ORATORICAL CONTEST: INCREASE POST-LEVEL PARTICIPATION

Legionnaires learn ways to grow the program by reinforcing the value of the contest.

By The American Legion

Before speaking at The American Legion’s National Oratorical Conference on Sept. 26 in Indianapolis, Samantha O’Conner reached out to Indiana speech and debate coaches for insight on how many participate in the Oratorical Contest at the post level. Those who responded to the Indiana High School Forensic Association executive director either confused the competition with others in the area or had never heard of the contest.

“That’s a little alarming because I think your speech contest has a set of benefits that others don’t,” said O’Conner, who participated in the Oratorical Contest during her senior year in high school. “You’re building citizenship, you’re teaching constitutional knowledge, and you’re allowing (students) to do an impromptu speech that the others don’t include. It’s all very meaningful. So it’s really important as you’re recruiting that you’re focusing on those benefits.”

In addition to highlighting what sets the Legion’s program apart from all others, O’Conner named three other areas Legionnaires should address when recruiting program participation at the post level: scheduling, branding and promoting.

The post-level Oratorical Contest will oftentimes coincide with other events that speech and debate students are participating in. Therefore, O’Conner stressed to get contest information out as early as possible and send frequent reminders. “The more times you remind high school coaches and students about your program dates, the more likely you are going to get them to participate,” she said.

For branding purposes, O’Conner heard about a post hosting its Oratorical event at a VA hospital, which “ties the competition back to veterans, making it more memorable not

See Oratorical Contest: Increase post-level participation on Page 4

NEWS ALERT

Donate your vehicle to support the Legion

Anyone can donate a vehicle (car, truck, van, SUV, boat, motorcycle, RV and more) to The American Legion Vehicle Donation Program and a portion of proceeds from the auction sale will benefit American Legion charities and programs.

Through the Legion’s alliance with Insurance Auto Auctions, Inc., vehicles are accepted in almost any condition, in all 50 states.

To donate your vehicle, fill out the donation form online at www.legion.org/donate/auto/about or call (844) 353-4466. For further information about the Legion’s Vehicle Donation Program, visit: www.legion.org/donate/auto/faq

Apply to Ohio department adjutant open position

The American Legion Department of Ohio is accepting résumés for department adjutant through Oct. 30. The position will be open Jan. 1, 2016.

All résumés should be directed to Department Commander James Campbell at 2389 Henn Hyde Road NE, Warren, Ohio 44484.

No résumés will be accepted electronically.

Please direct all inquiries to Campbell by phone (740) 602-6559 or email commander@ohiolegion.com

A complete job description with necessary qualifications can be found online: www.legion.org/careers
COMMANDER’S MESSAGE

Join me on a Walk for Veterans

During my travels to American Legion departments, I want to walk to raise awareness about veterans and the Legion’s positive impact on communities nationwide. And I’m asking you, the Legion Family, to join me by conducting an awareness Walk for Veterans.

I want you to tell your story when walking about why you joined The American Legion and why you stay a member in The American Legion. The awareness walks are also a way to walk for those who marched for us. I strongly believe that we should walk not for ourselves but for those who have marched before us. In war or peace, America’s veterans have repeatedly sacrificed for our freedom. These awareness walks are the least that we can do for them.

I have already participated in an awareness walk in Manchester, N.H., and in Kansas City, Mo. And both times the Legion Family presence was strong, and we made our voices heard in the community.

The walks can coincide with my visit to your department, but I also encourage departments to conduct them even if I’m not visiting. The walks can be any distance and should include Legion Family members, Legion youth program participants, Boy Scouts, high school JROTC units, community leaders and anyone else interested in helping bring Legion visibility to communities. Additionally, the walks can:

- Promote and raise funds for Legion charities, such as National Emergency Fund (the fundraiser for my term as commander), Operation Comfort Warriors and Legacy Scholarship Fund.
- Remind employers that the best way to thank a veteran is to hire them.
- Showcase the Legion’s premiere youth programs, such as Boys Nation and Legion Baseball.

Find a list of upcoming walks online at www.legion.org/walkforveterans. National Headquarters staff can assist in planning and promoting a Walk for Veterans event. For more information, contact Matt Herndon, deputy director of the Legion’s Membership Division, by email mherndon@legion.org or phone (317) 630-1406.

MEMBERSHIP

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

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.

Download the form online: www.legion.org/commander/pin
NATIONAL ADJUTANT'S MESSAGE

Legion Family sings for teen with cystic fibrosis

Rosie Albright of Avon, Ind., received a personalized song from attendees of the Legion's Children & Youth Conference.

