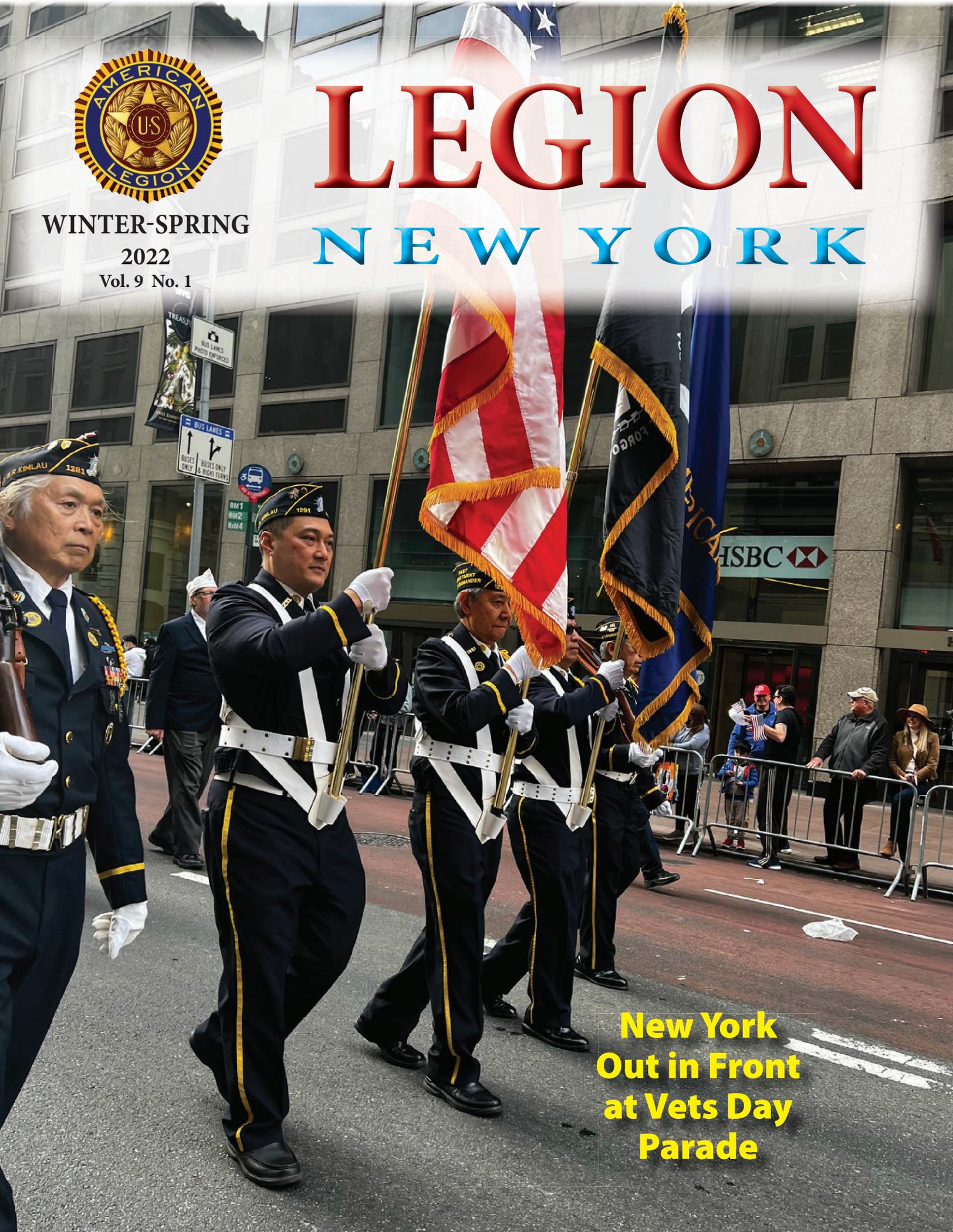




LEGION

NEW YORK

WINTER-SPRING
2022
Vol. 9 No. 1



**New York
Out in Front
at Vets Day
Parade**

LEGION NEW YORK

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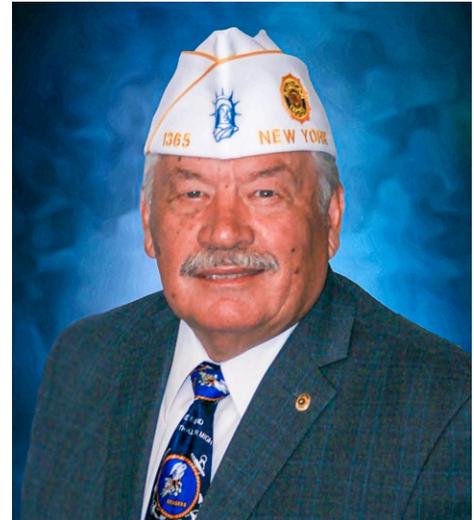
NEVER GIVE UP!

by FRANK LaMARSH

During the weeks leading up to the decision to cancel the Mid-Winter Conference, Adjutant Casey and I spent a considerable amount of time and effort weighing the options, scenarios, and possibilities associated with moving forward with the Conference or canceling it. One of the most important factors was, and will always be, the welfare and safety of our membership. We concluded that some of the activities, like the cocktail reception, dinner, social gatherings, meetings and taking into consideration our recent experiences bringing several hundred Legionnaires together, posed a threat that we were not willing to take. Along those lines, we felt the prudent thing to do was to postpone my visitations. I hope many, if not all of them, can be rescheduled.

