



California

LEGIONNAIRE



December 2020

Official Publication of The American Legion Department of California

caLegion.org



LA, OC senior and disabled veterans can receive free food

Veterans in Los Angeles and Orange County can receive three free meals a day courtesy of the Kevin Dobson Memorial Food to Life Program at Jewish War Veterans of the USA Post 680. Veterans must be 65 years or older or be disabled to qualify for the program. All food is handmade and prepared by our staff of professional chefs in our private gourmet kitchen. We are servicing all of Los Angeles and Orange County and all meals are delivered directly to the veteran's residence.

To register, visit Foodtolife.org or call 949-215-9995.

Rich Encinas is operations manager for the Kevin Dobson Memorial Food to Life Program at Jewish War Veterans of the USA Post 680.

Open our posts – We need your help!

By Seth Reeb
Legislative Advocate
Reeb Government Relations

The American Legion Department of California and 20 state commanders of the California State Commanders Veterans Council (CSCVC) submitted a letter to the Gov. Gavin Newsom's office last month, requesting the administration reopen our veteran halls and posts. As some have a restrictive veterans' liquor license, our posts have been misclassified as "bars" and have been closed since March.

Our posts serve a critical role in connecting veterans to essential services and benefits such as healthcare, mental health services, education and job training. Since the posts have been shut down, there has been a decrease in claims for veteran disability and pension benefits – totaling millions of unclaimed dollars in just eight months of closure.

The misclassification of posts puts us at the back of

the line for reopening, and puts access to services further out of reach for many veterans.

There has been great press attention on this issue, including radio interviews, news articles and TV stations coming out to posts in Sacramento, Los Angeles and Palm Springs to hear our veterans' perspectives.

But we need to keep up the pressure!

Please help reopen our posts by sending a message to the California governor today!

To send an email to the governor:

Use the sample email below to send your own email to the governor. Feel free to add additional information on your own post and the valuable services it offers to veterans of your community.

Send the email to: Melissa.Immel@gov.ca.gov and CC: dana.nichol@sbc-global.net

Thank you for your support – please contact us

with any questions on this issue or on the submission process.

SAMPLE EMAIL TO GOVERNOR:
Dear Governor Newsom,

I join veterans across California in urging you to allow California veterans posts to reopen safely.

Re-opening posts will enable them to resume providing essential services to veterans.

Veterans posts have been erroneously classified as "bars" due to their membership-only, restrictive liquor license. Due to this misclassification, our halls and posts will be some of the last to open, despite the critical role that our posts serve in connecting our state's veterans with the benefits and services they need.

Supporting the state's veterans is more important than ever. In these difficult times, our veterans' posts are a lifeline for those of us that have served, providing essential services for

veterans in their communities. Posts have veteran service officers that help veterans navigate and apply for their benefits, such as healthcare and mental health services. They also have resources for job training, education services and retirement benefits.

Since March, posts have seen a significant decrease in claims for veteran disability and pension benefits – totaling millions of unclaimed dollars in just 8 months of closure.

[If you can, add details here with your organization's post situation, and the type of valuable services that they provide veterans in your community. Otherwise, delete this paragraph.]

Reopening posts safely will enable California's veteran service organizations to resume providing essential and much-needed services for veterans and their families.

Thank you,
NAME
Military affiliation



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or

Call HQ
559-875-8387

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Editor: Contributors make this newsletter

By Jared Morgan
Editor
California Legionnaire

I've been your newsletter editor for a year and this issue will make the seventh I've produced for you, the post-level Legionnaire. I took over production of the newsletter beginning with the December 2019 edition. My goal was to transform the California Legionnaire into something everyone could pick up and read, regardless of veteran status. I've worked to translate some of the Legion jargon into language your communities

understand and I hope it has made a difference. Our National Headquarters has certainly taken notice, awarding the California Legionnaire 1st place among department publications across the country. The award came from The American Legion Media Alliance, or TALMA, formerly known as NALPA, or the National American Legion Press Association. Our newsletter's companion website, caLegion.org, the official website of the Department of California, was also awarded first place among department websites. None of this recognition would be possible if it weren't for the hard work our volunteers do on a daily basis, and allowing us to sing their praises in these pages. And none of your stories would be told if it weren't for our great team of writers who volunteer on committees and commissions across the Golden State. Thank you for doing what you do. Thank you for the great volunteer work you do on behalf of California's veterans and The American Legion.



National Commander Bill Oxford speaks at Waseca Post 228 in Minnesota in front of a large American flag. (Photo: American Legion Department of Minnesota)

National commander visit canceled due to pandemic

Due to current COVID-19 restrictions and mandated state safety regulations, the National Commander, James "Bill" Oxford's scheduled visitation on December 14-19 has been cancelled. As we are restricted the opportunity to showcase our Department, the safety of our members and following state measures is our main priority.

We appreciate the understanding of this decision and apologize any inconvenience this may have caused for posts planning events.

Thank you,

Ed Grimsley
Department Commander



Mark Foxworthy
National Executive Committeeman



Veterans legal services webinars: fair housing protections, record clearing



U.S.VETS is hosting a winter career fair on Friday, Dec. 4 at 10 a.m. Pacific time. We've partnered with some big employers who are hiring qualified veterans for their open positions.

Join Zoom Meeting
https://bit.ly/USVETS-jobfair
Meeting ID: 912 0234 1266 – Passcode: 008596
Remember to schedule an appointment with your veteran talent specialist for resume reviews and mock interviews prior to the event so you feel well prepared to put your best face forward as you engage directly with recruiters



Jennifer Delatte (Lynn) is a workforce development coordinator for U.S. VETS at Patriotic Hall in Los Angeles.

Legal Services webinars: fair housing protections, record clearing

The Los Angeles County Bar Association's Veterans Legal Services Project will hold two webinars in December aimed at assisting veterans and their families.

For the first event, we are partnering with Mental Health Advocacy Services on a Fair Housing Protections webinar for veterans.

The information during the webinar will be helpful not just for veterans who are immediately concerned about losing their housing, but also informative so that even the individuals who are not worried about losing housing are aware of their rights.

ALL veterans are welcome, but registration is required.

Our second event, is our monthly Record Clearing Clinic, which will be supported by attorneys from DLA Piper.

The hours are a bit earlier, with the clinic starting at 3:00 p.m.

All veterans who have tickets or convictions in a California State superior court are welcome to attend, to begin assistance with requesting leniency on tickets and expungement of criminal records on all eligible matters.

Registration and completion of intake paperwork is required for this event.



Fair Housing Protections for Veterans (COVID)
Virtual Webinar on Zoom
Dec. 15, 12-1 p.m.
Register here:
BIT.LY/MHAS-1215

Record Clearing Clinic
Virtual Webinar on Zoom
Dec. 16, 3-6 p.m.
To register, call (213) 896-6537 or email
inquiries-veterans@lacba.org



Tara Hunter is directing attorney for the LACBA's Veterans Legal Services Project.

In American Legion History

G.I. Bill of Rights
Dec. 15, 1943

Past National Commander Harry W. Colmery starts to write in longhand, on Mayflower Hotel stationery in Washington, the first draft of what will later become the "GI Bill of Rights" – considered the Legion's single greatest legislative achievement.

Veterans Department
Jan. 1, 1989

The Veterans Administration is elevated to Cabinet-level status as the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The Legion fought hard for the change, arguing that veterans deserve representation at the highest levels of government. assist families of servicemembers deployed for operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm in the Middle East.