By Daniel S. Wheeler

Last month, The American Legion’s National Children & Youth Conference in Indianapolis kicked off with a special musical dedication. Legion Family attendees sang a personalized song for an Indiana teenager who received a lung transplant last year due to her battle with cystic fibrosis, only to lose her older sister to the same disease.

Doug Lippert, development director for Children’s Organ Transplant Association (COTA), hand delivered Rosie Albright of Avon her “Song of Love” CD a week after the conference. Rosie, who smiled as she listened to the song composed in her honor, attended the Children & Youth Conference in years past with her sister, Melanie, to share their story of hope.

Both sisters were in need of life-saving lung transplants from their battles with cystic fibrosis. Sadly, Melanie was unable to continue her fight against the disease and passed away Jan. 14, 2014, at the age of 19. And six months to the day that the family lost Melanie, on July 14, Rosie received a lung transplant.

“The significance of that date was just God saying it was all going to be OK,” said Aimee Albright, mother of Rosie and Melanie. “Rosie’s transplant redeemed that date.”

The song created for 15-year-old Rosie was developed and produced by the Songs of Love Foundation, a Child Welfare Foundation grant recipient. The nonprofit foundation produces personalized uplifting songs, free of charge, for children and teenagers facing medical, physical or emotional challenges.

“It was incredible to create a song of love for Rosie since what she is going through is extremely challenging for her,” said John Beltzer, president and founder of the Songs of Love Foundation. “We wanted to bring a smile to her face in the best way we know how – through her very own uplifting personalized song of love.”

The lyrics for Rosie’s song was centered around her personality, favorite color and favorite activities, such as singing and performing in plays, jumping on the trampoline, dancing and swimming.

The Legion Family, National Headquarters staff, Beltzer and Lippert sang the chorus of the song and “everybody had a blast,” Lippert said to Rosie when he gave her the CD of the song. “You gave a gift to everybody just by letting us sing for you.”

Lippert has worked with the Albrights for the past five years as they fundraised through COTA for Melanie’s and Rosie’s life-saving lung transplants. Thanks to her lung transplant, Rosie was able to perform in the musical “Shrek” as Goldilocks without needing oxygen assistance.

“I cried a lot during (“Shrek”) because there was all of these firsts from seeing her in the last show that she had done,” Aimee said. “We had an oxygen tank in both wings during her last performance; she couldn’t make it through a whole scene without going to sit down. And when she did “Shrek,” she made it through the whole show without stopping.

“She could finally be just like everybody else.”

Rosie, who wants to be a chef or zoologist, said she “likes the song” and is looking forward to sharing it with friends.

To watch a video of the song performed for Rosie, visit: www.legion.org/cyconference
only for that student, but the coach as well,” she said. “You have to have something that makes you unique, that makes you different for coaches and students to not confuse your contest with others.”

Another way to set the Oratorical Contest apart from others is by “making appearances and setting yourself up as an organization that cares,” O’Conner said. For example, one of O’Conner’s speech and debate students won a post-level Oratorical Contest and the following year, when the program was gearing up again, the post members came to the student’s high school and presented her with an award in front of her peers, speech coaches and principal.

“It was a good way to remind us early in the year that (the Oratorical Contest) was something we should do,” O’Conner said. “And it built relationships because I was putting the names with faces of those Legionnaires together again, other than just inside the post on the day of the competition.”

For promotional efforts, O’Conner advised conference attendees to send notifications beyond high school principals or guidance counselors by locating the teacher directory on school websites. “The more you reach out to history teachers, speech and debate teachers and English teachers, the more likely you will get a response,” she said.

Cherian Koshy, director of development at the National Speech and Debate Association, reiterated during his conference presentation that “reinforcement of the value of this contest is the most important thing that needs to be accomplished in order for recruitment to occur.”

Since starting a relationship five years ago with The American Legion, the National Speech and Debate Association has been delivering the value of the Legion program and how to get involved to its 3,000 affiliated high schools through email, social media and advertising in its magazine.

“We are very proud to be partners with The American Legion, and we believe the relationship has been successful as we have seen growth at the post, district and department level in the number of Oratorical program participants,” Koshy said.

Koshy shared that Legionnaires can also promote the program for participation growth by being a judge for their local high school debate tournaments. At his alma mater in Apple Valley, Minn., members of Legion Post 1776 serve yearly as judges during speech and debate tournaments.

“This is a great opportunity for you to be in a space where students are, where teachers are in one setting,” Koshy said. “Building that relationship gives you the opportunity to create the reason why they would participate in your contest and show up at your post.”

