MURAL PAYS TRIBUTE TO KOREAN WAR VETS

Ohio artist places newest creation between World War II and Vietnam murals.

By The American Legion

As this year marks 65 years since the start of the Korean War, a new 20-foot-tall black-and-white mural in downtown Amherst, Ohio, pays tribute to veterans of America’s “Forgotten War.” It’s the third mural for local artist Mike Sekletar, who has painted the outside wall of a two-story brick building into a historic timeline.

The Korean War mural, which was dedicated during a ceremony this past Veterans Day, features a silhouette of the Korean peninsula surrounded by combat soldiers, fighter jets, a battleship and a nurse.

“Korean veterans that I’ve met are so proud and thankful that a younger guy paid respect to them with this mural,” said Sekletar, a member of Sons of The American Legion Squadron 118 in Amherst. “Truly, it’s a real honor for me to pay my thanks in this way, so I guess the Korean War is no longer the ‘Forgotten War’ in Amherst, Ohio.”

Sekletar’s latest mural, which he helped create with longtime friend Brian Goodwin, was inspired by the Korean War Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. Sekletar liked the “different portraits and scenes that are engraved and juxtaposed” throughout the memorial’s granite wall, which led him to represent various war scenes and branches of the military in his mural. One of Sekletar’s.

VA patients get a flu shot at Walgreens

Walgreens has joined forces with VA to provide VA patients no-cost flu shots.* The program is subject to availability and runs until March 31, 2016.

To participate, download the Walgreens flu shot form at www.legion.org/walgreens/registration. VA-enrolled veterans should complete this form and bring in their valid VA ID card and a photo ID to any of the 8,200 Walgreens locations nationwide: www.walgreens/findastore. Walgreens will send the information to your VA health record within the established requirements of the eHealth exchange.

For more information on the program call (877) 771-8537 or visit www.ehealth.va.gov/immunization.asp.

Legion Family members are encouraged to spread the word by downloading a flyer at www.legion.org/walgreens/flyer and displaying it at posts.

*State-, age- and health-related restrictions may apply. Family members and TRICARE members are not eligible.

Request a 2016 Emblem Sales catalog

Anyone who purchased a Legion, Auxiliary or Sons item from Emblem Sales in the last three years will automatically receive a catalog, as will commanders and adjutants on all levels. Anyone who needs to obtain a catalog can request one online: www.emblem.legion.org/inforequest.asp.
COMMANDER’S MESSAGE

Give the gift of patriotism

The holidays are here and for many of us, it’s a time of gift-giving. I’m always looking for unique, meaningful gifts to give to my family and friends of all ages. And this year, I’m thankful The American Legion has made that special gift easier to find.

The Legion’s new bookazine, “Indivisible: The Story of Our Flag,” describes the phenomenal journey of America’s colors, from Betsy Ross to the war on terrorism.

Just in time for the holidays, the bookazine is available for $9.95 per copy at Barnes & Noble, Books-A-Million, Bookworld, Sam’s Club, Hastings and selected U.S. military PXs and commissaries. The bookazine can also be ordered online from American Legion Emblem Sales; visit www.legion.org/flag for ordering details. Supplies are limited, so early ordering is encouraged.

Assembled in the 116-page publication are dozens of photos, graphics, illustrations, stories, voices, facts, histories and mysteries about the flag and its place in American, and global, society. The publication includes an illustrated guide to the U.S. Flag Code and the story of how The American Legion became the national leader in establishing standards of respect and honor for the colors.

The real story of “The Star-Spangled Banner” – from its origins in the War of 1812 to its 21st-century preservation at the Smithsonian Institute – is woven throughout the publication, as are poems, musical lyrics, unique flag-designed products and the national anthem’s various renditions through history at major sporting events.

This American Legion Family centennial publication shows why the U.S. flag is unique in its symbolism and meaning around the world. This is an important aspect of the Legion Family centennial story. The American Legion Auxiliary, Sons of The American Legion, American Legion Riders and The American Legion itself are the nation’s greatest ambassadors and experts on the flag. So if you’re looking for a patriotic holiday gift or stocking stuffer, share the Legion Family’s legacy of patriotism with “Indivisible.”

