Legionnaires storm Capitol Hill

Washington Conf. covers an array of veteran issues
By Tim Engstrom

WASHINGTON — From recognizing a Minnesota doctor as The American Legion Physician of the Year to lobbying members of Congress to act on burn pits and other veterans matters, from attending a reception commemorating the 60th anniversary of the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty to hearing from Secretary of Veterans Affairs Rob Wilkie, the Washington Conference on March 8-11 was packed with action.

Minneapolis VA Medical Center general psychiatrist Megan Press was honored for being the 2020 Physician of the Year. She stood on stage with Wilkie in front of hundreds of Legionnaires at the Washington Hilton.

It is the third year that The American Legion has given the Physician of the Year award, and it is the second time a doctor from Minnesota has won it.

“It has been an honor and a privilege working with veterans,” Press said.

She has worked at the VA Health Care System for 15 years. Press went to medical school at the University of Arizona in Tucson and did her residency at the University of Minnesota. She was hired by the VA right after.

Wilkie sang the praises of American Legion Executive Director Louis Celli, who was nearing the end of his time with the country’s largest veterans organization. After 13 years with the Legion (two as executive director, others in legislation and rehabilitation), Celli in March began as business strategy executive with Maryland-based... Continued on Page 8

Pandemic changes everything

Cancelled, postponed events dot the Minnesota military landscape
By Tim Engstrom

BLOOMINGTON — The world didn’t change in an instant, like it did in so many moments of modern American history, such as JFK’s assassination, the fall of the Berlin Wall or the 9/11 attacks...

... No, the COVID-19 pandemic was altogether different. The virus, yes, may have spread faster from overseas than generally anticipated, but the news was not all-of-a-sudden-at-once. For a big deal in a 24/7 electronic world, this information crawled into American life until it was the only news and everyone was working from home and stocking up on soup and toilet paper.

Each week, each day, coronavirus messages seemed to ramp up, and people couldn’t help but ask: “Is this really happening?”

Yes. It is.

The world will change, just as it had after the moments the news stopped Americans in their tracks and united everyone. We

Learn about Enhanced Buddy Checks
By Jennifer Gedney Havlick

TWO HARBORS — Heard of Enhanced Buddy Checks? In response to the COVID-19 pandemic American Legion National Commander Bill Oxford placed a strong emphasis on our Buddy Check program.

As I watched the pandemic begin to unfold, I thought we can do more than an average Buddy Check. I opened a note on my Facebook page and began writing what turned out to be titled Enhanced Buddy Checks. Instead of calling and chatting, an Enhanced Buddy Check is making sure we can do anything for aging veterans, and if we cannot help, we make sure to find someone who can.

Make sure they have the support system for everything to stay safe under the pandemic restrictions, even things such as hospital stays. Continued on Page 7

DEC meets mostly by conference
By Tim Engstrom

ST. PAUL — The Department Executive Committee met by remote communications on Saturday, March 21, during a time when America and the world were struggling with the COVID-19 pandemic.

The most newsworthy aspect? Pulling the meeting off in the first place.

The meeting had been planned for the Best Western Plus hotel in La Crescent as part of the Appreciation Rally. That was cancelled amid concerns of spreading the virus.

Instead, less than 10 people met in the Press Room of the Veterans Service Building in St. Paul — specifically eight people — and the rest called in through the room’s conference system.

There was no rally, to be sure. But the DEC dug deep into its bylaws and conducted its business.

Commander Mark Dvorak Continued on Page 7

Jordan student is Oratorical winner

ANOKA — A senior at Jordan High School is the champion of the Minnesota American Legion Oratorical Contest.

Jamie Jablonsky, 18, earns a $1,500 scholarship and was to move on to compete at the national level April 17-19 in Indianapolis before the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions on gathering prompted the cancellation of it.

Finalists from seven districts across Minnesota qualified to compete at the finals on Feb. 29, held at Anoka Post 102. Jablonsky was sponsored by Jordan Post 3 and was the winner of the Legion’s 3rd District.

The Oratorical Contest requires contestants to be able to deliver memorized speeches in front of a crowd. The topics are related to the U.S. Constitution. Some are eight to 10 minutes; others are three to five minutes.

Winners receive scholarships. This was her third year competing in the Oratorical Contest. The biggest hurdle, Jablonsky said, was her own nerves. She overcame the nerves through lots of practice.

“I know my speech back to front, but when you are up there in front of everybody it can be a little nerve-wracking,” Jamie said.

She said she probably will go into marketing, an Enhanced Buddy Check... Continued on Page 2

The winners of the 2020 American Legion Minnesota Oratorical Contest are Jamie Jablonsky of Jordan, Jasmine Siliznoff of Deerwood, James Hanley of St. Paul and Alexus Heins of Eyota.
VA grant program says no to funding new veterans homes

ST. PAUL — Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs Commissioner Larry Herke said he was disappointed his agency’s request for funding three new veterans homes didn’t make the federal Department of Veterans Affairs budget.

The projects had all the requirements, he said. They made the deadline. They had the land, state funding and construction arrangements.

“I felt at least one would get picked,” Herke said.

The three homes — Bemidji, Montevideo, Preston — ranked 50, 51 and 52 respectively in priority by the VA in its State Home Construction Grants, which was outside of what ended up being approved. However, Herke said this means the Minnesota homes picked up 11 notches to the ranks of 39, 40 and 41.

The three projects have a total price tag of $79 million. The grant requires a 65-35 match, with state and local sources, including private donations, handling the 35 percent portion. The grant covers the 65 percent side.

The grant program awarded $122.5 million in this cycle, out of $312.6 million in requests. The VA approved 21 projects calling for upgrades and renovations across the country, but it only funded a single new construction — a 64-bed facility in Post Falls, Idaho.

“We were close, but not close enough,” Herke said. He said the projects could get the green light this year, as the VA letter said the approvals could grow if more funding comes. That could include dollars from a federal stimulus package for the economic slowdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Minnesota Legislature allocated $33 million toward the projects, and Herke said he will leave the application in place for the VA grant program next year, then make an adjustment request with the Legislature regarding construction cost changes. His department will retain the architect, contractor and commissioning agent and expect better news next year.

Govener’s Challenge’ aims to end veteran suicide

ST. PAUL — Minnesota is among seven states selected for a national effort to eliminate veteran death by suicide.

The Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs is partnering with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Health Administration and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration in what’s called the Governor’s Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans and their Families.

Death by suicide has claimed more than 100 Minnesota Veteran lives per year during the past five years.

“As a member of the Army National Guard for 24 years, suicide in our veteran community is a tragedy that I take personally,” said Gov. Tim Walz.

“Those who raise their hand to serve our country deserve the best care and services our nation and state can provide. We must work together to provide veterans with immediate access to quality, culturally competent mental healthcare and make bipartisan progress toward eliminating veteran suicide entirely. Minnesota can — and will — lead on veteran issues,” Walz is a member of Mankato Post 11.

The Minnesota Legionnaire contacted SAMHSA, which deferred to the VA, about the other six states. A VA spokeswoman said states are operating on differing timetables and the other six states are not determined.

To support this initiative, Walz has directed multiple state agencies — including the Minnesota Departments of Veterans Affairs, Military Education, Human Services, Health and Agriculture — to prioritize this effort and work collaboratively along with other state, federal and local partners. The Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs will serve as the coordinator of the efforts.

MDVA is identifying additional Governor’s Challenge participants from other state agencies as well as other federal and local partners.

“We are confident that using a collaborative approach — like our work to end veteran homelessness — will position us to make a similarly positive impact in the area of preventing veteran suicide,” said Larry Herke, MDVA commissioner.

Herke is a member of Hastings Post 47.

“Added Maj. Gen. Jon Jensen: ‘The Minnesota National Guard is encouraged by this collaborative effort, under Governor Walz’ ‘One Minnesota approach, to ending veteran suicide. We look forward to participating in the Governor’s Challenge to end veterans’ death by suicide. One veteran suicide is one too many.’

“Eliminating veteran suicide is a goal all Minnesotans should embrace,” said Minnesota Department of Human Services Commissioner Jodi Harpstead.

“We need the right behavioral health services across the state — from crisis to clinics to chemical dependency — so that veterans get the help they need.”

Expertise from other state agencies such as departments of Agriculture and Health will be included in the initiative.

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Endorsements
Meyer for vice cmdr.

American Legion Post 113 and the 7th District proudly endorses Harold “Hal” Meyer Jr. for Department vice commander for the years 2020-2021, for the 2nd and 7th districts.

He has served on many committees in his Post has been 1st and 2nd vice commander and Post commander. In the District, sergeant of arms, vice commander Area Dwice, membership director and District commander.

Also, he has served many offices in the Sons of the American Legion. He is also a 53-year member of Marshall Post 113.

He and his wife, Pam, have five children, 10 grandkids and eight great-grandkids. All of them are in the Legion Family.

Dick Thill, longtime member of North St. Paul Post 39, died March 12.

He served the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and served on the USS Ward, which fired the first U.S. shots in World War II. That starboard gun from the Ward is outside the Veterans Service Building in St. Paul.

Endorsements
Hal Meyer

MyLegion.org becomes the main way to get things done

With Minnesota now under a stay-at-home order by the governor for a minimum of two weeks, Department Membership Director Sy Fix is asking now more then ever to put MyLegion.org to use.

He said it is unfortunate that it takes a situation like this for members to realize how useful the MyLegion.org tool can be to process membership and look up past dues and Post 1982 members.

“Pull up those past due reports, call your fellow Post members, send them some names to call,” he said.

Fix also suggests you look at the Post 1982 members and get them transferred into your Posts, especially if they have already paid their dues, in which case, there is no need to be in physical contact with them.

Fix and Commander Mark Dvorak said they are extremely grateful for all the hard work to date and ask that members keep pushing forward.

“We will get through this,” Dvorak said.

The American Legion Riders of Arcade Phalen Post 577 in St. Paul hand a check to Ken Larson, manager of the Veterans Campground on Big Marine Lake.

Photo by Lou Michaels

Bikers for Campers

Enjoy a Live WWII USO-Style Variety Show & Themed Dinner!

5:30 - 8:30 p.m. April 30, 2020
Gorecki Center, College of St. Benedict, St. Joseph
$75 for Museum Members $100 for Nonmembers

Ticket sales and donations benefit the Stearns History Museum.