MEMBERSHIP

$5 membership dues increase approved

The American Legion National Executive Committee approved a $5 dues increase during the organization’s 97th national convention in Baltimore in early September. This represents the first National Headquarters per-capita dues increase in nearly a decade, during which time the U.S. cost of living has increased 13 percent.

Legion posts increasing membership dues as a result of National Headquarters dues increase must fill out and return the Post Data Report form to their department headquarters. This updated information will appear on future membership renewal notices.


The Post Data Report must be returned to National Headquarters by Dec. 9 for it to be reflected on the renewal notice that is distributed on Jan. 8. Departments should be communicating with their posts on when they will need to receive all Post Data Reports in order to make the deadline to National. Post leaders who have questions about their deadlines and procedures should contact their departments.

A brochure titled “The 2016 National Dues Increase” explains more about the need for the dues increase. It is available for download online at www.legion.org/publications under the General section.

CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION SPOTLIGHT

Post 15 in Loveland, Colo.

In 1969, American Legion Post 15 in Loveland, Colo., celebrated the Legion’s 50th birthday.

SHARE YOUR POST’S LEGACY

Upload photos, print materials and videos of your post’s history on the Legion’s Centennial Celebration website: www.legion.org/centennial
Beads of Courage tells a child’s medical journey

While working as a pediatric oncology nurse at Phoenix Children’s Hospital, Dr. Jean Baruch “grew tiresome of handing out stickers” to children with cancer and other serious illnesses as a way to acknowledge their courage. “For me, stickers weren’t enough because stickers are disposable,” said Baruch, who spoke at the American Legion’s National Children & Youth Conference on Sept. 20. I knew that children were seeking something tangible, something to tell others of their experience beyond the physical.

From her experience as a nurse, Baruch knew that children enjoyed working with beads. This observation led her to The Bead Museum in Glendale, Ariz., where she discovered that “beads are the earliest art form known to humans, and they have been used throughout history as symbols of accomplishment and honor,” she said. Baruch left the museum with a plan – provide children with a specific bead for every step of their medical journey as a way for them to tell the story of their illnesses.

Baruch’s visit to The Bead Museum was the inspiration for her developing the Beads of Courage program in 2003 as part of her dissertation while working on her doctorate in nursing. Through the Beads of Courage program, bedside caregivers give children colorful, handmade glass beads that symbolize a specific treatment or procedure.

There are 18 procedures that are recognized with Beads of Courage, along with other beads for treatment milestones. For example, yellow beads signify an overnight stay; white beads signify chemotherapy; red beads signify a blood transfusion; brown beads signify hair loss; and black beads signify being poked by needles.

“Before Beads of Courage, the children really only had the physical manifestations,” said Baruch, founder and executive director of Beads of Courage. “What we have done with Beads of Courage is equip children with a very powerful visual illness narrative. They can hold up their beads of courage very proudly and say, ‘Every bead on here is something painful I’ve experienced and endured during my treatment journey.’ We encourage the children to hang their beads from their IV poles for them to see and others to see and honor their courage.”

A bead guide serves as the clinical protocol for bead giving, and children keep the journal at their bedside to keep track of their medical procedures and to inform their bedside caregiver when a bead is owed. “It’s a very powerful observation to see a child use the bead journal; they hold their clinician accountable for supporting them through the Beads of Courage program,” Baruch said. “And we educate clinicians to be thinking that every bead that they give is a dose of narrative medicine that helps the child tell their story of courage in a visual way.”

Baruch said a child averages 500 beads during a two-year medical treatment. And with the help of a Child Welfare Foundation grant in 2014, Beads of Courage was able to “restock our bead pharmacy with 600,000 beads and move children off our wait list,” Baruch said. “We are very proud of that. Your generosity is greatly appreciated.”

The program is now in 260 children’s hospitals worldwide, including Japan, Northern Ireland, United Kingdom, Canada, Scotland and New Zealand. “Our significant growth is evidence of the need for the type of support that the Beads of Courage program provides, and the impact that bringing art into the health-care setting can have on wellness,” Baruch said.

Learn more about Beads of Courage:
www.beadsofcourage.org
Read stories on how Beads of Courage has positively impacted the lives of children: www.facebook.com/beadsofcourage/

Recognize continuous Legion membership

Recently, Post 112 in Salt Lake City awarded James Cornwell, a 92-year-old member of the post, a plaque for 70 years of continuous Legion membership. And Post 150 in Frankenmuth, Mich., also awarded post members Ralph List and Wallace Weiss with a plaque for 70 years of continuous membership.

