

VIRGINIA LEGIONNAIRE

Official E- Newsletter For The Virginia Department

February 2009

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Upcoming Events!

Department Ten Pin Bowling Tournament - Norfolk,
February 28-March 1, 2009

2009 Spring Conference March 20-22 - VA Beach Resort, VA Beach
\$83

2009 State Convention July 9-12 - Sheraton Richmond West, Richmond
\$94

2009 Fall Conference October 30-November 1 - Holiday Inn, Hampton
\$71.00

2010 State Convention July 8-11 - Sheraton Richmond West, Richmond
\$99

2010 Fall Conference October 29-31 Holiday Inn, Hampton
\$74

2011 State Convention July 14-17 Roanoke Plaza Hotel & Holiday Inn, Roanoke
\$109

The Virginia Wounded Warrior Program

In response to the growing need to improve and expand services to our nation's veterans and service members, the Commonwealth of Virginia established the Virginia Wounded Warrior Program (VWWP) in 2008. It is operated by the Virginia Department of Veterans Services in cooperation with the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services and the Department of Rehabilitative Services. The VWWP supports the following persons on their road to recovery from the

effects of stress-related injuries (such as post traumatic stress disorder) or traumatic brain injuries:

- Veterans of any era who are Virginia residents
- Members of the Virginia National Guard not in active federal service
- Virginia residents in the Armed Forces Reserves not in active federal service
- Family members of veterans and service members.

The main office of VWWP is located at the Sitter & Barfoot Veterans Care Center in Richmond. Regional offices have been established in the northern, southern and western regions of Virginia. Grants are being made available to regional coalitions of Community Services Boards, brain injury services providers, and other public and private service providers. These grants will ensure that assessments, treatment, and support services are available on a timely basis.

(View Full Document):http://thelegionnews.com/VWWP_Flyer.pdf

Department Of Veterans' Affairs (Va) Addresses Month Of Death Discrepancies

WASHINGTON, DC-In mid December, 2008, Chairman of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, Senator Daniel Akaka, sent a letter to VA Secretary James Peake questioning the implementation of a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) policy with regards to surviving spouses of veterans and the payment of benefits during the veterans' "month of death". Senator Akaka expressed concerns that because of an apparent glitch in VA systems, widows may have been denied millions of dollars in benefits over the last twelve years.

In 1996, the Veterans Benefits Improvement Act (PL 104-275) gave veterans' spouses the right to keep their partners' final month of benefits. It instructed VA to make changes as needed to comply with the law, which took effect for spouses of veterans who died after Dec. 31, 1996. What appears to be the problematic part is that VA's system was never updated. As a result many surviving spouses were either denied the final month of payment or asked to send the checks back. In many cases, if the checks were already deposited or spent, the U.S. Treasury moved to seize the money directly from their accounts.

Brad Mayes, Director of Compensation and Pension Service (C&P), stated that VA had been working with Akaka's office on this issue, and will continue to do so. He further stated that VA is presently stepping up their outreach to reach spouses who may have been affected by this VA oversight, and to ensure that they receive the proper benefits due to them. VA is providing a fully staffed phone call center, reachable at 1-800-827-1000, to attempt to rectify the situation for those affected. Surviving spouses can call the number and VA will immediately begin the process of checking to ensure eligibility and delivering payments to those who need it.

View Full Document: <http://thelegionnews.com/Month of Death.pdf>

American Legion Releases New Report to Battle Illegal Immigration

INDIANAPOLIS (January 12, 2009) - The American Legion has updated its 2007 booklet "A Strategy to Address Illegal Immigration in the United States."

In the new edition, The American Legion highlights the most critical aspects of illegal immigration and offers distinct steps to be taken by government in order to curtail illegal immigration and eliminate it in the future.

"America is a nation built by immigrants and The American Legion recognizes and celebrates that," said National Commander David K. Rehbein. "We do take strong issue, however, with illegal immigration. It's a matter of national security. The 9/11 hijackers and three of the men who plotted to kill innocent Americans at Ft. Dix were perfect examples of terrorists exploiting our weak immigration laws and our lack of enforcement. This booklet is a good reminder that America has a serious problem that needs to be addressed."

