A SILENT WALK FOR POW/MIAs

Legion Family members in Wisconsin walk a mile in silence every third Saturday in September to honor servicemembers still unaccounted for.

By The American Legion

In honor of POW/MIA Recognition Day (the third Friday in September), The American Legion Department of Wisconsin’s 1st District has held a silent walk the day after POW/MIA Recognition Day for the past 30 years to honor the sacrifices made by America’s prisoners of war and those who are still missing in action.

“The participants (veterans and civilians) walk in unison for less than a mile with reverent silence and the only sound to be heard is a lone drum beat,” said Bob Miller, POW/MIA chairman for District 1 and a member of Post 24 in Lake Geneva, Wis. “What we are trying to achieve is just recognizing and not forgetting.”

The POW/MIA silent walk, which is hosted by one of the 45 1st District posts each year, starts at 11 a.m. and is followed by a ceremony that features a guest speaker, the reading of Wisconsin MIA Vietnam War servicemembers still unaccounted for and the release of black balloons.

About 100 veterans and civilians participated in last month’s walk, carrying U.S. flags, the POW/MIA flag and a 16-by-20 foot American Legion Department of Wisconsin banner that resides at Miller Park – home of the Milwaukee Brewers baseball team. The participants walked through residential neighborhoods in downtown Lake Geneva and ended at Post 24 where guest speaker John Scocos, Wisconsin’s secretary of veterans affairs, provided remarks and the names of the 28 MIA Wisconsin servicemen from the Vietnam War were read. The reading of each name was accompanied by the release of a black balloon.

See A silent march for POW/MIAs on Page 4
COMANDER’S MESSAGE

Share your military experience

Veterans Day is a time to honor veterans from all wars. As the symbolic day approaches, I encourage Legionnaires to visit students in the classrooms to share their military service and what it means to be patriotic. The American Legion believes that our military veterans are living textbooks of American history, and their accounts of experiences while in uniform should be preserved and shared with others, especially with students in America’s schools.

The American Legion has educational materials that posts can purchase at nominal cost through Emblem Sales to support a veterans in the classroom program. Examples include full color comic books such as “I Pledge Allegiance,” “Our Country’s Veterans” and “Our Country’s Flag;” the “Let’s Be Right on Flag Etiquette” booklet; and two DVDs titled “For Which It Stands” and “America’s Veterans.”

The educational materials can be located and purchased online under Americanism and flag education: www.emblem.legion.org

Legionnaires can also get involved with the Joe Foss Institute’s “Veterans Inspiring Patriotism” program, which has veterans nationwide educate young people (kindergarten through 12th grade) in the classroom about patriotism, public service, integrity and appreciation for America’s military. A 2014 Child Welfare Foundation recipient, the Joe Foss Institute was founded in 2001 by the late World War II Marine and Medal of Honor recipient Gen. Joe Foss.

Veterans who participate in the Veterans Inspiring Patriotism program speak to students for about 45 minutes on who Joe Foss was, their personal military service and what it means to be patriotic. The veteran also provides the classroom with a U.S. flag and copies of the U.S. Constitution, Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights.

Sharing your military experience with students today is vital as the U.S. flag is disappearing daily in classrooms and young people are not being educated on what it means to be a patriotic citizen and the freedom the flag represents. It is up to us to continue educating America’s youth today in effort to create future leaders for tomorrow.

Mike Helm
National Commander

MEMBERSHIP

National Commander Honor Ribbon

During the 2014-2015 membership year, American Legion National Commander Mike Helm will award his National Commander Honor Ribbon to any American Legion Family that achieves 100 percent membership by June 30, 2015.

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 to qualify for the award.

The National Commander Honor Ribbon incentive program will end June 30, 2015, or when supplies are exhausted.

Download the form online: www.legion.org/commander/ribbon

During the 2014-2015 membership year, American Legion National Commander Mike Helm will award his national commander pin to any American Legion Family member who obtains three new members into the Legion.

A new member is any eligible person joining for the 2015 membership year who was not a member of the American Legion during the 2014 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 Helm’s pin incentive program will end June 30, 2015, or when supplies are exhausted.

www.legion.org/commander/pin

Recruiters to be honored with ‘Stay On Course’ pin

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THE AMERICAN LEGION FAMILY
Halloween is a time for young people to dress up as their favorite cartoon character, music artist or superhero. It’s also a holiday that The American Legion believes children and parents should know how to observe safely.

