

VIRGINIA LEGIONNAIRE

Official E- Newsletter For The Virginia Department (.pdf version)

May 2009 Edition

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Upcoming Events!

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

State Baseball Tournament July 27-Aug 1
RF&P Park, Glen Allen, Virginia

2009 Leadership College August 7-9 Holiday Inn Koger Center
Richmond \$89

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

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The American Legion Is “Very Pleased” With President’s VA Initiatives

WASHINGTON, DC – APRIL 09, 2009 –Leaders of the nation’s largest veterans organization say they are “very pleased” with the Obama administration’s announced efforts to build what is being termed a “21st Century VA.”

Representatives from a number of veterans and military service organizations gathered at noontime today to learn from President Barack Obama the steps his administration is taking through the budget process to modernize and more efficiently fund the Department of Veterans Affairs. The group included The American Legion’s Senior Executive Director John Sommer.

The National Commander of The American Legion, visiting Legion officials in Missouri, reacted with a broad smile upon learning of the President’s initiatives. “Especially pleasing was the announcement of solid plans to implement what’s called a Joint Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record,” said Commander David K. Rehbein. “This type of paperless administrative and medical care record, which would follow a service member from enlistment through his or her lifetime, will facilitate much more expeditious and accurate delivery of the highest quality health care. It’s what those who wear, and have worn, the uniform need and deserve.”

Commander Rehbein continued, “We are also very happy to learn of the President’s strong support, along with VA Secretary Eric Shinseki, of advance appropriations for the Department of Veterans Affairs. As has been noted by administrations officials themselves, a timely, predictable, and sufficient flow of funding from year to year means better care for our veterans.” The Commander concluded, “The American Legion has long championed the implantation of electronic medical records and advance appropriations for VA medical care, so this is a proud and promising day for us.”

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D-Day Memorial Seeks Veterans

Week of April 13, 2009

The National D-Day Memorial in Bedford, Va. invites all D-Day veterans from around the nation to gather for the 65th anniversary of the Normandy invasion this June. Admission to the Memorial is free all day on June 6, but the Memorial is still anxious to hear from D-Day veterans planning to attend the commemoration to share news about special vets-only opportunities. D-Day vets can also arrange to have their oral histories recorded during their visit by appointment or by phone following the anniversary. D-Day veterans are encouraged to contact the Memorial Foundation at (800) 351-3329 or by e-mail at dday@dday.org. For more information about the Memorial and the 65th Anniversary, visit the [National D-Day Memorial Foundation](#) website.

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Post 28 Hosts Rolling Thunder Ride

Last year American Legion Post 28 in Triangle Virginia, in partnership with the Virginia Chapter of Vietnam Veterans Motorcycle Club, Azalea Charities and the Monclair Virginia Lions Club hosted a four day event at Post 28 in support of the Rolling Thunder Riders.

Post 28 is once again hosting the four day event on the Post grounds.

Post 28 is one of the staging areas for the Rolling Thunder Ride and is once again providing free camping and parking facilities for those who will be participating in the event.

The Post will have Post members available at the Post 24-hours a day starting on Thursday May 21st. through Monday May 25th. The Post will be serving meals on Friday, Saturday and Sunday with a special program on Saturday afternoon which will include a guest speaker and entertainment for our guests.

To find out more information on the program go to www.alpost28.org and click on the Rolling Thunder icon. Information will be updated as we get closer to the event weekend. If you have a big group that plans on coming please send an e-mail to our Adjutant so that we can better plan to make your stay an enjoyable time.

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Innovative Partnership Is Win/Win For Disabled Veterans And Employers

Sharyn Kenchen, Torrence Bowens, Cynthia Brown, and Muhammad Menzies all share three things in common. They each work in the Office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth; they are all veterans with disabilities; and Rick Schiessler with Health Net Federal Services and Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) was instrumental in helping them find their jobs.

“Every corporation and government agency uses temporary workers,” says Schiessler. “Unfortunately, a lot of times, the workers don’t have the right skills and their services are costly because you’re paying a fee to the temp agency.”

