An open letter
to Gov. Walz

Dear Gov. Tim Walz:

Sir, on behalf of more than 66,000 American Legion veterans serving in 550 Minnesota communities, we stand with the professionals in the restaurant, bar and hospitality industries and dispute the restrictions placed on opening our Posts.

The American Legion of Minnesota concurs with the caution and shared sacrifice that our state must take to prevent the spread of the virus. More than 300 of our Posts operate restaurants or bars in our Minnesota communities.

Mark Dvorak
Continued on Page 5

Legion Baseball 2020 season cancelled

Committee members unhappy about having to scrap pastime

BLOOMINGTON — No one liked having to make the decision. But in the end, the Minnesota American Legion Baseball Committee on May 9 made a unanimous and difficult decision: Cancel the 2020 season.

Baseball Committee member Jim Peck has been involved in Legion Baseball for 57 years.

“This is one of the worst days in all of my time in baseball,” he said right after the motion carried 14-0.

In addition to the state restrictions on gatherings, there were influencing factors that shut down many Legion Baseball programs across the country that weekend. Mainly, there would be no access to team insurance or the Legion name and emblem.

The COVID session didn’t leave much for Minn. veterans

By Tim Engstrom

ST. PAUL — There were only three pieces of veterans-related legislation that passed out of the unusual 2020 legislative session.

One was $6.2 million in COVID-19 Disaster Relief and Special Needs Grants for Minnesota Veterans. The Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs is processing applications and issuing grants of $1,000 and $3,000.

Veterans financially impacted by COVID-19 restrictions can seek assistance at minnesotaveteran.org/covidrelief.

The second was through the Legacy bill — $250,000 for the Minnesota Medal of Honor Memorial. The bill refers to the 2008 Legacy Amendment, which set up a stream of funding for arts, culture, clean water, outdoors, parks and trails.

The Legislature approved the Minnesota Medal of Honor Memorial in 2016, and it is planned for the Promise of Youth statue on the Capitol-facing side of the Veterans Service Building in St. Paul.

The third was veterans-related but also for the general population. It involves increased pay for personal-care attendants.

Still more veterans-related funding could come via the bonding bill during a much-discussed special session that would begin this month. The reopening of the Minnesota economy had been expected to aid Posts struggling with the shutdown, until Gov. Tim Walz announced dining was outdoors-only.

Special session

The Minnesota Legislature convened Feb. 11 to May 18, and when COVID-19 restrictions on gatherings began in March, the Legislature spent five weeks figuring out how to operate virtually.

Yes, phone calls and other discussions still took place, but that was five weeks without hearings on legislation.

When the deadline arrived, political parties were at odds over Gov. Tim Walz’s emergency powers and the bonding bill. The House had a $2 billion bill, while the Senate had one just shy of $1 billion.

It is expected Gov. Tim Walz will call for a special session starting June 12.

In the bonding bill, the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs requested $10 million for asset preservation for its 64 buildings, $4.2 million for security upgrades and $100,000 for completing a greenhouse at the Fergus Falls Veterans Home.

“The bonding money for the veterans homes has to get done,” said Trent Dilks, adjutant for Minnesota’s Disabled American Veterans. “These

Continued on Page 3

MEMORIAL DAY SOLDIERS ON

In a light rain and with the POW-MIA flag lowered, Rich Peltier blows “Taps.” About a dozen neighbors came by to watch the crowd-less proceedings. Memorial Day ceremonies pay tribute to fallen military members and typically happen regardless of crowds.

Bill Quintus, commander of the Apple Valley Post 1776 Honor Guard, reads the poem “In Flanders Fields” during a Memorial Day ceremony at Lebanon Cemetery in Apple Valley. Read the poem on Page 5.

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Bernie Bauman listens to Quintus during the ceremony.
The Promise of Youth statue typically goes in the center of this reflection pool outside the Veterans Service Building. The statue was taken down on May 19 because work drains state coffers, while getting them on the path to lifelong training. Their average hourly wage for personal care aides is $6 below the livable wage of $16.34, according to the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development.

The CTF approved its legislative plans in December, and at the time called for giving preference to homeless veterans in state-funded housing programs. The VFW’s Tommy Johnson said he stepped in to secure the measure for COVID-19.

Both bonding bills included $100,000 for the Martin County Veterans Memorial, as a local request.

The Minnesota Command of the American Legion has invited five legislative leaders — Senate Majority Leader Paul Gazelka, Senate Minority Leader Susan Kent, House Majority Leader Ryan Winkler and House Minority Leader Kurt Daudt — to a video conference slated for 10 a.m. June 16.

He said everyone has to learn from that experience, and it’s something that veterans and lawmakers must have majorities. The House side voted 4-0 in favor, with one abstaining. The Senate 4-1 against.

The votes in favor were Reps. Mike Maxa of the Minnesota American Legion and Commander Mark Dvorak.

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The MDVA had requested authority to operate an adult day center and dental clinics, among other things, in the Minnesota G.I. Bill. The clarification involved eligibility requirements to avoid confusing or misusing tuition, apprenticeships and certifications.

Those measures were ready for final votes on the floors of both chambers but never received votes. The MDVA’s Ben Johnson said they didn’t face opposition but the shortened window of time left them hanging.

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The MDVA suspended the distances between five state veteran homes and the House passed it out of committee asked the Minnesota Legislature for $1 million in this fiscal year for the MDVA to employ a public-relations agency never gained traction, Johnson said.

The idea was floated to help the MDVA span the distances between five state veteran homes and to better connect with the local media.

The MDVA supplemental budget request.

The agency asked the Legislature for $1 million in this fiscal biennium and $1.2 million for the next for preventing suicide among veterans. The MDVA wanted to hire a coordinator and liaison with the goal of developing a model for suicide prevention efforts and work in line with federal VA efforts.

It also sought $3.17 million this biennium and $6.33 in the next to fund 150 housing vouchers for veterans who no longer qualify for the HUD-VASH vouchers (issued by federal Housing and Urban Development and the VA).

Johnson said these measures were introduced but received no hearings because the budget projections after the COVID-19 economic shutdown tumbled down. He said housing and mental health veterans of all ages had organizations expected to at full value.

Johnson said the measure didn’t move because the Legislature shifted its focus to the pandemic.

"It was a casualty of the COVID session," he said. "There wasn’t the bandwidth to consider things like that.

Hunting, trapping, fishing

Minnesota American Legion Adjutant Mike Maxa, Disabled American Veteran Tracy Dils and Johnson met with the Department of Natural Resources to talk about reducing the cost of hunting, trapping and fishing licenses for service-connected veterans.

The DNR wants to review the discounts this summer and be ready for the 2021 session.

＂Preference for homeless stuck. The CTF approved its legislative plans in December, and at the time called for giving preference to homeless veterans in state-funded housing programs.

This year, was hoping lawmakers would tweak it so widows and widowers could to a one-time transfer to a property of similar or lesser value, allowing them to move in a more manageable-size home. The CTF garnered support from cities and counties, and they would get tax value from homes returning to the market.
Every Minnesotan is facing extraordinary circumstances due to COVID-19. There is communal uncertainty and grief. There are uplifting moments as well. Many are searching for meaning and human connection. That is exactly what history provides.

The Minnesota Historical Society holds our state’s history in trust for all its citizens. We know how Minnesotans endured the 1918 flu epidemic, the Great Depression, and World War II because that history has been preserved and shared.

Today, we can find connection, maybe even comfort, in the stories of Minnesotans who came before us. Tomorrow’s Minnesotans may find wisdom and inspiration in our response to what we are experiencing right now.

Together, our experiences weave a story that is uniquely Minnesota. The Minnesota Historical Society collects, preserves, and shares that story. We strive to build bridges between then and now, today and tomorrow. I invite you to step across with us.

Kent Whitworth
Director and CEO
Minnesota Historical Society

Do you believe that history matters?
I do. Now more than ever.

Baseball loss ends decades-old streak
Continued from Page 1

But in the end, the Minnesota American Legion Baseball Committee felt it would be best to present a united front. Credit for calling off baseball in a COVID-19 world would fall on the factors facing all sports — safety, insurance, legal issues and loss of ball-fields. There was no sense in having one part of the Legion blame another part.

