

WORLD'S LARGEST VETERANS ORGANIZATION



New Jersey LEGIONNAIRE



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103rd National Convention



“

We Did It!” Proclaims Commander Dillard

State Baseball Champs

Be the One NJ

Post Scripts

COMMANDER'S MESSAGE

My fellow Legionnaires and Legion Family members,



I hope that everyone had a great summer! Your American Legion dept. officers have stayed extremely busy representing you around the dept. and at National. We had the honor of attending the 25th Unsung Heroes Memorial Service for the United States Colored Troops (USCT) Civil War Veterans buried in Rahway Cemetery. A dignified and fitting tribute, particularly when you consider that the USCT troops by war's end made up approximately 10 percent of all Union Troops, and these Troops had a 35 percent greater mortality rate compared to the rest.

We have come so much further as a country since then and I believe that God gives us the strength to overcome, not only the hatred of the past, but the lingering hatred in society. I pray that God moves us all, with the spirit, to never allow such hatred into our hearts and the hearts of mankind.

Our 2021-2022 National Commander Paul Dillard visited our dept. in early Aug. and thoroughly enjoyed meeting our Legion Family. The tours of sites around our great state from Passaic to Middlesex, to Ocean and, of course, Camden with a VIP tour of the U.S.S. New Jersey, BB-62.

Our Dept. Membership Chair Rich Godfrey joined me and our Dept. Vice Commanders, Brian Hagal, Dennis Duddie, John Hanson, Patricia Tatum and Will Kramer, at the Annual Membership Conference in Indianapolis. We collaborated with Legionnaires from various depts. and attended powerful training sessions. There are many things each of us can do. I suggest looking at Post 1000 members that live near your posts. You never know, that new member may one day become our Dept. Commander.

We must continue to conduct Buddy Checks. We must work to change the perception of what is acceptable to discuss. We must ask veterans in our lives how they are doing. We must listen when a veteran needs to talk. We must reach out when a veteran is struggling. Will you all join me in being the one to save one life? BE THE ONE....BE THE ONE....BE THE ONE.

By the way, while you are performing Buddy Checks, why not reach out to that local veteran and invite them out to the post? You never know, that call or visit might be what they need.

We attended our National Convention in Milwaukee and participated in committee meetings, seminars and workshops. Our new National Commander Vincent J. "Jim" Troiola (NY), is looking forward to visiting NJ this year. I believe that we have started a very productive working relationship with Commander Troiola and his team. We have had several conversations pertaining to the issues affecting our posts' ability to conduct business. He understands and appreciates that we need the right tools to work effectively.

While we were at the National Convention, I received details about the Lake Hopatcong Post 245 being on fire. I want to thank Morris County DEC Thomas Dresdner for contacting the post and coordinating communications with us. When we returned from National Convention, it was the highest priority to go and see the post members. The building is a complete loss and there are plans

in the early phases to rebuild. We will keep you updated on any potential needs that may surface.

On Patriot's Day, after attending various memorial services, representatives from our American Legion Family attended the 17th Annual "Army of Hope Picnic" hosted by the NJ State Elks Association (NJSEA). Our Dept. Auxiliary President Colleen Breen-Lopez, Detachment Commander Mark Natale and I witnessed the generosity that the NJSEA accomplished through its members that day. The donations benefit the Army of Hope and Homeless Veterans. I took the opportunity to thank them and to ask all in attendance to "BE the ONE" to help end veteran suicide.

Saturday September 17th was an extremely busy day throughout our dept. Sussex County hosted a District Membership Training Session with our Dept. Membership Chair as presenter. Great job to DVC John Hanson, CC Ellis Marples, DEC Tom Dresdner and everyone else who made this event a success.

Morris County has an amazing Veterans Park located in Budd Lake. The park contains many monuments that were all made possible from private donations. Annually there is a 24-hour POW/MIA vigil. DVC Will Kramer and I read the names of POW/MIAs from Morris County during all wars. During the vigil the names are continuously read and remembered with honor and dignity.

Post 12 in Somerville hosted their very first COTA fundraiser. DEC Andrea Adair, PDC Bob Newell, PDC Bob Looby, along with the entire Post 12 family, did a great job for COTA and I hear plans are already in motion for next year.

Now, this day could not have concluded any better, with our Detachment, our SONS. The annual Watchfire at Seaside Heights was proper, dignified and extremely well attended. I, for one, am proud that our Sons, Legionnaires and Auxiliary, as one American Legion Family, continue to support each other and

Cover photo taken at the 103rd American Legion National convention, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, on the morning of Tuesday, Aug. 30. From left: Gene O'Grady, ANEC, Dan Dunn, outgoing NJ department commander, Steven Fisher, new NJ department commander, Berley Hannah, Jr., NEC.

New Jersey Legionnaire

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Statements contributed by individual writers may not agree with the endorsed position of the department or editor and will reflect the opinion of the contributor only.

Articles submitted may be edited for space and/or clarity.

Deadline for the winter issue is January 3, 2023

keep the message that a full accounting of those still missing must be resolved.

At the time I am writing this, we are preparing for the National Commanders and Adjutants conference, as well as the fall NEC in Indianapolis. Our Dept. Service Officers, Ken Connors and Judith Morales, are continuing their outreach activities, as well as looking forward to more "Ask A Service Officer" webinars. We will continue to hold various training events, webinars, revitalizations and workshops. If you do not have one in your area, reach out to your DEC and get one scheduled.

Our Trenton staff, Dept. Adjutant John Baker, Keith Black, Lois McNulty, Tricia Grunewald and Tammie Abdrabou, continue to do whatever it takes to support our members, posts and programs. Great job!

Our Dept. Chaplain Mike Schaffer continues to perform God's work helping our active-duty military families who need help putting food on their tables. Working with the Food Warriors program, they have supplied over 100,000 lbs. of food to families stationed at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst. They have expanded operations to assist with the need at Naval Station Earl, as well. May God continue to bless our service members and their families. If you are interested in donating or assisting, contact Chaplain Schaffer for more information. Thank you, Chaplain Mike, and God bless you!

Our Employment, Homeless and Education Committee continues to embrace its mission statement, and we are so proud of the achievements and impact they have on our NJ veterans. PDC Bob Loo-by, DVC Patricia Tatum, Bernhard (Bernie) Kofet and the entire committee, thank you!