Enola Gay
Jan. 30, 1995

The American Legion announces acceptance of exhibit "without political commentary" for the Enola Gay, ending the greatest controversy in the Smithsonian Institution's 149-year history.



VA Doctor examines patient. (Photo: Department of Veterans Affairs)

Military dependent Tricare premiums among major changes to military healthcare plans in 2021

By Christian Southards
Contributing Writer

Military dependents using Tricare will see premiums rise significantly starting in 2021, despite the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Monthly Tricare Young Adult premiums are set to rise significantly starting in 2021, despite the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Tricare announced on Twitter that the TYA Prime monthly enrollment fee will rise 12% to \$459 and TYA Select will

rise 22% to \$257.

Families with dependents on the Prime plan will be forced to pay almost \$1,000 more per year under these new policies, for a total of \$5,508. The announcements were quietly made by the Department of Defense

and Tricare health officials during an economically precarious year for the United States.

These changes are not the only new challenges associated with military health care either; retirees part of Tricare Select Group A will be forced to begin paying a new monthly enrollment fee of \$12.50, or \$25 for families.

Retirees that set up their payment plans before Nov. 20 can avoid having to pay their fees in advance.

One thing that is remaining the same for 2021: Tricare prescription drug costs will not rise in January.

However, unless legislative action is taken a cost increase is expected for policyholders in 2022.

The American Legion Advocates for Improved Access to Quality Health Care

The American Legion regularly advocates and operates on behalf of veterans for improved access to affordable, high-quality health care as well as a range of other issues.

Recently, The American Legion asked both 2020 presidential candidates about their plans regarding access to VA medical care, particularly in light of the pandemic.

More directly, the Legion continues to offer independent oversight over select VA functions, like monitoring individual health care facilities, while advocating against centralizing VA operations.

The Legion's Department of California also routinely engages state lawmakers on veteran's issues, with 15 of 16 veterans or military-related bills being signed into law by Governor Newsom this year.



Working-age military retirees are facing new Tricare Select fees in January, and they must set up a payment process. (Photo: Michael Beaton/Army)

What military retirees affected by new Tricare Select fees should do now

By Karen Jowers
Military Times

Defense health officials are encouraging the hundreds of thousands of military retirees who will have to start paying enrollment fees for their Tricare Select health care coverage as of Jan. 1 to take action now to set up their payment process.

And if you do this before Nov. 20, you can avoid

having to pay enrollment fees in advance.

Starting Jan. 1, these retirees, generally working-age retirees under age 65, will pay \$12.50 a month for individual coverage, or \$150 annually. Enrollment fees for those with families will be \$25 a month, or \$300 annually. These fees were put into law in the Fiscal 2017 National Defense Authorization Act, but delayed until

January 2021.

There were 407,431 military retirees and 764,936 retiree family members in Tricare Select at the end of 2019, according to a DoD report. It also applies to retirees in the Tricare Overseas Program Select.

The fees don't apply to retirees in the Tricare for Life program, nor does it affect Chapter 61 retirees (receiving disability retirement) and their family members, and survivors of deceased active duty service members. Active duty family members don't pay Tricare Select enrollment fees.

Affected retirees definitely should set their payment up before Nov. 20, said Mark Ellis, chief of policy and programs for the Tricare Health Plan. That way you can avoid having to pay one or two months of premiums in advance. Ellis, who is a retiree with Tricare Select coverage, said he recently made his call to set up his payment, "and it took all of about three minutes."

Officials also encourage retirees to set up their payment process before Open Season starts on Nov. 9, when the contractors will be busier.

Retirees should contact their regional Tricare contractor by phone or through their website to set up their fee payment — by retired pay allotment, through electronic funds transfer, or debit or credit card. Officials are encouraging retirees to pay for their Tricare Select coverage by military allotment if possible. Using another form of payment such as a credit card, or electronic transfer a checking or savings account can sometimes result in problems — for example, when a card is lost or stolen, or a charge is not accepted for some other reason.

If the premium isn't paid by Jan. 1, you could lose coverage. Under federal law, "we don't have legal authority to provide care or process claims" if the fees are not paid, he said.

"We realize things happen," he said, noting that there is a process in place for the Tricare Select retirees to be notified, if, for example, an electronic funds transfer or credit card payment fails to go through. There is a reinstatement period of 90 days, and if the back fees are paid, the coverage can be reinstated back to the

day after the retiree stopped paying fees, and coverage is brought up to date. "As long as back fees are paid, we can process denied claims," Ellis said. "We can't do it forever, but we do have processes in place."

These new fees affect retirees and their family members in the so-called Group A — the sponsor's initial enlistment or appointment was before Jan. 1, 2018. The retirees in Group A are generally working-age retirees under age 65. Currently they don't pay enrollment fees, but under the National Defense Authorization Act of 2017, Congress required defense officials to start charging these working-age retirees enrollment fees in 2021.

The law delayed the start of these fees until Jan. 1, 2021. Also starting in 2021, the catastrophic cap for how much these retirees pay out of pocket for Tricare-covered services increases from \$3,000 to \$3,500.

The 2020 Tricare open season begins Nov. 9 and ends Dec. 14, 2020.

Article republished from Military Times.



When will Boys State hold future in-person sessions?

By Tim Aboudara
Sr. Chief Counselor
California Boys State

The American Legion California Boys State Commission held its annual meeting, virtually, on Nov. 7.

In attendance were all six members of the commission, the Boys State senior staff and approximately 30 others.

At about 45 attendees, it was the largest number of attendees in memory. The commission welcomed its newest member, Frank Flores representing Area 4.

With the unknowns surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, the senior staff explained to the

commission the planning that is in process for a regular "in-person" session and a virtual session.

The commission heard a presentation from Tim Aboudara, Jr., the leader of the Boys State Virtual Session Task Force on what they are doing to make sure everything is in place if the 2021 program must be virtual.

He was accompanied by Nathan Rice and Nick Spear from the Boys State staff.

The Virtual Task Force is comprised of 45 volunteers from the planned 2020 Boys State staff of 90.

Tim, Jr. also reported on the ongoing dialog the senior staff and the Task Force leadership has had

with the Texas Boys State program who conducted a highly successful virtual 2020 program in June for 650 delegates.

Chief Counselor Tim Aboudara, Sr. discussed the "in-person" options if, in fact, California State University Sacramento is able to host summer conferences in 2021.

The biggest variable for the Boys State program is the number of available beds.

The Boys State Commission and the Boys State staff were in complete agreement that whether "in-person" or virtual, there will be a 2021 session of The American Legion California Boys State.

The adoption of the budget and fee structure for "in-person" or virtual will be finalized at a special Boys State Commission meeting on Dec. 5.

The shipment of packages of complete information for Boys State District Chairs will go out from Department Headquarters by Dec. 18.

The Senior Staff reported on the virtual college fair that was offered to the 2020 delegates.

Over 150 delegates and 45 colleges/universities participated.

The program also launched its new online store.

The senior staff provided a "tour" of the "new"

American Legion California Boys State website.

It includes a new portal for Boys State District Chairs to track the status of online Delegate registration, sections focused specifically for information for delegates, parents, schools and Legionnaires.

The revitalized website will launch soon at www.boysstatecalifornia.org.

Upon adoption of the 2021 Boys State budget, information on fees, the District Chair Virtual Meeting on Jan. 9, 2021 and new Boys State post chair training will be provided via special email notice, printed in the California Legionnaire and featured online at caLegion.org.