Although we are not meeting face to face as an organization, we still have much to do. Our membership team has been working extremely hard to get our numbers where they need to be, but there is only so much they can do. Much to my dismay, we have failed to reach even a single target date and we are next to last in the Northeast. It is on each of us to work together to reach our goals. Although many of our posts are closed or restricted, there are many things we can do to attract new members and retain / re-sign the ones whose membership has lapsed.

One of the easiest and most beneficial is the "Buddy Check." A simple phone call asking, *how are you doing,*



Department Commander Frank LaMarsh

and *can we be of assistance,* goes a long way. Get out into the community and help; run a food drive or if possible, look into allowing a portion of the post to be used for COVID-19 shots or boosters. We need to let our communities know our organization is alive and well and here to help.

Let the veterans in your area know that without the strong voice of the American Legion, the benefits we receive now, or they will need in the future, would be in jeopardy.

We have a clear choice. We can sit idly by and watch this incredible organization fade away or we can build on the legacy started in 1919. We may have to change the way we do business. Just remember who we are, what we do and who we do it for. Let us not throw our hands in the air and say we cannot beat this virus. America's military has never given up and neither should we.

COVER

The Honor Guard of Lt. B. R. Kimlau Chinese Memorial Post 129 led the Department of New York contingent in the New York City Veterans Day Parade. Photo by Holly Soria / The American Legion.

Legionnaire Leads State Division of Veterans Services

by JOHN J. CRESKEY, , commander, Adolph Pfister Post 1038

Rev. Viviana DeCohen, a member of American Legion Post 1038 in Valhalla, is the new director of the NY State Division of Veterans Services.

A veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps, she served as the commissioner of the Mount Vernon Veterans Service Agency and associate pastor at Mount Vernon Heights Congregational Church. She has dedicated her time and talent assisting veterans by ensuring they had food, shelter, clothing, education and employment opportunities, and by providing a little motivation which earned her the affectionate title of “Mama V.”

Along with being a Legionnaire, DeCohen is a member of Women Marines Association NY-6, Navy League, NAVPA (National Association of Veteran Program Administrators), Student Veterans of America, and military adviser to the Barbara Giordano Foundation.

Her military service afforded her the opportunity to earn a bachelor’s



degree in behavioral science and a master’s degree in health service management, both from Mercy College. DeCohen is also a caregiver coach, lecturer, writer of aging wellness programs, and speaker for the Westchester County Department of Senior Programs and Services and the Alzheimer’s Association.

She is currently pursuing her doctorate in Educational Leadership & Gerontology at Concordia University, Chicago. She is a VA 2021 Women Trailblazer for her work with veteran students at Mercy College with the development of “Operation Buddy Up” and “Operation Push” that allowed once struggling students to attain their

MEET YOUR STAFF

Carrie Ahearn Is New Buffalo DSO



Carrie L. Ahearn is making history as the new DSO for the Department’s Buffalo office (effective mid-February).

She is the first female service officer and the first Department Service Officer in the Department’s history. In addition, Carrie was the second woman to be honored as Department Service Officer of the Year (2020).

Carrie has been with Yates County Veterans Service Agency

Department Adjutant Jim Casey introduces staffers on a periodic basis.

since December 2017. Her advice to vets seeking benefits: “I think every veteran should be in communication with a service officer” so that changes in life (marriage, divorce, children, health status) can be recorded in a timely manner.

An Air Force veteran, Carrie was an aircraft structural maintenance journeyman, serving both stateside and abroad (Korea and Saudi Arabia). Carrie is a member of Johnson Costello Post 355 in Penn Yan.



A New Home for Winnek Post 396



Members of American Legion Winnek Post 396, state Legislature members and town of Seneca officials attended a ceremonial groundbreaking ceremony Nov. 29 for the post's new home on Routes 5&20. Photo by Mike Hibbard / Finger Lakes Times

by MIKE HIBBARD, Finger Lakes Times

SENECA — As the membership of American Legion Winnek Post 396 nears the end of what their commander called a “three-year adventure,” some turned out Nov. 29 to mark the next chapter in the organization’s long history.

“All I can say about this project is, ‘Wow,’” Dale Mosher said before a ceremonial groundbreaking at a plot of land on Routes 5 & 20 in the town of Seneca. “It’s been a three-year adventure, but we are excited to get started.”

