds. My hope is to spark the efforts to save these memories for posterity and promote a celebration of a part of our history that is not as familiar as many other aspects. The elevation of these stories and history shows the proud traditions, and clearly answers the question of why the members would want to maintain their heritage.

The recounting of the actions and works of the heroes from this article can serve as a reminder that many served and were never appropriately recognized. Striving to educate and illuminate the deeds of a few is a calling for all to preserve the memories and incidents of our associations in all wars.

It is past time to make this a constant effort to promote all Veterans' contributions, and share the history, good and bad, to highlight the proud history of the African American Veterans and the accomplishments shared with the Department of Maryland. The way ahead is lit brightly by their deeds and the inclusion of all Veterans is the solid foundation for the future!



Pictured left - Raymond E. Warthen - SP-4/US Army
Above - Andrew Youngstrom, Eric V. Warthen, Jr., Craig Dean, Eric V. Warthen, Sr. & Raymond E. Warthen at the Carnival Celebration Veterans Appreciation



Pictured-Ram's Battalion Army ROTC @ Southern Garrett High School, Oakland, MD

Open forum with JROTC Students on American Legion Mission- Be the One Discussion, Learning Collectively, Expressing ideas and Spreading awareness in the schools and Engaging in the Community.

Colleen Steffan

Are Your Friends and Family . . . A Member of Our Family?



When asking an eligible person to join The American Legion, Auxiliary, or SAL, remember to extend the offer to include their eligible friends and family members.

REGION/DISTRICT DATA

Eastern Shore Region

First, I would like to start off with a huge round of applause for the Department of Maryland and how well each region is doing! First place at the end of the year is up for grabs for every region, we all are right there together, and that is simply outstanding!

Now, that we have proven that we have a handle on our membership; we need to look to next year and what are we going to do to ensure all the new members who have joined the Legion family, retain their membership. We do this thru the Four Pillars of the American Legion where our framework for our programs lies. Through my travels through Maryland this year, I have run across several posts who take this seriously, and it shows with their rise in new members and the quality of programs they offer. I encourage every post, especially in the ESR to look closely at what your post is doing and breathe new life into your programs if you are struggling. Don't be scared of failing, if you have a great idea that didn't quite turn out the way you thought, that's ok, you take what you learned, regroup and try again. Get out of your posts and into your neighborhoods, create opportunities that allow you to get out there and show your communities who we are and what we are about! Taking Care of Veterans, their Families, and the communities we reside in. Exciting things are happening on the Eastern Shore! We are happy to announce that the ESR has a brand-new Post: Port Deposit American Legion Post 303, which will be located in Port Deposit, Maryland in Cecil County in District 1. Their temporary charter was approved at the DEC. I have had the pleasure to work with this group and all I can say is I wish I could bottle their drive and enthusiasm and share it with everyone! I see great things down the road for our new Legion family in the ESR. Their leadership was at the DEC for the vote, and I think they were a tad overwhelmed by the many who approached them with offers to help them get off to a great start!

It's that time of year, when we need to start canvassing for legionnaires to step and take a position on a DEC Committee. Here on the ESR, Doug, Lenny, Ken, and I will start scrubbing the committee list and actively recruit for seats that are opening up either on committees and or commissions. It's important that we fill these seats with Legionnaires that will commit to meeting responsibilities of these committees and who will bring back the information to their Region, District and Posts. Get Ready!

I am so proud of my Eastern Shore Region Family! You have been wonderful to work with and I love you guys!!! Our work is not done, but we have a great team that will get it done!! You can count on that!!



Nikki Randolph
ESR Commandeer

District 1 Commander

Greetings Legionnaires of District 1: Commanders, Adjutants and Membership Committees, we are entering Membership March Madness. Thank you Blake Blackston Post 77, Easton, MD for leading the District in this full court press. Commanders continue to press forward, we need to target 100% membership by the end of March. Teamwork makes the dream work, we are in this together. Reach out to our District leadership team and we'll support your revitalization efforts. Upcoming meetings, ESR March 3, 2024, 1400 at Dorchester Post 91, Cambridge, MD. Judge Advocate training will be held an hour prior to the meeting, arrive early and join this valuable training. District 1 meeting is March 10, 2024, 1300 at Mason-Dixon Post 194, MD. March 16, 2024 the National Commander will be visiting with the Department of Maryland and the Banquet is being hosted at Kent Island Post 278. In May, Post 243 Hurlock will be hosting the Department Commander's Banquet we need a healthy representation of the ESR. Thank you for your commitment to our Pillars and Preamble, it is an honor to serve with each of you.

Regards,

Ken "Radar" Huddleston
Commander, District 1
Eastern Shore Region
Department of Maryland



District 2 Commander

After completing all of my Legion Post Inspection Reports I have come to the conclusion that we are in need of new members. So where are the younger military at? Small town Legion Posts are going to be a thing of the past. Some Posts are dwindling so much sometimes that there are not enough members at monthly meetings to meet the requirement of Robert's Rules. Posts run the best they can with what they have to keep their doors open. A couple of my Posts have a great turn out and run the meetings by run by the Rules. I hate to use my experience but you use what you have. My wife and I traveled 8000 miles a couple of years ago to find many American Legions closed and the ones we found open were in large populated towns or cities. Below is a story that I found on line to be so true I have changed some of the locations to fit my story.

There was once an old Legionnaire who hadn't attended his post for 20 years. One day he thought he'd go and see what's been going on with his post in his absence. When he arrived, he found boards on the windows, and a padlock on the door and a sign saying CLOSED. As he stood staring at this sad lonely building a younger man walked up and looked along with the old man.

The old man said; I was a member here for many years.

The young man replied; I was the secretary for many years.