In Military History

Crossing the Delaware
Dec. 26 1776

In the first few months of the American Revolution, Gen. George Washington's Continental Army had suffered several defeats. Morale was low, so the general decided he needed a victory. The plan was to surprise the German troops hired by the British-hired Hessians mercenaries stationed in Trenton, New Jersey, a day after their Christmas feast when they'd least expect it. The surprise attack became famously known as the Battle of Trenton.

Stars and Stripes
Dec. 25, 1876

While crossing the Atlantic on his way home from a European vacation, John Philip Sousa wrote "Stars and Stripes Forever." The iconic song officially became America's national march in 1987.

Operation Linebacker II in North Vietnam
Dec. 11, 1972

The U.S. dropped 15,000 tons of bombs during 729 Air Force sorties involving some 12,000 airmen. The raids destroyed or damaged 1,600 structures, 500 rail targets, 10 airfields and 80 percent of North Vietnam's electric-generating capacity. Fifteen U.S. B-52s were also destroyed in the process, killing 35 men and leading to the capture of nearly 40 American prisoners of war. As a result of the campaign, peace talks resumed and the Paris Peace Accords came in January 1973. (Source: Defense.gov)



County adopts policies for veterans employment, vet-owned business

By Christian Southards
Contributing Writer

Orange County, California has officially enacted a new policy aimed at improving veterans' employment prospects in addition to adopting a separate policy that will see the county facilitate its own version of

the state's Disabled Veteran Business Enterprise (DVBE) program.

The two policy changes were brought about after several veteran CEOs and veterans service organization Veteran Strong USA began lobbying Orange County Supervisor Michele Steel's veterans office to implement

the changes.

Veteran Strong USA was founded by U.S. Air Force veteran Ted Fuentes and aims to improve veterans lives in California through legislative action.

The group primarily focuses on assisting veterans, disabled veterans, and aging veterans in California.

The first policy change will ensure that veterans and their spouses will automatically enter the interview phase for any county job they apply for so long as they meet the minimum requirements for said position.

There is no limit to how many veterans or veteran spouses can take advantage of this new perk per job opening. The policy was unanimously approved on Sept. 15 by the Orange County Board of Supervisors.

In a press release relating to the policy change, Chairwoman Steel said, "Orange County's veterans employment preference policy will be the most veteran friendly county program in the state."

The second policy recommendation pushed by Veteran Strong USA received similar approval on Oct. 6.

This policy change will see Orange County adopt a version of California's DVBE program, which ensures that

businesses owned by disabled veterans receive at least 3% of all state government contracts.

However, Orange County's DVBE program will increase that rate to 5%, or up to 8% if businesses meet specific criteria.



Members:
Sign up for
American Legion
Department of
California email updates
to receive
training, membership
info and other
important
updates.
[bit.ly/
calegion-emails](https://bit.ly/calegion-emails)

JOIN THE 2020 AMERICAN LEGION VIRTUAL LEGACY RUN FUNDRAISER



Get your t-shirt and coin!

With the coronavirus forcing social distancing and stay-at-home orders, all American Legion national events have been canceled throughout the summer. This includes what was going to be the 15th annual American Legion Legacy Run – the primary fundraiser for The American Legion Legacy Scholarship Fund. Through the efforts of the American Legion Family, spearheaded by the Legion Riders – five of the

previous six Legacy Runs have raised more than \$1 million for a fund that since 2004 has awarded \$3.6 million in aid to 401 military children of the fallen and disabled.

In order to continue raising money for the Legacy Scholarship Fund during these times, The American Legion has created a tiered donation program to provide an alternative way for individual American Legion Family members

to contribute to the fund. Donations start at \$15, signifying the 15th year of the Legacy Run, and will entitle the donor to various souvenirs from this year's altered Legacy Run, as has been the case for participants in and donors to previous rides. The tiered individual donation program is:

Tier 1 - \$15: Donors receive a thank-you card signed by the national commander and American Legion Riders chairman.

Tier 2 - \$25: Donors receive a 15th Annual challenge coin.

Tier 3 - \$50: Donors receive a 15th Annual Ride t-shirt.

Tier 4 - \$75: Donors receive a Legacy Run 15 years in review booklet, the ride's main patch and a "Quarantined 2020 Riding in Spirit" rocker.

Tier 5 - \$250: Donors receive all the above items. **Legacy Run Fundraiser Souvenirs**

Additionally, The American Legion maintains a reward program that recognizes \$500 and above donations made by individuals, posts or departments. These donations are either sent in to national, presented at the national convention or donated at stop points on the Legacy Run. The reward structure for those donations are:

The first \$500 donor receives a plaque with a Legacy Run coin affixed within. The plaque has five coin slots for consecutive years.

Each year after every \$500 or more donated, another coin is awarded (minimum donation amount received for all 5 years is \$2,500).

When the plaque is filled with five coins, another plaque is awarded and the reward program starts over.

Donate to the Legacy Fund
To donate to the Legacy Fund through this program now through Dec. 31, use this link:

[https://bit.ly/
donate-legacy-fund](https://bit.ly/donate-legacy-fund)

Thank you for your continued support, and we look forward to riding with all of you next year.

Mail-in Donations to:
The American Legion
Legacy Run
PO Box 1055
Indianapolis, IN 46206
Attention: Internal Affairs
& Membership Division

Please include your shirt size.

Breaking the stereotype of American Legion Riders

By Michael Hjeldstad
Area 6 Vice Commander

The American Legion Riders (ALR) are all-inclusive and welcoming. Any American Legion Family member – Legion, American Legion Auxiliary and Sons of The American Legion – who meet the Riders' eligibility requirements are eligible to join.

In an effort to reach current and eligible ALR members, the Department of California put together a few videos to present a clearer picture of what the riders are all about.

Watch the department videos here:

[https://bit.ly/
calegion-riders-videos](https://bit.ly/calegion-riders-videos)

"Being an American Legion Rider transcends generations," said Mick Sobczak, former head of the Department of California ALR program. Sobczak served in both the Marine Corps and the Army and retired as a combat engineer from the Army. He is a 12-year Legion member and the son of a 34-year Legion member from New York.

The California Legion Riders looked for a way to promote their approximately 90 existing chapters and also improve awareness and membership within the American Legion Family.

They are especially looking to include women and younger riders. Past Hollywood Post 43 Commander Jeric Wilhelmsen filmed three rides in California with the help of Dennis Kee, a founder and leader of Chapter 43's ALR program.

"We took a ride out to Malibu and down the Pacific Coast Highway," Wilhelmsen said. The other shoots took them to Bakersfield and Monterey Bay. The videos showed the world-class scenic rides of Southern California but focused on the Riders.

Watch Chapter 43's video here:
[https://bit.ly/
ch43-riders-videos](https://bit.ly/ch43-riders-videos)

Sobczak knew

Wilhelmsen had the skills to help execute the informative videos. They met when Wilhelmsen filmed the 2017 American Legion Legacy Run, which raises funds for the Legacy Scholarship that supports children of veterans who died on active duty since Sept. 11, 2001, or children of post-9/11 veterans who have a combined VA disability rating of 50 percent or greater.

Wilhelmsen was so inspired by the way Riders from the entire country came together that he wanted to be a part of it himself. He was an integral part of starting a new Legion Riders chapter at Hollywood Post 43.

"When I got back to my home post I heard that there was talk about starting a chapter, so I jumped on board and did everything I could do to help out in creating that chapter," he said.

When the Riders came to Hollywood Post 43 it was a perfect opportunity for Wilhelmsen to use his experience to develop and grow the chapter.

