Between two deployments to Iraq, Robert Stone of American Legion Post 51 in Las Vegas started a flag rewards committee to raise the Legion’s visibility in his community. As the flag committee chairman, Stone created a list of businesses in North Las Vegas flying the U.S. flag and personally created, framed and awarded certificates of appreciation to them. “I thanked the (business) managers for being patriotic, for flying the U.S. flag,” he said. “I like giving the flag certificate because it gives us that opportunity to go out and recognize businesses and people by saying, ‘Thank you.’ It’s also good for exposure, and it builds relationships.”

For businesses with empty flag poles, Stone created and distributed a sales flyer that featured photos and prices (shipping included) of U.S. flags sold from American Legion Emblem Sales. “I handed those businesses a flyer and a Post 51 business card and said, ‘I notice you have an empty flag pole. If there is anything that Post 51 can do to help, please let us know,’” Stone said.

Stone’s personal interaction with the local businesses not only created exposure for the post, but businesses began dropping off their unserviceable flags to the post. As a result, Post 51 members, in conjunction with the city, began hosting two flag retirement ceremonies a year – Flag Day and Veterans Day – at a local fire department.

“So many people drive by U.S. flags every day and don’t even notice them,” said Richard Sutton, commander of Post 51. “With the flag retirement ceremony, our goal is to make the flag visible; to make it understood.”

Post 51’s flag retirement ceremonies provide education to the community and youth on flag etiquette, protocols and procedures. Boy
COMMANDER’S MESSAGE

Protect the Pledge of Allegiance

The American flag is the most powerful symbol in our nation – it’s a symbol of freedom, pride and hope. When the men and women of this country who’ve made the decision to put on a uniform and serve their country through the armed forces make the ultimate sacrifice, that same flag drapes their caskets before they’re laid to rest. The American flag waves in the air during the singing of the national anthem before professional sporting events; it soars above local, state and government buildings; and it’s saluted when reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

Unfortunately, as youth today salute America’s most powerful symbol in classrooms to recite the 122-year-old Pledge of Allegiance, lawsuits are being filed to eliminate the phrase “under God.”

However, The American Legion is making great strides in ensuring that the two words added to the Pledge of Allegiance by Congress on Flag Day in 1954 remain. In early May, the American Humanist Association – an anti-faith group – filed a lawsuit in Massachusetts claiming the words “under God” violated “separation of church and state.” On behalf of The American Legion Department of Massachusetts, Liberty Institute filed a friend-of-the-court brief, emphasizing that “the Pledge is a ceremonial act of patriotism.” Massachusetts’ highest court rejected the lawsuit, allowing schoolchildren throughout the state to continue reciting the Pledge of Allegiance every morning with the phrase “under God.”

According to Liberty Institute, whose mission is to defend and restore religious liberty across America, “the court rejected the claim, noting that recitation of the Pledge is entirely voluntary and that reciting the pledge is a patriotic exercise, not a religious one.”

Lawsuits like this one are appearing across the U.S. Therefore, it is our duty to educate today’s youth on traditions of Old Glory in effort to protect the reciting of the Pledge of Allegiance in classrooms.

FUNDRAISING PROGRAM

NEF goal: $1 million

The American Legion’s National Emergency Fund (NEF) program is National Commander Dan Dellinger’s primary fundraiser this year.

A natural disaster can strike at any time, devastating the lives of men and women who honorably served their country. While we can’t prevent a natural disaster, the Legion does provide relief to veterans and their families affected by devastation.

Since 1989, the NEF program has provided more than $8 million in direct financial assistance to posts, Legionnaires and their families. The program helps with out-of-pocket expenses, including but not limited to food, temporary housing and clothing. All donations made to NEF go directly toward the program.

To donate: www.legion.org/nef

NEF Commander’s Challenge

American Legion department commanders are challenged to assist in fundraising efforts for the Legion’s National Emergency Fund. The departments currently in first place for their respective membership category include:

- Category 1 (100,000+): New York
- Category 2 (65,000+): Illinois
- Category 3 (40,000+): Maryland
- Category 4 (25,000+): Nebraska
- Category 5 (10,000+): Delaware
- Category 6 (9,999-): District of Columbia

www.legion.org/emergency/challenge

MEMBERSHIP

Recruiters to be honored with ‘Building for Tomorrow Today’

During the 2013-2014 membership year, American Legion National Commander Dan Dellinger will award his national commander pin to any Legion Family member who obtains five new members.