“We regret having to even make this choice,” said Director Randy Schaub. “Even the night before we were talking about waiting a couple of weeks to see if governmental leaders might provide direction on summer baseball.”

After the news came out, it seemed as though everyone had to go through a hailstorm of upset Minnesotans over the cancellation.

“We got to see the passion this state has for our product, that’s for sure,” said Baseball Secretary Tim Engstrom.

The news appeared all over Minnesota, and many stories focused on the fact that American Legion Baseball in Minnesota dates back to 1923, with a tournament every year since the first in Mankato in 1926. Both runs of seasons and tournaments will be broken with the century marks almost in sight.

With 366 teams fielded in 2019 and 357 team signed up for 2020, Minnesota American Legion Baseball is the largest among the 50 states.

“It was a difficult decision that affects many young people and their parents,” Commander Mark Dvorak said. “The American Legion is a major proponent of the sport of baseball, and we hope to return even stronger in 2021.”

Schaub said the irony is that 2020 has offered up the nicest spring in years. Typically, spring prep sports in Minnesota are cancelled or interrupted because of rainstorms, blustery days, cold snaps and even late-sea-son snow. This spring has been generally pleasant, except the lack of sports.

He was hoping summer would offer the kids the ability to play their cherished activity of choice.

Refunds to teams were handled largely by Vice Director Brandon Raymo, Finance Officer Laura Weber and Engstrom.

Sporting a St. Agnes School cap, Mike Streitz sits on a bench at Minnehaha Field. He coaches for 3M Post 599 and St. Agnes. He says he will miss the kids.

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We are documenting the COVID-19 health crisis by collecting and preserving your stories. Share your experience and explore the experiences of others at mnhs.org/historyisnow.

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Keeping memories alive honors fallen heroes

Chaplain’s Corner

Betty Jass

This year’s remembrance of Memorial Day was bittersweet with the coronavirus restrictions of not having public programs to recognize our Fallen Heroes. Many areas weren’t putting up flag displays in their cemeteries because they do not gather in those places. It just does not seem right being unable to publicly acknowledge our heroes like we have in the past. Even with that said, there is a way by being their Memory Keepers.

A few years ago, I was in Walmart shopping when I noticed a man wearing a “Korean War Veteran” cap and went over and thanked him for his service. While we were talking, he mentioned that he had a brother that was in World War II and the Korean war, too.

I told him about my two grandfathers, my father and brother-in-law in Vietnam, my service in the Air Force, etc. After exchanging a few stories, this man asked me if I knew what I was? I was not sure what he meant with a questioning look. He told me that I was a Korean Legion Family.

I continued by saying that every time I spoke of my family members, I was keeping their memory alive. You too, can be a Memory Keeper! As a family we set up pictures on our shelves at home, we fly a flag outside our homes and put flowers, religious crosses, and other memorabilia on their grave.

Any time we tell stories about our service, maybe about a Fallen Hero in your family, or the stay-at-home order, along with using Zoom, we can meet with an outlet to meet, share ideas and concerns.

The committee’s second priority was to assist with collecting and distribution of essential supplies to our veterans facilities around the state of Minnesota. Our logistics lead began to put in place Legion Family members around the state who would be able to transport essential supplies from around the state to the veterans facilities who needed them the most. Our technology leads worked to establish Zoom video accounts for each District. Once distributed and trained, Districts began using their accounts for meeting with their membership, voting on resolutions and a way forward. Some Districts met and decided to cancel their District convention while others held in-person meetings. With this technology we are no longer restrained by distance, whether those are impediments that might have restricted us.

As a community, we often see memorials, we dedicate our thoughts and prayer during this time.

This committee was approved by the National Executive Committee late March. It replaces the COVID-19 Response Ad-Hoc Committee and Strategic Planning Committee. The goal of this committee at its inception was to keep the Department of Minnesota moving forward despite the pandemic and the stay-at-home order, along with using Zoom technology for meeting with an outlet to meet, share ideas and concerns.

Chaplain Betty Jass is the chaplain for The American Legion Department of Minnesota.
In Flanders
Fields

By John McCrae

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with those who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

Obituaries

Mark Dvorak
Commander
The American Legion Department of Minnesota

Continued from Page 4

Taps

Adamski, Gerald "Jerry," 64, Army veteran of the Vietnam era, died March 16, 2020. He was a 41-year member of Chaska Post 57.


Anderson, Gordon B., 88, Air Force veteran of the Korean War, died April 24, 2020. He was a member of Park Forest Post 117.

Ardolf, Lawrence "Larry," 84, Army veteran of the Korean War, died March 22, 2020. He was a 19-year member of Hinckley Post 27.


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Baker, Erwin A., 84, Army veteran of the Vietnam War, died April 20, 2020. He worked as an airplane mechanic and part of the Black Shees Squadron. He joined the Marine Reserves and fought in the Pacific Theater of World War II, died March 21, 2020. He was a 32-year member of St. Peter Post 37.

Baker, Erwin A., 84, Army veteran of the Vietnam War, died April 20, 2020. He was a member of Worthington Post 5.

Bergstrom, 91, Army veteran of the Korean War, died April 20, 2020. He was a radio operator. He was a 36-year member of New Prague Post 45.

Bentson, Allan R., 83, Army veteran of the Vietnam War, died April 15, 2020. He was a 31-year member of St. James Post 33.

Brand, Herbert R., 83, Army veteran of the Korean era, died March 10, 2020. He was a member of Albert Lea Post 56.

Brouwer, Kenneth W., 70, Army veteran of World War II, died April 14, 2020. He was a 38-year member of Albert Lea Post 56.

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Buchanan, 81, Air Force veteran of Vietnam, served in Japan and Montana in the Air Police, died April 23, 2020. He was a chief deputy sheriff in Fairbault County, past commander of Blue Earth Post 89 and 36-year member of Grand Rapids Post 60.

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Do the VA’s veterans need to pay if they get tested for COVID-19?

Since June 6, 2019, the MISSIO-N Act has allowed veterans to visit Urgent Care providers in the community if the provider is part of VA’s Community Care Program. Urgent care services cover non-emergent, minor symptoms such as coughs, colds, whistling and sore throats, to name a few.

The addition of urgent care services is one of several changes that have come in at a better time as COVID-19 invades the U.S. With the shutdown of the VA Health Care Systems regular operations and limited foot traffic, veterans are left at home wondering if they are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19. Although, VA’s Call Center remains open and available to answer questions patients for health care needs including COVID-19 symptoms.

Veterans who prefer to use the local urgent care provider can without preauthorization from VA. If it is a contracted provider of the VA’s Community Care Program, veterans will receive care with minimal co-payment. VA will also pay for or fill a prescription for urgent care services covered, inclusive of services such as X-rays, some lab testing, and some medications. However, not all VA’s local Urgent Care network will be able to offer these services.

Some urgent care locations are administering COVID-19 testing and closer to home which may help with travel especially when you are not feeling well. The question is, will you be charged a VA copay for COVID-19 testing?

On March 20, 2018, Public Law 115-126 went into effect which exempts VA copayments for COVID-19 testing, screening and certain visits related to COVID-19. This includes, both in-person visits, telehealth appointments either done at the VA or in the community. Veterans enrolled in priority groups 1-6 can use their VA care benefit up to three times per year before they receive a $30 co-pay charge, although veterans enrolled in priority group 7-8 will have a $30 copay each time. All copays are billed by VA, not the Urgent Care Provider.

VA will also pay for or fill a prescription for urgent care for up to a 14-day supply. To fill an urgent care prescription of 14 days or fewer, veterans can either fill the prescription at a contracted pharmacy in the VA network or fill a prescription at a non-VA contracted pharmacy and pay for the cost upfront and file for a re-refill.

Medica-
tions
through Urgent Care follow regular VA co-pay guidelines. For an Urgent Care Provider, veterans should visit www.va.gov/find-locations.

The process for getting urgent care looks a little like this: When arriving at an in-network urgent care provider, an eligible veteran must ask and verify that the urgent care provider is part of VA’s contracted network of community providers and that they have a sign posted indicating so. Inform the provider they would like to use their urgent care benefit to receive care and the provider will confirm the visit coverage.