For tickets and more information visit: StearnsHistoryMuseum.org or call 320-253-8424.

Bulbuh Evening Herald

EXPLORE YOUR FAMILY HISTORY
Research your roots online using our wide array of digital resources. Locate birth, death, marriage, census, immigration, and military records, as well as newspapers and historical photos. Begin your research at mnhs.org.

EXPLORE HISTORY EVERY DAY AT MNHS.ORG

WATCH THE STORIED SERIES
Our Storied videos invite you to uncover the real stories and real people behind the dates—and for a short time, inhabit their lives. Watch Storied plus more video series at mnhs.org.

BECOME A MINNESOTA EXPERT
Visit MNonpedia, our authoritative digital encyclopedia, to read about significant people, places, eras, and events in Minnesota history. Each week, we add new content and resources from knowledgeable contributors across the state. Explore at mnhs.org.
Ideas to help us shine during crisis

We are in unprecedented times, and the rapid societal changes caused by the COVID-19 virus affect us all. The magnitude of this urgent and evolving situation has not fully developed, but I wanted to take this moment in our nation’s history to urge you to reflect on what it means to be in our ranks. Now is the time to be a beacon in our communities.

First and foremost, take care of yourselves. Many of us are in or near the age group that presents the most risk, and some of us have pre-existing medical conditions that could complicate treatment. The most current information from the Minnesota Department of Health is at www.health.state.mn.us.

Next, look after one another and check in on the members of your post and in your community. Our American Legion Buddy Check program is perhaps even more important now than ever before. Rely on telephone, email or social media to communicate since person-to-person contact is not the safest option. Please be particularly attentive to seniors, a population that is especially vulnerable to the harmful effects of this virus.

For those that post feature restaurants or bars, you have likely heard that Gov. Tim Walz has directed that all table service and restaurant service close through at least March 27. I recognize the hardship that this directive causes to many locations, but I am confident that our American Legion Family will do our part to mitigate the spread of this virus. For those employed by American Legion food and beverage operations, the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development has provided the sick leave insurance. Visit www.umm.org if this applies to you, and please share with your local post.

As stated earlier, our Veteran Service Organization is a beacon in our communities. We embody service, patriotism, and all who have served in unison. The American Legion is focused on the greater good, and I challenge you to model The American Legion at its best in your community. While striking the balance of safeguarding your personal safety and practicing social distancing, I encourage posts to consider leading the partnerships that will help your community through this challenge.

This is not a comprehensive list, but here are some Buddy Check-inspired ideas for your American Legion Post to be a beacon in your community:

- EDUCATION: Become a drop-off location for your local school breakfast or lunch programs.
- FOOD SECURITY: Coordinate a food drive, with a food drop-off and/or collection point.
- PRAY FOR MINNESOTA: Offer your facility, time and talent for county or city operations centers.
- ELDERLY OUTREACH: Develop a campaign to conduct phone calls to the elderly in your area.

MEALS ON WHEELS: Establish a “meals on wheels” operation that can deliver to the socially isolated members of your community.

BLUE DRIVE: Coordinate with your local Red Cross and organize a community blood drive.

EXAMPLES: Our friends and partners at 2019.

As of March 18, our squad was delivered a gut punch like I have never seen nor felt with a group of volunteers. Words came down that we would cease operations at the end of our last funeral because of the coronavirus pandemic. We felt angry, in disbelief, and that we were letting our fallen heroes down because we wouldn’t be able to provide honors for our fellow veterans being laid to rest at Fort Snelling National Cemetery. I can’t believe we’ve felt the bus as we rode to our next funeral.

Since 1979 the Memorial Rifle Squad has provided military funeral honors for those who served. The ceremonies include the presentation of the Flag, three rifle volleys, “Taps” and the folding and presenting of the flag to a surviving family member. The Memorial Rifle Squad performs honors Monday through Friday for as many as 16 veterans each day from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. The squads have never missed a scheduled service during their existence for any reason including the harshest Minnesota winters.

As of March 18, Memorial Rifle Squad has conducted close to 80,000 funerals for our nation’s fallen heroes.

As we are practicing social distancing due to the virus, there is no single solution that will work for everyone. As we discuss these options, please be kind and patient with one another. It is a challenging time for all of us.

# Fort Snelling Rifle Squads put down their rifles

Every Wednesday I hang out with some of the most honor- ed folks I have ever met. They are veterans, volunteers and they are members of the Fort Snelling Memorial Rifle Squad.

Our squad isn’t much different than the people who serve on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday. Still, we exhibit great esprit de corps for our Wednesday Squad.

On Wednesday, March 18, our squad was delivered a gut punch like I have never seen nor felt with a group of volunteers. Words came down that we would cease operations at the end of our last funeral because of the coronavirus pandemic. We felt angry, in disbelief, and that we were letting our fallen heroes down because we wouldn’t be able to provide honors for our fellow veterans being laid to rest at Fort Snelling National Cemetery. I can’t believe we’ve felt the bus as we rode to our next funeral.

Thus far during this pandemic our squad has never missed a scheduled service due to the virus, including the harshest Minnesota winters.

On Wednesday, March 18, the Memorial Rifle Squad has conducted close to 80,000 funerals for our nation’s fallen heroes.

Just before we readied ourselves for the last funeral, the director of Fort Snelling National Cemetery boarded our bus to thank the squad for being there and to tell us personally the justification for ceasing operations.

The air was pretty thick, the gut punch still being felt by the Wednesday Squad, when John Kapp talked about his discussions with stuff, the decision made and the support we received from Washington. John also talked about the seriousness of the virus and how vulnerably the Memorial Rifle Squad members are to the disease.

You see, the average age of the Memorial Rifle Squad is 75 years old. He wants these guys to stay safe, to stay healthy, to be able to carry on the mission and do our part to mitigate the spread of the virus.

If you have pre-existing medical conditions that could complicate treatment, please be particularly attentive to seniors.

Pray for our veterans and their families.

Pray for those who are losing the income and livelihood.

Pray for those in the medical profession.

Pray for the sick and those who are losing their homes.

Pray for the families of the deceased.

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Pray for those who bravely carried out their duties for the sake of humanity.

Pray for health workers, elders, others.

“He Ain’t Heavy, He’s My Brother” This is a ballad written by Bobby Scott and Bob Russell. Originally recorded by Kelly Gordon in 1969, the song became a worldwide hit for The Hollies later that year and a minor hit for Neil Diamond in 1970.

This article stresses our need to watch out for each other as we patiently await the next steps as we progress through the pandemic.

There is a lot of fear about this virus and some people are anxious out there in our communities. Facing the fear of the unknown, turning to our all-knowing God is a good response for clarity and direction.

How can we help to reduce that fear in others? We already use our Buddy Checks with our fellow members through text, emails andpostcards. We need to apply this to our neighbors as well.

We can also pray for the wisdom to take good care of ourselves in a way that focuses on the good of others. Caring for ourselves is good and right. Ask God to help you care for yourselves so that others will not have to bear you up. Pray for the wisdom, patience and tenacity to practice good health habits for your sake as well as for the sake of others.

Pray for those who are on the front lines and those who love them; pray for those who are losing the income that sustains them.

Pray for those in the medical community: physicians, nurses, technicians, and aids; custodial staff and food service workers; and all those who have the courage to receive and care for those contracting COVID-19, for they stand in the breach at the risk of their own health and lives.

Pray for those in the scientific, research, and pharmaceutical communities who devote their time and talent to the cause of global health, and that their wisdom may be multiplied by the Source of All Wisdom.

Pray for chaplains and other pastoral caregivers, clergy and lay alike, to visit bed-sides, enter homes, and bring prayer, blessing and the sacraments of hope to the ill. Pray that they may have the courage of Constance and Her Companions, the Martyrs of Memphis, who bravely carried out their sacred duties in the face of dis- ease and death.

Pray for our elected officials and all those who hold the common trust that their wisdom and compassion for all people will increase.

Finally, pray that our faith — may be unshakable.

Betty Jass

Chaplain’s Corner

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Betty Jass is the chaplain for the American Legion Department of Minnesota.
Prayer was a factor during the war

I read the interesting article by Tim Engstrom in the February 2020 Minnesota Legionnaire. I grew up in the Netherlands and was a fifth grader when Adolf Hitler’s army invaded Holland, Belgium and France.

Reading the article I noticed that an important element was missing. My comment is in no way critical about a good article. Rather, it is to bring forth some special information to the issue. It comes from a book: “Rees Howells Intercessor,” by Norman Grubb and published by CLC, Fort Washington, PA 19034.

Rees Howells, a humble miner in Wales, learned to intercede with God in prayer and faith for needs of persons or causes, including the mines, he served God in different ministries. He also served as a missionary in South Africa. After that, God directed him to build and lead a Bible college in South Wales.

When Adolf Hitler became leader of the German National Socialist Party, his hatred of Jews increased. That made it a need for Mr. Howells to get involved. He began to help Jews and to bring many Jewish children to safety. Following that, God told him to travel through Europe with staff and students of the college, to undermine Hitler’s domineering power. He was even in touch with staff of nearly 100 would pray on their knees each evening. What began with helping Jews gradually became a God-directed effort that continued until Germany surrendered on May 2, 1945.

The prayer effort went from one battle of the German war machine to the next. The “Prayer Brigade” in Wales prayed that England would not surrender. After Hitler invaded Holland, Belgium and France, they prayed for God’s help. They prayed for the large Army of British and other soldiers, which were surrounded by German forces and had the sea at their back. It was expected that they would soon become German war prisoners.

Not surprisingly, the whole Army was ferried in boats, even many small ones, from Dunkirk to England over the very calm North Sea that day.

When Hitler decided to invade Russia, he did not know that God had a “prayer brigade” in Wales that would undermine his plans. The German military force came close to Moscow, but it was snow and very low temperatures to bog down Hitler’s army with great losses. Hitler had not counted on God’s plans.

God and the “Prayer Brigade” are the main answer to the question why Hitler’s plans for Russia ended up in total failure.

Peter Wiering

Minneapolis

Obituaries

The Minnesota Legionnaire reserves the right to edit all obituaries for style and brevity.

Please send to tengstrom@mnlegion.org or in the mail to the Department of Minnesota.

Grove for 36 years. He was a member of Spring Grove Post 249.