Dale Barnett
National Commander

MEMBERSHIP

Recruiters to be honored with ‘Duty, Honor, Country’ pin

During the 2015-2016 membership year, American Legion National Commander Dale Barnett will award his national commander pin to any Legion Family member who obtains three new members into the Legion.

A new member is any eligible person joining for the 2016 membership year who was not a member of The American Legion during the 2015 membership year.

Each member listed must be eligible for membership in The American Legion. Forward names of SAL members or Auxiliary members to your detachment or unit for use in their respective incentive programs.

To maintain the integrity of the national commander’s pin incentive program, only one pin will be awarded per individual.

Upon receipt, national membership staff will confirm the names and mail the pin directly to the person who earned it. Commander Barnett’s pin incentive program will end June 30, 2016, or when supplies are exhausted.

www.legion.org/commander/pin

National Commander Honor Ribbon

During the 2015-2016 membership year, American Legion National Commander Dale Barnett will award his National Commander Honor Ribbon to any American Legion Family that achieves 100 percent membership by May 30, 2016.

For this award, the Legion Family is defined as a post and any combination of an Auxiliary unit, Sons squadron or Legion Riders chapter. Each branch must achieve 100 percent membership to qualify for the award.

The National Commander Honor Ribbon incentive program will end May 30, 2016, or when supplies are exhausted.

Download the form online: www.legion.org/commander/ribbon
$60,000 raised for Iowa veterans in 12 hours

Radiothon supports Department of Iowa’s veteran assistance programs.

By Daniel S. Wheeler

The American Legion Department of Iowa has once again shown how building relationships with community businesses can financially impact veterans’ lives in a positive way.

This past Veterans Day, the department partnered with Des Moines radio station KIOA 93.3 to host another “Vets of Valor” radiothon. In 12 hours, the radiothon raised $60,000 to benefit the Department of Iowa’s veteran assistance programs.

It was the second year in a row that the department and KIOA partnered to support veterans in need. Last year, the radiothon raised nearly $20,000 for the Legion’s Temporary Financial Assistance program.

“This year’s radiothon was a solid demonstration that the veterans in Iowa intend to take care of each other, and the citizens of Iowa have a strong bond with their veterans and have an appreciation for military service,” said Department of Iowa Adjutant John Derner. “This is one way they showed their appreciation.”

The radiothon was once again held in the lobby of Prairie Meadows Racetrack Casino Hotel, a partner in the drive along with First Class Credit Union. The phones were manned by First Class employees, KIOA on-air personalities conducted challenges with listeners and advertisers, and department Legionnaires and service officers answered questions from veterans and their families.

Within the first five minutes of the radiothon, $500 in donations were collected. Donations poured in from people who wanted to honor a loved family veteran, and Legion posts conducted challenges with each other. For example, Post 663 in Urbandale challenged other posts to meet its $100 donation.

“I told everyone who donated that The American Legion of Iowa will be very good stewards of their money and this is going to go a long way to help Iowa veterans,” said Kathy Nees, program director for the Department of Iowa. “It was a very good day.”

Pre-recorded testimonials were also aired during the radiothon from veterans and their families who have benefited from Legion assistance. And dignitaries such as Iowa Sen. Chuck Grassley and Gov. Terry Branstad provided on-air Legion testimonials. Branstad, a 45-year Legion member, shared how he became a post commander following his military service, and the importance the Legion has in America’s communities.

Derner said Nees has done a “tremendous job” working with Iowa radio stations over the years on veterans issues and needs, and it’s because of her dedication that KIOA approached the department about the radiothon.

“You can’t buy this kind of marketing. It’s the relationship that we built over the years that allowed this (radiothon) to happen,” he said. “(The Department of Iowa) cannot thank KIOA enough, First Class Credit Union, Prairie Meadows Racetrack Casino Hotel, the other sponsors throughout the day, and more than anything else the generosity of KIOA listeners who supported our programs. We thank all of our veterans who listened in that day and found out about our organization and learned about the services we can provide to their families and fellow veterans.”
favorite parts of the mural is that of nearby Lorain, Ohio, Korean War veteran Lou Repko behind the wheel of the jeep. The image first appeared on the cover a 1950 issue of *LIFE* magazine. Repko attended the mural’s dedication ceremony and handed Sekletar an original copy of the magazine featuring his photo.