"Our chapter really

"I was tired of being on the back seat and I wanted to do my own thing,"
Chaing said. **"I love riding with a pack, especially the Legion."**

—Stephanie Chaing

wanted to make splash and make our presence known and have the whole state or country know about us," he said. "I thought it was important to have a strong social media presence. So I immediately created our Facebook page, our Instagram page; in making those pages we needed content."

Wilhelmsen, a U.S. Army and Army Reserve veteran, now works as a video journalist with experience



covering adventure races like the Race Across America.

Kee also gave his skills to the project. He is part of a group of about 18 combat camera people who are members of Post 43.

This video project is intended to show exactly who the Legion Riders are and what they do.

"We do a lot of veteran support activities," Kee said. "We do welcome home activities, we do missions when groups deploy. We're really proud. We're just trying to get more Riders and to get everybody excited about it."

These videos are "to provide awareness and hit different demographics to show that we're not locked," Sobczak said. "And being that the Riders are the fastest growing program of The American Legion, we just figured these videos would take us to the next level."

"It's exciting to see the Auxiliary and the Sons involved," Kee said.

One of the videos highlights a female veteran rider named Stephanie Chaing.

"I was tired of being on the back seat and I wanted to do my own thing," Chaing

said. "I love riding with a pack, especially the Legion. It's a proud feeling. I'm passionate about riding because it's a therapeutic thing for me, but also to be able to come together and experience it as a family."

"Most people view us as the older guy riding a cruiser, and we use these videos, to show that there's sports bikes, there's cruisers, there's men, there's women, there's Auxiliary, there's (an SAL) squadron," Sobczak said. "We tried to hit as many demographics as possible with these videos."

"We are a program of The American Legion," Sobczak said. "We are Legion Family members serving veterans and our community. We just happen to do it on motorcycle. If you're in the military family and you want to ride, you're welcome."

For Wilhelmsen, the filming provided more than expected.

"As I got opportunities to visit these various chapters, I was learning a lot of the history about the Department of California: how the Riders first got started here in California and how they

developed. I really enjoyed learning the history of this state. As I was doing these interviews I realized that I was getting the history of the Riders. I was capturing a snapshot of the Riders in 2018."

The Department of California American Legion Riders goal is to have 100 chapters for the 100-year anniversary of The American Legion in 2019.

"Training and membership are very important to me," said Sobczak, a National Legion College graduate and instructor who helped develop California's recent Legion College. "I'm a firm believer that if people understand our history and how the process works, we will not only get new members but we'll retain and maintain active members."

Wilhelmsen expressed the value of learning the history of the organization and meeting people who were part of some of the first Riders chapters.

"I really hope that this archive of interviews of the current state of the Riders in 2018 is valued 50 years or 100 years from now," he said.

The Resolution: Great ideas grow from the ground up

By Nestor Aliga
Post 603 Historian

Our posts are the backbone of our Department and National Headquarters because they are our “boots-on-the-ground” and they witness the challenges as well as triumphs that our fellow Legionnaires face every day.

It is no wonder that most of the best ideas for improving outreach and services for veterans have originated from posts.

Let us remember the old saying, “knowledge is power when it is shared and acted upon...” So, if you know or see something that can improve the lives of our veterans, then please write a resolution as it is the initial step to identify a problem and to suggest a solution.

This year, American Legion Manuel L. Quezon Post 603 of Vallejo submitted 13 resolutions. Each went through District 5, then Area 1, then to our Department. Three of the 13 eventually went to national and they are among the 37 resolutions passed by the National Executive Committee in its Oct. 14-15, 2020 meeting.

Two of the three resolutions are shown below as a sample for each post to submit their own resolutions.

Resolution No. 10: Stellate Ganglion Block (SGB) Research for Treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD):

WHEREAS, Every June is designated as “National Post-Traumatic Stress Awareness Month” to help raise public awareness, reduce the associated stigma, and help ensure that those individuals suffering from the invisible wounds of war promptly receive proper treatment; and

WHEREAS, The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) reports that

approximately 20% Iraqi Freedom, 12% Persian Gulf and 30% Vietnam War servicemembers and veterans have post-traumatic stress; and

WHEREAS, Both government and non-government organizations have made significant advances in their identification, prevention, diagnosis and treatment of post-traumatic stress; and

WHEREAS, One of the most promising post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) treatments is stellate ganglion block (SGB) and the VA Long Beach Healthcare System, in California, and the Veterans Affairs Center for Compassionate Care Innovation are leading an effort to offer stellate ganglion block to a subset of veterans who have not experienced relief from traditional PTSD treatments; and

WHEREAS, There is growing evidence that stellate ganglion block may alleviate certain PTSD symptoms such as hyperarousal, exaggerated startle responses and anxiety, and it appears to calm an exaggerated “fight or flight” survival reflex in people having PTSD, which can become triggered by various events that do not warrant it; and

WHEREAS, Veterans who received stellate ganglion block for other health conditions like nerve pain, report positive effects for the PTSD symptoms including reduced anxiety and hypervigilance; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By the National Executive Committee of The American Legion in regular meeting assembled virtually on October 14-15, 2020, That The American Legion urges the federal government to accelerate stellate ganglion block (SGB) research and that the Department of Veterans Affairs



(VA) advertise SGB in all VA health-care facilities; and be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion supports the expansion of the VA's Center for Compassionate Care Innovation program nationwide and throughout VA facilities and to further the Center for Compassionate Care Innovation program's mission to provide veterans a wide array of state-of-the-art treatments and evidence-based therapies with further research,

innovation and access.

Resolution No. 14: Post 9/11 Transfer of Educational Benefits:

WHEREAS, Our servicemembers and our veterans have risked their lives to protect our freedom, and their families who colaterally sacrificed, deserve every possible resource to ensure their lasting physical, mental and educational well-being as more than 2,770,000 of our troops have deployed overseas since September 11, 2001; and

WHEREAS, In the military operations after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, over 959,701 reservists have been involuntarily and/or were voluntarily placed on active duty according to the Congressional Research Service; and

WHEREAS, The Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act, also known as the “Forever GI Bill,” was signed into law on August 17, 2017, and it brought significant changes to veterans education benefits; and

WHEREAS, The Forever GI Bill states, that as of August 1, 2018, veterans who transferred entitlement to a dependent can now designate a new dependent if the original dependent dies, and if the veteran dies, a dependent who received transferred entitlement can now designate a new eligible dependent of the veteran to transfer any of the dependent's remaining entitlement; and


WHEREAS, The Forever GI Bill states that even though a veteran may be eligible for Post9/11 GI Bill, they must also be a current member of the armed forces (active duty or selected reserve, officer or enlisted) on or after August 1, 2009; and

WHEREAS, The Forever GI Bill did not address the transfer of educational benefits for veterans that served after 9/11 but were separated before August 1, 2009, because those veterans did not transfer their educational benefits; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By the National Executive Committee of The American Legion in regular meeting assembled virtually on October 14-15, 2020, That The American Legion urges Congress to pass legislation that must allow the hundreds of thousands of veterans that served after September 11, 2001, but were separated before August 1, 2009 to transfer their educational benefits.

You can review Resolution No. 11, Mare Island Naval Cemetery and all other active American Legion resolutions at

archive.legion.org/handle/20.500.12203/1



Members:
Sign up for Department of California email updates to receive training, membership info and other important updates.
bit.ly/calegion-emails



Tuskegee Airmen circa May 1942 to August 1943 (Photo: Lenny Flank)

LA County honors local WWII veterans with new documentary

By Christian Southards
Contributing Writer

In honor of the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II, the Los Angeles County Department of Military and Veterans Affairs premiered a new documentary on Veterans Day featuring the stories of local veteran service members who served during the war.