I just can't understand how this post could have gone dark. I bought my life time membership 50 years ago. Said the old man.

To this the young man replied many members here were life time members as well.

Puzzled the old man said; if every one had a membership here and some life time memberships, then what happened? How did it go dark?

The young man replied; no one attended the meetings or became involved.

My point is just this; It isn't enough to buy a life membership or pay your dues, and it isn't enough to say you're a member. You have to attend, get involved and claim your benefits. This story is what is going to happened if membership in small towns cannot bring new members into their post. I think next years motto should be BRING ONE!

Leonard T. Ward, Jr.
District 2 Commander
"The Land of Pleasant Living"



Northern Central Region

"Building a Legion for the Future,

The one thing that the American Legion has taught me is that family comes first. That being said, I have completely scrapped my intended article to talk a little about family. We all have someone in our family that means so much to so many, and the same goes for members of our posts or districts. This year has honestly been one of the toughest for our family. You can't get wrapped up too much, so that you don't have time for what is important. In my post, we have a few people that do so much, it would be hard to operate without them. Commanders and officers come and go, but sometimes the stability is where we didn't expect. The same applies to our personal families.

The posts in the Northern Central Region have all been working to achieve the membership goals, but we do have some challenges. The members and officers need to put personal differences aside and work for the betterment of our American Legion Family. Our goals and incentives are just measuring sticks, but they are a means of friendly competition and a mechanism to help us increase our membership numbers. Our biggest obstacle in achieving our membership goals are ourselves. As a "Family" cooperation is required if we are to be successful. If your post is having trouble getting renewals processed, or reaching out for Buddy Checks, call your District and Region officers. We are here to work with you. When we work together, when we help each other, we can achieve our goals.



REGION/DISTRICT DATA

With all the hard work that you are putting in, you need a break sometimes. Our Legion Family often extends into our personal families. My sister Bonnie is the Unit 180 President, my brother Ray (U.S. Army SP-4) and Son Eric (U.S. Navy GSE-2) are members of Post 180, my daughters and wife are members of Unit 180 and my grandson Henry is a Squadron 180 member. Many of us share more than just our military service, or the fact that we are members of our post family. We have activities and hobbies that help us associate with each other. Sometimes the American Legion can be overwhelming. If you feel that you need a break from the American Legion, trust me, you do. That is okay. It is no different than when you need a vacation from work. Take the time to unwind and not think about the American Legion too much. Even if it is a day, weekend or even a week, take that break. While the Department and National Conventions can be fun and entertaining, they are not really vacations for most of us. We might need the extra little break.

My family had been planning our cruise for two years. My son, Eric, Jr., had booked a Western Caribbean cruise for the week of February 18, 2024, to celebrate his discharge after serving in the U.S. Navy for five years. He asked us to consider going along, so we did. Then a few more family members and friends looked into it, and we wound up with twenty-one of us, including Department Treasurer, Kraig Dean and his wife Lynette, ready to have a great week. We convinced our oldest daughter, Korynn and her husband Chris to go, but we were unable to convince Karyn to come along and bring our grandson Henry (aka. Big Hank). He is a little young and I get that. My sister Bonnie was in from the start, and my brother Ray and his wife Marge booked a few months later. We had cousins from Florida, Pennsylvania, North Carolina and Maryland who decided to join us too. What a crew we had!

Our family, like many, has always been tight. We've had disagreements, arguments, and even some knock-down drag-out fights. But we always came back to being a family. We have always been there for each other, and we will continue to be there. The cruise was no different. We had a few disagreements, but we worked through them, and we really had a lot of good fun. Thursday morning brought the news that none of us wanted. Ray passed away on the ship, just as we were getting ready to enter port in Honduras. As hard as it was, we had to keep going and try to have fun. It took a lot out of all of us, especially Marge. Ray is the kind of person who doesn't want you to sit around crying for him. He wants you to keep moving and keep growing. We did manage to have some fun, maybe not the best fun, but we did have some fun as a family. We were there for Marge, for each other, and we will continue to be there.

I got the opportunity to take some trips with Ray. Usually, it was to go to Florida or South Carolina for a family function. In 2022, I had him go with me to pick up Eric, Jr.'s car in San Diego. Ray always wanted to see and put his feet in the Pacific Ocean. So, I made sure he got the chance to do that. Then we drove to Phoenix for the American Legion National Convention, and on to Katy, Texas to visit Uncle George. It really was great to have him with me. He is thirteen years older than me, and he was the youngest, and most spoiled of us until I surprised them all, then I was the spoiled one. Until we meet again, I will still be looking up to my big brother.

Our post families need us to be there too. It isn't too late for you to be there for your post, auxiliary, squadron and chapter. A simple call to a new member or a member that hasn't been around in a while can make all the difference in the world. Please, let's all take care of our families, and look up to, and out for each other.

For God & Country,

**For God & Country,
Eric V. Warthen, Sr.
Department Vice Commander
Commander, Northern Central Region**

From the Desk of the District 3

Free State Warrior District 3 Release – 15 February 2024
Greetings NCR-District 3 Post Commanders and Legionnaires. I hope you're Winter events are prosperous and memorable. Our current Post membership drives have been a bit steady, but our latest report shows our membership numbers increasing slowly. Although we've just exceeded our 90% goal, there are several Posts that have not yet met their 85% membership goal. Overall, those Posts need 46 members to obtain this objective, which their District leadership will provide aid to help meet and exceed their membership objective. However, good job to the majority of the District 3 Posts who have worked hard and vastly exceeded our membership objectives. The District 3 Membership Revitalization Event at Towson Post #22 on February 2nd and 3rd, 2024 was a very successful event. Those Posts that took advantage of this Revitalization event not only realized a membership boost, but also benefitted from services provided by our Department VSO and invited Veteran Support organizations. These organizations were invited by the Post 22 Commander Anita Hammerer, who performed an outstanding job hosting the District 3 Revitalization event.