It is good to know that during these trying times, urgent care providers close to home may have access to urgent care network and can screen us for COVID-19 among other minor health care needs.

Jeremy Wolfstoller is the Department of Minnesota Restored Service Officer. His email is jjwolfstoller@mln.org.

Legionnaires at the 2019 Fall Conference in Mahomet, Illinois.

It’s good for the country that veterans take losing any serious freedoms so seriously.

All-American Legion Family Hospital Association

Let’s go back and review that oath we took when we joined the military here is the Oath of Enlistment:

I, [name], do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; and that I will obey the orders of the President of the United States and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to regulations and the Uniform Code of Military Justice. So help me God."

Officers take the Oath of Office:

"I, [name], do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I will obey the orders of the President of the United States and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to regulations and the Uniform Code of Military Justice. So help me God."

National Guard members, the oaths include the state name, too.

We always thought it was interesting that the oaths say “Constitution of the United States.” When we get out of the military, you can remember or forget oaths, but when we’re in uniform, we’re always thinking about our obligation. Today, I want to talk about some of the oaths we took as veterans.

All veterans I have ever encountered liked it to feel like we still have a duty to support and defend the Constitution. Never have I encountered one who said that it was well, the oath was just for the duration of my time in service.

That sense of duty leads veterans to join The American Legion Auxiliary and other veteran service organizations. Our national commander says he believes in being a voice for veterans.

If you see veterans getting touchy about some of the COVID-19 restrictions, understand that this is a band-aid. Of all citizens, they understand how to respect the freedoms we have that others have not.

When a while there seemed it like if you post anything online questioning our leaders, red or blue, you would get slammed for it by the thought police and internet trolls. The internet and media reports in late March became: shut up and obey. It’s nice to have our ongoing American dialogue back.

Sure, many people generally have a distrust for politics, but it doesn’t feel like America without it. Free speech and free press are part of living in the world’s greatest democracy. We have a Constitution that protects our First Amendment right to freedom of speech or press. And there was no debate in mid-March over suspending Article I, Section 8, of the Constitution.

I’m not the only one that feels like it. We have it written, puns, dixits, lobbyists, lawmakers and justices. And they take it very seriously.

But I am making a point that it is good for the health of our country that veterans identify what the Boundary would look like if freedoms when impinged. Of all citizens, they understand how to respect the freedoms we have that others have not.

We have structured our nation’s laws on the notion, “Veterans sacrificed so that we may have freedoms,” is not just something speakers say on Memorial Day. It’s very real and it’s at the very heart of what it means to have a tax-paying country.
Get the goods to the needs

The Legion's Randy Olson kicks into high gear in tough times

By Tim Engstrom

WINNEBAGO — When life knocked this Legionnaire down, he got right back up. Randy Olson of the 2nd District is an Army veteran and an electrician who worked on a contract basis at Birds Eye Foods in Waseca until the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions kicked in.

He found nesessitary, he laid off. The Winnebago resident wasn’t one to sit around the house, so he dove into the work of The American Legion. Not merely in his community. Not merely in the 2nd District. It began with his efforts in the nearby town of Wells.

Wells Post 210

Olson recalled reading old minutes from Mankato Post 21, and he liked to think about the doughboys did things in the early days of the Legion. He recalls how if a veteran’s family stove didn’t work, they took care of it.

The Legionnaires had each other’s backs in the military. And they were building each other’s backs in civilian life, too.

Wells Post 210 is the finest Post home in Faribault County, he said. It has a full kitchen, full bar and an elevator. It’s a good place for people to go and they can compete, rather than work together.

Over the years, the Wells Post leaders grew stuck in their ways, Olson said, and the young members had little say in Post matters. Many young members joined Briceilyn Post 165 instead. Olson said he helped younger members transfer back to the Wells Legion and to change the mindset that prevented change.

But it seemed that younger Legionnaires knew it was better for the Legion, SAL and the Auxiliary,” Olson said.

He wanted to get them back up and running without just relying on gambling and alcohol to write checks. And the young members wanted an active Post.

So Olson, the next, put on a suit and tie. Word spread, and the first night, they had 66 meals, plus were given donations. The second night, they served 80 meals and received donations. They expanded to a second night a week, doing Frasday and Saturday, and Lent was over, so they served cheeseburgers.

Then they worked with Conger Meat Market and sold ribeye steak meals. That sold out at 72, and they had to switch back to cheeseburgers for a few remaining customers.

“Just need a new, younger driving force to step it up and drive the thing,” Olson said.

Food drive

Trish Pagel of Stately, an AmeriCorps volunteer who is active in the Auxiliary, too, coordinates a food drive in Murray County. It gave Olson the idea to run one for Faribault County after he heard the Faribault County Food Shelf was needed food at a large grocery chain.

“Just a usual cases of means ends. He got four cans,” Olson said. “Food was going to food day cares as they had the top priority.”

So Olson started the Faribault County Food Drive, with donation sites in Winnebago, Blue Earth and Wells.

He had no place to send his hog. Olson coordinated the sale of hogs to Legion Family members. Sue and Paul Edwards of Brainerd ordered six. Later, they ordered an additional hog.

Burley got one, too. Roseville’s Dee Dee Bucy and Lino Lake’s Pati Coleman split one. The sales continue to happen. Olson ordered four, some for veterans in need, some for the local food shelf.

Blue Earth Locker handled the processing at first, but now several do: Conger Meat Market, Vernon Center Locker, Fairburn Butcher Shop, Welcome Meat Market and the Fareway.

Olson thanked My Pillow and the Salvation Army for supplying masks.

My Pillow

Olson is part of the Department COVID-19 Committee and is in charge of getting donations to where the needs exist. Want to donate to veterans hospitals and homes or other veteran-related activities? Contact him at 507-525-6352.

In April, Minnesota National Guard leased space in the building to area food banks to serve disproportionally hungry communities, according to a media release.

The first time, they met at the line to get in. At the second one, they were inside waiting in a line for Trump to appear and begin talking.

Lindell asked Olson what he did, because Olson was wearing a “Veterans for Trump” T-shirt. He explained he did a lot of volunteer work for veterans.

“Se he said if there was anything I can do for you and the veterans, just give me a shout,” Olson said.

When the news came out that My Pillow would switch from manufacturing pillows to masks, Olson decided to reach out. He sent emails, but those came back saying the company wasn’t making pillows. Olson realized he needed to speak with a real-life person.

He reached a gentle and told the story about Lindell’s promise. Eventually, someone from the company got back to him. But Lindell wanted Olson to help him find masks. Olson had to explain again he wanted to donate a mask.

In May, Olson sent them photos of Lindell and himself and said he wanted donations. A week later, boxes of masks showed up at the Minneapolis and Hastings veterans homes.

Olson thanked My Pillow and requested three more boxes be sent to the St. Cloud and Luverne and Hutchinson and Sioux Falls veterans homes.

Veteran Enterprises

Veteran Enterprises is a National Guard and Army Reserve veteran Garth Carlson purchased the former elementary school in Winnebago from the city. Carlson partnered with a company called Veteran Enterprises LTD and plans lease space in the building to local veterans organizations and non-profit organizations.

On the November ballot, voters will vote to continue the city contract for rental payments to Carlson.

“Veteran Enterprises LTD and plans lease space in the building to local veterans organizations and non-profit organizations.”

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When DeCristofaro was 1 year old, he and his siblings were taken from their home by the local sheriff’s office and placed into foster care. It was 1986.

His name back then was Anthony Wilson. He was the youngest of five kids. The next was a boy, then a girl, then him.

The home had drug abuse, and evidence of other kinds of abuse we don’t wish to print here. It had been a nightmare especially for the older kids.

Foster care was far better. When he was 4, almost 5, he was adopted by a couple from Oxenhill, Maryland — a new father worked for the Pentagon,

Tony DeCristofaro stands by the sign for the Songs From Heaven building on May 6. It is where he stayed when he was at Eagle’s Healing Nest in Sauk Centre. These days, the National Guard veteran is a recovery coach for Sobriety First, also in Sauk Centre.