Under an innovative partnership between the PVA, the U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and a corporate sponsor—Health Net Federal Services— Schiessler matches the skills of disabled veterans with the needs of employers. “They don’t have to pay us,” Schiessler says of the employers. “And, they’re under no obligation to hire a veteran. However, the arrangement saves employers money and gives veterans an opportunity to try jobs.”

Torrence Bowens loved being in the Army. “It felt good to do something for your country.” And, as a cook, everyone showed appreciation. He was training for combat during the Gulf War when he was hit by a humvee. He didn’t get treatment for the injuries to his leg and they got progressively worse, resulting in several surgeries as well as plates and artificial joints in his leg. He eventually left the Army on medical retirement.

“I couldn’t find a job ‘till I got this one here,” said Bowens. “The only job I could do is sitting down. I love it here. I’m a people person and I love working around people. I feel like I’m very much needed,” says Bowens, referring to his job with the Secretary of the Commonwealth

For Deputy Secretary of the Commonwealth Bernie Henderson, veterans like Bowens have been a dream-come-true. The Secretariat has several areas with unpredictable workloads. Over the years, they've augmented a skeleton staff with employees from temp agencies. "But, we weren't satisfied and were looking for ways to cut costs and increase quality," explained Henderson. After a few phone calls, Henderson got in touch with Schiessler.

Sharyn Kenchen considers herself "real fortunate" to have her job at the Secretary of the Commonwealth where she enters data for warrants and garnishments. Kenchen, an Air Force Veteran, has muscular dystrophy and diabetic neuropathy. "It's a nice quiet job," she says. Plus, the extra income supplements her meager Social Security disability income.

Muhammad Menzies spent 16 years in the Air Force, from 1969-1985, as an aerospace equipment technician. An injury resulted in surgery fusing three vertebrae in his neck; he also experiences hand spasms and back problems as well as arthritis. "I was out of work for a year," remembers Menzies. "At the time, I couldn't write my name. After surgery things worked better. The PVA at McGuire VA Hospital encouraged me to seek employment."

Menzies has worked as a Service Process Specialist in the Secretary of the Commonwealth's office since November 2007. He prepares legal papers to be served to defendants. "It lets me work around my disabilities," said Menzies.

Schiessler focuses on placing veterans in careers, not just finding them jobs. His best tool for matching veterans with employers is his ability to network. "We don't have any bureaucracy to encumber us," explains Schiessler. "I don't go through the internet, or job ads, or wait for employers to call me. I take them out to dinner; I play golf with them. And, while I'm at it, I show them how these vets are better than other candidates."

Cynthia Brown, who retired after 22 years from the U.S. Army, injured her back while she was in Kuwait. Although she thoroughly enjoyed the military and would re-enlist if it wasn't for her back injury, Brown enjoys her job in the Secretary's office.

"I've been in clerical work all my life. I came into this job doing data entry—entering applications and re-applications for notary publics. Lately, I've been typing letters that go with applications we have to return," said Brown.

"These are the most terrific employees you've ever seen in your life," says Henderson. "Their attitude is remarkable, they're interested and willing to learn, and they fit in wonderfully."

According to Schiessler, his job is a rehabilitation counselor's dream, "you do whatever you need to make it work." Schiessler doesn't have a budget. The support of Health Net Federal Services is paramount to our success says Schiessler. But, he also leverages the resources of other agencies and companies. For example, he suggested to several companies that they use their continuing education funds to hire veterans and train them for vacancies in their workforces. If veterans need assistive technology for their employment, Schiessler works with government agencies or finds companies willing to donate funds or equipment.

It's all about networking, resources, and building relationships, concludes Schiessler. "We do what we have to do to accomplish our goal."

For more information about hiring veterans with disabilities, contact Rick Schiessler, (804) 675-5155, ricks@pva.org. Ω

USA TODAY Wins The American Legion's Top Journalism Award

INDIANAPOLIS (April 2, 2009) – USA TODAY has been selected to receive The American Legion's Fourth Estate Award for the series, "The Smokestack Effect: Toxic air and America's schools." The Fourth Estate Award is presented annually by The American Legion for outstanding achievement in the field of journalism.