As we're pushing through the winter, we're looking for each of you to conduct "Be the One" Buddy Checks on your members, especially those you haven't seen in a while. Both your Post and your members will benefit from these interactions as you'll find their passions and interests as it relates to their Posts. We're also proceeding into the time when reports are due, starting with your Post Data Report, which will be due in a few weeks, culminating with your Consolidated Data Report due in May.

Lastly, when we refer to the Legion, we're referring to the entire Legion family, which includes our Auxiliary, SAL, and Legion Riders. Collectively, we're the premier Veterans Service Organization (VSO) serving our greatest priorities: our Veterans, Military, Youth, Families, and our Country.

Yours in Service,

**Henry (Hank) Allen
District #3 Commander**



From the Desk of the District 4

Let me begin by saying thank you to all posts and District 4 for their hard work and dedication. To what we are trying to accomplish in the communities we love and work in, bring back some of our comrades who by some reason lost contact.

Each post has its own way of communicating within its own community and some of our comrades take it a step further and help those who need help.

District 4 believes in leaving no one behind even when we return home. We in District 4 have assisted 48 of our comrades to find homes and all their needs that are available to them. We have given food and clothing when needed, and in some cases where to find healthcare.

Post 14 has been invited to join the community association.

I as District 4 Commander would like to thank the hard-working Legionnaires for their dedication to the cause. I wish I could mention all who take on the challenge of this task. I would also like to thank the Posts for their caring, prayers, and donations to our unfortunate comrades. District 4 says, leave no one behind and be the one.

God Bless America and bless those that give of themselves.

**Darrel N. Truesdale
District 4 Commander**



REGION/DISTRICT DATA

Southern MD Region

From the desk of: Dept of MD Vice Commander

My Fellow Legionnaires, I want to speak with you about leadership in our organization through critical steps. Over recent years, our Region has done something simple but simultaneously complex. We've begun to change the culture of the Southern Maryland Region. I first sat down and asked myself, "Why did I join this organization?" and "What do I want from it?" I knew this would keep me here, or I would leave. Once I decided to stay and pay dues, my journey began. I made it my business to get my \$35 worth, and six months later, I became PUFL. I began to enjoy serving the Veterans who served before I arrived. As I learned how our organization works, my interest and energy went up even more. I will never forget this moment.

As a result of my experience with influential leaders like Haywood Moss, Steve Brennan, Gary Gifford, Frank Porter, Earl McKay, Frank Kahan, Ed White, and a few more, I learned the history of the American Legion in Maryland. Next, I identified ways we could do things more effectively if we focused on solutions rather than problems. In short order, I realized working for something I didn't care about would be stressful, but I like to help others who wore the uniform before I came along. The results from our Region are due to the history of effective leadership in the great Southern Maryland Region year after year. The blue caps are the reasons we serve and honor Veterans on a day-to-day basis.

Leadership is the ability to get things done through people. Strategic Leaders focus on doing the right things, while tactical leaders are in the trenches and focused on doing things right. The leadership team in Southern Maryland met immediately after the last convention. I set a vision for the Region and defined success; however, getting "buy-in" from the Post Commanders meant I needed to help them help themselves while we adapted to change. Sure, there were grunts and frowns, but that's what happens when you introduce change. People like routine because it's easy, but when they have to do something different, the complaints begin to roll in. Again, good old-fashioned leadership and relationships will get you through this challenging period. Leadership is lonely, especially if you still need to win the communications battle.

Last November, our leadership team met to develop our approach for the next six months, or the "Road To The Convention," and how to instill a sense of pride into our members or struggling posts. We decided to focus the front end of the year on Membership and the back end on programs. This created a path to success for all hands as we began to shape expectations. We recognized that plans fail because of a lack of commitment, communication, or ownership, or people don't care. The reason they joined in the first place has disappeared. Our members must be tied to our purpose. From a Pillar Program perspective, I say to all Post Leaders, "If you don't measure it, you can't manage it," and I stand by it. There is a level of accountability we should expect from our Post Officers and paid members. If nothing else, come to the meetings!

Southern Maryland Region has recognized the need to change the culture, expectations, focus, and leadership style. We developed a plan, stuck to it, and followed the promise. When it comes to accountability, never be afraid to dismiss members from the team if you believe they're "standing on your air hose" or "holding everyone back. We are moving forward; our history supports it, and members expect it. Help a Veteran accomplish a goal this week. Your engagement matters, then follow us to the convention; we won't be hard to find, we will be the Region leading from the front, so you can read who we are on our backs!

Sincerely,

Billy J. Hill
Department Vice Commander
Southern Maryland Region



From the Desk of District Five

My Fellow Legionnaires, By now you can probably see a difference in District Five from previous years. The biggest difference has been the effort to put our members first. We had to makeshift from paying so much attention to membership performance in the Post to hearing the voice of our members. This year we took a proactive approach to engaging with our Posts and what is really occurring inside the Post, not by email or text, but visit our Posts and understand the needs of members. We found that most of our members are looking for the bond they had from their time in uniform, a place to relax with comrades, and a place to celebrate the love we all have for our country. This assessment is often called the current state of our District. Once we are able to thoroughly look at our District, we were faced with answering the question, what do we want our District to look like by the end of the year. This was known as the future state of our District. Sure, we have goals and objectives we want to achieve but we needed a "road map" of how to reach our goals. We called this road map "the Gap" and probably the most important piece to our success this year.