Kauffman, Russel E., 95, Coast Guard veteran of World War II, died Jan. 25, 2020. He was a member of Park Rapids Post 2.

Kleindl, Lawrence G., 99, Army veteran of World War II, died Feb. 19, 2020. He served as military police in the Philippines and Japan. He was a member of Graceville Post 297.

Korhonen, Arthur R., 95, Navy veteran of World War II, died Feb. 24, 2020. He was a Seabee who served in Japan, Tinian and Guam. He was a 45-year member of Grand Rapids Post 60.

Long, Jerry C., 82, Army veteran of the Vietnam War, died Feb. 9, 2020. He was a member of North Branch Post 85.

Mack, Vernon A., 98, Army veteran of World War II, died Feb. 27, 2020. He finished jump school in December 1944 and was a mess sergeant in the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment (of the 82nd Airborne Division). He was in Europe for six months after the Battle of the Bulge. He was a member of New Ulm Post 152.

Miller, Gordon D., 87, Navy veteran of the Vietnam War, died April 11, 2019. He was a member of Albert Lea Post 56.

Muchow, Darwin Hugo, 75, Navy veteran of Vietnam, died March 9, 2020. He served on the USS Newport News. He was a member of Gaylord Post 433 and managed the bar and Friday night steak fry for many years.

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Muldrow, Robert N., 89, Army veteran of World War II, died March 2, 2020. He served as military police in the Philippines and Japan. He was a member of Graceville Post 297.


Nielson, Howard “Howie,” 87, Army veteran of the Korean War, died Feb. 18, 2020. He was a 65-year member of Jackson Post 130.

North, Charles E., 87, Army veteran of the Cold War, died Dec. 29, 2019. He was a member of Zumbrota Post 183.

Oles, Donald J., 81, Army veteran of World War II, died March 7, 2020. He served for 30 years in the National Guard. He was a member of St. Peter Post 37.

Olson, Howard G., 87, Army veteran of the Korean War, died March 14, 2020. He spent a year in Korea after training at Fort Ripley. He was a member of Zumbrota Post 183.

Opdahl, George C., 92, Army veteran of World War II in Germany, died Dec. 20, 2019. He was a 70-year member and a past commander and gambling manager with Avoca Post 576.

Perra, John A., 93, Army veteran of World War II, died Feb. 7, 2020. He was a member of Zumbrota Post 183.

Pfannensteen, Kevin A., 80, Navy veteran of Vietnam, died Feb. 10, 2020. He was a member of Waite Park Post 297.

Redmond, Leo M., 63, Army veteran of World War II, died March 11, 2020. He was a 63-year member of Anoka Post 102.

Santema, Harold, 89, Army veteran of the Korean War, died March 2, 2020. He was a 44-year member of Milaca Post 178.

Schmidt, Paul, 87, Army veteran of the Korean War, died March 1, 2020. He was a member of Park Rapids Post 2.

Schmitt, Eldon C., 95, Navy veteran of World War II, died Feb. 24, 2020. He was a member of Albert Lea Post 56.

Schultz, Gerald J., 86, Army veteran of the Korean War, died Jan. 29, 2020. He worked in a motor pool with the 2nd Infantry Division, later was in the Reserve. He was a member of Albert Lea Post 56.

Sell, Harvey W., Army veteran of Korea, died Feb. 6, 2020. He served in the 1st Cavalry Division.


Shoup, Robert C., 93, Army veteran of World War II, died Feb. 5, 2020. He was assigned to the 375th Station Hospital in Japan. He was a 73-year member of Winona Post 9.

Skovbroten, Orvin E., 94, Navy veteran of World War II, died March 2, 2020. He was a member of Zumbrota Post 183.

Sorensen, Herbert L., Army veteran of Korea, died Feb. 24, 2020. He was a member of Albert Lea Post 56.

Stoelke, Curtis N., 89, Army veteran of the Cold War, died Jan. 21, 2020. He served as medical officer in the 1st Cavalry Division in South Korea. He was a member of St. Peter Post 37.

Thill, Richard, 96, Navy veteran of World War II, died March 12, 2020. He survived the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. He was aboard the USS Ward, which fired the first shots by Americans of World War II, sinking a Japanese Midget submarine (that same starboard gun is displayed near the Veterans Service Building in St. Paul). He also served aboard the USS Savannah. He was a member of North St. Paul Post 39.

Tremi, James, 76, Army veteran of Vietnam War, stationed in Germany, died March 11, 2020. He was a member of Wabasso Post 263.

Uecker, Harold A., 98, Air Force veteran of World War II, died March 6, 2020. He was a sergeant in the 5th Air Force, working as a mechanic in the Pacific Islands. He worked on B-24s, B-25s and P-38s. He was a member of Buffalo Post 270.

Van Horsen, Frank, 93, Army veteran of Korean War, died Feb. 22, 2020. He was a member of Adrian Post 32.

Visker, Dick “Dicky,” 94, Army veteran of the Korean War, died Feb. 24, 2020. He was a past post commander and served many years in the post color guard for Elk River Post 196.

Wendt, Donald E., 94, Navy veteran of World War II, died Oct. 17, 2019. He was a member of Zumbrota Post 183.

Wenig, Romaine F., 80, Army and Army Reserves veteran, died May 11, 2020. He was a member of Wabasso Post 263.

Wright, Harold C., 89, Army veteran of the Korean War, died Feb. 16, 2020. He was a member of Zumbrota Post 183.

Zeller, Marvin R., 83, Army veteran of Korea, died Feb. 23, 2020. He was a member of Albert Lea Post 56.

Zimmer, Darrell G., 87, Army veteran of the Korean War, died March 7, 2020. He served in the 18th Engineer Battalion in West Germany. He was a member of Redwood Falls Post 38.
The Gulf War is often remembered for its spectacular effective air strikes, an infamous tank battle, and the relatively low number of U.S. casualties. Although one of the quickest wars in U.S. history, the effects have contributed to lifelong, debilitating diseases for hundreds of thousands of Gulf War veterans. Still today, researchers are trying to figure out the causes of undiagnosed and medically unexplained multi-chronic illnesses Gulf War veterans suffer from.

How it went down
Sometime in July 1990, Iraq’s leader “Hussein” delivered a speech accusing neighboring nation Kuwait of siphoning crude oil from the Ar-Rumaylah oil fields located along their shared borders. Saddam insisted that Kuwait and Saudi Arabia canceled out $30 billion of Iraq’s foreign debt and accused them of conspiring to keep oil prices low to sell to Western oil-buying nations.

Shortly after Hussein’s confrontational speech, the dictator began assembling troops on Kuwait’s border and on Aug. 2, 1990, Saddam ordered the invasion of Kuwait. Alarmed by these actions, Arab powers like Saudi Arabia and Egypt called on the United States and other Western nations to help mediate the situation, which initiated Operation Desert Shield. Hussein disobeyed U.N. Security Council oil demands to withdraw from Kuwait and on Jan. 17, 1991, the Persian Gulf War began with a massive U.S.-led air offensive known as Operation Desert Storm.

In addition to the dominating air offensive, the battle of 73 Easting was fought on Feb. 26, 1991, the battle was later described in a documentary as “the last great tank battle of the 20th century.” After 42 days of relentless attacks by the allied coalition in air and on the ground, U.S. President George H.W. Bush declared a ceasefire on Feb. 28, by that time, most Iraqi forces in Kuwait had either surrendered or fled.

The last U.S. troops who participated in the ground war returned home on June 13, 1991. In all, about 697,000 U.S. troops had been deployed to the Gulf region during the conflict.

VA estimates that as much as 44 percent (306,680) of veterans who served in the Persian Gulf War from 1990 to 1991 have medically undiagnosed illnesses known as Gulf War syndrome. Because so many Gulf War veterans had these unexplained illnesses shortly after returning home, in 1994 Congress passed the Persian Gulf War Veterans’ Benefit Act allowing VA to pay compensation to veterans suffering from “undiagnosed illnesses.”

With help from The American Legion, Congress added “chronic multi-symptom illnesses” to the presumptive list for Gulf War veterans in 2001.

VA pays compensation to veterans who exhibit objective indications of a chronic qualifying disability like undiagnosed illness (UDI) or medically unexplained chronic multi-symptom illness (MUCMI). Examples include chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia, joint pain, sleep disturbances and functional gastrointestinal disorders. If a veteran has a UDI or MUCMI, they do not need to prove a nexus (relationship) with service if they served in the Gulf War.

The American Legion is唯 the national veterans organization to create a VA’s Special Chair to oversee the benefits for the Gulf War veterans.

Veteran on the corner
On March 13, at the corner of 11th Street and Jackson Street in St. Paul, B. was a veteran. He said he was homeless after returning from a freeway — there was a veteran holding a sign saying that he was homeless.

He began singing “Gimme Shelter” by the Rolling Stones. He said he knew about MACV and said he was wondering about having shelter would take away his anger.

“I’m sorry. What do you mean?” I asked.

He repeated himself, as if saying it twice makes it clearer. Still, it’s hard to help someone who doesn’t want your kind of help. I decided the panhandler either A. was not really homeless or B. was not really a veteran. I pulled onto the street and got on the freeway.

Veteran on a bench
In D.C., on March 8, I walked from the White House to the Washington Monument and during a pandemic. I started calling everything and every veteran’s service officer. It has to be hard to be a veteran employment specialist or a housing specialist or any number of positions helping veterans.

One day stands out. I went to look for the funny story. I tapped his toe with my toe and said, “Buddy check. What’s going on?”

He showed me his belly, and it was purple on one side. He was thinking it was related to serving in the Army Chemical Corps at Fort McClellan in Alabama. He was killing time until he could return to a homeless shelter that evening. I asked if there was a shelter program just for veterans in the nation’s capital, and he knew of none. I watched his belongings so he could get a nearby restroom. He lay is frustrated by the VA, and I encouraged him to report. I said I would help him with his next swell of swelling that was keeping him in the VA hospital longer, so the housing problem wasn’t as immediate. Still, it was going to become an issue once his swelling ends.

I needed to connect my guy to his Vets, but my guy decided he didn’t want help. He said he was sick and tired of talking to people who claimed to help. He had been tapped into too many fakers. I said what the differences of giving help from your home and getting help from his shelter for veterans? Besides, you’re a veteran, and you deserve any help because you paved your country.