The building was a blank canvas until four years ago, when Sekletar began using his talent to “give back to veterans.” On Veterans Day 2011 he dedicated a 20-by-35 mural of the iconic photograph “Raising the Flag on Iwo Jima,” and on Veterans Day 2013 he dedicated a 16-by-35 mural of artist Lee Teter’s 1988 painting “Reflections.”

“When I stand back from the murals I’m pleased with the way they pay tribute to a few different generations of veterans,” Sekletar said. “Each mural has its own look, but looking at all three together it shows a reverse timeline with ‘Iwo Jima’ being the first thing you see while driving into town on Park Avenue.

“I’m glad I am able to give thanks to veterans and also give back to my hometown of Amherst.”

**ASK A SERVICE OFFICER**

**VA’s Eight Priority Groups**

**Q. Am I eligible for enrollment in the VA’s health care Priority Groups?**

**A.** VA set up eight Priority Groups to make sure that certain groups of veterans are able to be enrolled before others. Based on your specific eligibility status, you will be assigned a Priority Group, which ranges from 1 to 8 with 1 being the highest priority for enrollment.

- **Priority Group 1:** Veterans with a 50 percent or higher service-connected rating and/or determined by VA to be unemployed due to service-connected conditions.
- **Priority Group 2:** Veterans with service-connected disabilities rated 30 percent or 40 percent.
- **Priority Group 3:** POW, Purple Heart recipients, and veterans discharged for disabilities incurred or aggravated in the line of duty, service-connected at 10 percent or 20 percent and receiving benefits under 38 U.S. Code 1151 or vocational rehabilitation.
- **Priority Group 4:** Veterans in receipt of compensation or pension at the housebound or aid-and-attendance rate, and/or veterans determined by VA to be catastrophically disabled.
- **Priority Group 5:** Non-service-connected veterans and non-compensable service-connected veterans rated 0 percent and/or with net worth not greater than VA financial thresh-
Las Vegas post meets needs of low-income veterans

American Legion Paradise Post 149 in Las Vegas provides food, basic necessities and financial support to local veterans in need through its Operation Vegas Heroes program. Over the past seven years, the program has donated more than 1,000 cubic feet of goods to a local veterans food pantry and has received nearly $17,000 in donations to assist veterans.

Operation Vegas Heroes was established after Post 149, which is largely comprised of Legion Riders, learned that Las Vegas veterans in subsidized housing were struggling to put food on the table, oftentimes forgoing everyday necessities so they could afford to eat. “That simply was not acceptable,” said Victor “Doc” Moss, Post 149 adjutant and Legion Rider. So the post began collecting food and toiletries for the Veterans Care Assistance Program food bank, which works with VA social workers to identify low-income veterans in need.

The post collects items for the food bank by standing outside supermarkets and handing out lists of items needed to shoppers wanting to show their support. Additionally, thanks to Post 149’s active Facebook page and website, local organizations have offered to conduct collections as well. For example, an Italian restaurant is asking for non-perishable food as the entry fee into a dinner and dance it’s hosting this holiday season.

“It doesn’t take a huge effort for a post to become more community-oriented,” Moss said. “Our post home is a small executive office that doubles as a meeting hall, but we like to tell people that our post is where we happen to be at the time they ask. Las Vegas is our post home.”

Post members also collect monetary donations outside supermarkets, but the biggest financial fundraiser is during the annual Las Vegas BikeFest. As an active Legion Riders post, members set up a boot at the event and place a 5-gallon water jug on a table with the goal to fill it. As an added incentive to receive donations, Riders ask BikeFest attendees to sign banners that read “Las Vegas, Nevada, Supports Our Troops.” When the banners are covered in signatures, the post sends them to troops deployed overseas. And in return, the troops send photos to the post with them holding the signs.

An example of how monetary donations to Operation Vegas Heroes have assisted veterans who don’t qualify for financial support through VA or Legion programs, such as Temporary Financial Assistance, is the ability to repair a veteran’s broken-down vehicle. The assisted veteran had a new job offer, which would allow him to continue to pay child support and keep him from becoming homeless, but he was immobile without the vehicle. “He got the job, his children are still taken care of, and we have a new member of The American Legion,” Moss said.