To fill the gap, we began by focusing on our most important piece, our members. This year we have been more hands on with our members, we called them more often, supported Post events, participated in pillar programs, asked questions about their needs, and shared solutions to common problems. Our members responded with over 250 members more than last year and held on to third place in the Department for more than a month. Nine of our Post have reached the 100% membership goal and our retention is the best it has been in four years. While no single action has caused these results, the TEAM EFFORT approach has been the engine that moves the train in our District. We needed to pay more attention to where we are going and less attention to how we did things 20 years ago. The way we served Veterans 20 years ago had to change as the world situation has changed. Today we are faced with the challenges of recruiting new members from recent wars to those currently serving. I created a vision for us based on our plan to be a stronger and more effective District that could help us recruit younger members.

My Vision is aligned with the vision of our Region Commander and the goals we want to achieve, and the desires of our current membership. At this point we needed the Post to do their part, and they have done it! Our Posts have taken off this year by executing their pillar programs, hosting events within the community, improving relationships between Posts, and promoting healthy lifestyles. I have never been this excited about the future as I am right now. Today, I thank you for your support or active involvement in the work of the American Legion. This version of District Five is only the beginning of a District that serves Veterans, serves the community, and continues to look for solutions to complex problems across the Department. If I had one wish, I would ask you to help a Veterans accomplish a goal this week because your engagement matters. Also, follow us to the convention, we won't be hard to find, we will be the District leading from the front, so you can read who we are on our backs!

Sincerely,

Melvin Graves
Commander, District 5

From the Desk of District Six

My Fellow Legionnaires, The American Legion Oratorical Contest – Character*Communication*Confidence

February is Americanism Month. As most of you are aware, Americanism is one of the Four Pillars of the American Legion. One of the many important programs under this Pillar, is the American Legion National Oratorical Scholarship Program.

Purpose

The National Oratorical Scholarship Program helps high school students develop a deeper knowledge and understanding of the U.S. Constitution, teaches the importance of leadership, and provides participants with a clearer understanding of the duties, responsibilities, rights,



Continued on page 13

REGION/DISTRICT DATA

Western MD Region

Greetings from the Ferocious 4th! The end of the Legion year is setting up to be interesting, can the Region reach 100%. Will the Department stop the slide? And for the first time in memory the Posts will have a vote in both electing the Department Commander and Senior Vice Commander in over 30 years!

Western Maryland Region reached National's 90% membership target date a month early! This is a tremendous achievement and a testament to the dedication and commitment of our blue cap Legionnaires. However, we still have a way to go to reach our 100% goal and stop the slide in Maryland. What is the slide? The slide is the loss of members each year who are not replaced. We encourage all members to auto renew their membership or pay ahead for up to 3 years to help us cross the finish line. Your continuing membership is important in ensuring that we continue to serve our veterans and their families. This investment allows The American Legion to have a powerful collective voice, advocating for the rights and benefits of all veterans.

In 2022, there were 324,204 members living in Maryland. Our goal is to reach 41,741 or 12% of the eligible veterans in Maryland. Reach out to family and friends and have them join The American Legion Family. If you have difficulty in telling them what The American Legion does, besides service officers, programs e.g., Boy Scouts, Oratorical, Boys/Girls State, and scholarships just look to the Preamble.

The Preamble to the American Legion's Constitution says it all: For God and Country we associate ourselves together for the following purposes: To uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States of America; To maintain law and order; To foster and perpetuate a one hundred percent Americanism; To preserve the memories and incidents of our associations in all wars; To inculcate a sense of individual obligation to the community, state and nation; To combat the autocracy of both the classes and the masses; To make right the master of might; To promote peace and goodwill on earth; To safeguard and transmit to posterity the principles of justice, freedom and democracy; To consecrate and sanctify our comradeship by our devotion to mutual helpfulness.

I certainly understand that times may be challenging, but your support is more important now than ever. Together, we can make a difference in the lives of our veterans and their families. Renew your membership today and continue being an important part of our ongoing mission to serve those who have served us. Visit our website or contact your local American Legion post for more information on how to renew. Thank you for your dedication and commitment to our organization.

As your Region Commander I am grateful for your continued support.



Bob Ouellette

Department Vice Commander/Western Maryland Region

From the Desk of the District 7

Greetings comrades. Hello from District 7 from the Great Western Maryland Region. Things in District 7 are moving along very well. Posts are up and functioning. The holidays have passed and posts are getting ready for spring. We had two great candidates for this year's oratorical contest. And I'd like to thank Ron Moots and Carol Gatling from District 7 for their part in chairing this function, And also a great thank you to all those from Post 10 that all came up to help at the district level And the judges from the western part of the district from Post 13 in Cumberland and Post 214 in Grantsville. We had plenty of help, Judges and participation. It was a great success. And a big thank you to Morris Frock. Post 42 In Hagerstown. and Webster B Harrison Post 26 in Hancock for the use of their facilities. Now onto the good stuff. It's time for the American Legion Riders to get those stands down on the ground and rubber on the road. We have some new riders coming into the American Legion Riders group this year from District 7. And there will be a meeting held in March at Brunswick Post 96. And I'm assuming that will be over by the time you read this and a shout out to Dave House and his group down there that keep these things rolling from our area. Also, membership is going well. We do what we can do to keep those numbers up and keep things moving forward. And a thank you to everyone who does all that they can do on this vital endeavor for the strength of our organization. Also, the new multiyear membership is moving along well in the district. We have quite a few people utilizing this important tool.



Cliff Bergstresser
District 8 Commander

And once again, I would like to thank everybody for their support. And I encourage everybody to support our organization to keep it strong and healthy. I will continue to do what I can do? To do my job. And to support our organization. In assisting posts in any way possible. If there's something you ask me to do and I don't know the answer, I will find out. Because, as we all know, we don't know at all. God bless our troops.