A new member is any eligible person joining for the 2014 membership year who was not a member of The American Legion during the 2013 membership year.

Each member listed must be eligible for membership in The American Legion. Forward names of Sons of the American Legion 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 program, only one pin will be awarded per individual.

Upon receipt of the certification form, national membership staff will confirm the names and mail the pin directly to the person who earned it. Commander Dellinger’s “Building for Tomorrow Today” pin incentive program will end June 30, 2014, or when supplies are exhausted.

Also, National Commander Dellinger will award his “Building for Tomorrow Today” coin to any Legion Family member who recruits 15 new members.

www.legion.org/commanderpin

www.legion.org/commanderpin

www.legion.org/nef

www.legion.org/emergency/challenge

www.legion.org/commanderpin

www.legion.org/nef

www.legion.org/emergency/challenge
NATIONAL ADJUTANT’S MESSAGE

Convention news for department adjutants

Sergeants-at-arms recommendations due; see official credentials for national convention.

By Daniel S. Wheeler

As the 2014 American Legion National Convention in Charlotte draws near, department adjutants are asked to email recommendations for national convention assistant sergeants-at-arms by Aug. 1 to Jeff Brown, executive director of National Headquarters in Indianapolis, at: pjackson@legion.org. Include the complete mailing address of each recommendation since a letter of appointment is sent to each nominee.

Official credentials for National Convention

The following credentials are considered acceptable official credentials for admittance to all national convention venues, including the convention floor, exhibit hall, shuttle bus transportation, etc.:

- National Headquarters staff badge
- Distinguished Guest badge
- Commission & Committee Visitor badge
- The American Legion Convention badge
- American Legion Auxiliary Convention badge
- Sons of The American Legion Convention badge
- News media credential
- Special ID card for past national commanders
- Exhibitor’s badge

The following are not acceptable for admittance to a national convention venue, including the convention floor, exhibit hall, shuttle bus transportation, etc.:

- White ribbon with blue lettering marked “Delegation Chairman”
- White ribbon with blue lettering marked “Delegation Secretary”
- Delegate (blue), Alternate (yellow) or Guest (red) ribbon
- National American Legion Press Association pass
- National American Legion Press Association button

These credentials are merely used as forms of identification. For entrance to convention venues, all of the above must be worn in conjunction with a national convention badge.

All delegates and alternates, as well as guests to the respective national conventions of The American Legion, must register prior to, or during, the national convention. Proper registration will ensure each attendee has the necessary credentials to enter the venues of the national convention. Without the proper credentials, access to the various venues of the national convention, including shuttle bus transportation, will be denied.

All guests of The American Legion Family who are 18 years of age or older will be required to register just as delegates and alternates are required to register. Guests who are younger than 18 years of age, and who are not delegates or alternates to the SAL or Junior Auxiliary National Conventions, will be provided guest credentials at no charge.

Delegate, alternate and guest certification forms have been e-mailed to all departments.

Identification information

The following is identification information for the 2014 National Convention in Charlotte:

- National sergeant-at-arms and special assistants wear red arm bands.
- Assistant sergeants-at-arms wear blue arm bands.
- Convention badges worn by commission and committee visitors have a purple ribbon with gold lettering marked “Commission & Committee Visitor.”
- Convention badges worn by delegates have a blue ribbon with gold lettering marked “Delegate.”
- Convention badges worn by alternates have a yellow ribbon with blue lettering marked “Alternate.”
- Convention badges worn by guests have a red ribbon with gold lettering marked “Guest.”
Scouts inspect and properly dispose of unserviceable flags; JROTC cadets present colors; and high school students sing the national anthem and perform Taps.

“I believe that if there is something good to be done for our community and youth, then let’s do it,” Stone said.