Our American Legion posts and programs need you! We need to mentor our members in order for the next generation of leaders to take the helm. Our posts will not survive if we fail to provide opportunities for our members or if we fail to remove barriers. Every card-carrying member of your post must have a vested interest in the long-term survivability of your post. Let your members know all about the history and good work that your post has done in your community. Give your members reasons why they should continue to belong to your post and add value to their membership. Provide an environment that encourages new ideas and change the narrative from "NO" to "HOW CAN WE ASSIST IN MAKING YOUR IDEA SUCCESSFUL." Remember we are, "VETERANS STRENGTHENING AMERICA!"

I ask that if your post, squadron, chapter or unit maintains a website, Facebook page, Twitter, etc., that you send an email with the addresses, handles, etc. to social@njamericanlegion.org. We hope to expand the reach of our message and promote the great things that our American Legion Family does every day! Use hashtags, such as **#GOTALF**, **#LEGION**, @mention our Dept. on Twitter **@LegionDeptNJ**.

Finally, I want to remind us all, that "NO DEPTH IS TOO GREAT TO HELP OUR VETERANS!"

For God and Country!

Adjutant's Column

John D. Baker

Department Adjutant

Tel. 609-695-5418



The season known as fall is upon us. Leaves are turning colors, days are growing shorter and the temperatures are starting to get a little lower. For your dept. leadership, it is "just another day at the office." Dept. Commander Fisher has been going non-stop since his election. Being a Naval Submariner, his idea of flying is "how fast can my car go". He has been all over the state already and will continue to do so throughout his tenure. He has also driven his commander's SUV to Indianapolis for workshops and conferences, and to Milwaukee for the National Convention. County official visits are just beginning, so you should be looking forward to seeing various dept. officers at these visits, as they bring you a wealth of information.

As we all know, national has a Suicide Awareness Campaign of "Be the One". Every Legionnaire can "Be the One" who checks on another veteran. Call someone to say hello and how are you doing. In today's social media, drop a line or text. Believe it or not, there are still things called cards and writing pads. Send someone a "Thinking of You" card or actually write a note and send. I am sure there are many people out there who would appreciate an actual handwritten note. BE THE ONE.

Your dept. staff continues to work diligently. The Service Office, with Service Officer Ken and Assistant Service Officer Judith, does a tremendous job assisting our veterans. If you have any questions

pertaining to the VA or benefits, contact them. At Dept. Headquarters things continue to roll along. Keith still handles finances. Normally, there are not a lot of calls from our membership for him. Tammie handles Legion programs and Boys State, so if you have a question concerning either, contact her. Lois handles the Commander's calendar. Any requests for the Commander to appear at any event should be sent to her. And, so everyone knows, Tricia handles membership. She, along with all the staff, work hard each day to assist you. Kindness and understanding goes a long way when you contact Dept. Headquarters.

A couple of items to keep in mind as we move forward. As you know, there has been a paper shortage and supply issues. Dept. HQ does not receive many of the brochures we used to receive from national. You can find them on national's website (www.legion.org). Download what you want and make copies. Last item, but certainly not least: elections are coming in Nov. Get out & vote. You hold the key to our future – your vote.

Service Officer's Report

Ken Connors

Department Service Officer



Now that summer is at an end, the Dept. of NJ has begun to move forward into the new Legion year. National Convention is over, and we have elected a new National Commander: Mr. Vincent J. Troiola from the Dept. of New York. The agenda continues to focus on the issue of veterans' suicide and the expansion of healthcare for veterans.

One of the biggest items that will impact the veterans of Viet Nam, the Gulf War and post 9-11 veterans is the passage of the PACT Act, which provides for new or expanded benefits for VA Healthcare, and compensation benefits to veterans with toxic exposures.

For the Gulf War and post 9-11 veterans, various types of cancers and respiratory conditions are now considered presumptive. The Viet Nam veterans now have two conditions recognized as presumptive due to exposure to Agent Orange. They are monoclonal gammopathy of undetermined significance (MGUS) and hypertension.

Like any disability, please keep in mind a medical diagnosis of a condition is required to be considered for approval of benefits. It is recommended that you speak with the service officer(s) before proceeding. Also, veterans that served during the periods covered are encouraged to enroll in any VA Health Care Toxic Exposure Screening that is available.

With the passage of the PACT Act, VA is to build a stronger skilled workforce, provide VA healthcare staff and claims processors with toxic exposure related education and training, along with conducting various research studies to follow veterans' health trends.

The PACT Act authorizes 31 new medical facilities across the country to provide greater access to VA health care. The VA has indicated that they will reach out to veterans who were previously denied a presumptive toxic related claim. Again, it is recommended that you contact a service officer. As more information becomes available you will be made aware. Do not hesitate to contact the office with any questions.

Keep doing the "Buddy Checks" and maybe making a difference for someone. If you are a veteran in crisis or a person that knows of a veteran in crisis, contact the Veterans Crisis Line 988 Press 1. Confidential crisis chat at www.veteranscrisisline.net or text to 838255. Continue to stay well and be safe.

Membership

Rich Godfrey, Chair



I hope that this issue of *Legionnaire* finds our Legion Family in good spirits and health. The leaves are changing and before we know it the holidays are right around the corner. As you know, our 2023 membership year started on July 1, and our goal for this year is 34,653. As of Oct. 1, we are at 19,403 and 55.9 percent of our goal. Our retention rate is 54.34 percent for 2022. We are in 29th place nationally. Thank you to all the Early Birds who have sent in their dues.

As the holidays get closer, our membership slows down. I am asking all our Legionnaires to please send in their dues. We need all the help that we can get to continue to make our goals and to help support all the great programs that The Ameri-

can Legion does for its veterans, their family members and the communities where we live.

The National Emergency Fund (NEF) provides nonrepayable grants of up to \$3,000 for individuals and \$10,000 for posts on a case-by-case basis. Overhead for the program is paid through membership dues, meaning that 100 percent of donated money goes to funding grants. With the recent devastation of Hurricane Ian in Florida and up the east coast, we need your help, so please send in your dues. We have seen the horrific damage caused by Superstorm Sandy a decade ago and how American Legion assistance made a difference to so many people. Through your support, we can make that difference.

I am asking our Legion Family to continue to reach out to our fellow Legionnaires to see if they are okay and if they need any help or just to give words of encouragement during these trying times. It is called Buddy Check and it's what we do: veterans taking care of veterans and their families.

As the National Commander Vincent "Jim" Troiola stated, as the military issues change, so does The American Legion. While The Legion continues to celebrate its past, it does so by, also, marching toward an evolving future, discovering ways to stay relevant and add even greater value to the lives of younger veterans. One thing that has not changed is The Legion's dedication to addressing the toughest challenges facing veterans and their families. Veteran suicide may be the biggest challenge yet, but anyone can "Be the One" to help save just one veteran. Let us all pledge to "Be the One".