All he had to do is pick up the phone and ask for the operator and pretend to speak with this person. I explained how easy it was. All of this was over Face-Book Messenger.

You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make him drink. I don’t know whether he picked up the phone, but I hope he did. In-person help is more effective than far-away help.

So, the tale of what direct veteran helpers go through. I’m nobody but a communications guy. They are the heroes. Let’s give them a big thanks next time we see them.

Tim Engstrom is the director of communications for The American Legion Department of Minnesota. He can be reached at tengstrom@mnlegion.org.
DEC: American Legion can stand out as ‘a sane voice in the wilderness’

Continued from Page 1

encouraged posts to be involved in their communities while staying safe. He cited National Commander Bill Oxford, who mentioned Hayfield Post 330 in his coronavirus updates. The Post provided toilet paper to the elderly. (See Oxford’s comments in the Legionnaire’s main COVID-19 story.)

Resolution

The Department Executive Committee on March 21 dissolved the Education and Training Committee, which began in 2017, and established a replacement called the Training Committee. The Training Committee will have eight members and two subcommittees — one for Legion College and one for MyLegion.org.

Five of the eight members will serve on the Legion College Subcommitte and three on the MyLegion.org Subcommittee, each with an annual rotation of appointments.

The resolution emerged from the three-person Department Training Ad Hoc Committee. During discussion on the motion, it was noted the subcommittees would meet more frequently than the larger full committee.

In times of crisis, watch for the helpers

Hello American Legion Family,

I know these are hard times. I know some of you are stuck at home. I know some of you are worried about what is going to happen next.

We have hoarding going on, and certain people are not taking this thing seriously, but I also see many of you stepping up. It does my heart good to see many of you in the Legion Family putting others above yourself.

A very dear friend of the Legion Family recently passed away. Patty Swanson was the reason I joined The American Legion.

I was down and couldn’t see much of a future, but Patty saw something in me and told me that I would feel better if I just started doing things for others. She told me to forget about my troubles and concentrate on others. I didn’t believe her, but I promised her I would give it a try.

She was right. I soon realized that not only did I feel better, but it also made me realize how truly blessed my life was. She will be missed dearly, and I will always be in her debt.

Even Mr. Rogers said in times of crisis to look for the helpers. When I see those in the news who are helping others, and those who are forgetting their own problems in order to make someone else’s life better, it warms my heart.

Please, if you can, find a way to help others. If you need help, don’t be afraid to reach out. Be kind to one another, stay healthy, and look out for others.

And of course: “Wash your hands.”

Paul Hassing is the director of the American Legion Riders for the Department of Minnesota.

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Judge advocate reviews Minnesota executive orders

Editor’s note: This was written on March 20, 2020. TheJudge Advocate General Keith Eilison’s March 13 warning: “With the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases rising in Minnesota, scammers are increasingly preying on Minnesotans by attempting to sell them bogus products or unproven treatments, as well as attempting to trick them into revealing their sensitive personal or financial information. “See COVID-19 story for visitor policy.” If any Legion member hears of any scams aimed at the elderly, particularly related to the pandemic, contact him and he will report it to the Minnesota American Legion Attorney General’s Office, he said in his report to the DEC.

Colby’s full report is available for download at mle gion.org on the “COVID-19 Update” page.

Colby cited attorney General Keith Eilison’s March 13 warning: “With the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases rising in Minnesota, scammers are increasingly preying on Minnesotans by attempting to sell them bogus products or unproven treatments, as well as attempting to trick them into revealing their sensitive personal or financial information.”

Unemployment claims as a result of the pandemic will not factor into future unemployment tax rates for employers.

He noted the rules for visiting Minnesota Veterans Homes do not ban visitors from end-of-life situations but have considerably authority to deny admission to work or volunteer and can isolate residents in their rooms, if needed. Personal visits via phone and video chat are allowed. See COVID-19 story for visitor policy.

A very dear friend of the Legion Family recently passed away. Judith Ganelius, adjutant of Post 182 in Elk River and her husband, Farrell, are Air Force veterans who are in their 80s living in Big Fork. We talked about the pandemic and I asked them how they and their Post members were doing and if they needed anything.

Her response made me chuckle. She said that they were fine and staying put, and they had plenty of supplies. She told me they were busy painting a room in their home. Then she told me that Farrell went out to the garage and grabbed some toilet paper they had stored. Farrell came in and handed her three rolls of toilet paper and said that they needed to be careful about how much they use because they only had a hundred rolls left.

We both laughed and thanked me for calling to check on them and told me to pass the word to Larry Poincliff of Hibbing Post 222. Larry is an Army veteran who also runs the Veterans Community Thrift Store in Hibbing Proceeds help veterans in the area.

The store has been closed since March 17 to protect workers and is planning a meeting on March 30 to determine the possibility of re-opening. In the interim, he is organizing posts in the 8th District and then moving on to our unit president to see how they are doing and how we can help them assist their members.

This project is ongoing so please reach out to your membership and to the families who have members deployed. Together we can ride through this pandemic and emerge kinder and stronger for God and Country.

Jennifer Gedney Havlick is the membership director for the 8th District and a past vice commander for the Department of Minnesota.

Havlick is a member of Two Harbors Post 109.

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In times of crisis, watch for the helpers

Legion Riders

Paul Hassing

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A screenshot of a video chat on Facebook Messenger.

Judit Ganelius, adjutant of Post 182 in Elk River, Judith and her husband, Farrell, are Air Force veterans who are in their 80s living in Big Fork. We talked about the pandemic and I asked them how they and their Post members were doing and if they needed anything.

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President Lincoln, in one of his final acts, created soldiers’ homes, and they were the first effort to care for soldiers after wars. They remain part of America today, he said.

He said veteran suicide is preventable and said the VA intends to launch a national roadmap of suicide prevention. It will provide resources to Legion Posts on the local level.

Wilkie noted that even Audie Murphy, the most decorated soldier of World War II, slept with a pistol under his pillow and would wake up in a sweat each night. He said mental health is a very important aspect of taking care of veterans.

He hopes to use digital technology to reduce paperwork hassles for veterans, ending the sight of veterans carrying around 800-page medical records and reducing “guessing” by hometown or VA doctors.

Wilkie quoted President Ronald Reagan, who said, when giving the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Gen. Mathew Ridgway: “Heroes come when they are needed; great men step forward when courage seems in short supply.”

Legionnaires from across the country met with their lawmakers or their aides.

Department Vice Commander Bill Brockberg of Worthington Post 5, like all others, ran through the Legion’s legislative agenda. He visited with Rep. Jim Hagedorn’s aide, Andrew Lutz, who himself is a veteran.

• Presumption of exposure when it comes to burn pits and toxic exposures. This particularly matters to veterans of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

• Health care for women veterans and victims of sexual trauma.

“Trying to get them into the VA is something that needs to be emphasized,” Brockberg said.

Lutz said his office has been working with the VA to ensure that the Vet Centers in Minnesota in no way can serve all the veterans who would benefit from their services.

Wolfsteller added the third-party care goes through Minnesota-based Optum, too.

Help end veteran homelessness.

Protect the G.I. Bill.

End declassification of the U.S. flag.

Support the VA’s suicide-prevention efforts.

Reaffirm commitments to allies.

Fully fund the national defense.

Provide support for Gold Star families.

Expand Vet Centers in Minnesota.

The VA runs Vet Centers, which provide readjustment counseling to veterans who have experienced combat, and their families, on a walk-in basis without it being part of their VA medical record. They also expose veterans to other VA services.

Wolfsteller said the third Vet Centers in Minnesota in no way can serve all the veterans who would benefit from their services.

Not take disability benefits out of military retirement pension. This also was not in the national legislative agenda, but it was an item Brockberg would like to see fixed. He said he is rated less than 50 percent disabled by the VA, and his disability is subtracted from his retirement.

Wolfsteller added, “We like to say if a veteran has a full pension, he or she should get the full benefits.”

Conversations like this were repeated through the halls of Congress.

One such talk was with Rep. Collin Peterson, who met with Denise Milton of Bigley Post 16 and NEC Man Bill Barbknecht of Underwood Post 489. They thanked Peterson for sending a letter to VA Secretary Wilkie calling for the expansion of Vet Centers in Minnesota.

Peterson is on the House Veterans Affairs Committee, a role he garnered after Tim Walz took office. He chairs the committee, so they used the chairman’s office.

Legion members Denise Milton and Bill Barbknecht meet with Rep. Collin Peterson at the Longworth House Office Building. Peterson’s main D.C. office, however, is in the Rayburn House Office Building. He had just come out of a meeting of the House Agriculture Committee, which he chairs, so they used the chairman’s office.

Congressman Collin Peterson met with Minnesota Legionnaires from across the country for a reception March 9 commemorating the Japan-U.S. alliance.

From left are National Commander Bill Oxford, Provider of the Year Mary Ballard of Oklahoma, Physician of the Year Megan Press of Minnesota, VA Secretary Rob Wilkie and American Legion VA&R Committee Chairman Ralph Bozella of Colorado on March 10 at the Washington Hilton.
Recruiting advice: ‘Treat young veterans with respect’

WASHINGTON — When recruiting young veterans to join The American Legion, Legionnaires have to do more than merely sign them up, said Past National Commander Dan Ludwig.

“They also need to treat them with respect and hear their ideas. “If you want to live in yesterday, you ain’t got no future,” Ludwig said.

Three past national commanders addressed Department commanders and adjutants of the Midwest Region during a session midday Sunday, March 8, to talk about membership.

Ludwig, of Red Wing, Minnesota, said Legionnaires are asking a lot of young veterans — carry on the missions and programs of The American Legion. Posts in Minnesota that are doing well are the ones blending young and old well.

“They treat them with respect and great things will happen,” he said.

David K. Rehbein, a past national commander from Ames, Iowa, said tackling the large problem of membership is a big task.

The best thing a leader can do is, in leading by example, is do a bite-size portion.

“What part of that problem can I affect?” Rehbein asked.

Past National Commander Jimmie Foster said young veterans indeed want to join The American Legion.

“Treat people like you want to be treated,” Foster said. “If you’re positive, it’s going to come around.”

Foster presently is the adjutant of the Department of Kansas but was from Alaska when he was national commander.