The booklet addresses topics such as overstays, crime, terrorism, education and the effects illegal aliens have on employment and wages. An electronic version of the 30-page booklet is available for download at www.legion.org/bulletins. Hard copies may be requested by calling (317) 630-1212 or mailing The American Legion, National Americanism Commission, 700 N. Pennsylvania Street, Indianapolis, IN 46204.

With a current membership of 2.6-million wartime veterans, The American Legion was founded in 1919 on the four pillars of a strong national security, veterans affairs, Americanism, and patriotic youth programs. Legionnaires work for the betterment of their communities through more than 14,000 posts across the nation.

Health Care for Formerly Ineligible Vets

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced plans to re-open enrollment in its health care system by July 2009 to about 265,000 veterans whose incomes exceed the current VA means test and geographic means test income thresholds by 10 percent or less - so called Priority 8 applicants. Enrollment for the lowest priority of the eight groups - veterans who are not being compensated for a military-related disability and who have incomes above a set threshold - was suspended on January 18, 2003, although veterans in the priority eight group who were already enrolled for care were permitted to remain enrolled. VA originally suspended enrollment for Priority 8 veterans because it was unable to provide all enrolled veterans with timely access to its health care due to a tremendous growth in the number of veterans then seeking enrollment. VA now plans to reopen enrollment for a portion of these veterans without compromising the Department's ability to provide high quality health care services to all enrolled veterans who are eligible for care.

Week of January 12, 2009

David and Judy Holt, Lakeview Golf Club Recognized for Support of Virginia Veterans Wounded Warrior Program

RICHMOND-Virginia Veterans Services Foundation Chairman, Frank Wickersham, recognized David and Judy Holt and the Lakeview Golf Club at the Foundation's December 3, 2008 meeting for their support of the Virginia Wounded Warrior Program (VWWP). The Holts and the Lakeview Golf Club in Harrisonburg, Va. organized two golf tournaments to raise funds for the VWWP.

Over the July 4, 2008 weekend, more than 400 players, volunteers, and visitors turned out despite daily thunderstorms and other holiday activities. The Club sold nearly 2,000 hotdogs and drinks. These sales, along with cart rentals, generated more than \$5,000 in support of the VWWP.

Shortly after the July 4 event, the Holts and the Lakeview Golf Club began planning for the Inaugural Victory for Vets Tournament to Benefit the Virginia Wounded Warrior Program. Held September 13, 2008, the tournament drew 166 adult players and 16 young juniors along with 79 individual and organizational sponsors. Although the accelerated planning time precluded attracting corporate donors, the tournament had several title sponsors, each contributing between \$1,000 and \$2,500. Title sponsors included Michael Stolfus, President of Dynamic Aviation; Bill Strang, Founder and CEO of Tactical and Survival Strategies, Inc.; Brett Kingstone, President of MaxKing Reality in Orlando, Florida; John Robertson, President of Robertson Marketing Group; and Joe and Debbie Showker, who are private benefactors and involved in DoD programs for veterans rehabilitation services in Harrisonburg, Va.

Every veterans service organization in the Harrisonburg area sent tournament players and were involved in other types of tournament support. The Harrisonburg High School JROTC provided an Honor Guard. A full luncheon was sponsored by State Senator, Mark Obenshain (Lenhart and Obenshain, LLC), where 22 area veterans of Afghanistan and Iraq were hosted. News coverage and notices were provided by the Daily News Record. Awards and trophies were guaranteed by Titleist, several area golf clubs, the VFW post in Harrisonburg, and Robertson Marketing Group. There were almost 80 event sponsors and Lakeview Golf Club donated the entire course for the tournament. All revenues from green fees, cart rentals, practice balls, refreshments, and other purchases went directly to the VWWP.