Stay safe, be well and, as a Legion Family, we can accomplish important things. Remember membership is the lifeblood of The American Legion.

Let's all "Be the One".

Baseball Report

Frank Calandrillo, Chair



The Dept. Baseball Committee is pleased to announce that we have a 2022 Champion. The Allentown baseball team has won back-to-back State Championships. They were crowned the 2022 champions on July 27th at the Wood-Ridge Athletic Field.

First, we began with a regular season, followed by playoffs in four districts. The winners and runner-

ups of each District moved on to the State Finals:

District 1: Winner: WHITEHOUSE 284; Runner-up: MONTGOMERY SUPERIOR

District 2: Winner: ALLENTOWN; Runner-up: CHERRY HILL 372

District 3: Winner: LAWRENCE 414; Runner-up: MULLICA HILL 452

District 4: Winner: BROOKLAWN 72; Runner-up: WASHINGTON 521.

The State "Elite Eight" finals took place Fri. to Wed., July 22-27, at the Wood-Ridge Athletic Complex. We thank State Senator and Wood-Ridge Mayor Paul Sarlo (who also coaches The Legion team Wood-Ridge Blue Devils); Business Administrator Christopher Eilert; and Assistant to the Athletic Director Charles Trentacosti for making The American Legion Championship Tournament a smooth success. The Wood-Ridge Police Department provided security during the games. We had all the help we could need at the Wood-Ridge Athletic Complex, affectionately called the WRAC. Everyone went above and beyond to do whatever was needed to be done. We are already booked at the WRAC for next year.

Heading into the Championship Game on Wed., July 27, Allentown faced Brooklawn 72. Allentown held off Brooklawn in a 2-0 win to move onto the Regional Tournament in Morgantown, WV. Congratulations to the Allentown team, which hails from Monmouth County and plays in the Mercer County Baseball League. This was their second straight appearance in the State Finals and back-to-back State Championships. Our MVP for the Championship Game was Allentown's Mike Doran.

In addition to the Yankees, we thank the following colleges, universities and major league teams that scouted the games: Rutgers, Ramapo, Clemson, Kean, NJCU, the Cincinnati Reds and Royals.

My thanks to PDC Dan Dunn, who assisted in presenting one of the two baseball scholarships prior to the Championship game. Representing our Dept. Commander was Dept. Vice Commander Dennis Duddie, who threw out the ceremonial first pitch. Bergen County Commander Sophia Dmoch led the teams in reciting the Code of Conduct. They also took part in the post-game awards ceremony (photos on page 11). We were pleased to have two honor guards at the game, represented by the Bergen County Sheriff's Dept. as well as by Rochelle Park Post 170. Thank you! You looked great.

A familiar sight at the games is my wife Brenda, who was sitting in the luxury suite (entrance gate) all

week. She collected admission, talked to parents about the baseball scholarships that the dept. offers, and helped spectators locate a piece of shade in the sweltering heat. The weather was brutal, and we thank those who attended the games in extreme heat. We returned a total of \$1,856 to dept. from admissions toward our budget.

The Mid-Atlantic Regionals were held in Morgantown from August 3-7. Allentown (22-6) faced South Charleston, WV, in their first game, winning 4-3 in an exciting 11-inning game. They fell the next day to Frederick, MD, by a one-run score of 9-8, but bounced back the next day to beat Wilmington, DE, in a 2-5 finish. With one loss and two wins, they faced Chesapeake, VA, in a battle of the bats but lost 5-4, ending their Regional run. Allentown finished their second championship season in a row, notching 46 wins over 2021 and 2022, acquiring two State Championships and two straight Regional appearances. Congratulations to the team. Thank you to the coaches, staff and parents of the Allentown team for their victories as they represented NJ. See you next year.

Finally, congratulations to the Troy, Alabama Post 70 baseball team on their win at the World Series, the first Alabama team to win it all since 1967. It was a thrilling 6-5 win against the back-to-back World Series Champions, the Idaho Falls Bandits, who fell just shy of becoming the first all-time/threepeat World Series champions. Congratulations to all.

Before I close, I would like to ask that all the counties consider starting up or revitalizing their baseball program – an American Legion program that has been around since 1925, the first tournament being held in 1926. This year the program had 3,400 teams involving more than 55,000 youth from 50 states and Canada. There are boys wanting to play. Some boys are so eager to participate in the program that they are traveling outside of the county in which they reside. Where is YOUR county baseball program?

In closing, I would like to pay tribute to the late Vin Scully. How many of us listened to his melodic lyricism that pulled us into each game (through a transistor radio, I might add). He would begin with “Pull up a chair, settle in, it’s time for Dodger baseball!” There were no boisterous home run calls at the top of his lungs. He was too humble to call attention to himself. Instead, he called the home run so that it would emphasize the batter’s accomplishment. Sometimes he sat for a moment in silence so you could picture what was going on. He would tell

us of long-ago players and stories. Vin Scully witnessed the greatest feats of all time, and he was the greatest of all time. Period.

Employment, Homeless and Education

Bob Looby, Chair



A select few of our committee, but mostly other veteran advocates, continue to improve and enhance our existing programs and events. This includes our DEC approved partnership with the VFW for resource fairs, our mobile and local Stand Downs, KOVA (Keep Our Veterans Alive) Strategic Plan, supporting the Food Insecurity and Affordable Housing initiatives.

But, foremost, I must mention the publication of our National and Dept. Awards program by Dept. HQ on Aug. 22 to the entire Legion Family. Note the deadline of Dec. 1 to HQ, since these recognitions are based on National’s rules of calendar year submittals. Even if your homeless, employer and other candidates do not qualify by National requirements, submit for possible dept. recognition. Contact your respective county chairs or me for any assistance.

We will continue partnering with the VFW, as approved at the Dec. 2021 DEC and subsequently with statewide resource fairs. Currently on the planning table are Union County, Hammonton and Lambertville. Union is at the initiative and is being managed by DEC Larry Platt. Hammonton will be an extravaganza started as a mobile Stand Down, morphed into a resource fair and now has incorporated a Wilmington Town Hall at the request of Medical Director Vince Kane. Both will be completed on Oct. 20 and 21 before the publication of this issue of the *Legionnaire*. Lambertville is still in the preliminary planning phase.