SAUK CENTRE — Tony DeCristofaro, 35, has been a substance abuser since he was 13. If you prefer, you could call him alcoholic, meth-head, drugger, all kinds of terms and slang. He usually uses addict.

You think the story gets better now?

No.

DeCristofaro then lost his rented housing and was sleeping on a friend’s couch. He got in an argument at the restaurant and quit his job. He fell behind on child support and eventually stopped paying it, so 60 percent of his National Guard pay was garnished for that purpose.

“I still did not stop using despite my falling apart and the agreement with the National Guard,” he said.

Somewhere, he didn’t face another piss test for more than a year. Meanwhile, he was trying to get the Army to fix his shoulder injury from the Fort Lee ropes course.

The Active Army wanted the National Guard to pay for it, and the National Guard was the Active Army that paid for it. His platoon leader — whom DeCristofaro holds in high regard — investigated the red tape.

They said, ‘You know that because it took so long to report, neither side would cover the costs.”

“The rejection was coming from some medical officer in the National Guard,” DeCristofaro said.

Now, he was angry at the Army (Active and NG).

“My drill sergeant had told us the Army will take care of you,” DeCristofaro said. “Now I need help, and I am getting denied because of money.”

In late 2015, he landed a job doing apartment maintenance, and that work provided him a place to dwell.

Tony DeCristofaro began drinking heavily, his non-commissioned-officer packet was 30 days shy of being recycled, so he fought through his shoulder injury from the Fort Lee ropes course.

DeCristofaro found he didn’t have a natural inclination to be a mechanic. He could look up stuff in the manuals, but many other guys just knew what to do. His roommate was so good he was fast-tracked.

In their free time, the soldiers would work out, and one day they did a rope course. DeCristofaro fell off, dropped 12 feet to the ground and injuring the rotator cuff on his left shoulder. He was placed on restricted duty for four weeks and had his pain. He didn’t want to be recycled, so he fought through the pain to pass the PT test. In June 2012, he enrolled in the GI Bill — the 22ię Transportation Company, 347th Regional Support Group, 34th Infantry Division — in Olivia.

His friend picked him up and drove him to Marshall. They went right to the bar.

DeCristofaro describes himself as a high-functioning alcoholic. He would drink at work as a cook in a restaurant in Marshall, then drink with his unit on Saturday nights.

Eventually, the commander banned drinking on drill weekends. Soldiers simply drank in bars or at the Sheep Shedde Inn on the west side of Olivia.

By now, it was 2014. DeCristofaro was an E-4 with an Army Achievement Medal and nominated for Soldier of the Year. Because of regular urine tests, he refrained from smoking pot, but he would get away with meth about three or four times a year, he said.

One day, his left shoulder began hurting again and soon he failed a PT test. He went from doing 80 pushups a year to 13 the next.

He let leadership know, and DeCristofaro was given a day at the hospital in Little Falls. His range of motion was terrible, and there was a lot of old scar tissue. The doc put him on oxycodone, a highly addictive opioid painkiller.

DeCristofaro was fast-tracked.

DeCristofaro still went to drill but wasn’t performing like the stellar solider he had once been. He fell asleep on convoys. He wasn’t closing check point gates.

“I went from being the lead E-4 to being pretty much a pile of [expletives] on the ground,” DeCristofaro said.

Finally, in July 2016, he had to take a urine test.

“I didn’t care at that point,” he said. “I just felt like a body in a uniform. I was bitter about the Army not fixing my shoulder, and I felt scorned, you know. I could be cut out, ranked, or whatever.”

DeCristofaro filled the bottle with water from a hidden condom and placed the bottle on the table.

“They said, ‘That’s not it,’” he said. “They made me sit for two hours waitiing for me to pass again.”

Continued on Page 9

The battle of addiction: ‘I felt like a body in a uniform’

National Guard veteran Tony DeCristofaro talks about his fall from stellar soldier to meth dealer to life as a recovery coach.

By Tim Engstrom

Tony DeCristofaro traveled to Boulder, Colorado, and was with a free-spirit girl for a spell before meeting another woman, then getting her pregnant. At age 21, in October 2006, he and she decided to move to Marshall, Minnesota, where the woman’s mother was a school principal and they would have a support system to raise the child.

The young couple built a life, but DeCristofaro began drinking heavily, to the point where he was hiding beer in the garage.

“Finally, the fights and arguments got way too much, and we split up,” he said.

A few buddies in Marshall had just returned from the Iraq War, and they suggested he join the Army. He had tried methamphetamine two or three times and decided the Minnesota National Guard would be a good way to clean up his life.

DeCristofaro went to basic training at Fort Jackson in South Carolina, learned a rare promotion from E-1 to E-2, shot “expert” with a 39 out of 40, excelled as a team leader and did well in the highly structured environment.

“I was an all-around fantastic soldier,” he said.

He went to advanced individual training to become a mechanic at Fort Lee in Virginia, where he had that structure on weekdays but was free on weekends. Sometimes he drank and even tried synthetic marijuana — but nothing wild and crazy.

DeCristofaro found he didn’t have a natural inclination to be a mechanic. He could look up stuff in the manuals, but many other guys just knew what to do. His roommate was so good he was fast-tracked.

In their free time, the soldiers would work out, and one day they did a rope course. DeCristofaro fell off, dropped 12 feet to the ground and injuring the rotator cuff on his left shoulder. He was placed on restricted duty for four weeks and had his pain. He didn’t want to be recycled, so he fought through the pain to pass the PT test. In June 2012, he enrolled in the GI Bill — the 22ię Transportation Company, 347th Regional Support Group, 34th Infantry Division — in Olivia.

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you think the story gets better now? Still, no.

Officially, DeCristofaro wasn’t out of the National Guard yet. He didn’t drill for October, November or December. The unit doesn’t meet in January.

On Jan. 4, 2017, the Brown-Lyon-Redwood-Renville Drug Task Force raided his apartment in Marshall. He had found old checks from the company that formerly owned his apartment complex, and he forged checks on a closed account.

Yeah, it was buy drugs.

The task force found a little bit of dope, he said, because he had stopped selling drugs and was using less meth. DeCristofaro was arrested and spent a night in jail. His girlfriend bailed him out after a court appearance.

Without access to his meth, he was coming down and that causes a brain complex, and he forged checks on a closed account.

DeCristofaro said he had seen his kids since May. He had $180 left. He bought meth, even though he faced another apartment. He hadn’t seen his kids since May. He had $180 left. He bought meth, even though he faced another unit doesn’t meet in January.

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MACV moves into new St. Paul offices

Note: This story was researched and photographed in March prior to the COVID-19 restrictions. It then was held to make space for cancellations and other pandemic happenings.

By Tim Engstrom

ST. PAUL — The Minnesota Assistance Council for Veterans moved into new digs in St. Paul last fall, and the staff couldn’t be happier.
The old place had two points of entry and difficult parking.

“It was kind of like a maze to find us on the third floor,” said Jon Lovald, chief operations officer.

The new place is at 1000 University Avenue West. That’s an easy address to remember. There’s a big parking lot in the back. You walk in, go up half a flight of stairs to the building’s main floor, then you have two choices: MACV or the Minnesota Board of Cosmetology.

If you are a veteran in need and want to take the test to get a hairdresser license, this spot is ideal.

(OK, it’s been a long shutdown. We need some humor today.)

If you are a veteran in need and want to take the test to get a hairdresser license, this spot is ideal.

But the best part is veterans can find help in the same office space: employment, housing and legal.

“We have yet to find anyone having problems finding us,” Lovald said.

“Many clients come and need a combination of those services. This arrangement is very helpful.”

MACV, which is 30 years old this year, has 52 employees statewide, mainly case managers. The St. Paul location has 25 employees. The others work in Mankato, Duluth and St. Cloud. There are a few individual employees in Rochester, Princeton and Moorhead.

Lovald said MACV started looking for new offices in spring 2019, and it made the physical move in September. It opened on Oct. 1.

The physical space is about 6,000 square feet, about the same as the old place.

While the veterans services are on the main floor, the MACV administration is in the basement in Suite 10. It’s not often you hear about bosses working in a lower level, rather than an upper level.