The Victory for Vets Benefits Tournament generated more than \$24,000 in cash donations, thereby providing more than \$29,000 in combination with the July 4 event for the new program. The Holts and Lakeview Golf Club have already begun planning for the 2009 Victory for Vets Tournament. The tournament is slated for Friday, August 7, 2009.

The Virginia Wounded Warrior Program was created by 2008 legislation directing the Virginia Department of Veterans Services, in cooperation with the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation, and Substance Abuse Services, and the Department Rehabilitative Services, to establish a program to coordinate support services for veterans with stress-related and traumatic brain injuries resulting from service in a combat area. VWWP ensures that Virginia veterans, members of the Virginia National Guard, and Virginia residents of the Armed Forces Reserves not in active federal service are provided timely assessment, treatment, and support. The program also supports the family members of these veterans, Guard, and Reserve members

Contact: Anne Atkins

America, What a Country!

John Kokernak, Department Americanism Chairman

Those words were said to me by my friend Mr. James Gongob over 15 years ago and they mean just as much today as they did back then. On January 20, 2009, America will once again celebrate the peaceful transition of power of our government despite our country being at war, dealing with a struggling economy and people concerned about their jobs, their homes and their retirement savings. This transition of power was possible because the American people exercised their right to vote in November 2008.

This transition of power from a Republican Administration to a Democratic Administration will occur without a coup or gunfire despite some fundamental differences on how our nation should be run. No matter what your political affiliation, we need to celebrate the process that our forefathers envisioned when our Constitution was written. It makes me proud to be an American!

If the Inauguration of our new President is not enough to make you feel proud to be an American, you need to attend a High School Oratorical Contest and listen to the students speeches on the U.S. Constitution or participate in the Boys State Interviews to see what fine young men we have and all the activities that they participate in. If that doesn't work for you, how about watching our young men and women perform in a JROTC Drill Competition or watch in amazement as our young men and women shoot the lights out in a Junior Shooting Sports Program match. If that still doesn't do it for you, how about watching a parade and having Old Glory pass by with the flags flying in the wind and watching the veterans and other spectators stand and show respect for the colors.

Personally, I get a boost every week day morning around 7:00 A.M. when on our way to work, my wife and I listen to a radio station in Northern Virginia where they play local elementary school kids reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. It always brings a smile to our faces and a feeling of pride to be an American when we hear the class finish the Pledge.

So let's celebrate this historic time in the history of our country and be thankful that we are Americans! Please get involved in your local Americanism activities so that others will also want to say "America, What a Country!"

MEMBERSHIP IS "US"

It seems that we are always being asked to increase our membership. No matter what program or topic being discussed, it always goes back to membership. We all know the obvious reason for this is "Membership is the Lifeblood of The American Legion." Without a healthy membership all of our programs would suffer. Without members, we would have no voice on Capitol Hill. Without members, there would be no accomplishment in assistance and support to our veteran's, their families, our community, state and nation.

It is that time of the year when we all need to help recruit, renew and reinstate members. To accomplish this all we really need to do is "JUST ASK." We need to get the word out to all veteran's who are not members, all legionnaires who have not renewed their membership for this year and members who have let their membership

lapse over the past few years. When asking veteran's to join our great organization, to renew their membership or to reinstate their membership let them know we take care of our veteran's in many ways. We love kids; we have some of the best Children & Youth programs in the nation. Through membership our voice is heard in Congress, to make sure the Department of Defense is funded to have the best equipped, best trained and best motivated military in the world. We support our troops. In Virginia our job, which we do extremely well, is to be here for them assisting their families. Just mention this to any veteran, any member who has not yet renewed or any member who has let their membership lapse about these four things. Mention the benefits available to legionnaires. We have insurance, vision care, prescription, financial, travel and many more benefits available to us.

We, in the Department of Virginia are very fortunate. We have legionnaires who know how important membership is. We also know that we have some of the best programs in the country. Our current membership is over 46,000. To make our 100% we still need over 10,500 members. To bring home another consecutive "ALL TIME HIGH" for the Department of Virginia we need approximately 13,000 members. With a little hard work from each and every legionnaire we can make our membership goals this year!! The time is now!! Each and every one of us needs to "ASK" veterans to join our great organization who are not currently members. In reality people want to be part of an organization who make a difference and that is "US." Many of our current veterans are just waiting to be asked to join. Letters need to be sent or personal contact should be used to ask members who have not yet renewed or have let their membership lapse. "ASK" them to come back to our great organization.