National Vice Commander Bruce C. Feuerbach of Keystone, Iowa, encouraged members to display pride in The American Legion.

“We’ve got to have brand awareness with our grade,” he said.

He called for departments to have a strategic plan and focus on teamwork.

“You need a large membership team,” Feuerbach said.

When signing a young veteran, he said, be sure to mentor them, too. Tell prospective joiners about the service officers and how the Legion helps other veterans and pushes for their benefits, he said.

VA suicide prevention doc: Can suicide really be halted?

WASHINGTON — The director of suicide prevention for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs struggles with the notion that suicide is preventable.

“I have a love/hate relationship with that saying,” Matt Miller told a room of Legionnaires at the Washington Conference of The American Legion on Monday, March 9.

As the chief of mental health at Vance Air Force Base in Enid, Oklahoma, Miller spoke with the airmen about suicide prevention every six weeks. That included a good friend, a pilot named John, who, unfortunately, died by suicide using a firearm.

The death made Miller feel like all of his efforts were for nothing.

He left the military, grew his hair out and holes himself up indoors.

One day, he watched “60 Minutes” on CBS. It had a segment on veteran suicide that was not encouraging.

“That was a eye-opener for me,” Miller said.

He thought he could either get off of his ass and do something or he could wallow in questions and guilt.

“I figured the best way to honor John was to do something,” Miller said.

He applied to work for the VA and got a call from Saginaw, Michigan. Google, he said, wasn’t kind to Saginaw, but he and the staff there liked the place. He was the chief of mental health there.

“We called it Sagainawesome,” he said.

Now, preventing suicide is not just his day job. He said he felt John’s death was the result of an impulsive choice, and he shared with the Legionnaires the three fronts of the VA’s efforts to prevent suicide.

1. Community-based coalition, where everyone is paying attention down to the county and city levels.

2. Veteran-to-veteran coalition, where veterans are tending to buddies.

3. Governor’s challenge of raising awareness and communication.

He said the time between the decision to die by suicide and the act of suicide ranges between five and 60 minutes. Efforts will focus on introducing a time and space between the two.

“Lethal means safety” is a term for limiting access to lethal means of self-harm, which has been a proven way to reduce suicides, Miller said.

That particularly regards firearms, without impinging on the Second Amendment, Miller said, but practicing safety and security.

Veteran suicide by firearms in 2017 among male veterans was 70.5 percent. Among female veterans, it was 43.2 percent. He said people tell him, “Matt, they will just find another way to do it.”

Miller said that is untrue and that 90 percent never attempt suicide after an intervention.

There were 6,139 veteran suicides in 2019, up from 6,010 in 2018.

The rate of suicide was 2.2 times higher among the non-veteran population. The rate of suicide was 1.3 times higher among male veterans compared with the non-veteran population.

Male veterans ages 18-34 experienced the highest rates of suicide, while 55 and older experienced the highest count of suicide. (Counts and rates are different approaches, and, of course, there are more veterans over 55 than between 18 and 34.)

“Both need careful attention,” Miller said.

He noted veteran suicide is set against the larger context of suicide as a problem among the general population. Suicide, Miller said, is now the second leading cause of death in the United States.

Suicides in the United States in 2005 was 31,610. Suicides in 2017 was 45,390. That’s a 43 percent hike.

Veteran suicides in 2005 was 5,787. Veteran suicides in 2017 was 6,139. That’s up 6.1 percent.

American Legion members from Minnesota gather March 8 for a caucus on membership and a photograph. Front, from left, are Patti Coleman of Circle Pines, Denise Milton of Bagley, Norma Tramm of Cold Spring, Carl Moon of Walker, Heather Larson of St. Paul. Middle, from left, are Peggy Moon of Walker, Tom Schottenbauer of Minnetonka, Mark Dvorak of New Prague, Eugene Leifeld of Zumbrota, Robert Hart of Oak Park Heights, Dan Williams of Bastrop, Texas, Mike Maxa of Montgomery. Back, from left, are Dan Ludwig of Red Wing, Bill Barkbnecht of Battle Lake, Bill Brockberg of Worthington, Curt Norenborg of Roseville, Jeremy Wolfsteller of Plymouth, Wilson Spence of Duluth, Dan Tengwall of Chaska.
Legionnaires from across the country listen to National Commander Bill Oxford on March 10.

Oxford: Time to ‘Act Legion’
National commander motivates Legionnaires

By Tim Engstrom

WASHINGTON — James W. “Bill” Oxford called on Legionnaires to “Act Legion” during the Commander’s Call at the Washington Conference on March 10.

“You may recall that last year one of our agenda items was the Legion Act,” he said. “But this year, instead of the Legion Act, I’m asking you to Act Legion.”


That means reminding members of Congress and their staff members there is no higher calling than the care of veterans, active-duty military and their families. This includes paying the members of the U.S. Coast Guard during government shutdowns.

Acting Legion, Oxford said, means protecting and improving the G.I. Bill Act, closing the 90/10 loophole, which encouraged for-profit colleges to count G.I. Bill-enrolled veterans as private money, when, in fact, it was taxpayer dollars, in calculating Title IV funding. The colleges developed sham marketing schemes aimed at vets.

“You will hear me tell Congress tomorrow that these benefits are not some sort of entitlement program. They are earned. They have been earned through sweat, sacrifice and blood,” Oxford said.

Too often, he said, the colleges would award false degrees or worthless certificates, and veterans would find themselves without careers and their college benefits drained. In some cases, the schools actually shut down.

Acting Legion means amending the Constitution to allow Congress to protect the flag — the flag used to cover the caskets of fallen members of the military, he said.

Acting Legion means advocating for the Blue Water Navy veterans and their long-overdue disability benefits.

“Acting Legion means treating all veterans equality, regardless of race, creed, gender or orientation,” Oxford said. “Acting Legion is ending military sexual trauma.

“We must condemn all acts of sexual violence and support the brave men and women who have been exploited through shameful acts of military sexual trauma,” he said. Acting Legion, he said, means continuing the serve at home, whether it is through mentoring youth or supporting fellow veterans. This includes supporting the commander’s project, the Veterans and Childrens Foundation, which has a $25 million fundraising goal.

It means supporting and saluting the Greatest Generation, the millions of Americans who won the bloodiest war in world history 75 years ago, he said.

Acting Legion means supporting and saluting the Greatest Generation, the millions of Americans who won the bloodiest war in world history 75 years ago, he said.
Go big or go home
The Minnesota Military Museum to move out of Camp Ripley

By Tim Engstrom

The Minnesota Military Museum has existed in a building — actually several buildings — at Camp Ripley for 40 years. If all goes as planned, the museum will have a major new home in a few years.

“We are in the process to launch a capital campaign to build a new museum,” said Executive Director Randal Dietrich.

More than 80,000 artifacts are stored in a dozen buildings throughout the Minnesota National Guard’s training facility near Little Falls. Dietrich would like to get many of them out of the dark and into the light.

“Camp Ripley has been good to us to provide this space to use,” he said. “A new museum would bring the collection under a single roof and allow the Minnesota Military Museum to share more stories, Dietrich said.

Plus, building it outside of Camp Ripley most likely would increase visitation, because it would be outside the security gates. He noted how many civilians don’t realize they can enter Camp Ripley, at least prior to the COVID-19 restrictions. Presently, the museum is closed, like all museums statewide.

The plans for a new building would offer 42,000 square feet of space and show more exhibits. For example, the museum plans to show the post-9/11 experiences as part of a mobile tour next year, and then the exhibit could have a place at the new location.

Presently, the museum occupies 24,000, but most of that is storage. Only 6,000 square feet is for public viewing inside a 90-year-old battalion headquarters.

“This aging and limited exhibition space does not allow for veteran stories from across the state and all the branches to be fully represented,” says the brochure on the proposed new museum.

The new location would be on the eastern side of the Mississippi River on a 32-acre strip of land across from the Minnesota State Veterans Cemetery between Minnesota Highway 371 and the BNSF Railroad that aligns Morrison County Road 76. The south end of the land abuts Minnesota Highway 115, which leads to Camp Ripley.

(By the way, Camp Ripley is on the western side of the river.)

The land had been a sunflower field with a $30,000 value and was donated by Bob Anderson, a veteran.

With the new site along three roads, Dietrich said, it no doubt will increase exposure and traffic.

Dietrich said the main motivator behind moving the Minnesota Military Museum is the FAA. The museum is in the crash zone for the Ray S. Miller Army Airfield at Camp Ripley. As cool as it is to see low-flying C-130 aircraft when visiting the museum, it also presents a danger. The FAA has directed the museum to move.

The plan is to have a 600-by-200-foot parade grounds with review stand and reflecting pools for each military branch. A trail called the Gold Star Trail will wind through the property.

There will be a court of honor, a veterans plaza, space for tanks and other military equipment.

Inside, the museum will offer galleries for wars from the Global War on Terror to the Civil War — in addition to the home-front efforts. There will be an art gallery, classrooms, a theater, research library, exhibit galleries, a resource center and, of course, a welcome desk.

“This is your dad’s story, your grandfather’s story or your mom’s story,” Dietrich said.

The names of all 87 counties will be etched into the walls.

“The intent of the site layout is to conceptually convey the entire spectrum of the Minnesota veteran experience,” states the brochure.

The price tag of construction is $13.86 million. The price tag of relocation is $25,000. Plus it needs $1 million for indoor elements and another $1 million for outdoor items. That rings up to $16 million.

Dietrich wants to make sure Minnesota is able to preserve stories of the past generations while being able to carry forward stories of present and future generations.

The goal is to break ground in August 2021 and open on Veterans Day 2022.

An architectural rendering shows the proposed parade grounds with mobile artifacts nearby, such as Humvees and tanks.
Long-haul trucker Sharon Davis of Tennessee found herself in Minnesota without a place to go.

**By Tim Engstrom**

MINNEAPOLIS — Imagine suffering from a life-threatening health problem in an unfamiliar state, and then the hospital kicks you out on the street to fend for yourself because you lack proper insurance.

That’s the situation long-haul trucker and Army veteran Sharon L. Davis of Henry County, Tennessee, found herself this winter. The American Legion, the Minnesota Assistance Council for Veterans and the Minnesota VA Medical Center came to her rescue after the Mayo Clinic apparently left her in a lurch.