And before a U.S. flag is retired, Stone inspects it for repair. He washes dirty flags that are in good condition otherwise and puts a new seam on a flag, making sure not to alter its size. “We hand the repaired flags out to businesses that have an empty flag pole. It’s no cost to us,” Stone said.

By the time Post 51’s flag retirement ceremony program was under way in 2010, The American Legion’s Flag Rewards Program was announced. Stone registered the post, already having established positive relationships with businesses that flew the flag. Participating in the program was also an opportunity for Post 51 to further support youth education.

Posts participating in the Flag Rewards Program receive a 10-cent credit for each dollar spent on the purchase of American flags. Purchases include those made by the post, as well as by the post’s members, friends, neighbors, local schools and businesses that choose to sponsor the post by buying their flags from The American Legion.

Post 51 earned $150 in credit in 2013 to spend in 2014 toward the purchase of any Emblem Sales catalog item. The post uses the credit earned every year to purchase youth medals, certificates and plaques or to pay membership dues for a veteran who cannot afford to. Stone’s goal is to make Post 51 No. 1 in Las Vegas for the Flag Rewards Program. To succeed, he hopes to encourage other post members to personally hand framed appreciation certificates to their neighbors who fly the U.S. flag. “It’s a great way to meet a new neighbor and that neighbor might be a veteran who becomes interested in joining the Legion,” Stone said. “At the very least, they would recognize a neighbor for flying the flag and have a new neighbor to wave at.”

Stone’s desire to see the U.S. flag soar in North Las Vegas for all to salute comes from his passion for volunteering. “We (The American Legion) exists to do for others,” he said. “That’s why I joined.”

For more on the Flag Rewards Program, visit www.emblem.legion.org/flag_rewards.

Q. I am a Vietnam Navy veteran and years ago I was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin lymphoma. I almost missed out on VA benefits for the cancer because I didn’t know I was eligible. I don’t want other veterans to miss out on benefits. Can you please get the word out?

A. Thank you for sharing your story. There is a special rule regarding non-Hodgkin lymphoma (NHL) that affects “Blue Water” and other Vietnam veterans. However, the rule isn’t much help if veterans don’t know about it and VA doesn’t consistently apply it.

NHL is a type of cancer of the lymph glands and other lymphatic tissue. Early signs of NHL include swollen, painless lymph nodes in the neck, armpit or groin areas. Other signs may include fever, night sweats, fatigue, weight loss, abdominal pain or swelling, chest pain or trouble breathing and itchy skin.

VA presumes NHL is related to a veteran’s exposure to Agent Orange or other herbicides during military service, service in Vietnam or service in the offshore waters of Vietnam during the Vietnam era. Veterans with NHL due to exposure of Agent Orange or other herbicides may be eligible for disability compensation and VA health care.

Additionally, surviving spouses, dependent children and dependent parents of veterans who were exposed to herbicides during military service, or who served in Vietnam during the Vietnam era (including the waters offshore), and died as a result of non-Hodgkin lymphoma, may be eligible for survivors’ benefits.

If you have any type of Vietnam service, it is important to let your doctor’s know that you may be at higher risk for certain diseases, including NHL. If you don’t understand a diagnosis or lab result, please ask for an explanation. And if you are diagnosed with NHL due to service in Vietnam, speak with a service officer about VA benefits.

Email claims questions to: asks@legion.org

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

CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION SPOTLIGHT

Post 223 in Shippensburg, Pa.

On the morning of Sept. 2, 1945, Japan formally surrendered. The signing of the surrender took place on the battleship USS Missouri, which was anchored in Tokyo Bay with other U.S. and British ships. Aboard the USS Missouri was Ernie Agle, who took a photo of the momentous occasion.

Agle, a former member of Oscar M. Hykes Post 223 in Shippensburg, Pa., donated the historic photo to the post.

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.legion.org/centennial
HONOR AND REMEMBRANCE

SAL member honors Nebraska’s fallen

Twice a year the yard of 20-year-old Thomas Landkamer becomes a tribute to the brave men and women of Nebraska who served their country and paid the ultimate sacrifice. Landkamer, a member of the Sons of The American Legion Squadron 16 in Norfolk, Neb., places 92 U.S. flags and crosses in his yard for Memorial Day and Veterans Day that bear the names of each Nebraska servicemember killed since 9-11. “I have seen this done elsewhere, and I thought it would be a great way to honor Nebraska’s fallen heroes,” said Landkamer, the son of Nebraska’s American Legion National Executive Committeeman Jerry Landkamer. “It helps our community make sure the fallen are never forgotten.”