MACV President and CEO Neal Loidolt said they planned it that way on purpose. It’s more important that veterans and staff interact than administrators have a nice view. Besides, it’s one of those basement walls with windows on the upper half, so they get sunshine.

The organizational mission is end veteran homelessness in Minnesota.

Lovald said he hopes MACV can re-engage American Legion and VFW Posts with a message: “When they identify a veteran who is homeless or in need of employment or legal services, it’s best to connect them with us.”

What’s the best way? “Bring them right to the front door, face to face, if you can,” he said.

The second-best way is to call.

Merely suggesting the vet in need go seek out MACV can lead to nothing doing. Stick with that veteran like glue until he or she is handed off to a MACV worker in person or by phone.

If by phone, then it’s good to offer a ride at the appointed time.

It may just be the footing they need to become contributors to society.

Are you a veteran who needs help with housing, law or employment?

COVID-19 has not stopped MACV. It says: “We want all veterans and partners to know that MACV’s services will be provided remotely whenever possible, and we have limited our in-person availability only for those veterans who otherwise would have no means to contact MACV for services.

Addresses:

5209 Ramsey St., Duluth, MN 55807
724 Madison Ave., Mankato, MN 56001
1000 University Ave. W., Suite 110, St. Paul 55104
Phone: 833-222-6228
Email: mac-v@mac-v.org
Web: mac-v.org

(‘Contact’ page has the initial service request form.)

Legion Posts offering free meals in southern Minn.

Continued from Page 7

other groups and for community events.

Right now, the CVSCO has a satellite office there, and so does a veteran assistance officer out of Mankato.

Meanwhile, Carlson has allowed the space to be used for free meal distribution during the pandemic. Veteran Enterprises and the Post 82 hand out free meals in Winnebago on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays to veterans and those in need.

The pork was donated by Fitzsimmons Pork of Good Thunder.

“We are showing the community we are helping,” Olson said.

“So people give donations to keep it going.”

Department Chaplain Betty Jass of Lake Crystal has volunteered. So has Mankato Post 11 Commander James Olson.

Randy Olson and Carlson want to use the proceeds from the free-meal donations to help 10 area Posts with start-up costs once the state says they can reopen.

Olson said he is concerned about addiction treatment centers in his part of the state, as many have closed down — some for good because of the COVID restrictions.

He said many addicts are experiencing relapses and anxiety.

The nearest treatment place is Fountain Centers in Albert Lea. He noted people who go into social work in his area worry about having steady careers without out needing to move to the Twin Cities. He and Carlson hope the former school can be used as a treatment center for the area.

“We want to keep our workers here in our county,” Olson said.

Olson’s trips around Minnesota include this one to Tricia Pagel with Redwood Falls Unit 38. She took the masks to the Sioux Falls VA Hospital.

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Legionnaire Randy Olson stands with Past Auxiliary Department President Donna Arends, left, and Auxiliary 2nd Vice President Mary Kuperus, right.
Mitigating the possibility of contracting the virus became our top priority and required us to move all staff to a work from home status. I am proud to report to you, in one week’s time, your American Legion Claims Divisions, in all its locations and special missions, from Fargo to St. Paul and all the Field Operations Staff from White Earth to the Vet Center in Minneapolis, moved to advocating from a secure location at home while continuing to provide preferred professional and uninterrupted advocacy to our claimants and to our stakeholders.

Staff have been fitted with the latest equipment to be able to connect with each other, CVSO’s and you if need be. They are managing the phone, email, instant messaging and monitoring all the systems they would normally use and monitor such as the Federal technology network, our claims division was dependent on the Federal technology network for improvements for them in doing their work. While fitting staff with the latest equipment to be able to connect with each other, CVSO’s and you if need be. They are managing the phone, email, instant messaging and monitoring all the systems they would normally use and monitor such as the Federal technology network, our claims division was dependent on the Federal technology network.

In times of change we also see time for opportunity. We have used this change in our business to embrace change and seize the moment in making improvement where before change would have been more time consuming and or difficult. As an example, in Fargo the claims division was dependent on the Federal technology network. Work. While fitting staff with equipment to work from home we modified the staff and moved them onto the state of Minnesota network making major improvements for them in doing so. Another example, the VA’s Board of Veteran Appeals was required to offer a modification to their hearing process.

The VA had been working with our Claims Division Officers to pilot a program called BVA Video Connect which allowed you, the claimant, to attend your BVA hearing virtually from your home or CVSO office of your choosing while still connecting with your power of attorney and the judge in Washington, D.C. We are now one of the lead states participating in regular video connect BVA hearings, a means in which BVA’s hearings will continue indefinitely. We see this time, as difficult as it may be, as a way to make progress and continue to support you in the best way possible.

Thank you for placing your trust in our staff, in our ideas and in our offices. We will continue to press on and honor you for the service and sacrifice you provided our beautiful state and country.

We continue operations and are virtually open for business. Please contact your local County Veteran Service Office or contact The American Legion Claims Division directly at 612-970-5662 if you are interested in any claims or benefits information.

I look forward to bringing you more information about our programs and the Claims Divisions on the ground for you every day.

Ronald D. Quade II is the director of the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs Claims Division.

Legion Riders
Paul Hassing

Hello Legion Family,

Wow, the month of May flew by. Why does it seem like the winter months drag on, but the spring flies by?

Maybe it’s just me because I am not a fan of cold weather. I hope everyone is doing OK and finding ways to deal with all of the changes and uncertainty going on. I do have to say that our American Legion Family is resourceful. It is great to see all of the drive-by graduations, anniversaries and birthdays. This is along with all of the new ways we are finding to have meetings and stay in touch with each other. I really miss seeing all of your faces up-close, but in light of the circumstances, seeing you on a computer screen will have to do.

I think the future of The American Legion will forever be changed. Sometimes change can be a good thing. As much as I like seeing all of you, it will be nice to not have to drive three hours for what sometimes ends up being a 20-minute meeting. It can also save some money, as well. I want to make a personal plea to everyone who reads this. Please be kind. Everyone is going through their own thing. We don’t always know what someone else is going through. We tend to judge others based on someone else is going through. I really miss seeing you on a computer screen and in our offices. We will continue to press on and honor you for the service and sacrifice you provided our beautiful state and country.

In previous segments you were introduced to one of the members of Silver Lake Post 141 honoring a fellow member at the Good Samaritan Home in Howard Lake. One of the members should have been cited as Norby Scherman. It was a photo of members of Silver Lake Post 141 honoring a fellow member at the Good Samaritan Home in Howard Lake. One of the members should have been cited as Norby Scherman.
The SAL Update: Everyone hoping for events to resume

Hello from the Sons of The American Legion!
We are moving forward with getting Legionville ready and looking good.

Tom Sanford and his crew are working hard at cleaning the camp up, painting and whatever else it takes to get Legionville all ready for next year.

On the other hand, we are waiting to make the decision on the Camp Oceola/Fall Harvest Rally as well as the John Zgoda Memorial Disabled Veteran Deer Hunt. We await to hear how the decision is planning on opening up for groups larger than 10. Certainly hope we can have Camp-o-ree and the John Zgoda Memorial Disabled Veteran Deer Hunt.

Don’t forget that National SAL dues increase goes into effect this year on June 1. This $3 dues increase goes into effect with any membership transmittals and the 2021 Membership that is received after that date.

The resolution that approved this read, “RESOLVED, That the Sons of The American Legion in National Convention assembled on August 23-25, 2019, in Indianapolis, Indiana, amend the Constitution of the Sons of The American Legion, Article X, Section 2 to read, ‘The amount of such annual National dues shall be $5 per member and shall be payable Oct. 20 of each year and for the succeeding year;’ and be it further

“RESOLVED, That the increase take effect on June 1, 2020, with the distribution of the 2021 National Membership cards, and applied to all membership transmittals received after that date.”

The approved increase raised the national per capita from $2 to $5 annually per member, a $3 increase. The $2 per capita has not changed for the last 37 years, since 1983.

Like everything else in this world, the cost of goods and labor only increases and never decreases, unfortunately national headquarters is no different.