The Legion’s brochure, “Make Halloween a Fun and Safe Night,” provides trick-or-treating safety tips to keep in mind on Halloween. The brochure can be found and downloaded on the Legion’s publication’s web page under Children & Youth: www.legion.org/publications

The American Legion also encourages posts to promote Halloween safety and to make it a fun night for youth in the community. Last Halloween, Post 490 in Houston hosted a party for local children with food, games and treats.

When the children arrived at the post, Legion Family members filled their Halloween baskets with candy and gave them each a trick or treat bag containing a ruler with the photos and names of the U.S. presidents, a No. 2 pencil, a book marker quoting the Pledge of Allegiance, and the Legion’s “Our Country’s Flag” comic book and “Geography Coloring and Activity Book.”

“The post was filled with children of all ages, and everyone was enjoying watching the children play various games,” said Gil Hernandez, public relations chairman for Post 490. The games included musical chairs, throwing bean bags inside a large pumpkin and fishing in a plastic pool. Post members fed the hungry trick or treaters hot dogs, popcorn and cotton candy, and allowed them to safely trick or treat around the post’s neighborhood as volunteer police officers monitored the area.

Hernandez said the highlight of the evening was the costume contest where 128 children participated. The contest was divided into three age groups (1-4 years old, 5-8 years old and 9-12 years old) and a child from each age group won for wearing the scariest, most original, cutest and most patriotic costume. The winners were each given a $50 savings bond.

“Regardless of selections, the crowd thought all the contestants were winners,” Hernandez said. “Supporting our children and the community gives our post a great feeling of accomplishment.”
For many years, Post 48 in Oxnard, Calif., did not have a post home. Chartered in 1919, many Legionnaires said that Post 48’s first home was in Charles P. Daly’s 1917-1920 Ford Model T. Daly, Post 48’s adjutant, and other post members turned the car into a portable office and drove it to post meetings throughout the area.

Share Your Post’s Legacy
Upload photos, print material and videos related to your post’s history on the Legion’s Centennial Celebration web page:

www.centennial.legion.org

VA launches Burn Pit Registry

Q. Am I eligible to take VA’s Burn Pit questionnaire?
A. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) launched the Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry for servicemembers and veterans who may have been exposed to airborne hazards such as burn pits, oil-well fires and dust storms. The Burn Pit Registry will help VA and doctors better assess the health of veterans and determine to what extent air pollution from burn pits caused diseases and medical conditions in servicemembers.

Participation in the registry is voluntary and open to any veteran or servicemember who deployed to:
- Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm
- Operation Enduring Freedom
- Operation Iraqi Freedom
- Operation New Dawn
- Anywhere in the Southwest Asia theater of operations after Aug. 2, 1990 to include Djibouti, Africa, after Sept.11, 2001

Veterans and servicemembers can use the registry questionnaire to report exposures to airborne hazards (such as smoke from burn pits, oil-well fires, or pollution during deployment), as well as other exposures and health concerns. Take the questionnaire online:

www.mobilehealth.va.gov/app/burn-pit-registry

VA will maintain the security of all information provided in the registry.

Most veterans and servicemembers will complete the questionnaire once. However, VA may ask others to participate in studies that could involve additional questionnaires and exams. VA will determine eligibility for the Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry based on deployment information from the Department of Defense.

Email claims questions to:
askso@legion.org

Find a Legion service officer:
www.legion.org/serviceofficers

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balloon and the ringing of a bell. Last year, 29 names were read but the remains of U.S. Marine Merlin Raye Allen of Bayfield, Wis., were found and returned home. Balloons were also released in honor of all POW/MIA servicemembers still unaccounted for.

“It is a very moving observance and an appropriate manner in which to show our respect for those who have made the ultimate sacrifice while in captivity and for those missing in action whose fate is still undetermined,” Miller said. “We never play Taps during the ceremony because Taps means burial and the end of a (servicemember’s) story. Until they are identified, we always assume that they are still out there – there is always hope.”