“They should have called someone and transferred her care to the VA Medical Center in Minneapolis,” said Jeremy Wolfsteller, service officer for The American Legion Department of Minnesota. In 1978, Davis could not get into auto-mechanic school after attending Madison West High School in Wisconsin, so she entered the Army and, after basic at Fort McClellan, Alabama, she worked as a track-vehicle mechanic. During advanced training at Fort Knox, there were 63 men and three women.

A little 5-foot-tall woman working on big, menacing machines was quite a picture.

Davis found a beau and went the stay-at-home-mom route while her husband continued to serve, three sons born at Fort Hood and two daughters at Würzburg, Germany, before splitting in 2006. They had settled in Henry County, Tennessee, where she drove a school bus and did odd jobs.

Eventually, she picked a new line of work, though she loved the schoolkids.

“They pay you a fortune to haul Cheerios. They pay you nothing to haul children,” Davis said.

In the summer of 2016, she drove a straight truck and fell in love with the over-the-road lifestyle — the freedom, the people, the places. She was on the road so much, there was no need for renting an apartment. The truck was her home.

To get a Class A commercial driver’s license, she worked for cooperation out of Springfield, Missouri, for a year, now driving a semi. Then she moved Stoughton, Wisconsin, where she would be near loved ones who needed her help and work for a Green Bay paper hauler.

Unfortunately, close to three months later, a wind gust caught her empty trailer while she was crossing black ice, and it spun her rig 180 degrees.

“I was only going 48 mph when the wind caught me,” Davis said. “They had to let me go because I was under 90 days.”

Lawrence Transportation in Rochester hired her because she was a veteran, a woman, mature and didn’t mind life away from home, she said. Davis began on March 1, 2019.

Fast forward to Jan. 24 of this year. Davis woke up at 3 a.m. in her truck’s sleeper cab at the Lawrence yard in excruciating pain. She called a taxi, and the cab driver called 911. Five police officers came, along with fire rescue and an ambulance, to bring her to the Mayo Clinic.

It turns out she was processing a large kidney stone, and a doctor determined her kidneys were 50 percent full of stones. She had a hernia, too. Mayo did a minimally invasive operation; put bags on each ankle with tubes to her kidney to drain fluid, and she was told her kidneys needed time to heal.

A doctor came to discuss her insurance. She explained, she had been told she had VA Health Care. The doctor explained the Mayo Clinic does not accept VA. In other words, it is not part of the third-party contract administered through Optum.

“They said to see if they can work out financing and that we would do a follow-up in two weeks,” Davis said. “After that, it was like a light bulb switched.”

She speaks quite a lot about the nurses, but she said otherwise she felt ignored after that insurance conversation. Then she was discharged with her bags and tubes and no advice.

It was Jan. 27, a Monday. “Mayo has been known to do that to veterans because veterans are not part of their nebulous,” Wolfsteller said.

Davis took an Uber to her track at Lawrence yard. On Tuesday, her company allowed her to drive a company vehicle to Olmsted County’s veterans service officer so she could transfer her VA care from Tennessee to Minnesota and get a fix of her DD214 from records at the Paris County Court House.

(Editor’s note: Kids, when you exit the military, bring your DD214 to your local courthouse to become a permanent record.)

Davis — clearly a let’s-go kind of worker, atrait common among veterans — was back on the road, doing short hauls, for less than a week. She made it to Ogden, Utah, and fought a snowstorm on I-80 in Wyoming on the way to Brownsville, Tennessee.

“When I got in late to Brownsville, I wasn’t feeling too swift,” Davis said. “When I woke up on Tuesday, Feb. 11, I thought I had the flu.”

After delivering a load to Indianapolis, she came back three hours at Rochester on the Wisconsin-Illinois border. She got in late on Feb. 14, and she called the Rochester VA office to inquire about the paperwork. That was inconclusive, but she advised her to call the VA in Minneapolis. She got back to Rochester around 5 p.m.

A very good Samaritan paid for an Uber to get Davis to the Minneapolis VA Medical Center. When she arrived, they had her in the emergency room within five minutes.


“I felt like I was finally getting cared for,” Davis said. “I had a team of four doctors and daily they would come and update me.”

On Feb. 20, a doctor told her she would be discharged. Davis said the doc felt really bad because she had nowhere to go. A nurse helped her download the Airbnb app, and Davis managed to find a place up the light rail line for that night.

But she needed to figure out how to get there and needed to find housing for beyond that night. The VA information desk suggested the library. A supervisor at the library suggested she speak with Jeremy Wolfsteller of The American Legion.

Davis came to the fourth floor, found his office and walked in.

“I could tell by the look on her face she was distressed,” Wolfsteller said.

It was getting late in the day, and he wanted her to have time for errands. He provided her with meal cards and gift cards for food and clothing. She headed off while he worked on her situation. By 4 p.m., Neal Loidolt, president of the Minnesota Assistance Council for Veterans, had found space for Davis within MACV’s new women’s transitional housing.

The next morning, Wolfsteller let Davis know there was a place, and a little after 1 p.m., Davis was at the MACV main office at 1000 University Ave. They took her to the housing.

“I was in awe of all of this,” she said. “Before the Legion and MACV, I was preparing for the worst. I had a piece inside of me that said I was going to be OK. The way I ended up getting to Jeremy was nothing short of a miracle.”

She stayed at the transitional housing with three other women veterans, and though they had other reasons for being there. They talked by connecting about life, men, kids.

“It was a great environment,” Davis said.

Once she was in MACV’s hands, its staff did everything from carrying her bags to assist her with paperwork, in addition to giving her transit tokens to get to the hospital.

“I have a difficult time asking for help,” she said.

David Nguyen, statewide operations manager for MACV, said: “This is an example of what homelessness looks like in Minnesota. Nobody just wakes up and becomes homeless. It stems from multiple situations. Those often are mental health, addiction, physical health, job loss, legal issues or a medical barrier, he said.

Nguyen said MACV works on the root causes in an effort to prevent housing for homeless veterans.

“If a veteran remains engaged with us, we will remain engaged with them to the bitter end,” he said.

Davis praised Minnesota’s response to preventing a veteran from becoming homeless.

“To be a homeless veteran in a strange state, you are doing pretty good,” Davis said. “I can’t say the same for every state.”

Davis was welcome to stay at the women’s transitional housing until her VA care is done and she can get back on the road. Lawrence Transportation has assured her she will have a job as soon as she is medically able to drive a commercial vehicle.

VA doctors zapped the stones in her right kidney on March 23, and further procedures are in the works. Wolfsteller used American Legion funds available to him to provide emergency financial assistance and to make sure she will have transportation on the rail line and back to Rochester when the time comes.

“This 1960 Chevy is going to get all her repairs done, and then she is going to hit the road,” Davis said.

American Legion Department of Minnesota Service Officer assists veteran Sharon Davis in his office at the VA Medical Center in Minneapolis.
The Minnesota American Legion Foundation Veterans Assistance Fund 85 (Fund 85) is a fund which has given a lot of donations to Minnesota veterans’ needs which are not funded with traditional funding but still needed.

Some of the donations have been to VA hospitals, State Veterans Homes in Minneapolis, Hastings, Fergus Falls, LaVerne and Silver Bay, Minnesota. Additionally, the Foundation has given funds to the two Minnesota Veteran Cemeteries at Little Falls and Preston, Minnesota. Funding has also been given to the Armed Forces Services Center at MSP Airport.

Minnesota has three new Veteran Homes which, despite the recent setback, will be coming in a few years to Montevideo, Preston and Bemidji. Funds of $5,000 each have been committed for their flagpoles.

The Minnesota American Legion Foundation (which is an IRS-approved 501C-3) accepts donations from post gambling funds (Account 85), other post funds, SAL, Auxiliary Units funds, individual donations, trusts, bequests and corporate donations.

Minnesota veteran employment stats

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<th>Year</th>
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The 10 worst states are Ohio, Maryland, Louisiana, Mississippi, New York, Wyoming, West Virginia, Indiana, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania.

The 10 best states are New Jersey, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and South Dakota. Veteran-owned businesses are most prominent in Oklahoma and South Carolina.

The U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs spent more than $180 billion on various programs for veterans in fiscal year 2018, the most recent year for which the agency has published data.

**Helping People**

First, the good news: Veteran unemployment in America these days is much better than it was during the Great Recession. The unemployment rate for veterans in December was 2.8 percent, while among non-veterans it was higher, at 3.3 percent, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

During the Great Recession, joblessness among Iraq and Afghanistan veterans was around 13 to 15 percent, with general veterans around 8.5 to 10 percent. The overall unemployment rate peaked at 10 percent in October 2009. (It was at 4.7 before the recession.)

This is another way to look at things: Veteran unemployment has fallen by more than 300 percent between January 2011 and December 2019.

Now the bad news: That success is not equal among all states.

Inmyarea.com studied which states are best for hiring veterans. It considered joblessness, government hiring, median income, veteran business ownership and job training investment per veteran.

The 10 best states are New Jersey, Alaska, Virginia, California, Massachusetts, Maryland, South Dakota, Georgia, Rhode Island and Connecticut.

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Continued from Page 1
and restaurants to close effective 5 p.m. March 27.

Legion, VFW and Amvets Posts operating rules are unaltered. The American Legion Baseball Championship, planned for July 21-26, has been cancelled.

American Legion Baseball
The American Legion Baseball 2020 schedule for national and local remains in place, including the American Legion World Series Youth National Competition on Aug. 13-18 in Shelby, North Carolina. All activities are subject to the respective state restrictions. State and national Legion baseball committees are monitoring developments.

The Department of Minnesota Base-

No-visitors policy

The Department Convention slated for June 5-6, New Ulm Post 43

The American Legion Department of Minnesota
American Legion employees who work at the Department of Minnesota offices at the Veterans Service Building in St. Paul and at the VA Medical Center and federal Whipple Whistle Stop in Minneapolis began working from home the week of March 23, though a few began the process earlier. Email and voicemail are encouraged.

Have a claim question? Department Service Officer Jeremy Wolfsteller can be reached at 612-467-3849. His voice-mail forwards to his email account, which is jwolfsteller@mnlegion.org. Adjutant Mike Maxa is assessing presentation recommendation each Friday to determine next steps.