Some of you should recall our very successful Affordable Housing symposiums, wherein we attracted The Legion National HQ, National and local VA’s, developers, property managers and service providers to discuss, network and partner to build permanent housing for our homeless and at-risk veterans. One of the many positive resultants of those sessions and other efforts, was the formation and appointment of Jim Scanlon as an Ad Hoc Chair to pursue further the feasibility of converting and reno-

vating Legion posts for that purpose. That outcome was also so successful, a permanent committee was approved by the DEC with Jim as chair with two proactive members. Based on all those successes, we will combine our committees’ efforts, including conducting another Affordable Housing and Employment & Homeless event (on steroids) to help educate everyone on the value of enhancing our posts, and other properties to permanent affordable housing for our vets and families. This symposium was conducted Nov. 3 at Stockton University, Atlantic City.

All dept. and county leaders, and many others should be aware of Dept. Chaplain Mike Schaffer’s independent blessed and heroic efforts of collecting and delivering tons of food and other resources to our military on Joint Base – MDL. Our National HQ has also realized this and assigned the Homeless Policy Analysis to this important issue for both our military and veterans. Therefore, we as a dept. committee will strongly support Mike under our current mission statement.

Our KOVA initiative with statewide and local awareness sessions is continuing and expanding. This is still the only NJ-wide effort with its sole emphasis on veteran suicides. As you’ve read in prior issues, we’ve conducted two statewide “Normalize the Conversation” Talks (vs. town halls) at Ocean and Brookdale Community Colleges. These sessions presented by vets and family members who have lived this tragedy and designed by our VA Liaison Pat Carney, attracted employers, service providers, elected officials, county prosecutors, NJ state departments and a leading candidate for National Commander. Realizing these larger events are not the only solution to reach our members and everyone in the public and private sectors, smaller mini-KOVA sessions were designed and are being scheduled and conducted. Subjects include Lethal Means Safety; Identification of Service Members, Veterans and their Families and Screen for Suicide Risk; Promotion for Connectedness and Improve Care Transitions; the VA’s S.A.V.E. program; and presentations by local prosecutors and police depts. Most recently a very successful event was conducted at the Edison VFW Post with 62 attendees. Other scheduled and planned events include Veterans Haven North on November 14, Camden Community College on December 10, Legion Post 12 in January 2023, Hamilton in February, and Monmouth at the “Y” in March.

Stay tuned for more proactive efforts from a few value-added members and advocates.

Housing Our Heroes Program Receives Fifth National Award

For the fifth time in seven years, the American Legion Family of New Jersey's "Housing Our Heroes" program was recognized for superior performance in assisting homeless veterans. (photo on back page).

The initiative became a priority for PDC Bob Looby in 2010-11 when he served as Department Commander and realized that the state's homeless veteran program lacked funds to provide adequate shelter and furnishings to help those who have served get back on their feet. Since then: "we're now up to \$2.5 million dedicated for the homeless – mostly shelters, furnishings – all from the The American Legion Family, The Legion posts, Auxiliary and Sons of The American Legion," Looby said

Looby borrows a phrase The American Legion is now trumpeting nationwide to reduce veteran suicide – "Be the One" – to characterize NJ's commitment to helping the homeless. "A lot of people don't even realize the plight of a lot of our brothers and sisters," he said. "You see a homeless person on the street, even though they may have a veteran placard, and just blow them off, because some people don't believe a veteran can be homeless. The burden is on us – no different than veteran suicide – to be the one for homelessness." New Jersey's program has also been recognized by the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans and VA.

Housing Our Heroes became especially vital for homeless veterans during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Looby said. "When others canceled Stand Downs because of COVID, we re-engineered and designed mobile Stand Downs where we took mobile vans to known pockets," he explained, noting that The Legion Family in New Jersey has now conducted 17 Stand Down events, to go along with multiple other activities to help veterans find good jobs, enter business or obtain resources after service.

The American Legion Veterans Employment and Education Commission presented its annual awards as part of the 103rd American Legion National Convention in Milwaukee.

Affordable Housing for At-risk/Homeless Veterans

Jim Scanlon, Chair



We are excited to report our third symposium, a three-way partnership with Chair Bob Looby and the VA Director, Wilmington, on how to rebuild your Legion post and, also, construct affordable housing for at-risk/homeless veterans on American Legion property, was held Nov.

3 at Stockton University.

Approximately 100 housing units remain in various planning stages. We attended meetings with elected officials and dept. heads at locations in Westfield, South Amboy, Montclair and Hoboken. We continue to meet monthly with leadership teams from Westfield, South Amboy, Montclair and Hoboken. We regularly include additional resource people to attend these meetings such as Past Department Commanders, COO of Monarch Housing and the VA. This has been a learning and team building experience for all of us. We are currently evaluating the potential of additional American Legion posts that have requested our assistance. Commanders may contact me directly.

Vouchers assure a revenue flow and they are not easy to come by. Meetings on vouchers with HUD, the VA and numerous elected officials have kept all of us busy. Vice Chairs Darrel Collins, John Carey and I have made presentations before town committees, zoning boards, historical societies, real estate developers and town business administrators at all four locations.

We have a seat on the Board of Directors on a foundation 501C3-"Affordable, Sustainable housing for Homeless and At-Risk Veterans". This foundation will support all four units and more. Board Chair Joe Mindek was instrumental in raising much of the capital to put up Phase 1 of Hoboken Post 107. He is currently heading up our marketing/capital campaign in support of the Westfield American Legion Building Fund.

Our vision is to have sustainable housing units. Therefore, we are researching other sites such as Camp Salute in Gloucester County to study this model. Many sites like Camp Salute have a foundation in place with administrative

and professional staff that are best equipped at project management, grant writing, revenue flow, resident support and more.

Anyone looking for additional details may contact me directly or speak to either Vice Chairs John Carey or Darrel Collins.

National Convention



Convention, Day 1, Tuesday, Aug. 30

"We did it. YOU did it," proclaimed National Commander Paul E. Dillard in his Report to Convention opening remarks at the 103rd National Convention on Tuesday, Aug. 30, at 12:43 p.m. As he looked back over his year as American Legion national commander, Dillard told delegates to the organization's national convention in Milwaukee that passage of the PACT Act was a monumental accomplishment for The American Legion Family.

"The American Legion Auxiliary did it. The Sons of The American Legion did it. Thanks to your congressional visits, letters, phone calls, e-mails and hard work, the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxins Act (PACT) of 2022 is now law. It would not have passed Congress without you.

"Now, an estimated 3.5 million veterans exposed to burn pits can get the benefits they deserve. The same goes for those exposed to Agent Orange, radiation, and other poisons and toxins. When I ran for national commander, I did so on the platform of 'No Veteran Left Behind.' The PACT Act will ensure that millions will not be."