“What I get the most from seeing the other (post members’) involvement (in the Operation Vegas Heroes program) is knowing that if someone simply is willing to lead, others are sure to follow. Seeing the satisfaction they get out of helping, and the pride they take in being part of such an unconventional post, motivates me to keep doing what I do for the good of the Legion, and the good of mankind. If I can do my small part to keep my post members on the right track, I know that my post will be successful for years to come.”

Rewarding the flying of Old Glory

A string of phone calls nine years ago has resulted in American Legion Post 24 recognizing more than 120 businesses in Champaign, Ill., for flying the U.S. flag. Community members were upset that a business on a main intersection in Champaign was flying an unserviceable flag and wanted Post 24 to take action. Instead of highlighting its wrongdoing, the post decided to award those in the community that were properly displaying the flag.

Once a month since 2006, members of Post 24 have hand-delivered a framed certificate that salutes businesses for flying Old Glory.

“Very seldom will you see an unserviceable flag flying after a business receives the award,” said Chuck Zelinsky, a member of Post 24 and a member of the Legion’s 100th Anniversary Observance Committee. “It’s been a very successful program for the post, and it’s been very heartwarming.”

Zelinsky drives around the community looking for businesses to honor, and no one has received the award twice due to new development over the years. He said businesses will often share their motivation for flying the U.S. flag. For example, one privately-owned publishing company was flying the flag to honor two employees who were serving in Desert Storm at the time.

The post has also received a lot of publicity in the community from their flag reward program thanks to a local radio station. WDWS 1400-AM personality Ann Rhoton announces Post 24’s flag reward winner the first Sunday of every month. Before the announcement, Rhoton will play the march “American Legion Forever” and afterward will dedicate a patriotic song to the winner. Rhoton said if listeners miss the announcement, she receives phone calls asking who the winner was.

The winner is also featured in Champaign’s local paper, the News-Gazette, in Post 24’s monthly newsletter and on a bulletin board inside the post home.

“We would like to see a (U.S.) flag that’s not 100 percent correct than not seeing a flag fly at all,” Zelinsky said.
Army National Guard Maj. Mitch Nethery never got flustered when trying to teach a group of elementary students to march military time on Nov. 3 at Cypress Cove Farm in Red Bay, Ala. Nethery was in charge of the marching station during American Legion Post 120’s annual veterans program at the farm.

In its third year, the veterans program is the brainchild of Post 120 Commander Frankie Miller and longtime Alabama State Rep. Johnny Mack Morrow, who owns the 300-acre Cypress Cove Farm.

“Most of these kids weren’t born when 9/11 happened,” said Miller, a Vietnam War veteran. “We need to tell these kids that freedom isn’t free. That somebody paid a price for our freedom. If we don’t tell the younger people, they’re not going to know.”

During its first year, Smith said the post invited Red Bay fourth, fifth and sixth graders “and just kind of shot from the hip. I got two or three veterans to talk. We started out with four stations. It was a trial to see if it would work.”

It did. The post surveyed the teachers and students. All the numbers came back positive, Smith said, so Post 120 began opening up the camp to students at other schools and involving other Legion posts. In three years, the camp has grown from 200 campers to more than 1,000.

In addition to learning how to march and fold the U.S. flag, campers hear from four different veterans about their military experiences and also visit the onsite Fred Rosemore and Gordon Morrow Memorial Museum.

Fran Nabers, a fourth-grade teacher at Red Bay High School, said her students look forward to the camp. “Most of the time I have a hard time with kids turning in permission forms,” she said. “The next day they bring (the veterans camp forms) back. They really enjoy it.”

Morrow said, “Patriotism is something that needs rekindling in America today. I am just so proud that we have Frankie Smith and the volunteers that are members of The American Legion … that are willing to come out and make this happen. The feelings I get are overwhelming.”

Morrow added that the dedication Smith has shown to the program “just says that he cares. He cares about the future of our country, and the future of our country is right here today: these children.”
MEMBERSHIP INCENTIVES AND AWARDS

BIG TWELVE COMPETITION

The Big Twelve Competition recognizes departments that meet or exceed their pledged membership goal percentage by the March target date. The percentage does not include members gained through DMS.

