

THE AMERICAN LEGION

Dispatch

July 2014

A National Headquarters Publication

HONOR & REMEMBRANCE

LEGION HONORS GOLD STAR SON

Myles Eckert found a \$20 bill and gave it to a servicemember with a note about paying it forward.

By Cameran Richardson

Myles Eckert made CBS Evening News when he found a \$20 bill in the parking lot of a Cracker Barrel, wrapped it in a note and handed it to an Air National Guardsman dining with his family inside. The note read, in part, "My dad was a soldier. He's in heaven now. We like to pay it forward in my family. It's your lucky day! Thank you for your service."

Paying it forward to servicemembers makes the 9-year-old Gold Star son from Waterville, Ohio, "happy, happy, happy," he said, because "it reminds me of my dad."

Army Sgt. Gary "Andy" Eckert was killed in Iraq on Mother's Day in 2005 when Myles was only 4 weeks old. The boy said he "feels like the spirit of my dad is in me" when he wears his father's dog tags and wedding ring around his neck, which he did on May 16 when he was recognized for his selfless generosity by The American Legion Family of Ohio. Myles received his accolades alongside his mother Tiffany and 10-year-old sister Marlee, during the 51st Sons of The American Legion Detachment of Ohio's Convention in Westlake.

"In one instant a young man personified everything our organization is about – paying it forward to veterans," said Jason Graven, internal affairs director for the Department of



Photo by Lucas Carter

Ohio. "He took the \$20 and used it to thank a veteran, to make that veteran's life just a little bit easier."

Myles received an honorary lifetime SAL membership to Squadron 587 in Toledo, Ohio; a \$5,000 donation in his name to the Folds of Honor Foundation from the Department of Ohio; and a complimentary invite for him and his family to attend the Auxiliary's three-day Survivors of Fallen Heroes Family Camp this fall. SAL National Commander Joe Gladden presented Myles with his commander's pin and coin, as well as a plaque on behalf of American Legion National Commander Daniel Dellinger.

"They say integrity is doing the right thing when nobody is looking — that's what you did that day," Gladden said when recognizing Myles.

Paying it forward started as a coping mechanism for Tiffany when Andy passed away, and it has turned into a way of life to

NEWS ALERT

Correction: Band contest canceled

The June issue of *Dispatch* stated that the color guard contest for The American Legion's 96th National Convention in Charlotte, N.C., had been canceled when in fact it's the band contest that has been canceled. The band contest is canceled for 2014 only. Meanwhile, the color guard competition will be held Aug. 22 at 5 p.m. in the Charlotte Convention Center Hall A. www.legion.org/convention

Legion Baseball app debuts this month

The app will be available for baseball fans to follow the regional tournaments, Aug. 7-11, and the 88th Legion World Series in Shelby, N.C., Aug. 14-19. The free app will allow smartphone users to access box scores, pairings, stories, photos, travel information and more. The app will be available for download online: www.legion.org/mobileapps

Meanwhile, ESPN3.com will live stream all World Series games leading up to the championship game on Aug. 19. ESPNU will televise the championship game live, the first time in 35 years. For the ALWS game schedule, visit:

www.legion.org/baseball

Access USO lounge

American Legion delegates arriving and departing through Charlotte/Douglas International Airport during National Convention can access USO of North Carolina's lounge, Aug. 18-31. Register online: www.legion.org/convention/resources

COMMANDER'S MESSAGE

NEF: Let's hit \$1 million



Dan Dellinger
National Commander

When I was elected the 2013-2014 national commander during the 95th National Convention in Houston last August, I announced that the Legion's National Emergency Fund would be my fundraising project. I set a donation goal of \$1 million, which came down to just 50 cents a member. However, as my time as your national commander comes to a close, NEF donations stand at less than \$425,000. I'm not giving up; I know we can still meet the \$1 million goal!

The American Legion Department of Illinois is only a few thousand dollars shy of reaching its \$46,000 NEF goal – a success accomplished by asking for 50 cents a member. And the Department of Nebraska surpassed its \$18,000 NEF goal by nearly \$5,000 by asking for \$1 from its members; members in District 3 donated \$1.50. "When I was a district commander, I gave out some NEF funds to a Legionnaire (who was a victim of disaster)," said Dave Bruckner, department commander of Nebraska. "The looks on the family's faces when I presented the check made me want to get involved all the more with this project."

In 2013, NEF granted nearly \$750,000 in assistance to victims of tornadoes in Moore, Okla., and flooding in Marseilles, Ill.