But it was not, by far, the organization's only accomplishment over the past 12 months. Dillard pointed to victories via the nation's highest court. He noted the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Texas vs. Torres*, that ruled that a former state trooper had the right to sue his state after it refused to rehire and accommodate him following health conditions that incurred while he was deployed.

“The ruling was a perfect response to national Resolution 85, passed at our Reno convention in 2017, which calls for the strengthening of re-employment rights for Guard and reserve members returning from deployment. It is just another example of our America Legion delegates being ahead of our public policymakers.”

He mentioned another Supreme Court ruling in *Kennedy vs. Bremerton School District* that he said protected the right of a high school coach to pray on the football field during games. “The coach happened to be a veteran, though we support the right of all Americans to practice their faith in a manner that is guaranteed by our First Amendment,” he said. “When veterans are denied their constitutional rights, it meets my definition of veterans left behind.”

Dillard also asked Legionnaires to continue to push the “Be the One” veteran suicide-prevention initiative and pointed to a letter to *The American Legion Magazine* from a Florida Legionnaire who survived a suicide attempt after learning he was about to be homeless due to undiagnosed PTSD. In his letter he wrote, “Most days I am grateful I survived. Thanks to VA treatment, I was able to reconstruct my life.”

Dillard said examples like this are “why we have Buddy Checks. This is why it is so important that we check on the wellbeing of our fellow veterans. Very few of us are professional therapists, but we do know how to listen and ensure that veterans in crisis get to the VA or other qualified counselors.”

Turning to membership, Dillard pointed out that signing up new members isn’t good enough, calling it “only a band-aid approach if you don’t make that member feel welcome. Attend a couple of post meetings with those new members. Sit next to them. Don’t just call them when it’s time to collect dues. If they feel like family, they will stay in.”

Dillard said that in order to follow The Legion’s motto of “Veterans Strengthening America,” the organization must show growth. “In order for the organization to truly strengthen America, it will take many of us,” he said. “A larger American Legion is a stronger American Legion. And a stronger American Legion means a stronger America.”

However, much occurred before the commander’s remarks. He called the convention to order at 8:30 a.m. with LCDR Evangelo Morris, US Navy (Ret.), Old Glory orator and performer (photo above right), have the assembly sing the National Anthem with him. He then gave an inspirational Tribute to Old Glory, an extraordinary salute to our flag, which received a standing ovation.



Master of Ceremonies was Rob Jones, Paralympian, Marine and Afghanistan veteran. In 2010 he stepped on land mine resulting in amputation of his right leg above the knee. “I wouldn’t let that terrorist kill my spirit, because if he did, he would kill the spirit of the Marines and US society,” he said. So, he took up rowing and trained for the Paralympics. At the Paralympics in 2012, he

and his partner won a bronze medal in rowing. Not stopping there, in 2013 he rode a bike from Maine to California in 181 days raising money for wounded-veteran charities. In 2017, the Post 295 member ran 31 marathons in 31 days in 31 major cities.

He and Commander Dillard presented American Legion Youth Champions awards for Baseball, Eagle Scout, Oratorical Champion, Boys Nation President and Shooting Sports.

LTG Walter Piatt, director of the Army Staff, and CSM Robert M. Patterson, USA (Ret), Medal of Honor recipient, then joined Dillard in presenting the Spirit of Service Awards to seven members of the armed forces, including the Space Force for the first time, for their service to community. Sgt. Christina Gilman, USMC, served as part of the honor detail for those killed on Aug. 26, 2021, in Kabul; she dedicated her award to them, naming each one.

“These honorees saw a need where no one else did and rose to meet it,” said Piatt. “We are strong because of our people, machines don’t win wars, our people win wars. But the wars come home with you, always,” he added. “We must look out for our fellow veterans who have invisible wounds. Let us commit today to ‘Be the One.’”

Patterson, a member of Post 30, Lincolnton, NC, began his remarks recounting how much trouble he got in at the beginning of his enlistment: first Article 15 in basic training for being two hours late from a weekend pass; second for disobeying an order; third for falling asleep on guard duty in Vietnam. When he asked his commanding officer why he was laughing, he replied “this is the first time I’ve recommended someone for a Medal of Honor and given him an Article 15 in the same day.”

“There is no such thing as a born leader,” said Patterson. “Leaders are developed. Our country is in

trouble. I knew politicians were going to turn their backs on the Afghanistan veterans like they did Vietnam. We need to find people with integrity to put in Washington. We need to look at who is running for office; what they represent and stand for; and if they don’t stand for us, don’t put them in.”

Michael Fox, national commander of the SAL, reported that the volunteer value to all programs of the SAL amounted to \$98,923,207. Andy Wickstrom, president of Henry Repeating Arms, presented Commander Dillard with a Henry Golden Boy Service Edition Rifle and a \$50,000 donation in honor of the company’s silver anniversary. Dillard then collected donations to the Legacy Fund. NJ Commander Dunn and Adjutant John Baker made a donation of \$3,500.

Following the presentation of The American Legion Patriot Award to Robert Bosworth of *The Quincy (MA) Sun*, and the Distinguished Service Medal to The Honorable David P. Roe, MD, The Honorable Ron Johnson, US Senator from Wisconsin began his remarks by thanking The Legion for its service. “We sacrifice, not only for us, but for others around the world,” he said. “We support you in DC.” He discussed the PACT Act, adding “Congress will always support our veterans.” He went on to discuss the growing deficit and debt; the dangers to the economy and not “mortgaging or children’s future. A divided nation weakens us and other countries are noticing it,” he added. “Thank you for building this great land. We continue to be in a fight for freedom and it is a fight we must win.”

Before recess on Day 1, donations were accepted to the Veterans and Children Foundation and the National Emergency Fund. From left, in photo below: NJ Commander Dan Dunn, National Commander Paul Dillard, NJ Dept. Adjutant John Baker.



At this 103rd convention, there were 1999 delegates (plus the commander) representing 55 departments. NJ had 44 delegates, who got together at the

NJ Caucus on Monday, Aug 29, at the Potawatomi Hotel and Casino, 1721 W. Canal St. Milwaukee, at 7 a.m. to hear committee reports and endorse Vincent J. Troiola for 2022-2023 National Commander.