The membership packets we hope to have out as soon as we possibly can get them to all the squadron safely. More to come on that as we figure it out. I hope everybody is well and we will see you all soon.

Dave Vulcan is the commander of the Detachment of Minnesota for the Sons of The American Legion.

Obituaries

This month we are beginning a section to recognize our members who have passed on to Squadron Everlasting. If you would like to include someone, submissions should be sent to salshawndavis@gmail.com. The Minnesota Legionnaire reserves the right to edit all obituaries for style and brevity.

Thomas, Wade R., 57, Sons of The American Legion St. Peter Squadron 37, died April 21, 2020. He was the son of Lawrence M. and Mary H. Teacher.

Semmel, Gary K., Sr., 77, Paid Up For Life (PULF) member of the Sons of The American Legion Coon Rapids Squadron 334, died March 19, 2020. He was a past Detachment Commander having served for two years, 2011 - 2013.

USS Minnesota is the best in Atlantic fleet

GROTON, Connecticut — The Virginia-class fast-attack submarine USS Minnesota (SSN 783), homported at Naval Submarine Base New London, was announced as the winner of the 2019 Battenberg Cup Award April 23.

The Battenberg Cup Award for the U.S. Atlantic Fleet Battle Efficiency “E” winner is presented annually to the ship, or submarine, selected by the fleet commander as the best all-around in the Atlantic Fleet based on accumulation of crew achievements.

Under the command of Comdr. Thomas Flaherty, Minnesota’s crew achieved excellence in all aspects of submarine operations and was rewarded for their efforts.

Adm. Christopher Grady, commander, U.S. Fleet Forces Command, congratulated Minnesota in an official message.

“I am pleased to announce USS Minnesota as the winner of the Battenberg Cup for 2019, and offer my congratulations to the crew,” Grady said. “Every Minnesota sailor should be proud of their record of sustained excellence and superior teamwork.”

As one of the highest performing submarines in the Atlantic Submarine Force, Minnesota sustained superior combat readiness throughout 2019 by rigorously and flawlessly executing deployed operations in the European Command Theater. The crew operated the boat in a manner that achieved unprecedented mission accomplishments while conducting multiple operations vital to national and theater security.

“The crew of USS Minnesota went above and beyond during their numerous operational commitments in 2019, and are incredibly deserving of this prestigious award,” said Vice Adm. Daryl Caudle, commander, Submarine Forces. “I am immensely proud of these warriors who have demonstrated sustained excellence in submaring, unbounded energy and professional enthusiasm. Thanks to their hard work and relentless dedication, Minnesota directly contributed to maintaining the undersea dominance of the Submarine Force.”

During her numerous operations, Minnesota outperformed peers and amassed unmatched standings as the 2019 Submarine Squadron Four Battle “E” award winner by achieving first place marks in overall battle efficiency, engineering readiness, personnel metrics, weapons readiness and communication. Minnesota also won the 2019 Retention Excellence Award that recognizes superior command accomplishment in executing programs and policies that best enable sailors to succeed in naval careers.

“It is a proud moment for our Viking team, and we are honored to receive this award,” said Flaherty. “I am extremely proud of my crew’s accomplishments, including a very successful deployment to the European Theater. The Viking team demonstrated sustained excellence across multiple mission areas and continued to exercise tactical initiative and expertise.”

USS Mitscher (DDG 57) and USS John C. Stennis (CVN 74) were also nominated as best all-around within their commands, and were congratulated for their performance.

“Outstanding achievements by the crews of each command made the selection process extremely difficult,” Grady said.

All finalists distinguished themselves by their exceptional performance and will be justifiably proud of their accomplishments.”

Each year, the Battenberg Cup Award is presented to only one of the nearly 100 eligible surface ships, aircraft carriers and submarines, based on crew achievements. These include performance in competition for Atlantic Fleet Sportmanship Award, Type Command Sailor of the Year Award, Golden Anchor Award, Ney Award and command excellence awards.

Other information, such as operating schedules, commitments and unusual factors contributing to the nomination may also be considered.

Fast-attack submarines like Minnesota are multi-mission platforms enabling five of the six Navy maritime strategy core capabilities — sea control, power projection, forward presence, maritime security and deterrence. They are designed to excel in anti-submarine warfare; anti-ship warfare; strike warfare; special operations; intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; irregular warfare; and mine warfare. Fast-attack submarines project power ashore and Tomahawk cruise missiles in the prevention or preparation of regional crises.

Commissioned on Sept. 7, 2013, Minnesota is the 10th Virginia-class fast-attack submarine. It is the first submarine to bear the name Minnesota and the third U.S. Navy vessel to carry the name Minnesota. It is 377 feet long with a beam of 34 feet. Virginia-class fast attack submarines have a crew of approximately 149 made up of 18 officers and 131 enlisted sailors.

Photo by Steven Hoskins/U.S. Navy
Quick thinking saved a life
Meet the Minn. Outstanding Law Enforcement Officer of the Year

A life-saving deputy has been The American Legion 2020 Outstanding Law Enforcement Officer of the Year for Minnesota.

Deputy Tracey Pagel of the Olmsted County Sheriff's Office performed actions last fall that saved the life of a little girl after a gravel-road-intersection car crash. She was recommended for the honor by Olmsted County Sheriff Kevin Torgerson and Eyota Post 551.

A remarkable turn of events led to the nomination:

On Nov. 4, shortly before 4 p.m., Olmsted County deputies were dispatched to a T-bone crash four miles east of Elgin, where there were severe injuries and 3-year-old girl wasn’t breathing. The 38-year-old mother was performing chest compressions.

“This is a type of call nobody wants to go to but is the type of call everybody goes to, to try and help,” Torgerson wrote in his nomination.

Pagel was the first to arrive and checked the vital signs of the girl, Evelyn McKenzie, of Elgin. She found she wasn’t breathing and lacked a pulse. She had difficulty putting the pads of a defibrillator on the girl’s small body, so she took over from the mother, Kathryn McKenzie, in performing CPR.

Deputy Tom Olson arrived four minutes later and began monitoring Evelyn’s vitals and began to detect a faint pulse.

Pagel continued with rescue breaths while the girl had agonized breathing (reflex gasping but not true breathing).

Elgin Ambulance, Mayo Clinic Ambulance and Mayo One Air Ambulance arrived and took over care for Evelyn and brought her to St. Mary’s Hospital in Rochester. The girl was able to go home to her family on Dec. 20.

Pagel is married with two sons and enjoys riding horses, camping and fitness in her spare time. She sings the national anthem for many events such as the Eagle’s Cancer Telethon.

She was a reserve deputy from October 1993 to July 1997. She became a detention deputy that month and in June 2007 became a patrol deputy. She is a DARE instructor from 2008 and 2016 and a school resource deputy from 2011 to 2016. She serves on the sheriff’s honor guard. She is a certified lifesaver instructor, a crisis negotiator and a member of the mobile field force. She has been involved in community policing efforts, too.

A fire story in the Rochester Post-Bulletin said the driver who struck the McKenzie car, injuring the girl, is a man from Chatfield. His name is Joshua Michael Jacobson, 39, and he faces two counts of criminal vehicular operation and gross misdemeanor criminal vehicular operation. He also was in trouble for driving after his license was revoked.

The story says a blood sample was taken after the crash, and it was found to contain methamphetamine and amphetamine, as well as marijuana. Court records say Kathryn McKenzie was heading east in her Toyota Camry at about 5 mph when she was struck by Jacobson’s northbound Ford Explorer. The crash’s force wedged the Toyota against a utility pole, damaging the right rear door, and the girl was buckled in a child seat in the right rear.

Jacobson told deputies when he approached a yield sign he slowed down but did not see the Camry because the sun was in his eyes. The Post-Bulletin story said he admitted to using the drugs two days before the crash. A drug-recognition evaluator determined he was under the influence of a central nervous system stimulant.

Eyota Post 551 Commander Jonny Enright added that Pagel has earned other honors. Among them was successful negotiation with a man in Wabasha County who had fired a round from a gun and wanted to kill himself. She was awarded the Stingr strip Pin for a successful deployment of a spike strip system, ending a pursuit that began in Mower County. She was honored by a local NBC affiliate TV station with the Amazing Woman Award.