Landkamer has been honoring America’s heroes with the Field of Flags display since 2011, and he said residents of the neighborhood appreciate his patriotism. The tribute is especially moving for one neighbor whose son’s name is among the 92. Landkamer said when the father visited the Field of Flags memorial and saw his son’s cross and flag, “he left in tears. He was impressed with the memorial.

“The memorial makes me proud to be an American, and it reminds me of the sacrifice of the veterans. It’s what this country is all about.”

Jerry said his son has been “dedicated to his colors” for many years. While in school at Norfolk Catholic High School, he was voted most patriotic student of the year several times, he raised and lowered the flag every day, he designed a Gold Star and a killed in action flag, and he helped get a POW/MIA flag flown at his school. Landkamer also raised and lowered the flag when school was out for the summer on special holidays, such as Memorial Day, Flag Day and Fourth of July. He also replaces worn flags at veterans’ gravestones with his own money.

“He’s a very patriotic young man, he is a role model son, and his mother (Starla) and I are very proud of him,” Jerry said.

Starla echoed Jerry’s sentiments. “As parents, we feel truly blessed to have a son who knows and understands what the red, white and blue is all about and isn’t afraid to take a stand for what he believes in,” she said.

Photograph by Thomas Landkamer

Did you know?

Mike Buss, deputy director of The American Legion’s Americanism Division, was interviewed by the History Channel for its “Ten Things You Don’t Know About” series on the U.S. flag. The episode is scheduled to air in August.

Five American Legion departments achieved 100 percent membership for the 2013-2014 year: Colorado, Puerto Rico, France, Philippines and Mexico.
**TROOP SUPPORT**

Legion teaming up with brewing company

During The American Legion’s Spring Meetings in May, the National Executive Committee approved an alliance with the Founding Fathers Brewing Co., a new U.S.-owned company that brews premium lagers. Founding Fathers will support American military families with half of net royalties from sales through American Legion posts.

“This new alliance will provide significant benefit to a variety of American Legion programs on national, state and local levels,” National Commander Daniel M. Dellinger said. “We are proud that Founding Fathers is dedicating a significant portion of their royalties to assist veterans and their families. This additional revenue will allow The American Legion to continue to provide necessary support to our nation’s greatest asset – our veterans.”

Founding Fathers is currently taking orders in nine states (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, Minnesota, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, South Carolina and Tennessee) with product availability set for June 2014. They will continue to add additional states to their distribution through 2014 until they become a national brand in early 2015. American Legion department leaders will be contacted directly by Founding Fathers Brewing Co. when their state is being considered for product distribution.

The beer will be distributed through each post’s current wholesaler, and local distributors and Founding Fathers representatives will call on each post in offering the product line. They will also provide extensive point-of-sale materials to include Founding Fathers/The American Legion co-branded tap handles, glassware, coasters, signage and banners. All material will be available at the time of product delivery.

www.foundingfathersbrewingco.com

**DATELINE: CAPITOL HILL**

House passes VA accountability bill

On May 21, the House of Representatives passed American Legion-backed legislation H.R. 4031, the Department of Veterans Affairs Management Accountability Act of 2014, by a vote of 390-33. In brief, the measure “authorizes the Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA) to remove any (VA) employee from a Senior Executive Service position upon determining that such individual’s performance warrants removal.” It also allows the VA secretary to fire that person from the civil service or demote him or her as the Secretary sees fit.

Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., has introduced the bill in the Senate but it is not clear whether the Senate will take it up.

The House action came amid growing reports of mismanagement, long wait times for appointments, falsified records and preventable deaths at VA clinics, such as in Phoenix. The scandal was brought to light at the Phoenix VA Medical Center where whistleblowers allege that the facility kept a secret waiting list that included veterans waiting more than 200 days for an appointment, which may have resulted in the deaths of 40 veterans.