Commander Dvorak on March 13 announced the cancellation of the Appreciation Rally that had been planned for March 21 in La Crescent. The Department Convention slated for July, as well as other meetings, remain planned as scheduled.

Decisions to cancel District-level meetings and Post-level meetings are at the discretion of the respective commanders. No District conventions have been cancelled. All Districts are in late May or early June. Commanders are monitoring events.

Here is a schedule of District conventions:
1st District: May 16, Austin Post 91
2nd District: June 5-6, New Ulm Post 43
3rd District: May 30, North St. Paul Post 59
4th District: June 6, Holliday Inn Bloomington Airport South
6th District: June 6-4, at Nisswa Post 627
7th District: June 6, at Ashby Post 75
8th District: June 6, Hibbing Post 222
9th District: June 12-13, Warren Post 27
10th District: June 6, Osseo Post 172

Joint Testimonial Dinner
The Testimonial Dinner Department of Minnesota Commander Mark Dvorak has been rescheduled for Saturday, June 20, instead of April 18.

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The Department of Minnesota Base-
 CONTRACTED THE VIRUS AND ARE
SCAMS TO AVOID USING CURRENT
PRODUCTS, BUT IF PEOPLE ARE TRYING TO
CONFIRM AND VERIFY IT’S THEM.
THEM, YOU’LL BE UPSET AND DO
A GIFT CARD ONLINE, IMMEDIATELY,
AND YOU DON’T THINK TWICE WHEN
YOU DON’T THINK TWICE WHEN
YOU ARCTIC SICKNESS (LIKE TISSUES OR FACE MASKS).
YOU SHOULD KEEP YOUR MONEY FOR ITEMS YOU
SHARED ON SOCIAL MEDIA WITH TEXTS.
YOU RECEIVE A FALSE EMAIL WHICH LOOKS LegITIMATE. IT READS
AS IF IT WAS SENT FROM THE CENTER FOR
DISEASE CONTROL (CDC) OR THE WORLD HEALTH
ORGANIZATION (WHO). THE EMAIL MIGHT LINK
TO A PRODUCT THAT WILL “HELP” YOU.
HOWEVER, THE EMAIL IS ACTUALLY A SCAM AND NOT SENT BY
THE ORGANIZATION IT APPEARS TO BE FROM.

FAMILY SCAMS OR EMAILS
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The principal of St. Paul’s Lutheran School receives the flag.

The folded flag is given to all veterans.

**The forgotten service**: Man recounts time in Merchant Marine

By Gabriel D. Lagarde
Brainerd Dispatch

BRAINERD — Decades of hard farm labor have done little to diminish the towering frame of the World War II veteran who — at 92 years old — looks uncommonly spry, like he simply shed off the years much as he doggedly soldiered through the dangers of war, the loss of his first wife in 1987 and 40 years of injustice for his comrades in the United States Merchant Marine.

That’s why Carl Eschenbacher, the retired farmer and part-time mail carrier from the hinterlands south of Brainerd, stopped by the Dispatch on Feb. 26 — the Merchant Marine. He’s subdued, a little wary of the camera while he sits in a chair, interlaces his large age-spotted hands and recounts his life in a calm, measured sort of way.

“When I went into it, I didn’t really know what it was like,” Eschenbacher said. “I thought it was more like a Coast Guard. But, you know, we got to the employment service and this friend of mine, he joined and he asked me if I wanted to go. I was talking it over and I said ‘Sure,’ so I went home to the folks and told them I wanted to join. Well, mom, she just fell apart.”

Signing up at the tender age of 17, Eschenbacher would serve from 1944 through 1947, criss-crossing the Atlantic at the tail end of World War II and continuing to serve after its conclusion in places like the Panama Canal, Rotterdam, Spain, Germany and Italy.

As a mixture of the military and private sector support, the Merchant Marine played a low-key, if vital, role for the armed services during World War II, functioning as auxiliary seamen to the U.S. Navy and manning the supply ships that served as the lifeblood for the United States and its allies in the trans-continental conflict.

Despite this, Merchant Marine veterans were not eligible for benefits until a court ruling in 1988 — more than 40 years after the end of World War II, which left about 2,500 remaining Merchant Marine veterans out of roughly 20,000 who took up the fight. Up until that time, Eschenbacher said, a small headstone next to a veterans cemetery was about as good as you could get as a Merchant Marine.

Still, Merchant Marines remain a “forgotten service,” said Eschenbacher, who pointed out that even at the Veteran’s Affairs Office in St. Cloud staff are unfamiliar with the Merchant Marine and often lump them together with the U.S. Marine Corps.

“I still get the Legion magazine and once in a while you’ll see somebody who served with the Merchant Marine, but it’s very seldom,” Eschenbacher said. “People just don’t remember the Merchant Marine.”

Eschenbacher suspects the unromantic role of the Merchant Marine as able-bodied seamen and suppliers is partially to blame for this lack of recognition, despite the inherent risk and danger of their work. Often vulnerable and unprotected on sluggish transport ships in the wide open ocean, hunted by German U-boats and Japanese bombers, more Merchant Marines died per capita than any branch of the armed forces, according to the U.S. Department of Defense.

“When the ship went down before they had convoys, there was nobody there to protect you,” Eschenbacher said. “Once in a while they’d save some, but most of the time it was the end for them. … There were a lot of ships sunk that we didn’t know about until we got into the war. Such a waste, you know?”

On the other hand, World War II marked the end of an era, as the following decades saw the emergence of non-American ships being contracted to ship military supplies at a cheaper rate than the Merchant Marine. And, as the decades passed, he said, the “forgotten service” continued to become more and more obscure to the public consciousness.

But, now, with United States National Maritime Day coming up on May 22, Eschenbacher said he hopes more recognition can be given the United States Merchant Marine and the paltry few World War II veterans who remain of that service.

Congressionally mandated commission: Women should be eligible for draft

By Stars and Stripes

A congressionally mandated commission recommended March 25 that women be eligible for the draft and required to sign up at 18.

Congress created the National Commission on Military, National and Public Service in 2017 to develop recommendations about the need for a military draft and how to foster an interest in all types of national service among young Americans. In their final report, which was shared with the Pentagon, White House and Congress this week, commissioners recommend extending selective service registration to women.

“Women are as likely as men to be qualified for military service,” said Debra Wada, vice chair of the commission and the former assistant secretary of the Army. “Ensuring they are part of the registration pool will only make sure we’re more prepared. It signals that all Americans may be expected to serve in a national emergency.”

Conscription into the military hasn’t been used in more than 45 years, but adult men are still required by law to sign up for selective service at 18. The commission proposed that Congress introduce legislation to amend the Military Selective Service Act to eliminate male-only registration. The policy change would expand draft eligibility to all Americans ages 18 to 26.

Over a period of nearly three years, commissioners held public meetings and hearings, spoke to people in 42 cities, consulted more than 530 organizations and collected 4,300 public comments. The topic of extending the draft to women “evoked a range of passionate and heartfelt views,” the commissioners wrote.

In the end, they decided the male-only military draft excludes women from a fundamental civic obligation, reinforces gender stereotypes about women’s roles and omits a skilled population from being called into military service during emergencies. The commission found that 29 percent of men and slightly more women, at 29.3 percent, are qualified to meet the initial physical and educational standards to serve in the U.S. military, Wada said.

“Ultimately it comes down to making sure that at a time of critical need, we have access to highly qualified individuals,” she said.

More than 224,000 women serve in the U.S. military.
Greetings from the mighty 1st District American Legion Family.

All we need to stay strong through all of this global COVID-19 pandemic is our willingness to be setting our schedules and then interrupting them, too. It is changing very fast and our commander in chief has to make some major changes.

Watch the websites mnlegion.org and mylegionfirst.org for updates. Sometimes change faster than they can be updated.

Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, most posts are closed temporarily.

Membership revitalization in Austin was a good sign that revitalization does work. The 1st District in Minnesota is in third place, less than 1 percent out of 1st place. Minnesota is in first place in the nation. Good job.

Check in on our veterans, see if they need assistance with anything.

The district convention is scheduled for May 16 in Austin at Post 91. Veterans Day on the Hill, planned for April 20, is cancelled. Pray for our deployed troops and their families. Thank you for your service and support.

God bless. For God and Country.

Hello to all of you. I would normally be telling you about the upcoming meetings and what a good time we had on the third Sunday visiting with fellow veterans at the VA Medical Center, but it has been cancelled until further notice.

Thanks again to Ken and Sandy Gibson for getting the word out so quickly. Thanks to all the Posts that keep meeting and or exceeding membership goals.

If any of you Post commanders or members have questions about membership, please contact your vice commanders or me; we shall do our best to answer them.

The RCCC meeting this month was well-attended, but we should be able to normally be telling you about the upcoming meetings and what a good time we had on the third Sunday visiting with fellow veterans at the VA Medical Center, but it has been cancelled until further notice.

Please remember my twin projects: Legionville can use current inmate campers and more money. The Armed Forces Service Center needs more and or exceeding membership goals. However, the AFSC suspended operations starting at 4 p.m. March 18 and hopes to reopen April 13. It is due to two factors: First, the military has cancelled all leaves, hence no traveling GIs; second, we can only keep our volunteers over 65 years of age, the prime age group for infection.

Hello, Legionnaires, The COVID-19 has sure had an effect on all of our lives, can cancel events and postponing others. We will all get through this trying time, just as we have in the past.

I urge Legionnaires to take precautions. You should consider a mask, social distancing, bars closing, events canceled or postponed, and or exceeding membership goals. Also, please consider a mask, social distancing, bars closing, events canceled or postponed, and or exceeding membership goals.

Is that not what this organization was founded on over 100 years ago?

Still Serving America.

Greetings from the 4th District.

We’re praying that you all are in good health and taking all precautions necessary to keep us safe. We have made the decision to cancel several functions so far.

With 1st Command­­er in Chief: March 22 pancake breakfast, April 4 President’s Dinner and Fund­­raiser, April 7 American Legion District assembly.

At last membership report we are still in last place. We can still phone the phones and mailings to get our numbers up.

Next up is the 5th District Testimonial at Post 1 on May 22 and the 6th District assembly at Post 1 on May 5, hosted by Northside Post 230.

By the time of these events, we’re hoping that there will be a let up of the coro­­navirus.

If any of you Post command­­ers or members have questions about membership, please contact your vice commanders or me; we shall do our best to answer them.