Photo above, from left: Dept. Adjutant John Baker, Dept. Commander Dan Dunn, NEC Berley Hanna, Jr.
Photo below: NJ delegation in caucus.

looking to end homelessness and getting veterans into homes. The plan is to get 38,000 veterans into homes this year; as of convention 22,500 had been placed. "No veteran should be homeless in the country they fought for," he said. "Suicide prevention is VA's number one priority." He noted in 2019, 6,000 veterans took their own lives, which was 399 fewer than 2018. "So, prevention is possible," he added. Another of the VA's goals is to make all veterans feel welcome: women, LGBTQ, non-citizen veterans, overseas, non-honorable veterans. And delivering for toxic exposed veterans. "There are more than 20 new presumptive conditions; apply for PACT Act benefits right now. Conditions were presumptive on Aug. 10; there is no waiting; call 1-800-698-4111 or go to va.gov/PACT."



Convention, Day 2, Wed., Aug.31

Day 2 was called to order at 8:31 a.m. NJ Commander Dan Dunn was asked to assist in the presenting of the Chapel of the Four Chaplains Legion of Honor Bronze Medals to National Commander Dillard and his vice commanders, by Capt. Louis A. Cavaliere (at podium), USN (RET.), director of the Chapel of the Four Chaplains Board of Directors.



Secretary of Veterans Affairs Denis McDonough told the assembly that his agency will "fight like hell for veterans, caregivers and survivors." The agency is



Like last year, the Ganassi Racing Team had a Fireside Chat. Chip Ganassi, Jimmie Johnson and Tony Kanaan (from left in photo above) discussed the team's year of racing with Autry James (right) and focused on the Be the One campaign. "I was shocked at how many veterans take their lives each day," said Johnson. "I hope through our racing we help move this cause forward."

"When I heard about the Be the One campaign, I was all in," said Ganassi. "My father never wanted to talk about his World War II experience."

Kanaan was gearing up to do an Ironman race on Oct. 8 in Hawaii, at which he would be carrying The Legion and Be the One logos. Ganassi and Johnson were made SAL members by National SAL Commander Michael Fox. Johnson and his wife pledged \$1.5 million to The American Legion.

During the Membership Awards, Dillard discussed recruiting and retention, and the importance of the Consolidated Post Reports, noting that when he testified before Congress, his statistics were from but 65.2 percent of American Legion posts.

A presentation was given by Michael Rodriguez, president and CEO of the Global War on Terrorism Memorial Foundation. The memorial would have 4

tenets: honor, heal, power, unite. It is hoped to be finished in 2027.



Another Fireside Chat was on Veteran Suicide with Dave Berkenfield (center), former Navy Seal and current team member of Extreme E Series Center for Ganassi Racing and Dr. Thomas Joiner, director of the Florida State University Psychology Clinic (right). Moderator was Waco Hoover, (left) CEO of VET TV. Berkenfield and Joiner both spoke from first-hand experience as Berkenfield's older brother committed suicide, as did Joiner's father, a Marine vet. "Suicide runs in families," said Joiner. "Scientists are trying to find out why this happens. The good news is there is hope: prevention. If you feel like you don't belong; have no worth, you can contemplate suicide; but suicide is also scary."

"You have to let people know you are there; available to talk to," said Berkenfield.

"Access a touch point," advised Joiner, "a primary care physician, clergy, caring contacts," who also advocated for Lethal Means Safety. "Put distance between the person and the harmful object."

Berkenfield on the Be the One campaign: "How do you measure success? If we save one life, be happy with that. Be the One to give help; to ask for help. Each one of you has the opportunity to Be the One."

Kelly Shackelford, president and CEO of First Liberty Institute, presented the Philip Onderdonk Religious Liberty Award, a Henry Repeating Rifle, to Coach Joseph Kennedy, who was fired by his school for praying after his team's games. He was fired by the Bremerton School District. The American Legion wrote a brief in his support to the court, which overturned his firing.

The next day, Day 3, at High Noon on Sep. 1, Vincent J. Troiola was elected National Commander. His theme as national commander is "V.E.T.S., Veterans, Education, Teamwork and Sponsor."

"My platform and No. 1 priority for my year as National Commander will be tackling the toughest

challenge facing veterans: veteran suicide," Troiola said. "The American Legion is asking you to 'Be the One' ... and by you, I include every one of us, military and civilian alike. We all need to 'Be the One' to begin thinking, talking and acting to save just one life."

With that, the NJ delegation said adios to the Potawatomi Hotel, the Harley Museum, the Bobblehead Museum and The Fonz and looked forward to Charlotte in 2023.



Dept. of NJ Be the One Campaign

The American Legion, Dept. of NJ, is diving to greater depths in support of the Be the One campaign. Initiated by 2021-2022 National Commander Paul E. Dillard, the Be the One campaign continues to be a major priority of newly elected 2022-2023 National Commander Vincent J. "Jim" Troiola. During Past National Commander Dillard's visit to NJ in Aug., he emphasized the need for all Legionnaires to reach out to their fellow veterans.



Dept. Commander Steven Fisher kicked off the first quarter of his leadership year with an awareness campaign and a plea to NJ Legionnaires to lead by example.

"The Be the One campaign is a direct message to red, white, blue/white and blue cap members of The American Legion to reach out to their fellow veterans and to see how they are doing," Fisher said. "We must make an impact in our communities to minimize the number of suicides by veterans. One suicide is too many!" Fisher is being proactive by pledging to directly contact NJ Legionnaires and other veterans living in the state. He is making

phone calls, sending emails, texting messages and creating public service announcements to directly contact all veterans who reside in NJ. He is asking fellow NJ Legionnaires to reach out to veterans in their communities, as well.

Commander Fisher initiated his campaign with a unique event that brought attention to the suicide rate among veterans. A skydiving activity took place at Sussex County airport on Saturday, Aug. 6. Skydive Sussex conducted the parachute activities including tandem jumps made by veterans. Organized by the Sussex and Morris counties American Legion, the event brought together corporate community sponsors, disabled veterans and members of several American Legion posts. The last jumper of the day displayed the US Flag during the descent. Skydive Sussex made a surprise flyby as the flag was presented to the audience upon landing. Commander Fisher rendered a salute to the US Flag while occupying the co-pilot seat during the flyby.

A Be the One campaign banner was created and presented during the event.

At the National Convention of The American Legion, the Dept. of NJ proudly displayed its Be the One banner in the main hall for all of the thousands of delegates to see. Many of the attendees were seen posing for photos in front of the banner.



The American Legion Be the One campaign would like all members who have served, and who are currently serving, in the US Armed Services to reach out to their comrades and to be impactful. One phone call, text message, email or in-person communication can make all of the difference in a fellow veteran's life. It could literally mean life or death. The Be the One campaign makes the following request of fellow legionnaires:

- ◆ TO ASK VETERANS IN YOUR LIFE HOW THEY ARE DOING.
- ◆ TO LISTEN WHEN A VETERAN NEEDS TO TALK.