Vaughn K. Beard
District Commander, Kerm
Commander, 7th District

From the Desk of the District 8

Greetings from District 8, proud member of the Western MD Region Ferocious Four. We are more than halfway through the year, which means the pressure is on us to keep our focus on membership. As we all have experienced in the past, that last 10% is the hardest to achieve. I have asked my Post Commanders to continue with their commitment to see this through. With the constant slide in membership the past many years, it is paramount to our survival to do what it takes to make the American Legion strong. It is what the American Legion does for Veterans, Communities, and the nation that makes this so important. That said, my posts are doing well so far, and I encourage them to continue to do so.

Personally, I have been going through some changes in my life recently. On a positive note, I am being installed as a Licensed Lay Pastor in the Moravian Church located in York, Pa. My faith journey over the past twenty-five years has brought me to this point in my life. As you may be aware, the main line Christian denominations have a shortage of Ordained Pastors. I am currently enrolled in the Crossroads program at Moravian Seminary. This continuous Christian education is preparing me for my role as a Pastor. The reason I bring this up is twofold. First, I will be relying heavily on my District 8 team for coverage on Sundays, meaning I will be missing the next two DEC meetings. I will have representation there in my place. Thank you, Todd Morris First Vice. Second, much of what we do in the American Legion is to help our fellow Veterans and their families, especially those less fortunate than ourselves. This mission of caring is what means the most to me in the American Legion and I consider it part of my Faith Journey. As we all are aware the American Legion is about God and Country. I am committed to continue to be a part of this fine organization, but will be challenged on Sunday meetings going forward.

God bless you all,

Cliff Bergstresser
District 8 Commander

Region / District / Post Legend

ESR (Eastern Shore Region)

District 1: Caroline, Cecil, Kent, Queen Anne's, Talbot

POSTS: 15, 18, 29, 36, 70, 77, 135, 143, 193, 194, 228, 246, 278, 296, 303

District 2: Dorchester, Somerset, Wicomico, Worcester

POSTS: Post 16, 64, 67, 87, 91, 93, 94, 123, 132, 145, 166, 218, 231, 237, 243, 269.

NCR (Northern Central Region)

District 3: Baltimore, Harford, Howard

POSTS: 2, 17, 22, 38, 39, 47, 55, 122, 128, 130, 148, 174, 180, 182, 183, 256, 263.

District 4: Anne Arundel, Baltimore City

POSTS: 14, 19, 34, 40, 95, 109, 127, 139, 154, 156, 187, 213, 276, 277, 285, 294, 300, 332.

SMR (Southern Maryland Region)

District 5: Anne Arundel, Montgomery, Prince George's,

POSTS: 7, 41, 60, 66, 86, 105, 108, 131, 136, 141, 172, 175, 196, 217, 226, 235, 268, 275.

District 6: Calvert, Charles, Prince George's, St. Mary's

POSTS: 54, 82, 85, 170, 206, 220, 221, 227, 233, 238, 248, 255, 259, 274, 298.

WMR (Western Maryland Region)

District 7: Allegany, Garrett

POSTS: 10, 13, 24, 26, 42, 71, 155, 189, 202, 208, 211, 214, 222, 236, 239.

District 8: Carroll, Frederick, Montgomery, Washington,

POSTS: 11, 31, 68, 96, 116, 120, 121, 168, 171, 191, 200, 223, 247, 282, 295.

The Fight for the Post Quorum

There have been times when the Post Commander has shared three strokes of the gavel, and we began to look around the room, wondering if we had enough for a quorum. Do we have members coming from other rooms or perhaps the parking lot? Just so we can make sure we have a quorum. We all know something is happening, but rarely do we address this critical point because we hope things will get better. A quorum is a pre-established number of members required to transact business for the good of the Post, Committee, or Unit.

The American Legion is only as strong as our Posts and our membership. The fact that Posts are challenged by inactivity and, in some cases, lack of leadership is not all that new but very important to the future of our organization. There are various reasons for this shortfall, and all of them can be overcome. To have an active and engaged Post, someone in the room must "care" about the American Legion, be there for the "greater good," and be connected to the mission. When you're doing something you don't care about, it becomes stress. This can be one person, but one person will never be a quorum, only an individual. Other elements are also there when there is a need for a quorum. These elements include lack of interest, lack of time, lack of resources, or a bad experience with the Post members.

We are at the point where even the elected officers require nudging, training, and to be held accountable for the position they took an oath to execute. The Quorum should be where we can see the finish line but disagree on the road to getting there. I was once told, "Disagreement is not bad; you don't want to surround yourself with people who always agree with you." However, if no one is there, how can we make decisions?

Today, we have Posts with over 600 members. However, there is a struggle to reach the eight-member Quorum. Why, you ask? We are experiencing internal and external change. Internally, we have lost some of the Comrades from eras such as WWII, Korea, and Vietnam. The culture of our organization is vastly different. Today, members are there for different reasons. Externally, the world situation in areas such

as the economy, technology, and even our values have become more about the members and less about the Veterans beside them. The veterans beside them used to be why many looked after each other, but today, the social benefits have suffered, and members don't talk to each other like old buddies.

How do we win the fight for a Quorum? Get personal! Call every member and get their contact information. Have an honest conversation with Comrades and create a bond with them. Don't be alarmed when they say, "I never hear from anyone," because some are only contacted when their dues are late. Generate a list of activities within the Post and continue to show appreciation for their service and support for their family. They want to know that we care about them as members! Develop a more robust level of Post Pride, then consider connecting with other posts in your area. The answer lies in your consistency. In short, we are talking about a culture change, which takes time.