Greetings to the Legion Family.

Holy buckets, what a month! And it is only half over. Time change, Friday the 13th, full moon, coronavirus, home from a cruise with the flu, schools and bars closing, events canceled or postponed, and or exceed­­ing membership goals. To the older members, you have had your time and leadership to make good for this organization, but now is the time to take a step back and mentor the younger members that have the passion and desire to move up and help them make this the greatest organization everyone looks to for guidance.

To the older members, you have had your time and leadership to make good for this organization, but now is the time to take a step back and mentor the younger members that have the passion and desire to move up and help them make this the greatest organization everyone looks to for guidance.

Is that not what this organization was founded on over 100 years ago?

Still Serving America.

Greetings from the 7th District.

With all the news this past couple of weeks about health concerns and specifically the elderly people in your nation and communities and all of our veterans who may have underlying medical problems, we need to take all necessary precautions we can to maintain your health and the safety of everyone.

We as The American Legion have always been an organization that stands strong and united with one another through whatever may face us. Let’s pray for continued strength and encouragement one another through this time.

May God bless American Legion Family and bless this nation, and we emerge stronger than before.

My, have things changed since my last posting.

The governor and federal administration have decided to cancel or limit the very kind of meetings that we utilize regularly. We will try to complete our business as best as possible using various methods and limiting number of meetings.

We ad-hoc Bylaws Committee formed to review our bylaws and rules and regulations necessary to update them to present, and make changes to represent the present needs of our District and stay in line with the Department and National.

Legally, we still have our West Duluth Post, necessary to present the changes to the membership in the May newsletter (30 days maximum before voting on them at Convention). If you are interested, contact me, or come to West Duluth Post (check first).

May God bless each of you.
President's Column

Mary Hendrickson

Late March brought the world and each of us a new kind of normal: a need for social isolation, great concern for the health and safety of our family and friends, fears concerning our work status and economy. As we know, there are no precedents to learn from, guidebooks or crystal balls to predict the future for pandemics. First and foremost, we need to take care of ourselves and our families.

Community service is such a large part of the American Legion Auxiliary philosophy and agenda. If you are able, please check on your neighbors. They may need food supplies, medicine from the drugstore or something as simple as a “How are you doing?” telephone call.

We are a caring organization that always steps up when there need be no limits.

Looking back, the first three weeks of March were very busy ones for me. I enjoyed the Leadership Workshop led by 2nd Vice President and Leadership Chairman Mary Kangurus held at the Forest Lake American Legion Post. There was a nice turn out of Auxiliary members even though it was a Sunday morning.

I was very pleased to see several Junior Auxiliary members at this workshop. They were active participants and made me feel confident about the future of our organization.

Before the pandemic crisis arrived, my husband, Carl, and I were able to attend American Legion birthday parties in Brownville and Anoka. I had been to the Anoka Post two weeks earlier to attend the Minnesota American Legion Oratorical Contest.

All seven contestants were very good. This is a wonderful program — one we need to encourage more participation in as a part of our Auxiliary.

Good morning to all! As our country faces a health crisis, let us remember that the American Legion Auxiliary is a community of volunteers! Our veterans, military, their families, our fellow members and our communities need us now more than ever. If you or any of your members are able, please contact us so we can continue to serve them. Perhaps contacting an elderly member or neighbor that needs groceries or just needs to eat or toilet is needed help. Perhaps a younger person who needs help. Perhaps a young person in need of help.

Just because we’re staying at home, it doesn’t mean we can’t reach out to one another. You can call, text, FaceTime or even sing from a balcony or rooftop — whatever it takes.

This time is now to strengthen our organization, as Past National President Opal Glynn challenged us at our last session. Our upcoming Week of Caring and Sharing is April 1-7. Like the American Legion’s Buddy Checks, it adds that personal touch to reaching out to connect with community and former members.

Some checks made during this time at home, checking on your members, will count toward the Week of Caring and Sharing.

We realize with every thing going on, it will be difficult to get those rejoiners in to National. We will extend the deadline for Week of Caring and Sharing verification form to May 15 to allow extra time to get information entered, and we will count any member that is rejoined in ALAMIS (American Legion Auxiliary Management Information System) between April 1 and May 15.

We are aware that membership processing has slowed down due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We are NOT concerned. We know that the membership processing will pick up soon and we will be back on the road to reaching 100 percent as a national organization. Encourage your members to pay online, or to call National Headquarters and pay over the phone. Currently, they are working and able to take your phone calls and answer questions. They are practicing social distancing and want to help each of you!

Our prayer for you all is to stay healthy and move forward. Light that firecracker under fellow members and know that we are behind you all and are here for you. Thank you all for your continued efforts.

What’s happening and now not happening ...

March 23, 2020, Membership:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Membership Total</th>
<th>Percent of Goal</th>
<th>Membership Last Year</th>
<th>Membership Change</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>One</td>
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<td>3,837</td>
<td>91.86%</td>
<td>3,880</td>
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<td>569</td>
<td>-7</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Seven</td>
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<td>3,035</td>
<td>90.09%</td>
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<td>Eight</td>
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<td>91.34%</td>
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<td>Nine</td>
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<td>Ten</td>
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<td>88.92%</td>
<td>3,947</td>
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<td>28,966</td>
<td>90.85%</td>
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</table>
Purple up!, Department of Minnesota American Legion Family!

Purple Up! for Military Kids Day is April 15. This is a day for communities to wear purple to show support and thank military children for their strength and sacrifices but also the whole month of April is known officially as the month of the military child.

Purple indicates that all branches of the military are supported; Air Force blue, Army green, Navy blue, Marine red and Coast Guard blue all thought to combine as a single color, purple.

We need to help build awareness for the needs of our military families and celebrate our heroes . . . our military children. This grassroots effort began in 2011 to honor the sacrifices that our military children make every day for our country. How can we celebrate? Wear Purple on April 15; ask local officials and businesses to wear purple on Purple Up! Day; ask local schools, sports teams, youth organizations, clubs, after school programs, and community organizations to recognize Purple UP! Day; request local businesses, stores and restaurants post a Purple Up! message in their establishments or on social media.

Use the hashtag #MNALAPurpleUp to show your activities or take selfies of yourself and members wearing purple to support our military children. Be creative and have fun celebrating our military children.

DRAWING! I will be doing a random drawing from the hashtags for one lucky American Legion Family member!

Approximately 2 million military children have experienced a parental deployment since 9/11 and the average military family moves three times more often than their civilian counterpart.

Our military children bear a difficult burden that most children do not. They may not always understand what’s going on when their parents deploy or get re-assigned, depending on their age. They are not always willing to share with other friends or adults.

We need to be available to support where and when we can. Due to privacy your unit would not be able to get names of students within your schools, but your unit can reach out to your school administration, counselors and social workers to let them know if there are needs for these students to contact your Children and Youth chairman or unit representative.

The Department of Minnesota members are very proud of our Children and Youth programs throughout the state. Members take great pride in promoting a positive image of our organization in their communities, supporting and caring for the children in their communities, with the emphasis of those of veterans and military families.

Robin Dorf is the children and youth chairwoman for the American Legion Auxiliary.

Secretary’s Notes

Sandie Deutsch

My dear friends, where does one start?

Many of you who know me know that I am never out of words, but today I am having problems. My heart breaks for our veterans in hospital and homes who can’t have visitors and also for our own representatives who can’t get in the facilities at this time and do what they love to do — serve our veterans.

I received a call from Mary Ann Davis who is bored and misses her job at the Minneapolis VA Health Care System. What does that tell you about dedication? I pray every day that things get back to normal for a few selfish reasons — I so want Department Convention to go on without a hitch.

I have worked closely with President Mary Hendrickson, and she has had quite an interesting and sometimes trying year so far. She has handled everything with professionalism, tact and compassion and I commend her.

I feel I have another friend for life and hope she feels the same. I have a new grandson arriving the first part of May and so want to go down and be with my family. My heart breaks for our Honorary Junior President Emily as we have to postpone her Junior Conference, and she has done such a tremendous job this year.

Come hell or high water, Emily will have her conference! Please remember our office is here to serve you and if there is anything you need call anytime. I have the best staff in the world who really want to be in the office daily — they are very dedicated and hard-working. That is my shout out for this month!

Prayers and love to all you all and for a speedy end to whatever this is we are in the middle of. I have my own opinions on this entire fiasco but will save that for another time.

Sandie Deutsch is the executive secretary for the American Legion Department of Minnesota.

Celebration postponed

The celebration of life for Vicki Bibeau, which was planned for April 11 in Walker, has been postponed. A new day, time and place will be announced at a later date.

Auxiliary Taps

Wilheminson, Lucille H., 95, died Dec. 3, 2019. She was a member of the Spring Grove Auxiliary Unit 249.

THANKFUL

Ely American Legion Contest winners are pictured above.

A very proud grandmother, Patti Buffington from Ely Unit 248, sent this, written by Owen Marolt, who received third place in their competition:

“Americanism is being patriotic to our country. What Americanism means to me is that I am free because those who have come before that have given that right of freedom to us. When I grow up, I can pick the job I would like. I can play safe in the town I live in. I have clean water and healthy food. I can get a good education. I can say the Pledge of Allegiance. We can go to school and do what we want. We believe in being loyal by following the laws. In some other countries there is no clean water, but there is in the United States. When I get older I can vote for president if I want to. I am thankful for the people that have risked their lives for others for our country so we have these rights. We should respect our flag to show our Americanism.”

STRONGER TOGETHER

National American American Legion Auxiliary President Nicole Clapp of Iowa, second from left, shares the stage at the Washington Conference Commander’s Call on March 10 with Sons of the American Legion National Commander Clint D. Bolt of Virginia, far left, and American Legion National Commander Bill Oxford, third from left. Speaking in this photo is Texas congressman Mac Thornberry, who was awarded the American Legion’s Distinguished Public Service Award. Clapp and Bolt also appeared with Oxford before a joint Senate-House hearing on veterans affairs on March 11. Congress stopped accepting visitors on March 12 due to coronavirus restrictions.
All of us at 4 Seasons Vacations say **THANK YOU** to all who have traveled with us in the past and hopefully again in the future. As we navigate through this uncertain time we want everyone to stay **healthy and safe**. We want you to know we are here when you’re ready to travel again!

Thank you!

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