A very important part of membership is recognizing and rewarding the top recruiters of each Post. Establish a top recruiter program. Recognize your top recruiters. Everyone likes to be recognized. Do this at your regular Post meetings or in your newsletters. Many Posts give away gift cards for dinner at local restaurants or a free pass to dinners held at their Post. Utilize the Department Awards Manual to reward top recruiters. There are many individual membership awards available. All Post Adjutants should have a copy of the manual. Any Legionnaire can go on line and download the manual at www.valegion.org

I am sure everyone could use some extra cash with the current state of the economy. Take advantage of the special "Department Commander's Award." A \$500.00 debit card will be awarded, at the Department Convention in July, to the Legionnaire who recruits the greatest number of new members by June 1, 2009. The winner must recruit at least 50 new members, or any war era, and qualify for the Gold Brigade Award.

I am asking all Legionnaires to adopt the theme for 2009, "JUST ONE." Recruit, renew or reinstate "ONE MEMBER." If every Legionnaire does this from now until the Department Convention in Richmond, we will have absolutely no problem making our 100% or another "ALL TIME HIGH" at the end of the year and put Virginia "ON TOP." WE NEED YOUR HELP!

Department Commander Les Clevinger, the Department Officers and I thank you for what you have achieved in membership and what you will achieve in the coming months.

FOR GOD AND COUNTRY

Ron "SKI" Miluszewski, Department Membership Chairman

To The American Legion Leadership,

As the Preamble to our Constitution states, The American Legion is "For God and Country," which is why we will continue to fight for both. No single issue encapsulates both entities as much as the legal battles currently being fought over religious symbols at veterans memorials. The Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America, Inc., is attempting to once again remove the cross from a memorial at Mt. Soledad, Calif., by appealing an earlier legal decision to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals.

We have some powerful opponents on this issue such as the ACLU and other like-minded groups, who are well-funded and committed to eliminating all expressions of religion from the public arena. But it goes further than that. The ACLU and such groups actually profit from these cases by getting you and I - the taxpayers - to pay their legal fees. For example, the ACLU has received \$50,000 from the city of San Diego because of their frivolous claims over Mt. Soledad. They received another \$63,000 in the Mojave Desert cross case and \$121,500 from the state of Kentucky over a Ten Commandments display. They have even milked the city of San Diego for another \$950,000 because they allowed the Boy Scouts - a group that believes in God - to lease land in Balboa Park.

Unfortunately, the last Congress did not pass legislation which would end the awarding of tax-funded legal fees for this purpose. The American Legion, however, does not intend to give up and will continue calling for its passage.

Moreover, we have filed amicus curiae "friend of the court" briefs to defend these important symbols and memorials. While we have had some legal setbacks and some legal victories, we believe the issue will ultimately be decided by the U.S. Supreme Court. Again, we plan to register our support.

You can do your part by letting us know if there are any memorials in your area under legal or community attack. These instances are being registered at <http://www.alliancedefensefund.org/memorials/report.aspx> . You can also call 1-800-Tell-ADF.

You can find more information from the booklet "In the Footsteps of the Founders" at <http://www.legion.org/whatsnew/publicrelations/publications/pr> . The legislative information expired with the last Congress, but the background material still resonates. The website also includes other PERA-related tools such as guest editorials, a petition form and suggested speech. Again, keep in mind that new Congresses require new legislation to be introduced.

I have attached six national resolutions that The American Legion has passed since 2003 supporting veterans memorials and calling for an end to this lawsuit abuse. With your help, The American Legion's voice will continue to be heard in the Congress and the Courts.

For God and Country,
David K. Rehbein
National Commander

View Attachements: <http://thelegionnews.com/Resolutions.pdf>