- ◆ TO REACH OUT WHEN A VETERAN IS STRUGGLING.

For more information on The American Legion Be the One campaign visit legion.org/betheone.

Legislative Report

Joseph M. Gugliuzza, Chair



GRASS ROOTS ALERT: TELL SENATORS MENENDEZ AND BOOKER, TO SUPPORT THE "STRONG VETERANS ACT"

Our most sacred responsibility, as a nation and as veterans, is to care for our fellow men and women who have served this nation with honor. The American Legion has long had a "Buddy Check Week," asking our Legionnaires to conduct veteran outreach as part of their daily routine. The American Legion's "Buddy Check" program has been an excellent tool for membership and we strongly support legislation that expands the program to the VA.

S.544, the Buddy Check bill is now included as a provision in H.R.6411, "The Strong Veterans Act of 2022." This legislation is a comprehensive veterans mental healthcare package that passed the House in July. Among the other provisions, it would:

- Expand eligibility for Vet Center services,
- Require additional studies into veteran mental health records,
- Mandate a review of the training for the Veterans Crisis Line Responders,
- Expand VA's Peer Specialist Support Program.

It is now awaiting action in the Senate. The American Legion proudly supports this legislation and asks that you contact Senators Menendez and Booker and tell them to support H.R. 6411, "The STRONG Veterans Act" today!

By Email: menendez.senate.gov ; 973-645-3030
or booker@senate.gov ; 973-639-8700.

At the National Legislative Commission meeting, Aug. 27, at the Wisconsin Convention Center, chaired by Daniel Seehafer, of the Dept. of Wisconsin, Seehafer offered opening remarks and lauded the effort of The American Legion in putting the PACT Act over-the-top. The chair then turned the meeting over to Lawrence Montreuil, legislative director of The American Legion. The director reviewed the agenda and wins of The American Legion in the 117th Congress:

- The passage of the SFC Heath Robinson PACT of

2021, which addresses toxic exposure and burn pits (H.R. 3967),

- Improving health care for women veterans. Making advances in mammography and medical options (MAMMO) for Veterans Act (S.2533/H.R.4794),
- Suicide Prevention & Peer Support, Strong Veteran Act of 2022 (H.R.6411) "Buddy Check Week" Act. (S.544),
- Concurrent Receipt. (S.344) Major Richard Star Act,
- Guard and Reserve GI Bill Parity. Guard and Reserve GI Bill Parity Act (H.R.1836),
- Afghan Adjustment Act (S.4787).

Jeff Steele, legislative associate, gave a brief update on S.4787. He also detailed the progress of the repeal of the Authorization to Use Military Force (AUMF) still on the books as follows:

- To repeal H.R. 256, 2002 AUMF against Iraq,
- To repeal H.R. 326, to repeal the 1991 Iraq,
- S.J. Res. 10, To repeal the 1991 and 2002 AUMFs against Iraq,
- To repeal the 2002 AUMF H.R. 255.

Citizenship for service: H.R. 7946, Veteran Service Recognition Act of 2022 and S.2265 The Veteran Visa and Protection Act of 2021.

Katie Isaacson, legislative correspondent, reported on the following:

- Military Housing, S.4360/H.R. 8281, The Military Housing Affordability Act of 2022,
- Food Insecurity, in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) to improve the Basic Needs Allowance (BNA).

Adi Thampi, legislative associate:

- H.R.8736 – The Governing Unaccredited Representatives Defrauding (GUARD) VA Benefits Act,
- Concurrent Receipt – The Richard Star Act,
- COVID-19 pandemic lessons learned – C & P exams and virtual boards.

John Kamin, legislative associate and grassroots coordinator:

- Guard and Reserve GI Bill Act (H.R. 1836.) This bill would give GI Bill benefits to Guard and Reserve personnel when activated,
- Homelessness – Building Solutions for Veterans Experiencing Homelessness Act (S.2172),
- VA Home Loan GRACE Act of 2021 (H.R.6124),
- Employment – HUBS for Veterans Act of 2021 (H.R.6335),

- TIER Act (H.R.7891),
- Small Business – Military Spouses Hiring Act (S.3909),
- Veteran Entrepreneurs Act of 2021 (H.R. 5920).

Kamin also reviewed the PSACT Campaign total. New Jersey had 1,110 actions for a 3.27 percent completion rate, as compared to other departments, against our total membership of 33,958 members.

Also introduced at this meeting was Elizabeth Hartman for the Dept. of North Carolina, who is the new chair of the National Legislative Council. Hartman introduced herself and stated that her goal is 100,000 members to the Action Alert network.

There being no further business before the commission, the meeting was in recess, subject to recall by the chair.

With the mid-term elections growing close, there will be a new Congress taking their respective seats in Washington. There will be some new faces in Congress from NJ. After the election, we will form a new dept. council. There will be more on this soon after the election.

Post Scripts

Post 331 Honors Seashore Ace Family



On Aug. 30, members of Stone Harbor's American Legion Post 331 and its Sons of The American Legion Squadron 3331 presented the Seashore Ace Fisher family with an American Legion plaque of appreciation for their continuing support to veterans. Their hardware store in Stone Harbor has supported a number of veteran efforts and has donated generously to Post 331's veteran outreach programs. These programs help Cape May County homeless veterans, residents at the Vineland Veterans Home, Citizens/Veterans Advisory Committee activities, as well as community emergency response and school activities.

In making the presentation, Post Commander Tom McCullough thanked the Fisher family for their continuous support of the post's programs and the veterans of Cape May County.

Legion members present were Commander Tom McCullough, Trustee Jon Ready, Historian Art Faint

and Reese Moore, First Vice Commander of Squadron 331.

Pictured, from left: Jon Ready, Tom McCullough, Scott Fisher, Joey Fisher, Jim Fisher, Art Faint, Reese Moore

Legionnaire Turns 100



Legionnaire Loretta Aydelotte turned 100 years old on Sep. 21, with a major celebration at Post 38, Haddonfield. Aydelotte served in the Women's Army Corps as a Corporal (T-5). She belonged to the all-female A.L. Ruth Altone Post 374 when

other posts were not open to females, before joining Post 38. Frank Troy, Haddonfield commissioner, presented her a proclamation; Ted Gallagher of the Camden County Office of Veterans Affairs presented a county medal and certificate; The American Legion, Dept. of NJ sent a certificate of appreciation in her honor. Many of her family members were on-hand for the celebration. Giving her a hug is Sam Romanelli, post membership chair.