**VA ENROLLED VETERANS FACE LESS PAPERWORK**

In 2003, Congress tightened health care eligibility requirements for veterans based on their income. A health-care card entitles an enrolled veteran to services at VA hospitals and other medical treatment facilities. This year, for the first time, VA will use federal tax returns as a means test to decide whether a veteran is eligible for subsidized health care instead of requiring an enrolled veteran to submit an annual income statement. VA will go online to verify data supplied to them by the Internal Revenue Service.

**SGLI PREMIUMS TO INCREASE**

Effective July 1, the Servicemembers’ Group Life Insurance (SGLI) program will increase its monthly premium rate from 6.5 cents per $1,000 to 7 cents per $1,000. For a servicemember with the maximum $400,000 life insurance policy, this change will mean an increase of $2 a month.

In July 2008, VA lowered the monthly premium rate for basic SGLI from 7 cents per $1,000 to 6.5 cents per $1,000 to reduce excess reserve funds in the program. However, according to VA, reserve funds have decreased and it is now necessary to increase the premium rate as a result of a prior half-cent reduction and decreases in interest rates.

**FY 2015 NDAA BILL APPROVED**

On May 23, the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) passed the Senate version of H.R. 4435, the fiscal year 2015 National Defense Authorization Act. The bill authorizes $514 billion funding for the Department of Defense and the national security programs of the Department of Energy. It now goes to the full Senate for further action.

The SASC did agree with the House in rejecting administration proposals to establish TRICARE-for-Life enrollment fees, cutting $1 billion from the annual commissary subsidy, and initiating another round of Base Realignment and Closure.

As our economy continues to improve, and our military retirees struggle to hang on to the benefits they have earned, The American Legion urges the Senate to follow the leadership of the House lawmakers on this issue and discard the misguided attempt as extorting millions from the pockets of our dedicated military retirees.
MEMBERSHIP INCENTIVES AND AWARDS

EAGLE INCENTIVE WINNERS

The Commander Dellinger Eagle Award was awarded to the top department in each Big Twelve category showing the largest percentage of membership growth between the 55 and 100 percent target dates.

An eagle was also presented to a national vice commander whose region displayed the highest percentage of membership gain during the same period.

Douglas W. Wooddell of Aurora, Colo., The American Legion’s Western region national vice commander, was awarded the seventh eagle.

The Big Twelve category eagle winners:

- Category I – 100,000 or more members: Florida
- Category II – 65,000 - 99,999 members: Texas
- Category III – 40,000 - 64,999 members: Arizona
- Category IV – 25,000 - 39,999 members: Washington
- Category V – 10,000 - 24,999 members: New Mexico
- Category VI – 9,999 - or less members: Alaska

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
Legion scholarship recipients honored

For the first time in their 18-year relationship, The American Legion and Samsung Electronics hosted a special recognition for the 2013 Samsung American Legion Scholarship recipients. Eight of the nine recipients were in Washington, D.C., June 1-2 for breakfast at the Legion’s D.C. office and a luncheon at The National Press Club.

As recipients of the $20,000 college scholarship, the students attended American Legion Boys State or Auxiliary Girls State and are direct descendants of a Korean War veteran. Keynote speaker at the luncheon and 1996 Samsung Scholarship recipient Dr. Rachel Forbes – a kidney transplant surgeon at Vanderbilt University Medical Center in Nashville, Tenn. – told the recipients that “they (veterans) are the reason we are all here today together. And although you are amazing in your own right, they are amazing too and that’s why you are recipients of the scholarship.”

Samsung gave each student a Galaxy Tab 4, and the Legion provided a tablet cover.

“A huge thanks to The American Legion and Samsung for this trip, the scholarship and now these gifts; they are really generous,” said Cameron Akker of Sammamish, Wash.

“This trip has been a blast,” said Dallas DeBruin of Greenfield, Ohio. “We are completely grateful to both Samsung and The American Legion.”

In 1996, Samsung endowed a $5 million educational scholarship fund to the Legion for administration to direct descendants of U.S. war veterans. Through interest earned on the fund’s principal, more than $4.9 million has been awarded to 1,700 eligible applicants.