We don't know when or where the next disaster will occur, nor do we know how severe it will be. We do know that Legionnaires, posts and family members will need assistance as they recover from a tragedy. NEF donations help Legion Family members pay bills and posts rebuild after a disaster. And remember, 100 percent of donations go toward NEF grants.

There is still time to collect 50 cents from members in your department or to host an NEF fundraiser. Let's hit the \$1 million goal so The American Legion can continue to financially assist Legionnaires and their family members when a natural disaster strikes.

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

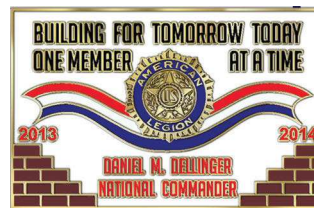
Recruiters to be honored with 'Building for Tomorrow Today'

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

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

NATIONAL ADJUTANT'S MESSAGE

A retreat for military families

Post 543 in North Carolina hosts a golf tournament to help Operation At Ease provide Fort Bragg military families a complimentary weekend getaway.

By Daniel S. Wheeler

As Legionnaires and grateful Americans, we are continually looking for ways to thank active-duty military servicemembers and their families for their service and sacrifice. Three women from St. James, N.C., found a way and the local American Legion Post 543 is helping them fulfill their mission.

Eleanor Colston, Jean Fiedler and Chris Stitche co-founded Operation At Ease (OAE), a nonprofit whose mission is to provide a complimentary relaxing weekend getaway to the scenic coastal community of St. James Plantation for Fort Bragg active-duty military personnel – who have deployed, or are about to deploy, to Iraq or Afghanistan – and their families. Since 2008, OAE has hosted more than 330 military families.

“It gives one a great deal of satisfaction to be able to help our military by providing them the opportunity to visit and have a relaxing time (at St. James Plantation) as provided by Operation At Ease,” said Cheryl McGuire, a board member of OAE and wife of Post 543 Commander Don McGuire. “The people of St. James Plantation wanted to find a way to say thank you and show their gratitude for all that the military families do and sacrifice for their country. This is our way of showing that appreciation.”

During the weekend retreat, families stay in privately owned

condos and receive food vouchers and complimentary access to tennis courts, three swimming pools, golf courses, massages, boat rides on the Intracoastal Waterway, kayaking, family pictures and more.

OAE has about 125 volunteers, including 23 active Post 543 members. The post helps OAE host its annual Military Appreciation Day – a golf tournament and picnic – and all proceeds are distributed between the two organizations.

“Military Appreciation Day has given the community the opportunity to honor our military (men and women) and veterans,” said Cheryl. “Being a new post (chartered in 2012), it was an excellent opportunity for Post 543 to be part of this endeavor.” Cheryl said thanks to the partnership OAE and Post 543 has formed, several OAE volunteers have become members of the post. “It’s been a win win for everyone,” she said.

During Post 543’s mid-winter conference, a plaque signed by National Commander Dan Dellinger was presented by North Carolina National Executive Committeeman Jerry Hedrick for the post’s continued support of Operation At Ease.

OAE hosts families from March to October. To sign up for a weekend with OAE, visit: www.oaeamerica.org



Photo by John Muuss

Follow National Convention coverage, Aug. 22-28:

www.legion.org/convention

Dispatch

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Correspondence and letters to the editor:
The American Legion Dispatch
P.O. Box 1055
Indianapolis, IN 46206

Subscriptions/Customer Service:
(317) 630-1221

Email: dispatch@legion.org

Fax: (317) 630-1280

Online: www.legion.org/dispatch

EDITOR
Cameran Richardson

DESIGNER
Jason Reed



SAL Commander Joe Gladden presents Myles Eckert with his commander's coin and pin. Photo by Lucas Carter

From *Legion Honors Gold Star Son* on Page 1

keep his spirit alive. “We do something daily, whether it be picking up a tab or leaving someone a note,” Tiffany said. “It’s such a cool thing that my kids are at an age where they are paying it forward on their own; I’m not prompting them.

“I made a promise to Andy that I would keep his spirit alive. Andy loved (Myles and Marlee). He would have been such a great dad.”

Myles’ nationwide fame for his act of kindness has enabled him to travel and promote the importance of paying it forward, such as on the *Ellen DeGeneres Show*. However, he said his favorite thing he has done so far is partnered with a chain restaurant to host an ice cream party at a public school in Toledo. During the event, he talked to the kids about paying it forward, signed autographs and received a \$1 bill from a student asking him to give it to a soldier.

“I like giving back to other veterans so they can feel good about themselves. Soldiers remind me of my dad; you should respect soldiers every day.”