The documentary, “Unsung Heroes of the Greatest Generation,” highlights the accomplishments and contributions of servicemen and women who may have previously gone unheralded due to racial and gender prejudices common in that era.

One such story features Yoshio Nakamura, who served in the

legendary 442nd Regimental Combat Team—one of the most decorated combat units in U.S. military history—after volunteering for military service from the Gila River Japanese internment camp.

Nakamura tells of his time in Italy, where his unit was ordered to take a fortified enemy position atop Mount Folgorito that had stymied allied forces for six months.

Silently scaling the mountain, the 442nd successfully took the outpost, providing a key victory for allied forces in Italy.

Overall, the film recounts 10 different stories of Los Angeles veterans who fought or served against the Axis Powers.

“This film is dedicated

to the men and women who served so valiantly in World War II that may have gone unnoticed until now.

Typifying the greatest diversity of our nation, our brothers and sisters proved that when we fight for one common goal that we can achieve anything,” said Ruth Wong, a retired Air Force brigadier general and current director of the Los Angeles County MVA, in the film.

The documentary is free to watch on Vimeo and will also be airing on LA County Channel (36) until the end of the year.

The Los Angeles County MVA offers assistance for obtaining VA benefits, including services related to education, employment, healthcare.

Winners of \$7,000 sweepstakes raffle announced

By Cheryl Ing
Coordinator
Programs & Fundraising

The American Legion Department of California announced the eight winners of its sweepstakes raffle, where \$7,000 will be dispersed.

The “Honoring Those Who Served Sweepstakes”

funds programs that inspire and support veterans, families and the communities in California. It supports veteran suicides and substance abuse, expands services that heal our veterans and their families, and inspires young Americans to love and honor our flag and country.

\$7,000 Sweepstakes Winners

- 1st Prize \$5,000 – Dennis Griffin, Sutter Creek, Post 108
- 2nd Prize \$1,000 – Dan Murtha, San Jose, Post 318
- 3rd Prize \$500 – Louis May, Morro Bay, Post 66
- 4th Prize \$250 – William Talbert, Seaside, Post 591
- 5th Prize \$100 – Rudy Alderete, Temple City, Post 748
- 6th Prize \$50 – Allen Mercer, La Crescenta, Post 288
- 7th Prize \$50 – Charles Wilson, Yorba Linda, Post 679
- 8th Prize \$50 – William Bloemhof, Palmdale, Post 381



American Legion Department of California Adjutant Paul Brown selects a winning ticket from a drum of thousands at the organization's headquarters in Sanger, California, on Monday, Nov. 9, 2020. (Photo: American Legion Department of California)



Your post can receive a credit for each dollar spent on the purchase of American Flags from Emblem Sales.

[Legion.org/dispatch/flag](https://legion.org/dispatch/flag)

YOUR VOICE: What do you think of the U.S. decision to withdraw troops from Afghanistan in January?

What's your opinion about withdrawing U.S. troops from Afghanistan? Do you think we should do it? Are you opposed? Tell us why and we might use your response in a future edition of the California Legionnaire in print and online at calegion.org.

* Be sure to include your full name, post city and post number, your phone number and a photo (A headshot in your Legion cap is preferred).

Email your responses to: editor@calegion.org
Phone in your responses by calling: 310-750-9782

Mail your responses to:
California Legionnaire
1601 7th St., Sanger, CA 93657-2801



Legion posts in California petition Newsom to reopen

By Christian Southards
Contributing Writer

American Legionnaires in Los Angeles and throughout California are lobbying to reopen their posts in light of an eight-month closure due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Some Legionnaires are saying the closures could become permanent if posts aren't allowed to reopen so they can begin generating revenue to pay bills.

Advocates note that many Legion posts are rented out for local city council meetings and other events to generate income that goes towards keeping posts afloat.

Without income, many posts throughout California are at serious risk.

Advocates have thusly petitioned Gov. Gavin Newsom to change Legion posts from being designated as "bars," which are not allowed to be open in

counties labeled with a purple tier rating indicating widespread coronavirus transmission.

Those for reopening Legion posts note that while many posts do contain bars and provide a space for socializing, the primary purpose of these posts is to provide support and services for veterans.

California State Commanders Veteran Council lobbyist Bob Reed, who was part of the group petitioning

Gov. Newsom, says "the bar does not have to be open in these posts in halls. These posts and halls serve important roles in the lives of our veterans."

Although some Legionnaires have been able to adapt to an online-only structure to continue receiving Legion services, many have not—including the majority of older veterans who served during World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War.

State of the Pandemic: Coronavirus Lockdowns Have Been in Effect Since March

Most American Legion posts have remained completely closed since the initial shutdown orders were issued in March. While case numbers began to decrease in summer, recent reports note that California recently surpassed one million cases.

Nationally, the U.S. is averaging 100,000 new cases per day.

COULD CALIFORNIA HOST NEW US SPACE COMMAND?

By Valerie Insinna
Defense News

WASHINGTON — Six locations have survived the first round of cuts and are still in under consideration to become the new headquarters for U.S. Space Command, the Air Force announced last month.

The six locations include four Air Force installations — Kirtland Air Force Base in New Mexico, Offutt AFB in Nebraska, Patrick AFB in Florida, and Peterson AFB in Colorado — as well as Redstone Army Airfield in Alabama and Port San Antonio in Texas, which was home to the former Kelly

Air Force Base and currently hosts Air National Guard and reserve operations.

A memo listing potential U.S. Space Command locations leaked to the press in 2019, and included four bases in Colorado — Buckley Air Force Base, Cheyenne Mountain Air Force Station, Peterson Air Force Base

(the command's current, but temporary home) and Schriever Air Force Base — as well as Redstone Arsenal and Vandenberg Air Force Base in California.

"The Department of the Air Force evaluated each location and will now conduct both virtual and on-site visits at each candidate

location to assess which location is best suited to host the U.S. Space Command Headquarters," the Air Force said in a press release. "This assessment will be based on factors related to mission, infrastructure capacity, community support, and costs to the Department of Defense."



VA telehealth helps veterans keep appointments COVID-19

By Christian Southards
Contributing Writer

The Department of Veterans Affairs recently announced its Remote Patient Monitoring – Home Telehealth system, which is connecting California veterans in close proximity to wildfires with VA medical services.

The VA said last month that its RPM-HT system has been able to alert veterans in high-risk areas regarding precautions that can be

taken to avoid smoke-related illnesses.

Though firefighters have made significant progress containing the state's many wildfires, including the Blue Ridge and Silverado fires, some fires in the state continue to burn and air quality throughout California is still diminished.

Confronting a separate threat, the VA has also been using the RPM-HT system to conduct virtual appointments with veterans in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The VA says that since the pandemic began, it has been able to "support more than 25,000 virtual appointments each day."

Telehealth has helped limit the number of in-person visits to VA healthcare facilities, in addition to allowing VA medical providers to check up on patients often.

While the VA has largely been successful in containing coronavirus thus far, spikes in VA coronavirus-related case

numbers have occurred as recently as mid-October.

The American Legion Offers Assistance to Veterans Suffering from Wildfires

Veterans residing in areas that were previously declared to be in a state of emergency due to wildfires may be able to seek assistance from The American Legion's National Emergency Fund.

The NEF offers grants

for active legionnaires that have been displaced due to a declared natural disaster.