In addition, for the actions at the car crash, Pagel was given the Olmsted County Sheriff’s Office Life Saving Award.

Outstanding Firefighter of the Year is old leader

A fire chief who is involved in his community is The American Legion Outstanding Firefighter of the Year for Minnesota.

Kevin Grote, chief of the Chatfield Fire Department and Region 7 representative with the Minnesota Fire Chief Association, was nominated by North Branch Post 85.

Grote is the team leader and teaches gun safety.

A snippet of the MyLegion.org website.

Training Committee gets back to business with Legion College and MyLegion.org

BAGLEY — Legion College Committee chairwoman Denise Milton, chairwoman of the Department of Minnesota mail it to a committee representing this month that Legion College is scheduled for October at Camp Ripley.

“It is the new Auxiliary, Sons of The American Legion and its Auxiliary programs. It prepares Legionnaires for leadership positions in Posts, Districts, and national departments through education, development and motivation. The curriculum challenges student leaders to think critically and creatively about issues confronting the Legion.

What’s all this talk about MyLegion.org?

The Legion College Committee consists of two sub-committees, Legion College and MyLegion.org.

The MyLegion.org subcommittee, consisting of Linda Dvorak, Tim Haugen and Joe Dvorak, was designed to train and help all individuals at the Post and District levels use MyLegion.org for almost all things membership.

MyLegion.org is an extremely valuable tool that can be used to report, process membership, change addresses, phone numbers, emails, process membership, etc. You can also do your Consolidated Report Post from MyLegion.org.

Each District will have two individuals who will be responsible for training the Posts in their District, we have set up a couple training sessions for the Post Training, one for the District via Zoom.

The first Post training session will take place at 7 p.m. June 10 and will cover reports available in MyLegion.org. These reports include how to find members in your area, including those members that are in Post 1982AD (National’s Holding Post). The second Post training session will be at 7 p.m. June 24 and will cover how to process your Post membership online. No more having to mail your membership to Department. The District training will be on June 15 and will cover the District reports available.

There are training aids already on the mylegion.org website under Membership. These training aids are what will be reviewed for each training session. More training aids will be added as they are completed.

To request to participate in the training please email the following information to Linda Dvorak at ldvorak56@gmail.com with the subject “MyLegion.org Training Signup.”

Name: Post: Phone:

Field: District or Post training:

Dvorak asks District or Post because users will need access to Legion College via the Post website.
THE LEGION IS THERE FOR THE COMMUNITY

New Prague Post 45 supplied lunch for the two clinics, the New Prague Police Department and both shifts at the local Mayo Hospital. All meals were supplied by local restaurants and paid for by Legion Post 45.

Eagan Post 594 Family gathered at Eagan Central Park for a brief Memorial Day remembrance. After an abbreviated speech and benediction, the names of the fallen service members and deceased veterans from the local area were read. Wayne and Gwen Olsen placed a wreath at the Tribute and Memorial Plaza, followed by a moment of silence and the playing of “Taps.” At the conclusion, memorial poppies were left at the plaza by the Auxiliary.

GOD IS NIGH

On May 21, Daniel R. Olsen American Legion Post 594 held an event honoring the 14 Eagan High School seniors who have committed to the U.S. military after graduation. In keeping with the established guidelines set out by Gov. Tim Walz, the event was moved from Eagan High School to the Central Park Pavilion.

Post 594 Commander John Flynn was the emcee of this program and the guest speaker was Past American Legion National Commander Dan Ludwig of Red Wing. Eagan High School teacher and Post 594 member Paul Kovach opened and closed the event. Principal Polly Reikowski attended and the Post 594 Color Guard participated. All of the seniors and family members remained in their vehicles during this ceremony. In lieu of each student talking about their future plans in the military, Flynn shared their stories.

At the end of the program, each student received individual resolutions from the Minnesota House and Minnesota Senate, American Legion Certificate of Commendation, and a plaque from Eagan High School. They also received branch-of-service pins from Post 594. The resolutions were provided by state Rep. Laurie Halverson and state Sen. Jim Carlson.

CEREMONY FOR SENIORS

On May 23, several members of Eagan Post 594 visited St. John’s and Christ Lutheran cemeteries to honor the veterans interred there. At each cemetery, while practicing social-distancing, all Post members placed bronze veteran markers and 12-foot-by-18-foot U.S. flags at each veteran gravesite. Post Commander John Flynn delivered a Memorial Day tribute to veterans of all wars and eras. This was followed by a prayer shared by Post Adjutant Wayne Beierman. Fort Snelling Rifle Squad member and Post 594 Past Commander Tom Mullon then played “Taps” to conclude each service. Some family members of the deceased veterans attended these services.

Seventeen members of the Eagan Post 594 participated in its cleanup of Duckwood Drive under the city’s Adopt-A-Street program on May 23. There was quite a bit of trash collected. Due to the current guidelines, the city could not provide gloves, vests or bags. Post members brought their own gear, and the post is taking care of properly disposing the trash collected. Many residents stopped by to thank Post members.
This is the day John Jayla, center front, got out of the hospital from a surgery to remove a benign tumor on his brain. That surgery was successful, but he found out he had cancer in a lung. That is being treated with chemo. A parade of cars drove by his house to welcome him home. Front from left is Al Nickila, commander of Hibbing Post 222, Jayla and Larry Pocrnich of Post 222.

WELCOME HOME, BUDDY!

Veterans service organizations showed their appreciation for the staff of Minnesota Veterans Homes May 10-16. In Minneapolis, the Paralyzed Veterans of America and Jewish War Veterans and Sons of The American Legion purchased food truck meals for the staff on May 13.

AMERICAN PRIDE

For this year’s Memorial Day, Eagan resident Ron Paul displayed hundreds of U.S. flags on his property in honor of fallen service members. This effort took several hours and Ron was assisted by his daughter Kelli in getting this respectful show of patriotism completed. They also took the step of adding signage to further embody the spirit of Americanism. Residents and neighbors really appreciate that Ron and Kelli did this and often stop by to thank them. They both take great pride in fashioning such displays. Ron is a U.S. Air Force veteran of the Vietnam War and a member of Eagan Post 594.

TO THE RESCUE

Tim Engstrom, representing Bloomington Post 550, hands a check to Twin Cities landlady Amy Gonyea at her offices in St. Louis Park in February. With them are two employees of Gonyea’s company, Sela Investments. The Minneapolis Housing Authority purposefully left a veteran’s fiancé and 2-year-old child homeless, and several American Legion and VFW Posts rallied to the cause of housing the pair. Bloomington Post 550 donated $2,000 for a security deposit. Palmer Lake VFW Post 3915 gave $1,200 in rental assistance. Osseo American Legion Post 172 gave $1,200 in rental assistance. Hopkins VFW Post 425 covered the application fee, renter’s insurance, movers from storage to new apartment, Cub and Walgreen gift cards, among other needs. The Hopkins Elks gave move-in supplies as a welcome-home gift.
Detroit Lakes Post 15 has made available to members of the community gold and blue star banners for families that have a loved one in the service. Phil Bellefeuille from the post and Diane Hayes of the Auxiliary display the banners.

St. Joseph Post 328 held a flag retirement ceremony this year. Post Sergeant-at-Arms Rick Studer recited a poem respecting the flag prior to the burning of the flags.

The New Ulm City Cemetery features a poppy garden in remembrance of the World War I military members who died in the war.

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Greetings from the 1st District

Dale Wellik

GREETINGS FROM THE 3RD DISTRICT

Hello from the 3rd District

Dale Wellik

GREETINGS FROM THE 4TH DISTRICT

Joe Jansen

GREETINGS FROM THE 5TH DISTRICT

Andrew Rose Sr.

GREETINGS FROM THE 6TH DISTRICT

Paul Edwards

GREETINGS FROM THE 7TH DISTRICT

Dean Knutson

GREETINGS FROM THE 8TH DISTRICT

Annie Koskinen

GREETINGS FROM THE 9TH DISTRICT

Lowell Philp

PROPOSED SCHEDULE FOR YEAR 34 OF THE WORLD WAR II ROUND TABLE

The Harvard College World War II History Roundtable hopes to begin this year by gathering again at the Minnesota History Center. It’s audiotorium get-togethers were cancelled once the pandemic was declared in mid-March.