The American Legion has been strong supporters of Gold Star families since 1929, the founding of Gold Star Mothers. During its Spring Meetings in May, the National Executive Committee passed Resolution No. 22 to ensure that American Legion departments support the criteria established for the issuance of both Gold Star and Next of Kin of Deceased Personnel lapel buttons, and to provide public awareness of the significance of the two before and during Gold Star Banner ceremonies.

Both lapel buttons are acquired and presented by the U.S. Department of Defense.

ASK A SERVICE OFFICER

VA clothing allowance



Cajun Comeau
Department Service
Officer, North Carolina

Q. *Is clothing allowance available with VA disability compensation?*

A. Veterans who have unique clothing needs as a result of a service-related disability or injury may receive a supplement to their disability compensation. The clothing allowance reimburses you if your clothing gets permanently damaged by a prosthetic or orthopedic appliance you wear, or by a prescribed medication you use on your skin. If eligible, you can receive a one-time or yearly allowance for reimbursement. You may receive a clothing allowance as a veteran who uses either of the following:

- Prosthetic or orthopedic appliance, such as a wheelchair or crutches, because of a service-connected disability. Soft and flexible devices, such as an elastic stocking, are not included.
- Medication prescribed by a physician for a service-connected skin condition that causes permanent stains or otherwise damages outer garments.

Additional clothing allowances may be provided if more than one prosthetic or orthopedic appliance, or medication described above, is used and/or affects more than one type of clothing garment. Payments are based on the rate table set by law. To receive annual payment, you must establish eligibility by Aug. 1 of the year for which you claim payment.

To apply, submit the application for annual clothing allowance (VA Form 10-8678) to the prosthetic representative at your local VA medical center. It is highly advised that you seek assistance from an accredited service officer to assist in filing. If you have not submitted a claim for disability compensation, you must complete the application prior to filing for clothing allowance. Applications are collected throughout the year and held until the closing date of Aug. 1. They are then processed and veterans will receive payments between Sept. 1 and Oct. 31. This is an annual payment and will only be made during this time frame. If you have not received your payment by Oct. 31, you should contact your local prosthetic representative.

Email claims questions to: ✉ askso@legion.org

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

CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION SPOTLIGHT

Post 30 in Springerville, Ariz.

The John H. Slaughter American Legion Post 30 participates in the annual Springerville Fourth of July Parade. Besides riding on Post 30’s float during the parade, members fire a Civil War cannon, ride in a small plane and display a red, white and blue tank that they built by hand. Visit Post 30’s Centennial Celebration web page to learn more: 🌐 www.centennial.legion.org/arizona/post30



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

VETERANS JOBS

Legionnaire recognized for employing service-disabled veterans

U.S. Army veteran Mark Steiner of Orangevale, Calif., was recently awarded the 2013 John K. Lopez Award for Business Excellence by the California Department of Veterans Affairs. Owner of M.A. Steiner Construction, a service-disabled veteran-owned small business, Steiner received the award for his “dedicated support of disabled veterans through hiring, training and counseling.”

“Those who bear the wounds of service deserve every opportunity,” said Steiner, a member of American Legion Post 119 in Placerville, Calif. “There is too much unemployment generally, and it is particularly painful if it affects a disabled vet. You could say we owe them respect and service. We also owe it to our country.”

Between M.A. Steiner Construction and sister company Security On-Site Services, more than 75 veterans, including 20 service-disabled veterans, have been hired since 2011. The training and counseling provided to new hires is performed by veterans because “adapting to civilian life is not always easy,” Steiner said. “Veterans bring discipline and a sense of teamwork to the job, but they must learn about the job, the mission, the measure of success and dealing with challenges. Our team (of veterans) excels at that and accomplishes the mission.”

Steiner said he was “very proud” to have received the John K. Lopez Award for Business Excellence, but “we still have far too many unemployed veterans, including disabled veterans, so this is more of a break than a finish – time to go back to work. We can solve the veteran unemployment problem one veteran at a time.”



Legionnaire Mark Steiner, left, receives the 2013 John K. Lopez Award for Business Excellence from California Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Peter Gravett. Photo courtesy of American Legion Department of California.

HONOR & REMEMBRANCE

Painting supports Vietnam veterans

A framed 18-by-24 watercolor painting representing our nation's heroes was recently raffled off, raising more than



\$1,500. The funds will help American Legion Post and Auxiliary Unit 18 of Portsmouth, R.I., host a “Welcome Home” ceremony this Veterans Day for Vietnam veterans. This is the third artwork to be raffled for the benefit of honoring veterans, thanks to the talent of local artist and Unit 18 member Paula Visnoski.