Received funds are intended to be used to help pay for costs associated with displacement, such as temporary shelter, diapers, and so on.

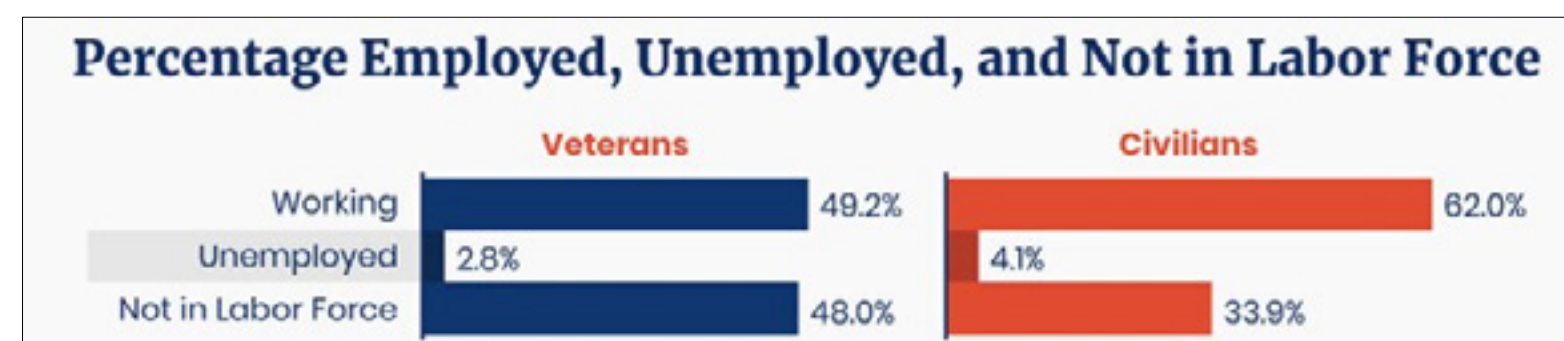
The NEF was established in 1989 to help survivors of Hurricane Hugo.

Since the start of the year, over \$100,000 has been awarded to legionnaires throughout the country, including in California.



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Eagle Scout Christian Gonzalez, a senior at Sanger High School, a member of Scout Troop 223 (St. Anthony of Padua) and son of Post 23 member Cesar Gonzalez, a lieutenant colonel with the 144th Fighter Squadron in Fresno, California, unearths a time capsule during a service project at the post on Friday, Oct. 16, 2020.

Eagle Scout project unearths 1923 time capsule

By James JD Bennett
Commander, Sanger Post 23

What started as an Eagle Scout project at American Legion William Lee Netzer Post 23 in Sanger, Calif., turned into the finding of a historical treasure trove.

Christian Gonzalez, a senior at Sanger High School and a member of Scout Troop 223 (St. Anthony of Padua), contacted me to propose an Eagle Scout project.

It was a beautification project that would conform to water conservation measures in California, as well as install a pedestal with a bronze plaque in front of the flag pole.

Christian, son of Post 23 member Lt. Col. Cesar Gonzalez with the 144th Fighter Squadron in Fresno, Calif., was jackhammering concrete around the flag pole when he noticed a metal box.

Thinking it might be an electrical box he stopped and began chipping away with a hammer.

What he found was a shocking surprise to him and members of American Legion Post 23 – a time

capsule from June 14, 1923, when the post was chartered.

Inside the time capsule was a:

- Bible with the name Eugene Bradford inside the front cover; he was listed as the post adjutant on the charter roster.

The Bible marker was on John 3:16, one of the most quoted verses in the Bible: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

- Charter membership roster. The roster included the name of Frank Netzer, who is believed to be related to William Netzer whom the post is named after.

- Roster of what is believed to be the Auxiliary unit.

- 48-star small American flag.

- Photo of a young soldier kneeling next to a tent, believed to be possibly from World War I.

- Two newspapers, the Sanger Herald dated June 14, 1923, and The Fresno Republican dated June 16, 1923. The Sanger Herald had a front-page story featuring the dedication of American

Legion Post 23.

Post 23 will be looking for a way to preserve this piece of history and possibly find family members alive today of the Bible, charter members and the soldier in the photo.

To bring this finding full circle, Post 23 decided to fill the time capsule with a bit of modern treasures. The 2020 time capsule features a:

- Bible donated by Post 23 Chris Conway that he received at basic training prior to leaving for Vietnam, where he too had underlined John 3:16.

- Current Post 23 and Auxiliary unit membership roster.

- Local Mid Valley Times newspaper.

- 2017 issue of The American Legion Magazine. On the cover is then American Legion National Commander Charles Schmidt with President Trump as he signed the VA Appeals Modernization Act on stage during the National Convention in Reno, Nev.

- 100th anniversary American Legion pin.

- 2020 American Legion Post 23 100 percent membership pin.

- Department of California bear logo pin.

- Few challenge coins. And nothing in 2020 would be complete without a mask, a few sheets of toilet paper, and a bottle of hand sanitizer.

We do have a sense of humor, because hey, it describes this year fairly well.

All items were wrapped in plastic prior to being placed in the time capsule to help preserve their integrity.

The time capsule was resealed and the concrete was poured to encapsulate it.

Post 23 would like to extend our thanks to Christian for all of his hard work and congratulate him for the historical treasure find.



Eagle Scout Christian Gonzalez poses for a photo after a job well done. (Photo: Sanger Post 23)



American Legion Department of California Commander Edward Grimsley poses with the US Army Reserve's 801st Engineer Company (Construction) for the opening of the based at Mare Island in the City of Vallejo on Wednesday, Nov. 11, 2020. (Photo: Fred Shacklett, Department Historian)

Naval cemetery rededicated on Veterans Day

By Nestor Aliga
Post 603 Historian

The refurbished Mare Island Naval Cemetery (MINC) in Vallejo was rededicated on Veterans Day by 200 socially-distanced, mask-wearing individuals in an outdoor, overcast, 60-degree, 5 mph-wind setting.

Our keynote speaker was Lt. Governor Eleni Kounalakis. Ed Grimsley, our Department of California Commander, was one of the acknowledged special guests.

Due to COVID / HPCON-C (Health Protection Condition-Charlie) guidelines, most of our out-of-area federal invitees opted to not to travel. So we asked all of them to provide video-taped messages. We then combined their videos with the live speakers to create YouTube – which you can view at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VS621G7psmI> (or search for “youtube+nestor+aliga+mare”).

Legionnaires from Manuel L. Quezon Post 603 in Vallejo joined members of the Vallejo Navy League and the Naval Sea Cadet Corps on Nov. 8 in placing flags in preparation for the Veterans Day ceremony.

In March 2017, retired US Navy Captain Ralph Parrott of Virginia visited MINC and was appalled at its dilapidated condition. Parrott and Karnig Ohanessian, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy (Environment), then assisted the City of Vallejo in applying for the Department of Defense

written on MINC since 2018.

For a little review: MINC is the oldest naval cemetery on the west coast. Memorial Day and Veterans Day ceremonies have been held there since 1871 and 1920, respectively. Designated as a National Historic Landmark, MINC has three Congressional Medal of Honor recipients: James Cooney, USMC; William Halford, USN; and Alexander Parker, USN.

Over 860 Sailors and Marines who served in the periods from the War of 1812 to the World War I and 100+ of their relatives are interred here. The first burial was George Dowd of the USS Massachusetts on February 12, 1856, Pres. Lincoln's birthday.