As I stated earlier, someone has to care. Some of your members will say, "I don't have time" or "I don't know how to do it." Don't let them off the hook. These are excuses that must be ushered out the door. As leaders, we can't stop and retreat at the first hint of pushback. They usually want to know they're essential to the Post; however, if you don't ask, it doesn't matter. If we want our organization to last, we must understand where we are and decide where we want to go. Thousands of new Veterans are born every day, and we want them in our organization. We want them on our roster and in our Quorum. I challenge all Posts to build a Quorum based on the principles of the American Legion and the values of your Post. You will undoubtedly win the war for a Quorum if you consistently achieve the small wins. Build a Quorum with members that care, share your vision, then march to your goal with all things considered.

Billy Hill
Vice Commander
Department of Maryland



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District six

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and privileges of American citizenship. In 2007, the contest's official name became the American Legion High School Oratorical Scholarship Program – A Constitutional Speech Contest. This contest provides a unique focus on Constitutional study and American history.

Contest Description

Contests are usually held January through March. The national competition is held in Indianapolis in April. High school students under age 20 are eligible. Each contest has two phases for each contestant:

- Eight to ten minute prepared oration
- Three to five minute assigned topic presentation
- Competition begins at the post level and advances to a department competition
- Department winners compete against each other in two speaking rounds
- Legion department representatives certify one winner per department to the national contest
- The national contest concludes with a final round, that decides the top three finishers Scholarships

The largest scholarships are offered at the national competitive level. To date the American Legion Oratorical Scholarship Program has awarded more than \$3million

dollars in scholarships to students at the national level of competition. It currently awards \$203,500 annually to department winners competing at the national level. Each department winner who is certified into and participates in the national contest's first round receives a \$2,000 scholarship. Those who advance past the first round receive an additional \$2,000 scholarship. The overall national contest winner gets a \$25,000 scholarship. Second place takes home \$22,500, and third place receives \$20,000.

As our youth are our future, we must commit to serving the nation's children and caring for the children of our comrades and active-duty military. The American Legion High School Oratorical Scholarship Program provides a great opportunity for students to prepare for future success in their chosen vocation or profession. Being able to address an audience, communicate effectively, articulate a point of view, and speak with intention, are the essential characteristics of the oratorical program. The lack of interest in hosting a contest and recruitment of students in District 6 to be a part of this program, highlights the need for improved post level support and Legionnaire participation. See you at the convention, we will be out in front, so you can read more about who we are on our backs!

Murray Hall
Commander, District Six
Southern Maryland Region

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Our bees are busy buzzing and collecting membership, Maryland is doing a fantastic job. Congratulations to all the districts. I had the honor of riding in 2 parades with Commander Ruth Higgins. We also attended Perry Point V. A. for the annual Christmas wrapping for our hospitalized Veterans. I attended the Department Christmas party at post 206, what a fantastic fun party enjoyed by all who attended. I also sent 8 1/2 hours at post 278 cooking, serving and greeting the Wreathes Across America Caravan. There were 14 semis in the caravan. I was also able to meet again with our National President Lisa Williamson who



American Legion Auxiliary



was traveling with the caravan. I also was able to support our American Legion Family at the polar plunge. It would have been a great day for me had I not fallen off a 4 wheeler and broke my arm. Even with a Boken arm i was still able to attend the S.A.L. Mid winter training in Ocean City. God Bless

America, Troups and Veterans

Joanne K. Weis
The American Legion Auxiliary
Department of Maryland President
Cell 410-200-5640
E-Mail chickiejo@hughes.net

2024 Polar Bear Plunge



S.A.L. Commander

It is hard to believe we completed eight months of this administration year for the Detachment of Maryland. I am looking forward to early spring so we can get outside to assist our veterans and communities.

The Detachment was busy the first weekend in February. We started off by plunging into the chilly waters of Chesapeake Bay for Maryland Special Olympics where the Legion family across the state of Maryland raised over \$25,000. I want to thank the members of the Legion family who both plunged and supported the plungers on that cold windy day.

The Detachment had their annual midwinter conference in Ocean City. In addition to meetings, training, and spending time with legion family members across the state, we raised over \$30,000 in donations and fundraisers for various legion programs.

Our Detachment Caravan travel team continues to visit squadrons/posts throughout the state of Maryland. The team consists of the Detachment Commander and Vice Commanders along with anyone else who would like to travel with the group.

The caravan team visited four American Legion Posts in the Eastern Shore Region the weekend of January 6th, 2025 (Kent Island Post 278, Corporal Herman Hughes Post 87 in Cambridge, Blake-Blackston Post 77 in Eastern and Benedict A. Andrew Post 296 in Queenstown). We were happy to have many of our Legion officers including Department Commander Ruth Higgins and Eastern Shore Vice Commander Niki Randolph.

In February caravan team returned to the Western Maryland Region and includes stops at Cascade Post 239, Francis X. Elder

POST 121 in Emmitsburg, Hesson-Snider Post 120 in Taneytown, Glen W. Eyler Post 282 in Woodsboro, and Francis Scott Key Post 11 in Frederick. This makes 28 American Legion Posts that the caravan has visited since July. We will be back in Southern Maryland on the first Sunday in March.

The caravan team also made a visit to Operation Second Chance at Raven Rock near Washington County. We received a beneficial tour of how our injured veterans receive assistance for their physical disabilities.

As mentioned in the last issue of the Pride, my project is to build Pavilion at the American Legion Youth Camp in Cheltenham, MD. I want to thank my project chair Dave Hullihan for all his hard work and assistance promoting this project. I also want to give special thanks to the squadrons who made donations to the project at our Winter DEC meeting. As of February, we raised over \$20,000 and expect an increase in donations at the Commanders drawdown in March.

Until next time, take time to be with your family during spring break. I look forward to seeing everyone at the National Commanders Banquet in March.