The competition is broken down into six categories. The winner in each category will be reimbursed for computer equipment purchases of up to $2,000, while the runners-up in each category will be reimbursed for computer equipment purchases of up to $1,000.

The six categories in the Big Twelve Competition are:
- Category I – departments of 100,000 or more members
- Category II – departments of 70,000-69,999 members
- Category III – departments of 40,000-69,999 members
- Category IV – departments of 25,000-39,999 members
- Category V – departments of 10,000-24,999 members
- Category VI – departments of 9,999 or fewer members

Read more about the Big Twelve Competition by downloading the online National Membership Points Award Manual located under Internal Affairs.

www.legion.org/publications

GOLD AND SILVER BRIGADE

Legionnaires who recruit 50 or more new members (transfers do not count as new members) into The American Legion by the May target date qualify for The American Legion's Gold Brigade award.

First-time Gold Brigade members will receive a Gold Brigade patch, a special Gold Brigade cap pin, a Gold Brigade certificate, and a designer jacket or polo shirt or sweater with a Gold Brigade logo. Second time/repeat Gold Brigaders will receive a Gold Brigade patch and certificate, a hash mark for a jacket sleeve, and a designer jacket or polo shirt or sweater with a Gold Brigade logo. A Gold Brigader who has won the award for five consecutive years is eligible for a distinctive Gold Brigade blazer. And a Gold Brigader who has earned the award for at least six consecutive years or more is eligible for a $150 check and a Legion cap with the inscription "Master Recruiter."

A Legionnaire who recruits 25-49 new members (transfers do not count as new members) into The American Legion by the May target date qualify for the Silver Brigade award.

Download the National Membership Points Award Manual: www.legion.org/publications

POST EXCELLENCE AWARD CONTINUES

The Post Excellence Award program honors posts that show excellence in membership participation, youth activities, community service, and support to veterans and U.S. troops.

Criteria
- **Membership.** Post membership must be at least one member more than the previous year. A post officer must attend district meetings.
- **Youth activities.** The post must sponsor and actively participate in at least one primary youth program: Boys State, Legion Baseball, Oratorical Contest, Boy Scouts of America or Junior Shooting Sports.
- **Community service.** The post must organize a community service project that involves members of the Legion, Auxiliary or Sons of The American Legion. A monetary donation may only be one part of a project.
- **Service to troops or veterans.** The post must organize a project supporting troops or veterans (for example, Family Support Network or Operation Comfort Warriors) that involves members of the Legion, Auxiliary or SAL outside the post. A monetary donation may only be one part of a project.

Certification. District commanders must certify posts as having fulfilled the four specified criteria, and submit a list of the post’s name, number, address and commander’s name to department headquarters. If possible, accompany with copies of press releases submitted to local media that raise awareness for the projects and enhance the Legion’s public image.

Awards. Each qualifying post, as well as district commanders whose districts have at least 50 percent of posts reach certification, will receive a certificate of recognition.

www.legion.org/commander/postexcellence
Veterans turn uniforms into art

More than a dozen veterans gathered at American Legion Post 134 in Portland, Ore., last month to transform their military uniforms into art.

The veterans shredded their uniforms with scissors, turned them into pulp with a pulverizing machine, and created canvas-like paper to write or paint their war stories on.

“When I was literally tearing up my uniform and cutting it up into little pieces, something happened inside that felt so good just to decommission that uniform,” said Ray Facundo, a member of Post 134 and coordinator of student veteran services at Portland State University.

Post 134 and the Portland State University Veterans Resource Center sponsored the event to help veterans use their military uniform - which would otherwise be stored away in a box - to share their experiences. The veterans wrote war poems and stories about their military experience on the paper, and painted favorite memories from their time in service.

“The symbolic act of shredding a uniform and putting it into something a person can use today is freeing,” said veteran Malcom Chaddock. “It takes a lot of baggage and lets a person deal with it in a way that’s concrete. You take it and you shred it with your hands, with your scissors, and you create something new out of it. I think that’s a really therapeutic thing.”

Post 134 Commander Sean Davis said the event was “a healing process; art heals the soul. There is a lot of stuff that we have gone through as combat veterans, but this helps us out a lot. Seeing these veterans do this was incredible.”

Watch a video of the veterans turning their uniforms into art online:

www.legion.org/legiontv