Training Seminars in Sussex County



On Sep. 17, at Post 278, Stanhope, Sussex County conducted a membership training seminar for post leadership from Sussex, Morris, Passaic, Warren and Bergen counties with Dept. Membership Chair Rich Godfrey. The training included a large screen video tutorial presentation on mylegion.org for training, recruiting, retention and membership goal setting.

Follow-up hands-on seminars on mylegion.org will take place Nov. 12 and Dec. 10 at the Sussex County Main Library. More dates will be added in 2023. Each attendee will receive personalized hands-on instruction using Chrome Books provided by the library. Ellis Marples, Sussex County commander and

membership chair, organized the training sessions and is an instructor.

Post 239 Hosts BBQ

On July 13, Post 239 met at The Veteran Equine Therapy Stables (VETS), 828 Harrison Ave, Mays Landing. The post has been donating to them on a quarterly basis, and members felt it would be cool to hold their meeting there, have a BBQ after and give the members a chance to walk the farm to see where donations are going.

After the meeting they presented the quarterly check as a group! ShopRite graciously donated the food for the BBQ.



From left: VETS Board Member Jim Spreng, George Strunk, Ray Lambert, VETS Secretary Debbie Pucci, Bill Eisele peeking in between, VETS Founder John Pucci, Ed Kennedy, Bill Archer, Paul Sutton, John Olansen and Don Marple.

Seven Year Old SAL Member Wins Medal

Jake Myers, a member of Sons of the American Legion Squadron 105, Belleville, received the prestigious Ten Ideals Award at a regular meeting of the Squadron in Sep. Following a course of study, Myers became only the second young SAL in NJ to receive the award in 2022.

PDC Henry Hasselhan, Alternate National Executive Committeeman (right), and Steve Sangemino, Squadron 105 commander (left), presented the award.



The award, a medal suspended from a blue ribbon, is a national award for younger members, given out at the squadron level. It is given in recognition of completing a program of Patriotism, Health, Knowledge, Training, Honor, Faith, Helpfulness, Courtesy, Reverence and Comradeship. Jake completed the course with his dad, Rusty Myers, ad-

jutant of Squadron 105, and Children and Youth Commission chair at the state level for the SAL.

Post 170 Remembers Korean War Veterans

In mid-Aug., Taejon Chapter 170 Commander Fosco Oliveti led members to the Chapter Korean War Monument in Saddle Brook to honor the end of the Korean War: July 27, 1953. This was the first time members chose to honor the end of the three-year war and those military members who died. The Taejon Chapter monument was erected in 2000. The ceremony commenced at 10 a.m. with the posting of colors, the US flag and South Korean flag, and the placement of two memorial wreaths.

Representing The American Legion at the service was Vice Commander Dennis Duddie, who is also the Post Commander of Rochelle Park Post 170. Duddie expressed how proud and honored he was to be with the group "on this historical day in United States history." Following the ceremony, everyone met at the Saddle Brook Diner for breakfast.



From left DVC Dennis Duddie and Chapter 170 Historian Louis Quagliero.

2022 BASEBALL



Photo above, from left: PDC Frank Calandrillo, Dept. Baseball chair, presents scholarship to Anthony Icavino, with PDC Dan Dunn.

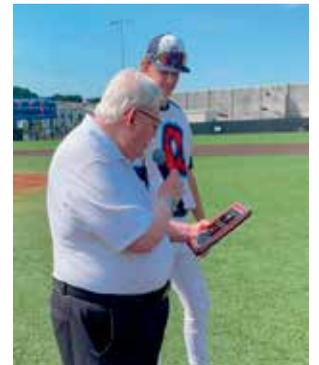
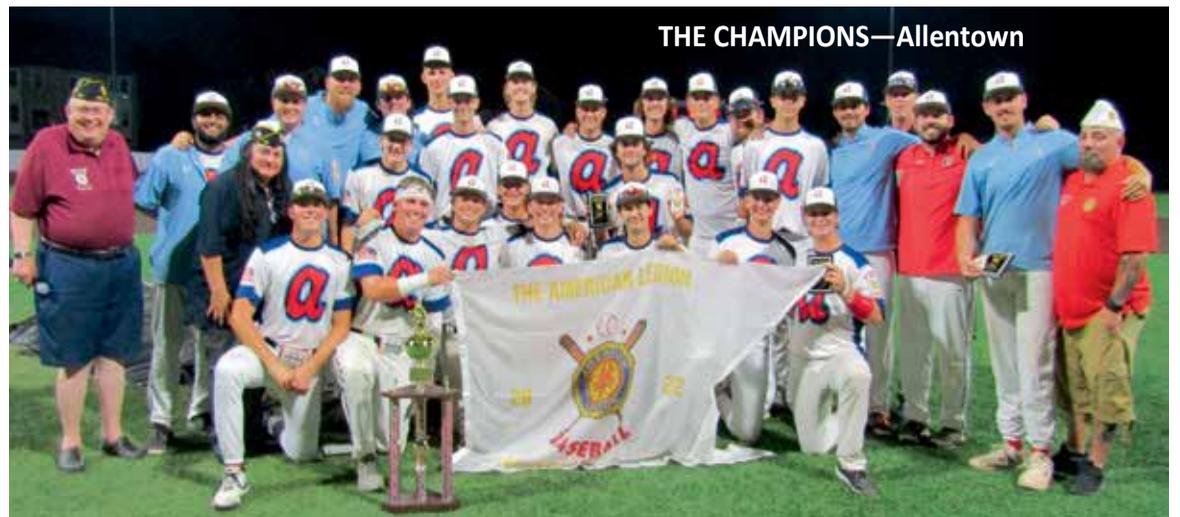


Photo right, from left: PDC Frank Calandrillo, Dept. Baseball chair, presents scholarship to Gavin Kincs.



Bergen County Commander Sophia Dmoch, DVC Dennis Duddie, MVP Mike Doran from Allentown, and Dept Baseball Chairman/PDC Frank Calandrillo.



THE CHAMPIONS—Allentown



New Jersey
LEGIONNAIRE



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National Award Comes to NJ, Again!



The National Michael Guty Homeless Veterans Outreach Award for the year 2021 was awarded to The American Legion Family of New Jersey's Housing Our Heroes program.

This marks the fifth time in the past seven years that the program has been recognized for excellence with this award.

It was accepted by, from left: Eugene O'Grady, Alternate National Executive Committeeman, Bob Looby, New Jersey Employment, Homeless & Incarcerated Veteran advocate, and Dan Dunn, immediate past department commander of New Jersey, with James LaCoursiere, Employment Commission Chair, making the presentation.

Photo by Jeric Wilhelmsen