Joe Lohman
Commander,
Detachment of Maryland



The Gold Star Legacy Run Is Counting Down To Our 9th Run



We are three months and counting down till the start of the 9th Annual Maryland Gold Star Legacy Run. On Friday morning June 7, 2024 we will start our 9th Run. However, this year like last, the festivities will start on Thursday night at Harry White-Wilmer Post 82 in LaPlata with a dinner and hopefully collecting some donations for this year's cause... Veterans and Childrens Foundation. Post 82 came in 2nd place in last year's contest for Largest Legion Family Donor with a donation totaling \$50,635.00.

The Gold Star will leave Harry White-Wilmer Post 82 and is heading to Laurel Post 60. Last year Laurel won the 1st Place Plaque for the largest Legion Family Donor with a donation of \$51,086.00. At this stop, Laurel will turnover the Largest Donor traveling plaque. We won't know till the dust settles whose Legion Family name will be added to the plaque. We will depart Laurel Post 60 for a wreath laying ceremony at the Annapolis Gold Star Families Memorial. This is always a special time when you remember those that have made the ultimate sacrifice and their families that have as well. We will depart the Memorial for the Eastern Shore where we will be having lunch at Kent Island Post 278 in Stevensville and then on to dinner at Dor-Wic Post 218 in Sharptown to finish Day One.

On Saturday June 8th, we will leave the Holiday Inn in Delmar for our first stop at Talbot Post 70 and home of Department Commander Ruth Higgins for a morning snack. After leaving Easton, we will be stopping in Centreville for one of our favorite stops at Jeff Davis Post 18 for hopefully a visit from the Heritage Girls. Departing Post 18, we will be heading to Rock Hall for lunch at Sgt. Preston Ashley Post 228. We have never been disappointed in the treatment they have given us in the past and I'm sure it will be that way again. When we leave Post 228, we will be heading around the bay to Joseph L. Davis Post 47 in Havre De Grace for dinner and our final stop on Day Two.

Sunday June 9th will be a short day for

all participating. We will be departing from our hotel for a visit to the Gold Star Families Memorial in Havre De Grace. Once we complete our wreath laying, we will have completed our weekend Run with over 350 miles traveled, two Regions, 5 districts and 8 Post homes visited. We are hoping to raise \$100,000.00 for VCF. Following is a little more about this Charity.

The National Organization of The American Legion has asked the National American Legion Riders Committee to take on this new challenge. The Veterans and Children Foundation is another American Legion 501 C (3) charity that provides financial grants to soldiers and veterans that have children and are having financial difficulty, and as important, to fund the training of our American Legion Service Officers. These services officers fight daily to help our veterans get the service-connected benefits they are entitled to. Millions of dollars a year are going to help our veterans in need from the VA that might not otherwise have been received.

With your help we will reach this goal. Please send all donations to Towson ALR 22 located at 125 York Road Towson, MD 21204 or you can present them at any of our stops on the 2024 Run to get credit from the Gold Star and from the National Organization. Together we can make Maryland the largest donor again. We will be mailing our ride packet out in March 2024; however, we need you to start planning now and to start raising funds for this cause. It will be interesting to see what Legion Family receives that Top Donor Plaque at the Department Convention in July 2024 and to see whose name will join the list of past winners of this coveted award!

United In Service

Joe Gladden
Towson ALR 22
Past SAL National Commander
2013-2014

Department Service Officer

Adrian G. Gamboa

Greetings Legionnaires, I hope 2024 is treating good so far. I wish you and your families health and prosperity; may all your New Year resolutions come true.

VETERANS BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION

For Veterans looking for clarification on the wide range of VA benefits available to them, the **2023 VA Federal Benefits Booklet** serves as a guide to help them make the most of their post-service lives. It includes information on everything from health care and educational assistance to housing aid and career development initiatives. To access the booklet, type the following address into your web browser: https://www.va.gov/opa/publications/benefits_book.asp

Safeguarding your identity: Keeping your VA benefits safe from identity theft and fraud. In the contemporary digital era, identity theft is a more likely occurrence than home burglary or car theft. As a Veteran, you hold more sensitive information than an average citizen, necessitating careful protection of your personal accounts, Veteran ID, VA.gov account login, and any benefits you may receive, such as disability compensation and education benefits. Veterans are highly susceptible to fraudulent activities, online scams and deceitful individuals. Identity theft occurs when hackers obtain sensitive Personally Identifiable Information (PII) like credit card details to sell on the dark web or use for their own gain. Identity theft is a difficult crime to prevent, but there are several measures you can take to safeguard yourself and your VA benefits. It's essential to stay vigilant and familiarize yourself with the following frequently occurring common online scams:

Direct Deposit/Payment redirection: A bad actor obtains PII to unlawfully access and gain control of Veterans' and beneficiaries' accounts.

Phishing: A fraudulent practice where an imposter creates a fake online persona to deceive Veterans and their beneficiaries into providing PII.

Email: A type of scam in which a fraudster sends a fake email, often promoting a contest or reward, to trick a user into clicking on a malware link or obtain sensitive personal information.

Phone: A scammer may pose as someone you trust and try to obtain your money or personal information to commit identity

theft.

Spoofing: A caller disguises the information shown on caller ID, giving them the ability to impersonate a specific person from a certain location.

Wired: A type of fraud that involves the use of some form of telecommunications or the internet.

Forgery: The act of forging or producing a copy of a document, signature, banknote or work of art.

Malware: One of the top cyber schemes used by bad actors to infect computers. They may even hold your computer "hostage" with malware until you agree to pay a ransom; this type of malware is also known as "ransomware."