MINC closed in 1921 but the last pre-arranged family burial was in 1984. Also buried there is Anna Arnold Key Turner whose husband, Daniel, fought in the War of 1812, and she is the daughter of Francis Scott Key who wrote our beloved National Anthem, The Star Spangled Banner.

In March 2017, retired US Navy Captain Ralph Parrott of Virginia visited MINC and was appalled at its dilapidated condition. Parrott and Karnig Ohanessian, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy (Environment), then assisted the City of Vallejo in applying for the Department of Defense

Innovative Readiness Training (IRT) program.

Concurrently, Parrott enlisted many volunteers including Thomas Bandzul of Washington, DC, retired US Army Colonel Nestor Aliga of Vallejo, and Robert Wyllie of the Scottish American Military Society to urge the federal government to re-possess MINC per the provisions of Public Law 93-43, National Cemeteries Act of 1973.

Their petition quickly collected over 50,000 signatures and they also secured the unwavering support of The American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, (the Big 2), AmVets, VVA, Purple Heart, IAVA, Navy League, WWP, MinorityVets, FRA, MilitaryWomensCoalition, NABMW, and other veterans service organizations.

The US Army Reserve's 801st Engineer Company (Construction) based at Mare Island, the City of Vallejo, and many volunteers started the IRT in August 2019. But operations were suspended from March to August due to COVID / HPCON-C guidelines.

They have nearly completed this extensive project to bring MINC back to national shrine conditions worthy of Pres. Lincoln's promise, “to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan.”

From 2018 to 2020, REP Mike Thompson and SEN

Dianne Feinstein introduced H.R.5588, H.R.578, H.R.6039 and S.2881, S.127, S.2983, respectively, but they were not passed by the House nor Senate Veterans Affairs (VA) Committees.

However, we are now optimistic that their July 2020 amendments to the

the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) Veteran Utilization Rate will increase.

Nationwide, less than 20% of eligible Veterans and family members chose to be buried with the NCA because daily or frequent visits to their departed



Legionnaires from Manuel L. Quezon Post 603 in Vallejo joined members of the Vallejo Navy League and the Naval Sea Cadet Corps on Nov. 8 in placing flags to nearly 900 graves in preparation for the Veterans Day ceremony.

FY21 National Defense Authorization Act “...to require the VA to seek an agreement with Vallejo for the transfer of MINC...” will pass by year-end.

By the way, the Benicia Arsenal Post Cemetery, the west coast's oldest Army cemetery, quietly transferred to the US Veterans Affairs in September 2020 and it is the newest VA National Cemetery on the west coast.

If everything goes well, we are looking at 1 to 2 years for MINC to become another VA National Cemetery. More importantly, MINC can be re-opened for new interments so that

loved one(s) is important for their grieving and closure process.

The NCA's 75 mile-rule, as-the-crow flies, is just too far to traverse especially in congested metropolitan areas.

The NCA taking over then re-opening MINC as soon as practical is a win-win solution for the San Francisco Bay Area until the Alameda Point National Cemetery – which has been delayed many times since the President G.W. Bush era – is finally built within a decade.

Urge passage of 'Buddy Check' bill

Visit The American Legion Legislative Action Center to send a message to your congressional representatives urging them to cosponsor and support National Buddy Check legislation introduced in the House in 2019 and the Senate in 2020.

Senate and House bills S.4657 and H.R.2898 are currently making their way

through Congress and will direct the Veterans Administration to establish one week for providing educational opportunities on how to conduct personal wellness checks and require increased resources for the Veterans Crisis Line.

The legislation, inspired by the successful American Legion Buddy Check program, reads as follows:

"A bill to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to designate one week each year as "Buddy Check Week" for the purpose of outreach and education concerning peer wellness checks for veterans, and for other purposes."

Legion.org/buddycheck/contact-legislator



Comedian Fernando Sanchez warms up attendees of American Legion Post 397's comedy night Oct. 10. The Monterey Park, Cal. post has turned to events like this to raise money during the pandemic. (Photo: Robert Garrova, American Homefront Project)

Legionnaires innovate as COVID-19 upends business models of posts

By Robert Garrova
American Homefront Project

The meeting halls and lounges of American Legion posts across the country serve as a community hub for veterans and their families.

But during the pandemic, many have had to shut their doors to retired service members looking to grab a cheap drink or rent out the hall for an event.

That has meant a big hit to some posts' bottom line.

On a recent Saturday night, comedian Scott Shimamoto thanked the

audience for coming out to a comedy night in the parking lot of Monterey Park, California's Post 397.

The physically distanced outdoor show came complete with a stage, emcee, DJ, and taco stand.

"I know it's been difficult for them because they're used to having a big audience here and having their friends, veterans," said John Padilla, who helped organize the event. He's not a veteran, but he's been coming to this post since his friend, a Vietnam Vet, first invited him.

"Their daily life, their routine, has been disrupted," Padilla said.

Gabriel Suarez has been commander of this post for the past decade. It's got about 70 members now.

Pre-pandemic, Suarez said this post would host parties almost every weekend. It's the kind of place veterans could grab a drink, enjoy a meal, and swap stories over a game of billiards.

It's been hard not having community gatherings as often as they used to. Suarez motions to a water feature that has gone dry.

"Every veteran would sit right there and just listen to the babbling of the water until they fell asleep, and most of them did with a

cigar in their hand," Suarez said. "It's just those little things, we provide a home environment."

The festivities were all about camaraderie. But they were also about keeping the lights on.

The comedy night was billed as a fundraiser, with the money helping the post compensate for the hit it's taken since the pandemic froze bar sales, hall rentals, and other sources of income.

"There's a big necessity for fundraising for our building," Suarez said. "We need to keep our building open so we're able to do the food banks, so we're able to invite our comics out tonight."

And Post 397 is not alone in its need to raise money.

"We have about 423 posts in California, and I'm fairly certain ... that a good 20 percent of them are in danger of financially having to close their doors due to the losses that they've incurred due to this pandemic," said Paul Brown, Adjutant for the American Legion Department of California.

Brown said what local posts in California are feeling is probably not too much different from the restaurant industry, especially as they feel the whiplash from state reopening guidance which has changed over the last several months.

"They're trying to adapt, they're trying to modify, they're trying to overcome the situation, survive it," Brown said.

It's hard to get a sense

of just how much the pandemic has affected the more than 12,000 posts across the country. But in October, The American Legion National Executive Committee announced the Mission Blue Post Assistance Program. Eligible posts can apply for \$1,000 grants which "must be used exclusively to pay current or past due rent, mortgage, utilities, and insurance."

"We are definitely concerned about it," said Jeff Stoffer, director of media and communications at the Legion's headquarters in Indiana.

"A lot of posts have just basically converted what they were doing towards different purposes," Stoffer added.

That's meant comedy nights, or even a drive-in movie theater at a post in Hollywood.

"Because we've had to be innovative, we've had to figure out how to modernize a lot of American Legions," said Michael Hjelmstad, vice commander of Hollywood's Post 43. "The American Legion, historically, is not real fast to take to change and new technology and things like that, so this has kind of forced us to really step up in ways that would have taken us a lot longer."

And that, Hjelmstad said, may be one silver lining on the cloud of this pandemic.

This story was produced by the American Homefront Project, a public media collaboration that reports on American military life and veterans.

Are you checking on your buddies?

The Buddy Check program was launched in March 2019 as a "comradeship campaign" to encourage posts to reach out to veterans in their areas – members, former members and others – to see what The American Legion could do for them.