Miller said posts start planning in January for the walk and promote it through stories in the local newspapers, business cards, invitations to posts and the selling of T-shirts that commemorate the event. Posts wanting information on how to model 1st District’s POW/MIA silent walk, contact Bob Miller:
bmillerplake@gmail.org

Additionally, during the Legion’s 96th national convention in Charlotte, N.C., the National Executive Committee passed Department of Wisconsin’s Resolution 208, which states that ”The American Legion petition Congress to authorize a forever POW/MIA stamp to honor the sacrifices of the brave men and women of the armed forces who are still prisoner, missing, or unaccounted for while serving in any conflict – past, present or in the future.”

CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION SPOTLIGHT

Post 48 in Oxnard, Calif.

For many years, Post 48 in Oxnard, Calif., did not have a post home. Chartered in 1919, many Legionnaires said that Post 48’s first home was in Charles P. Daly’s 1917-1920 Ford Model T. Daly, Post 48’s adjutant, and other post members turned the car into a portable office and drove it to post meetings throughout the area.

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I had heard of The American Legion, but I knew very little of what it stood for. By getting involved with a terrific American Legion program (the Oratorical Contest) this year with my home-schooled daughter, it taught my family a lot about the organization.

First, The American Legion and the home-school community share some important values. The Legion believes in strong families, a vibrant patriotism, and our country’s special place in history. Many in the home schooling community share and appreciate these values, especially as values like these continue to be pushed aside by the dominant voices in our culture.

Second, The American Legion takes the notion of civic duty seriously. The organization is built on the concepts of service and civic duty. Legion members voluntarily work together for progress, and they care about the future of our country, our freedoms and our way of life. The men and women of The American Legion all served our country in uniform, and they continue to serve today.

Third, The American Legion offers many opportunities for youth to broaden their knowledge and skills. For example, the Legion’s high school Oratorical Contest gives students the opportunity to earn college scholarships while gaining a deeper understanding of the U.S. Constitution. Boys State and Girls State programs teach rising high school seniors about the rights, privileges and responsibilities as citizens. And American Legion Baseball was founded on the principles of sportsmanship, good health and active citizenship. These are just a few youth programs offered by The American Legion that contribute to healthy families, patriotism and American culture.

In Idaho and across the country, The American Legion is seeing and appreciating the results of home education. Legion members are continually impressed by the character, the citizenship traits and academic excellence many home-schooled youth possess.

The American Legion is a great place to see what patriotism looks like. It is a great place to gain an understanding of what the Legion calls Americanism. And, it is a great place to meet veterans and hear their stories.

Ken and his wife Marylin live in Meridian, Idaho, and home-school their four children.

Did you know?

- Ramona Chapman Henricks (left in photo), 91 years old, is a 70-year member of The American Legion and a 90-year member of the Auxiliary – her mother signed her up for the Auxiliary when she was a baby. Henricks served in the WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service) during World War II, and worked as a legal secretary at the Naval Proving Ground in Dahlgren, Va. She is currently a member of Post and Unit 117 in Cerro Gordo, Ill. In August 2004, during the Auxiliary’s national convention in Nashville, she was named “World War II Woman Veteran of the Year.”

- Since June, The American Legion has held 11 Veterans Crisis Command Centers, helped more than 3,000 veterans and their families, and secured nearly $900,000 in retroactive VA benefits compensation.
On Sept. 26, President Barack Obama signed into law P.L. 113-181, the Veterans’ Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) Act. The legislation increases COLA for veterans with service-connected disabilities starting Dec. 1, 2014, as well as the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for the survivors of certain disabled veterans. The rate of the increase will be the same as the cost-of-living adjustment for Social Security recipients. That rate will not be determined until later this year.

On Sept. 19, the president signed into law P.L. 113-164, the Continuing Appropriations Resolution 2015, which keeps the federal government operating at the regular appropriations acts expire on Sept. 30. The law continues funding for government programs and services capped at the current annual rate of more than $1 trillion until Dec. 11, 2014.

On Sept. 26, the president signed into law P.L. 113-175, the Department of Veterans Affairs Expiring Authorities Act. This bill would extend some 30 Department of Veterans Affairs programs in the areas of health care, rehabilitation, housing, transportation, education and other benefits.