"Reporters Blake Morrison and Brad Heath demonstrated the power of ambitious, national reporting and a commitment to the public good that unveiled serious health hazards outside hundreds of schools in large cities and in small towns across the nation," said David K. Rehbein, national commander of The American Legion. "Working with more than 30 reporters and others from Johns Hopkins University and the University of Maryland, they joined teams sent to 95 schools in 30 states where they used pumps, metals filters and other equipment taking snapshot samples of the air outside schools. They found toxic chemicals that can aggravate asthma, trigger learning disabilities and cause cancer decades later."

Environmental Health News, a daily publication of Environmental Health Sciences, a non-profit organization founded in 2002, called the project "simply stunning in its scope and breadth...It's an extraordinary example of how to combine scientific research and database analysis with investigative reporting to uncover an important public health problem, hitherto largely ignored."

Morrison and Heath compiled a database that enabled users to look up any school in the country and empowered parents to learn about the types and sources of chemicals that might touch their child's school. With it, they identified thousands of schools where the air outside appeared to be at least twice as toxic as air in the nearby neighborhoods, and in some cases, up to 10 times worse.

"This extensive journalistic effort reflected outstanding professionalism, exhaustive research, unmitigated commitment and dedication that resulted in sweeping and unprecedented action from coast to coast, on the local, state, and national levels," Rehbein said. "Thanks to their work, and the support and encouragement of USA TODAY's executive leadership, America's children have been well served. Journalism does not get any better than that."

"We're humbled by this honor and gratified that our series has made such a difference in communities across the nation," said Executive Editor John Hillkirk. "We're proud that our work has empowered parents, school officials and others to learn more about the impact of industrial pollution on children. And the efforts of Blake and Brad, their editor Linda Mathews, and dozens of others at USA TODAY and Gannett, Johns Hopkins University, the University of Maryland and the University of Massachusetts Amherst made this possible."

Previous winners of the award include Dateline NBC, C-SPAN, United Press International, The Detroit News, Fortune Magazine, ABC News, and Life Magazine, among others.

The award will be presented to Messrs. Morrison and Heath during the 91st National Convention of The American Legion in Louisville, Ky. on Aug. 27, 2009. The series may be viewed at: <http://smokestack.usatoday.com>.

With a 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.

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U.S. Senate Adopts ‘Serve America Act,’
Includes Sen. Warner’s Military Veterans Corps

Legislation also includes study to attract mid-career managers to gov’t. service program

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Senate approved legislation today expanding opportunities for public service, voting 79-19 to expand AmeriCorps to 250,000 participants over eight years. At the request of U.S. Senator Mark R. Warner of Virginia, the Serve America Act includes a Veterans’ Corps to promote service opportunities and fellowships for our nation’s military veterans

In addition, Senator Warner successfully amended the bill to include a six-month study of the best way to establish a Private Sector Corps within AmeriCorps to provide midcareer professionals with an opportunity to provide specialized management expertise to non-profit groups, local, state or federal governments. Senator Warner believes private-sector expertise could be applied through AmeriCorps to recommend efficiencies and taxpayer savings across government programs.

Veterans’ Corps will help identify the unmet needs of veterans through activities such as recruiting veterans into service opportunities, promoting community-based efforts to meet the unique needs of military families, assisting veterans in developing educational opportunities, including professional and workforce certification, and developing projects uniquely tailored to assist older veterans and disabled veterans returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan.

“Veterans’ Corps will help assist and support veterans, especially our wounded veterans, by giving them additional opportunities to serve their country when they return home,” Senator Warner said. “Military veterans have a unique set of leadership skills and experiences that can strengthen our communities at the same time we’re trying to promote and expand the role of public service across the country.”

Senator Warner also succeeded in including language directing the AmeriCorps board to conduct a study on ways to implement a potential Private Sector Corps. The Private Sector Corps would tap the energy and patriotism of mid-career managers, senior executives and others with specialized skills to connect with non-profit organizations and federal, state, and local governments to provide expertise to create efficiencies and cost savings.

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