The vision for the painting originated from Christine Hayward, Unit 18 president and Post 18 adjutant. “While Vietnam veterans were denied the welcome home all heroes deserve, they are often the first in line to thank current servicemembers returning home,” she said.

The painting reveals a Vietnam Marine combat veteran shaking the hand of a current active-duty Army servicemember. The yellow and red colors in the background symbolize the Vietnam Service Medal, which represents the flag of the Republic of Vietnam, and the green alludes to the jungle. “The details and symbolism are striking, as is the look of mutual respect passing between the heroes,” Hayward said.

The post and unit also challenged local high school students to research how returning Vietnam veterans were treated and how they will personally ensure that current and future returning servicemembers are treated with honor and respect. The contest winner will read his or her essay at the “Welcome Home” ceremony.

Did you know?



On Memorial Day, 105-year-old World War II veteran Curtis Tigard was presented his American Legion membership card by Department of Oregon Commander Mike Morris. Tigard, who is believed to be the oldest individual recruited into the organization, is now a member of Post 124 in Beaverton, Ore.

More than \$4,000 was raised for the Legion's Operation Comfort Warriors program during the 2014 Tractor Relay Across Nebraska – a nine-day, 425-mile ride.

www.legion.org/ocw

HEALTH CARE

Legion crisis centers help 1,800 veterans

Since early June, The American Legion has assisted nearly 1,800 veterans and their family members affected by delays in accessing VA health care by setting up Veterans Crisis Command Centers at Legion posts in Phoenix, Fayetteville, N.C., and El Paso, Texas.

Members of the Legion's national staff, along with local Legionnaires, staff from VA facilities and volunteers from other organizations are on hand at the crisis centers to provide help with medical appointments, benefits claims, bereavement counseling and other services to veterans and their families. The Legion's System Worth Saving (SWS) Task Force also conducted town hall meetings prior to conducting the crisis centers.

Ralph Bozella, chairman of the Legion's SWS Task Force, said, "People know we're here to help them solve their access problems, their enrollment problems, their claims, and also with counseling. It's a terrible situation (with VA), but a lot of times it takes almost a disaster to happen before people pay attention to a huge problem. This structure was not working. But we have the greatest opportunity I've seen in the last 20, 30 years for the VA to turn around right now, because everybody now is aware."

Douglas Chapman, a veterans service center manager for the Veterans Benefits Administration regional office in Winston-Salem, N.C., said he and his staff were able to complete decisions, in one day, in favor of several veterans' benefit claims while they waited at the crisis center. "It's been a wonderful partnership with The American Legion," he said. "We're getting a lot of questions answered and a lot of decisions done while we're here. It's important to us to hear the veterans, sit face-to-face, and answer questions and concerns that they have."

The Legion plans to operate such centers throughout the summer in several cities affected by delayed VA health care, including Colorado and St. Louis.

www.legion.org/systemworthsaving



DATELINE: CAPITOL HILL

House, Senate approve VA reform bills



Brett P. Reistad,
Chairman, National
Legislative Commission

On June 10, the House of Representatives passed **H.R. 4810**, Veteran Access to Care Act. The bill directs the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to enter into contracts for the provision of hospital care and medical services at non-VA facilities for patients with extended waiting times for appointments at VA facilities.

On June 1, the Senate approved **S. 2450**, the Veterans' Access to Care through Choice, Accountability and Transparency Act. The bill would spend \$500 million on more doctors for VA, as well as authorize leases for 26 new medical facilities. But until the expansion gets up and running, between now and 2016, VA patients who run into long delays or live more than 40 miles from a clinic would be able to access private care facilities like community health centers or private hospitals. This measure also gives the VA secretary new authority to fire senior executives.

PRAYER ADDED TO WORLD WAR II MEMORIAL

On June 30, President Barack Obama approved PL 113-123, the World War II Memorial Prayer Act. The Legion-backed bill authorizes the U.S. Department of the Interior to engrave the prayer that President Franklin D. Roosevelt delivered on D-Day in 1944 on the World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C.

Read the prayer: www.historyplace.com/speeches/fdr-prayer.htm

FY 2015 DEFENSE APPROPRIATIONS PASSES HOUSE

On June 20, the House of Representatives passed **H.R. 4870**, the Fiscal Year 2015 Defense Appropriations bill and sent it to the Senate for action. The bill provides \$491 billion in discretionary funding, an increase of \$4.1 billion above FY 2014 and \$200 million above the president's request. The bill also includes \$79.4 billion in Overseas Contingency Operations for the ongoing war efforts abroad, the same level assumed in the president's budget request and in the House-passed National Defense Authorization Act.