Organizer Don Patton said he hopes the gatherings will resume this fall.

“I am working to make Year 34 a strong comeback from the momentum that we were developing as result of the transition of moving dates and locations this year,” he said.

In addition, he noted the Congressional Gold Medal ceremony for Muslim American War Vet Braveheart survivor, Walter Straka, which was originally April 13, is now part of the Bataan Marathon in Brainerd on Sept. 12.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Oct. 13</td>
<td>Invasion of Japan</td>
<td>D.M. Giangreco</td>
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<td>Oct. 27</td>
<td>Nazi strategic failure</td>
<td>Andrew Nagorski</td>
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<td>Nov. 10</td>
<td>Winter War in the Middle East</td>
<td>D.K.R. Crosswell</td>
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<td>Dec. 8</td>
<td>Origins of War in Pacific Richard Frank</td>
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President’s Column
Mary Hendrickson

The merry month of May continued to challenge our patience and resilience. It was disappointing to cancel attendance at six events during the first 17 days of the month. I was looking forward to the 10th District Convention in Delano, a spelling bee in Hanska, a Mother’s Day Membership Banquet in North Branch, a Memorial Service in Nashwauk, a unit meeting in Roseau and a spring gala in Wayzata.

Hopefully, I will be invited to these events next May. I definitely sympathize with all families who have had to cancel many-anticipated weddings, graduations and family reunions. We will get through this challenge and be able to sing “Happy Days are Here Again.”

Social distancing has led us to gathering via Zoom meetings to conduct Auxiliary business and interact “face to face” with other members of the American Legion Family. I’d like to thank our incoming Department secretary and current secretary treasurer, Marsha Bible, for doing the necessary groundwork to obtain our Auxiliary Zoom account.

Carl L. technology dinosaurs, have survived camera and microphone issues with our older home computer setup and now have been active participants in several Zoom meetings. Zoom has allowed me the opportunity to attend Girls State Committee, Department Financial Committee and Department Auxiliary Membership Team meetings. It’s fun to see the faces of friends who I’ve missed seeing in person.

Speaking of virtual meetings, on Saturday, May 2, National had a very informative session. With the onset of the pandemic in March, National (and Department) have been flooded with questions about the supposed end of this Auxiliary year and what happens in 2020-2021.

Three individuals: National President Nicole Clapp, National Vice President Kathy Dauddiet and new National Executive Director Kelly Circle answered questions they had received from members, Units and Departments over the last two months.

If you’d like to see this very informative National Leadership Virtual Meeting, go to: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0mhiZUaGw-feature=youtu.be.

I hope some of you had the opportunity to take part in the first-ever Virtual National Poppy Day watch party on Facebook at noon Friday, May 22. We know that any day can be Poppy Day. We hope you took time during the Memorial Day weekend to remember the veterans who have left us and those who made the ultimate sacrifice to protect us and our freedoms.

Stay safe. Don’t let up your guard. You are needed and appreciated.

Mary Hendrickson

The American Legion Auxiliary, like The American Legion, is classified as an exempt organization under section 501(c)(19) of the tax code. This classification only stands if we meet the following requirements:

Members must be within two degrees of consanguinity (the fact of being descended from the same ancestor) that means that the most distant allowable relationships are grandparent, sister and grandchild. Even though great-grandchildren were “allowed” in the past, the current IRS ruling does not allow that in the definition.

The only exception—— if you currently have a member who is a great-grandchild they may retain their membership as long as their membership dues are kept current and do not become delinquent (paid no later than Dec. 31).

American Legion Auxiliary 2019-2020 Scholarship winners

Department Education Chair Pam Gades is pleased to announce the following recipients of the $1,000 Department Scholarships for 2019-2020:

Kennedy Grover, Bagley
Tegan Marty, Montevideo

Continued on Page 15
Farewell, Legion Family, but it’s not by forever

Editor’s note: Sandie Deutch is retiring after nine years as executive secretary for the American Legion Auxiliary Department of Minnesota. She is writing this specially brief goodbye column.

My first year, and neither of us knew what we were doing. How could I tell her that I was going to be this Legionnaire? I was proud of this woman as I am — she gives so much of herself to do the work.

Here we are today with President Mary Hendrickson. This woman is really a basset. She has done so much in the past so why should she not do it now.

She is doing a phenomenal job leading the organization, and we can expect to see her again for another year. She will be a big help transiting Marshala into her job.

On to my staff ... I had a few snafus at the onset, and I have to thank you for understanding. I want to say that once I had Jan Lauby and Julie Denefee in place, things couldn’t have been better for me as they are a well-oiled machine, and we hope that you agree.

Our drive was just too much for her after almost six months. I know that drive well as I have been doing it for nine years.

It stinks, but because I love this job, I stick it with. After Julie left us, Jan and I struggled on along — you will expect to see us pop up here and there because of work — no more giving justice to this woman. She has always been done.” I really never got to know Sandie until her year as president, and ever since, every day I have missed her fun whenever we are together.

Next was the ever smiling Sandy Fredrickson, who worked so hard with me in trying to do things that we had not been able to do before, but whenever we are together.

There is always some sort of mail needing to be collected together — love her dearly. You keep taking care of Tinday Lou for me.

She had a tough back. I had to take a break to dry my eyes.

Carol Kottom came to my side next, and that is what I have been doing it for nine years.

We worked hard this past year to make the American Legion Auxiliary Minnesota Girls State a success, so we will continue working together as a team to make the 2021 Membership Cards

Volunteer at the VA

Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service (VAVS) representative. It is requested that you serve at least four hours per week for at least six months.

Mary Ann Davis is the American Legion Auxiliary Vet erans Affairs Volunteer Service (VAVS) representative. Contact her at 651-696-3272.

2021 Membership Cards

362x25]

Peggy Tesdahl, Girls State Director

organized the following recipients to be forwarded on to the US Department of Veterans Affairs.

Lesley Christoffer, Girls State Committee Member

Joanie Joachim, Americanism Chairman

Jean Walker Girls State Chairman

Peggy Tesdahl, Girls State Director

Amelia Tesdahl, Girls State Education Director

Lesley Christoffer, Girls State Committee Member

Joanie Joachim, Americanism Chairman

Jean Walker Girls State Chairman

Notre Dame, Rosetown-Memorial Unit 542

Taylorsit, Okahena Unit 608

Megan Lindahl, Chokio Unit 529

Department Education Chairman Pam Gades has se lected the following recipients to be forwarded on to the Northwestern Division for National competition. The deadline for this scholarship was changed and no national winners have been announced as of this date.

Children of Warrior’s Scholarship: Maria Melo, Bagley Unit 16

Spirit of Youth Scholarship: Tyrja Johnson, Spicer Unit 545

Junior Member Loyalty Scholarship: Lexus Efta, Argyle Unit 353

Nontraditional Student Scholarship: Shannon Swanson, Apple Valley Unit 1776

by Jean Walker

Update on Girls State

By Jean Walker

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The OGP is real; I wish the coronavirus-19 were not

Guest Column
Larry Johnson

Are you the son of a veteran? Maybe you are a veteran and the son or grandson of one? Either way, join your local Sons of the American Legion.

The future doesn’t have to be uncertain.

The lower the Margin, the more you qualify for. Call for our low rates. Libor Margins as low as 2%. Call or email me for a free personal quote.

Revere Mortgages

The Department website was rebuilt last summer with a new design and more information.

Reverse Mortgages

The Department of Minnesota has a survey on its website that asks visitors for feedback on their use of the website.

The survey began June 1 and will run for one month. For the first two weeks, it will appear on a pop-up page.

There are eight questions. The survey asks about how they use the website, how they would rate navigation of the website, whether they found what they were looking for and where they get their Minnesota American Legion information.

The Department of Minnesota website is mnlegion.org.

“We want to provide the best level of service possible, and our website is a key means of doing that,” said Department Adjutant Mike Maxa.

The Department website was published on the first day of the month.

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