On Sept. 17, the House passed two veteran-related bills that await consideration by the Senate: H.R. 3593, which would direct the inclusion of an outside entity – the Army Corps of Engineers – to assist in the management of VA’s major facility construction efforts; and H.R. 4276, which would require VA to provide reports to Congress on the pilot program for assisted living services for veterans with traumatic brain injury.

On Sept. 17, the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee approved H.R. 5229, Wounded Warriors Federal Leave Act of 2014, which would give disabled veterans hired as federal employees access to their full year’s sick leave immediately upon starting their jobs. Full-time federal workers in their first year on the job have no sick leave when they start and accrue four hours of sick leave per pay period. That amounts to a balance of 104 hours at the end of their first year. But disabled veterans, who must attend regular medical appointments to take care of their health and to continue to receive their benefits, quickly use up their sick leave. Many veterans also have to travel to reach the nearest VA facility to receive treatment, which can eat up leave time.

The 2014 Wounded Warriors Federal Leave Act would apply to first-year federal employees with a service-connected disability rating of at least 30 percent. During their first year on the job, veterans would still accumulate their normal sick leave. The employees would only be able to use their extra sick leave for treatments directly related to their service and would not be able to carry over the one-time “wounded warrior leave” after the first 12 months on the job.

**DATELINE: CAPITOL HILL**

**COLA increase starts Dec. 1 for service-disabled veterans**

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MEMBERSHIP INCENTIVES AND AWARDS

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.

Learn more about membership messages from watching American Legion videos online: www.legion.org/recruiting

DISTRICT COMMANDER RACE-TO-THE-TOP

The District Commander Race-to-the-Top award is given to district commanders who attain at least 100 percent of the district’s assigned membership objective by March 31, 2015. Competition is divided into five categories:

- **Category I** – districts of 15-1,499 members
- **Category II** – districts of 1,500-2,999 members
- **Category III** – districts of 3,000-4,999 members
- **Category IV** – districts of 5,000-7,499 members
- **Category V** – districts of 7,500 or more members

**First Place Award** is a trip to the 97th National Convention in Baltimore, Aug. 28 to Sept. 3. The award will be presented to the top district commander and guest in each category whose district membership on March 31 represents the greatest percentage over the final previous year membership of that district. Cannot be less than 100 percent to qualify. This entitles each winner and guest to a trip to attend the national convention as a distinguished guest of the national commander, including round-trip airfare, tickets to the National Commander’s Banquet, and hotel accommodations for six days/five nights. These district commanders will also be awarded a Legion cap that signifies they are a Race-to-the-Top winner and ribbons will be awarded for each of the district’s posts.

**Second Place Award** is presented to the district commander in each category whose district membership on March 31 represents the second highest percentage over the final previous year membership of that district. Cannot be less than 100 percent to qualify. A $500 check will be awarded.

**Third Place Award** is presented to the district commander in each category whose district membership on March 31 represents the third highest percentage over the final previous year membership of that district. Cannot be less than 100 percent to qualify. A $375 check will be awarded.

A MESSAGE FROM MEMBERSHIP

As a Legionnaire, help make a post an inviting place by getting involved in its history and featuring it on the Legion’s Centennial Celebration web page. By doing this, we can retell the community and new members about the history of our post and the organization. It’s also a good way for new members to engage in what we’re doing and where we’re going over the next 100 years.

Kenneth Orrock
National Membership & Post Activities Committee Chairman

Learn more about membership messages from watching American Legion videos online: www.legion.org/recruiting
Three-time American Legion Gold Brigade Award recipient Edward Castillo of Post 68 in Hayward, Calif., recruited 51 new members into the Legion in 2014. The U.S. Army Vietnam veteran sets up membership booths at local street fairs, festivals, job fairs and stand down events. He also has a membership booth one or two weekends a month at a local grocery store.

“The easiest part of the job is explaining the Legion programs to possible recruits and letting them know the numerous advantages of becoming a member,” Castillo said. “The term ‘veterans helping veterans’ and seeing the look in their eyes at the thought of becoming a Legionnaire and actually having someone available to guide them through the various programs open to them is the most rewarding feeling. It makes the time on my feet, in the hot sun, cold wind or rain worth every minute.

“It is an honor to be recognized for doing something that I truly love doing.”