Here are some identity theft prevention tips Veterans can follow to protect themselves:

- Screen emails carefully, and only open emails from senders you know and trust. Delete and block emails from unknown or suspicious senders.
- Be cautious of popups and links on websites, emails and texts that can be used to infect your device with harmful malware.
- Limit PII when you post online, such as your address, date of birth, workplace, or kinship details.
- Delete old social media accounts and limit online presence and available biographical information.
- Maximize privacy settings on all active social media accounts to protect information from unknown users.
- Do not accept friend or connection requests from individuals with only an online presence. Only add friends or connections you know and trust in real life, not those who you have only met online.
- Download strong antivirus software to protect yourself from malware attacks.
- Be aware of signs of a malware infection. If your computer runs unusually slowly or frequently crashes without explanation, it may be an indication it is infected with malware.
- Never send bank information or payment to "online friends" or others. Scammers may threaten to destroy your files or data if you do not send payment or banking information. Be alert! Identity theft is not



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always committed by strangers.

- Frequently change and maintain strong passwords and never use PII in the password.
- Be cautious of telephone numbers on your caller ID. Scammers can change the telephone number (spoofing) to make a call appear to come from a different person or place.
- Only shop on sites that are validated—go directly where you want to shop. Check the URL for spelling mistakes or errors.
- Use a credit card instead of a debit card. Credit cards typically provide added protection against fraudulent charges.
- Do not sign forms that are not VA generated or are a third-party authorization for someone to provide “behind-the-scenes” claims assistance.

If a Veteran believes their identity has been stolen, they should contact the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). Identity theft can be reported to the FTC at IdentityTheft@ftc.gov. If a Veteran has concerns about their VA services being impacted by identity theft, they can call the toll-free VA Identity Theft Helpline at 1-855-578-5492.

Veterans Benefits Banking Program (VBBP) & VETCENTS

The Veterans Benefits Banking Program provides Veterans with a safe, reliable and inexpensive way to receive and manage their VA monetary benefits. VBBP participant banks and credit unions will provide no-minimum-balance, low-to-no-cost checking accounts to direct deposit customers. VBBP helps Veterans and other VA beneficiaries choose among the three available options for receiving VA monetary benefits:

- Direct Deposit into an existing or new bank account
- Electronic funds transfer to a Direct Express® prepaid or other prepaid card
- Mailing of paper checks to pre-approved beneficiaries

To enroll in VBBP type the following address into your web browser: <https://veteransbenefitsbanking.org/>

VetCents was created by the Military Family Advisory Network (MFAN), a national nonprofit, to connect families to information and resources that they need to reach their financial goals. Today, VetCents is fully integrated in VBBP, multiplying VetCents’ potential to support the financial wellbeing of those who have served our

country as they navigate their financial journey. VetCents is provided at no cost to Veterans, Veteran beneficiaries and Veteran caregivers thanks to support provided by the Wells Fargo Foundation and the ABA Foundation. To sign up for VetCents type the following address into your web browser: <https://app.vetcents.org/introduction>

Veterans Affairs Life Insurance (VALife)

VALife is VA’s first new insurance program in nearly 50 years, and since Jan. 1, 2023, has provided Veterans with the peace of mind that comes from knowing loved ones will have some funds after their departure. VALife eliminates time limits to apply, increasing access to more Veterans than ever before. The program offers guaranteed acceptance, whole life insurance to Veterans aged 80 or under with any level of service-connected disability (0-100%). Veterans aged 81 or over may qualify if they meet certain criteria and apply within a certain timeframe.

VA is the nation’s 12th largest life insurer and has issued \$950 million in coverage to 31,400 Veterans for VALife in its first year alone.

Key features of VALife include:

- Coverage up to \$40,000, available in \$10,000 increments
- No health questions or medical exam to enroll
- No deadline to apply if you are age 80 or under
- Convenient online application and enrollment, and
- Cash value that builds over the life of the policy, after the first two years of enrollment

VALife premium rates **are not** based on medical underwriting and **will not** increase over the life of the policy. Premiums are based on the Veteran’s age upon enrollment and the coverage amount selected. VALife premium rates are competitive with, or better than, similar private sector guaranteed acceptance programs. VALife does not offer waiver of premiums.

The full table of monthly VALife premium rates can be found online, or at <https://www.va.gov/life-insurance/options-eligibility/valife/>.

VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION Mobile Medication Units

Mobile Medication Units provide care to Veterans with Opioid Use Disorder (OUD) who otherwise may not be able to engage in services at brick-and-mortar opioid treatment programs. Consistent with the

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Office of National Drug Control Policy’s charge to expand access to medications for OUD via mobile medication units, the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) is supporting a pilot expansion of mobile medication units across VA. The Perry Point VAMC was awarded a \$1.2 million grant in Fiscal Year (FY) 24 to hire staff, customize a vehicle, and support supply costs in preparation of launching mobile medication services to our Nation’s Veterans. During FY25, after completion of the pilot, the mobile medication unit will be deployed into the community to bring these critical services to Veterans.

The proposed plan is to deploy into Cecil and Harford counties initially. Future plans to deploy into the counties on the Eastern Shore of Maryland will proceed after successful deployment into counties close to Perry Point. Veterans who currently cannot receive care for OUD will now receive life-saving care in their local community. Reduction in substance use relapse is expected with the deployment of a mobile medication unit. Veterans who currently live in the community and who use mobile medication unit care will likely engage in fewer visits to local emergency rooms and

inpatient facilities. Reduction in the number of unexpected opiate overdoses is expected when mobile medication units are deployed, thereby reducing the overall burden on local emergency responders. Provision of mobile medication units reduces the need for Veterans to secure care in the community, opening more resources for non-Veterans in need of OUD care.

Please call or send questions to serviceofficer@mdlegion.org. Our office number is (410) 230-4420. All calls made from our office will appear as 1-800-827-1000 since we are co-located with the Veterans Benefits Administration at the Baltimore Regional Office.

Adrian Gamboa
Department Service