The program was successful in its first year and potentially life-saving in

2020, through the COVID-19 pandemic and as winter months drew near, affecting the mental health and well-being of isolated veterans.

American Legion posts throughout the country have assembled, and are assembling, Buddy Check teams to safely contact local veterans and their families by phone,

email, text message and personal visits to see what help they may need.

Three toolkits are available for posts developing their Buddy Check programs. The original kit provides basic guidance about how to contact local veterans and let them know The American Legion is there for them. A second

toolkit focuses on Buddy Checks to help veterans through the COVID-19 pandemic. The most recent toolkit emphasizes the importance of mental health, well-being and suicide prevention.

Legion.org/buddycheck/tools



Dec. 15 provides opportunity to promote Legion's oratorical contest

Dec. 15 will mark the 229th anniversary of the ratification of the Bill of Rights. From 1789-1791, the states ratified 10 amendments to the U.S. Constitution to confirm the fundamental rights of citizens.

Amendments of the Bill of Rights guarantees freedom of religion, speech and the press, and the rights of peaceful assembly and petition; the rights of the people to keep and bear arms; the rights to private property, fair treatment for accused

criminals, protection from unreasonable search and seizure; freedom from self-incrimination; a speedy and impartial jury trial; and representation by counsel.

This upcoming anniversary of the Bill of Rights ratification is a great way for American Legion posts to educate youth and the community on the U.S. Constitution, and promote The American Legion's oratorical contest program that provides a better understanding and knowledge of

the Constitution.

As stated in American Legion Resolution No. 23, Constitution Day, "many of today's youths lack an understanding of the founding documents created by our founding fathers, namely the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution with its incredibly important Bill of Rights. Our rights and liberties rooted in these cherished documents gave birth to our nation and those documents set forth

the principals upon which our government is based."

Education can come in the way of providing youth with a copy of the Declaration of Independence and Constitution brochure that can be purchased through Emblem Sales. As well as encouraging youth to participate in the oratorical program, an opportunity to speak on the U.S. Constitution.

The American Legion's National Oratorical Finals provides more than 50

young high school orators an opportunity to earn \$203,500 in scholarships. Speaking subjects must be on some aspect of the U.S. Constitution, with some emphasis on the duties and obligations of citizens to our government. The 2021 National Oratorical Finals will be held April 9-11 in Indianapolis.

Learn more about how to participate in the oratorical contest at the post level by visiting Legion.org/oratorical.

Veterans get free entry to national parks for life

By Leo Shane III
Military Times

As of Wednesday, Veterans Day, veterans and Gold Star families are now able to visit national parks and other public lands for free under a new initiative, the Department of the Interior announced last month.

Active-duty service members and their families are already granted free access to those sites under existing department rules.

The new announcement broadens that benefit to more than 20 million more individuals in recognition of their service and sacrifice on behalf of the country.

In a statement, Interior Secretary David Bernhardt said the move gives all veterans “free access to the iconic and treasured lands they fought to protect.”

Active-duty military are also eligible for a year-long pass.

Bernhardt and other federal officials made the announcement during a ceremony at the Iowa Gold Star Museum, which focuses on the history of the state’s veterans and their families.



Yosemite National Park. | Photo: Randy Lemoine/Flickr/Creative Commons License

“Our veterans and Gold Star Families have made incredible sacrifices to defend our freedoms and our homeland,” Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, said in a statement. “Ensuring that they are able to enjoy all of the natural wonders of the country that they’ve served is one small way of saying thank you.”

The policy includes admittance to well-known sites like Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming, Mount Rushmore in South Dakota, Grand Canyon National Park in Arizona

and Shenandoah National Park in Virginia.

Interior officials did not provide cost estimates for the move, but said that the policy change will affect about 2,000 public locations across the country. Fees for the sites can range from a few dollars per person to nearly \$100 for some weekly and annual passes.

The U.S. House of Representatives has passed a proposal from two Maine lawmakers to give families of fallen military service members free access to

national parks.

For free access to the sites, veterans will have to present a Department of Defense Identification Card, a Veteran Health Identification Card, a government-issued Veteran ID Card or a state-issued U.S. driver’s license or identification card confirming an individual’s status as a veteran.

Gold Star family members can use similar Defense Department identification cards to verify their status.

National parks officials

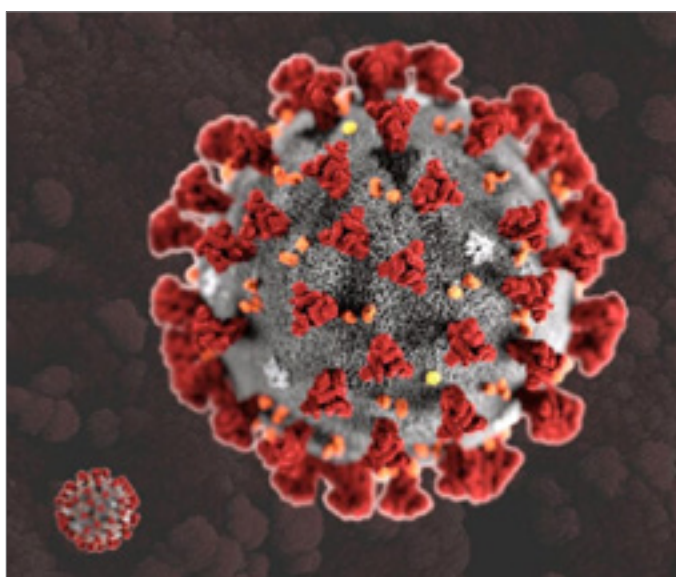
already run promotions throughout the year to offer free admission to all visitors on certain holidays, including Veterans Day.

While most national parks sites have remained open or re-opened in recent months amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, some programs and facilities still have limited access. Parks officials encourage all visitors to check with local parks administrators before traveling to the sites to ensure safe visits.

Bernhardt also announced Wednesday plans to waive entrance fees to national parks, wildlife refuges and other public lands for all 5th grade students and their families from now until Aug. 31, 2021. The move was made because many families may not have been able to take advantage of the department’s Every Kid Outdoors Annual 4th Grade Pass program because of pandemic precautions earlier this year.

More information on the fee waivers will be posted on the Interior Department website.

Article originally published on Military Times.



‘Mission Blue’ offers up to \$1,000 to posts impacted by the pandemic

At the 2020 Fall National Executive Committee Meeting, Resolution #36, titled “Mission Blue Post Assistance Program” was approved.

Posts impacted by a government’s public health restrictions implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic may apply for a grant up to \$1,000. Posts

must meet the following eligibility criteria:

- A post must have a current consolidated post report on file.

- A post must have filed an IRS 990 within the prescribed due date.

- A post must have filed all other required forms and reports as prescribed by the departments.

- A post must have actively participated in one or more The American Legion(s) within the last 18 months.

- A post must have a financial need.

- A post must provide a certificate of insurance naming The American Legion National Headquarters as an additional insured (copy of insurance declaration will be attached to application).

- A post must provide documentation indicating that the post is properly incorporated.

The funds from this grant program shall be used exclusively for the following:

- Current and past due mortgage principal and interest or

- Current and past due real estate rents or

- Current and past due insurance premiums or

- Current and past due utilities.

The American Legion posts receiving this grant are required to submit a true and accurate report outlining how the funds were used, signed by the post finance officer, and certified by the post commander or post adjutant within six-months of receipt of the grant funds

or no later than February 22, 2022. Whichever comes first.

To access instructions and application click this link:

<https://bit.ly/legion-mission-blue>



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