The American Legion encourages posts to recognize members with years of continuous dedication to the organization. A continuous membership patch, tack, pin and certificates can be purchased through American Legion Emblem Sales.

To view the available products online, visit: www.emblem.legion.org/continuous-membership/products/162/
On Sept. 25, the Senate passed S. 2082, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Expiring Authorities Act of 2015, which extends specified VA programs. The measure was approved by the House on Sept. 30 by 423-0 recorded vote. It now goes to the White House for President Barack Obama’s signature.

The VA can now shift the $625 million it needs to finish the Denver VA hospital from other accounts within its budget. But the deal strips VA of authority to manage big construction projects in the future and gives it to the Army Corps of Engineers, a change that lawmakers demanded in order to avoid continued mismanagement by VA.

The half-finished hospital in the Denver suburb of Aurora is expected to cost nearly $1.7 billion, almost triple last year’s estimate. The Corps of Engineers blamed the overruns on multiple design changes and a decision by VA officials to use a complicated contract process that they didn’t fully understand.

Several lawmakers expressed concerns as VA has not fully presented the plan for where the $625 million will be shifted to fund the project. Some projections include VA shifting money from medical accounts and construction in other districts, drawing consternation from lawmakers who feel their districts are being negatively impacted by VA’s failures on this project.

A few other VA programs that the bill extends authority for through fiscal year 2016 include:

- Appropriations for assistance and support services for caregivers.
- Grants to veterans service organizations for transportation of highly rural veterans.
- Pilot program on counseling in retreat settings for women veterans newly separated from service, the homeless veterans reintegration programs, and the homeless women veterans and homeless veterans with children reintegration program.
- Housing assistance for homeless veterans, financial assistance for supportive services for low-income veteran families in permanent housing, and the grant program for homeless veterans with special needs.
- Treatment and rehabilitation services for seriously mentally ill and homeless veterans, including a program to provide homeless veterans with benefits and services at certain locations.
- Referral and counseling services for certain veterans at risk of homelessness.
- Monthly assistance allowances under the Office of National Veterans Sports Programs and Special Events.
- Appropriations for adaptive sports programs for disabled veterans and members of the armed forces.
- Temporary eligibility expansion for specially adapted housing assistance for certain veterans with disabilities.

Yogi Berra, who passed away Sept. 22 at the age of 90, played American Legion Baseball for Fred W. Stockholm Post 245 in St. Louis. In an interview with American Legion Magazine in April 1999, Berra said he “loved American Legion ball” because he was able to travel. “I thought, ‘just think if you make it to the big leagues, you get to travel to all them cities.’ I never would’ve left St. Louis without The American Legion.”

Two wounded servicemembers received Samsung Galaxy tablets from The American Legion’s Operation Comfort Warriors program during the Sept. 18 Alethia Foundation Dinner in Washington, D.C. The recipients, retired Army Staff Sgt. Liliana Caparo and Marine Corps Staff Sgt. Anthony Mannino, are recovering at the Walter Reed National Medical Center.

American Legion posts and Legion Family members are encouraged to march in the largest Veterans Day parade in New York City. America’s Parade will start at 11:15 a.m. on Nov. 11 at Fifth Avenue and 26th Street. To march in the parade, email parade@americanlegion.com.

For more information, visit America’s Parade website: www.americasparade.org

On Sept. 22, 140 women veterans left the Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport for the first all-women Honor Flight. Read the story online: www.legion.org/honor
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 70,000-99,999 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, ahash 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
Show your military support with the Buzz Cut Challenge

The American Legion has joined forces with Great Clips – the nation’s largest hair salon brand – to support veterans, military members and their families by encouraging people nationwide to participate in the Buzz Cut Challenge.

The American Legion and Great Clips will hold #BuzzCutChallenge community-based events in more than a dozen cities across the country from Nov. 2-10. For a suggested donation of $10 at these events, Great Clips stylists will provide buzz cuts to attendees willing to let their hair hit the floor to support veterans and their families. Local event details will be featured online at www.legion.org/buzzcut as they are available.

People not near a Buzz Cut Challenge event can also take part in the challenge. Just get a buzz cut and post a photo or video to Facebook, Instagram or Twitter with the hashtag #BuzzCutChallenge.

Participants are encouraged to tag their friends and family to extend the challenge.

Not up for a buzz cut? You can support veterans, military members and their families by donating at one of the Buzz Cut Challenge events or online at www.legion.org/buzzcut.