Eighty-five percent of the contingency funds cannot be used until the Secretary of Defense provides Congress with a detailed spending plan for the account, including an assurance that no funds will be used in contravention of current-law notification requirements to Congress regarding transfers of Guantanamo Bay detainees. The bill's appropriation for discretionary spending is consistent with the current cap for defense spending set by December's Bipartisan Budget Act, and is \$202 million above the president's request.

After enactment of the budget act, Congress passed P.L. 113-76, the Consolidated Appropriations Act for FY 2014, which provided full, detailed spending for each of the 12 annual appropriations bills, including defense. With defense and non-defense spending caps in place for FY 2015, House and Senate appropriators must still avoid gridlock on spending bills, but Congress has not yet enacted any individual appropriations measures this year for FY 2015. Thus, Congress must still enact defense spending that conforms to budget caps, but it may do so partly by shifting funding in the regular Pentagon appropriations account to the Overseas Contingency Operations account which is not subject to the caps. The defense appropriations bill largely mirrors the House-passed defense authorization bill for FY 2015, **H.R. 4435**.

MEMBERSHIP INCENTIVES AND AWARDS

RACE TO THE TOP WINNERS

The American Legion 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. The winners and a guest will receive an all-expense paid trip to National Convention in Charlotte, N.C. They will receive the Race to the Top Award on stage at National Convention, along with a new Legion cap that signifies their award status. For the 2013-2014 membership year, there was not a category four winner. The winners in their respective district categories are:

- Category I (15 - 1,499 members): Johnny Camacho, Department of Colorado
- Category II (1,500 - 2,999 members): Michael Hughes, Department of California
- Category III (3,000 - 4,999 members): Dean Casey, Department of Colorado
- Category V (7,500 and above members): Thomas Biddle, Department of Florida



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.

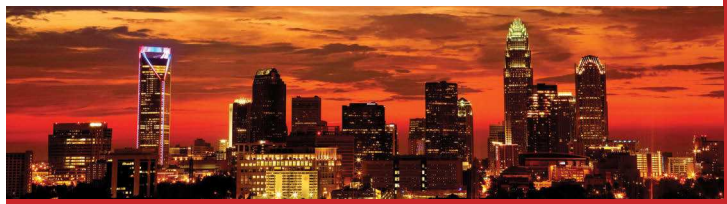
Criteria

- **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



A MESSAGE FROM MEMBERSHIP



Kenneth Orrock
National Membership &
Post Activities Committee
Chairman

American Legion posts should consider creating a Facebook account. Having a Facebook account allowed me to reconnect with people I hadn't spoken to in years. If it can allow me to do that, it can allow posts to reconnect with post members or connect with veterans who are looking for a place to serve, a place to access their benefits or a place filled with camaraderie, which The American Legion provides.

Learn more about membership messages from watching American Legion videos online:

 www.legion.org/recruiting

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WHAT'S INSIDE

FEATURE STORY: LEGION HONORS GOLD STAR SON

Page 1

Commander's Message: NEF: Let's hit \$1 million

Page 2

Adjutant's Message: A retreat for military families

Page 3

Ask a Service Officer: VA clothing allowance

Page 4

Honor & Remembrance: Painting supports Vietnam veterans

Page 5

Membership: Race to the Top winners announced

Page 7

MEMBERSHIP

Legionnaires awarded for recruiting 9,200 new members

The American Legion honored 106 Legionnaires with the 2013-2014 Gold Brigade Award. Legionnaires who recruit 50 or more new members (transfers do not count as new members) into the Legion by the May target date qualify for enrollment in the Legion's elite Gold Brigade.

The 2013-2014 Gold Brigade recipients recruited nearly 7,500 new members into the Legion. See the Gold Brigade Award recipients and the number of times they have earned the elite status online: www.legion.org/documents/legion/word/GOLDBRIGADE.docx

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 (or more) 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.

The American Legion also awarded 54 Legionnaires with the Silver Brigade Award. A Legionnaire who recruits 25-49 new members (transfers do not count as new members) into the Legion by the May target date qualify for this award. See the 2013-2014 Silver Brigade Award recipients online: www.legion.org/documents/legion/word/SILVERBRIGADE.docx



PLANNER

JULY

31-Aug. 2 National Membership Workshop, Indianapolis

AUGUST

1-2 24th annual Junior Shooting Sports National Championship, Colorado Springs, Colo.

15-19 88th American Legion Baseball World Series, Shelby, N.C.

17-21 American Legion Legacy Run

22-28 96th American Legion National Convention, Charlotte, N.C.