Moments later, Mosher and others put gold shovels in the ground, where the post’s new, 4,800-square-foot home will be built. Depending on the weather and construction activity, it could be ready by spring 2022.

Legion members were joined by state Sen. Pam Helming, Assemblyman Jeff Gallahan, and town officials. Helming, R-54 of Canandaigua, and Gallahan, R-131 of Manchester, presented Mosher with citations from their respective legislative bodies.

“As the commander said, this has been a roller-coaster ride over many, many years, and you never gave up,” Helming said. “You kept pushing, just like our veterans did and those who serve in the military today. The American Legion has been part of the Geneva community for more than a century, and it’s important to not only our veterans but their families, our first responders and the community. We are thrilled you are here in the town of Seneca.”

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“This has been three years in the making, but it probably seems like 30 to the membership,” said Gallahan, a longtime Sons of the Legion member. “I know what it means to go to the post home and be comfortable there, with amenities. Moving from down on the lake, a very pristine location, is unfortunate. Fortunately, this Legion will have the amenities you need.

“The Legion reaches so many different people. It’s amazing how deep the roots go in the community.”

While it has been a longtime topic of discussion among Legion members, officials announced in 2018 they were looking to sell the Lochland Road property they had called home for more than a half-century. They cited a dwindling savings account, declining membership, and high maintenance costs at the site.

The membership voted to sell the building and grounds, but a potential sale fell through in early 2021 — after which Legion officials said they were going to keep the property. However, they put it back on the market in April and sold it for \$1.7 million to Pine Ridge Construction of Williamsport, Pa.

The project, dubbed Lake’s Edge

Seneca, will include townhomes, a hotel, restaurant and craft brewery. Work is expected to begin in March.

The Legion will continue to be on Lochland Road until spring.

Mosher said the decision to sell the property wasn’t an easy one.

“The membership ... saw the fact that it was time to move on from our current home,” Mosher said. “They wisely chose to proceed with the purchase of this property and voted to build new. Without a doubt, there is not one Geneva Legion family member — including myself — who wanted to leave that location. We all have great memories of awesome events and strong bonds there. However, with the shrinking membership and a building that was close to 150 years old ... it wasn’t financially possible, and the membership agreed it was time to move on.”

The new Legion home is close to the Seneca/Geneva town line.

“We have a parcel of land we are looking forward to the American Legion building their home on,” Seneca Supervisor Drew Wickham said. “This town is committed to making sure you have the home you deserve and it suits

your needs. We will do everything in our power to make sure that happens on this site.”

Gorham-based Chrisantha Construction is the general contractor. Matt Bragg, company vice president, said the new building will include meeting space, a bar/restaurant area, and office space. Work is expected to begin soon.

“It will meet their needs and what they have now,” he said. “If we get lucky in the next couple of weeks with weather, our plan of attack is to get the structure up, get it enclosed and insulated. We would like to open in the spring. That is the plan.”

Mosher noted: “The goal of the building committee, and stated to the membership at numerous meetings, was simple: build a new, smaller, more efficient post home and place enough money in the bank where this post will be financially stable for the next 100 years. I think we have completely fulfilled that goal, and we start today with this groundbreaking.

“The town of Seneca welcomed us into this community. The future of the Geneva Legion looks extremely bright, and we are very happy to be moving here to the town of Seneca.”

BAYVILLE POST HONORS 13 KILLED IN AFGHANISTAN

BAYVILLE, LONG ISLAND – Last November’s Veteran’s Day had a special focus for members of Robert H. Spittel Post 1285.

They chose to honor the 13 service members killed by a suicide bomber while they were helping Afghans trying to flee the Taliban at a Kabul airport gate on August 28.

“We wanted to recognize their bravery,” Post Commander Vincent Libertini told the *Long Island Herald*. “Many of them were just kids.”

Legionnaires took turns reading the names and ages

of 11 Marines, a hospital corpsman and an army staff sergeant.

“Flags of every military service branch were placed on the lawn for the ceremony” outside the Village Hall, as well as 13 American flags, the newspaper reported.

“Each had a plaque in front bearing the names of those who died, as well as their photographs.”

“Tony Congero, who served in the Marines in Vietnam, lingered by each plaque. ‘It was terrible what happened to them, especially to those who were Marines,’ he said. ‘It should have never happened.’”

NY STATE VETERANS HALL OF FAME

WAYNE BAUMGARTNER

Members of The American Legion were inducted into the New York State Senate Veterans Hall of Fame in 2021.

Among them was 2020 Department of New York *Legionnaire of the Year* **Wayne Baumgartner**, who was inducted by State Senator Sean Ryan;

Baumgartner is a past commander of the Milton J. Brounshidle Post 205. The Town of Tonawanda resident is a veteran of the U.S. Air Force who served in Vietnam. He has been a member of the Legion for 52 years,

holding a number of positions in his Post.

Baumgartner “volunteers countless hours to coordinate and plan events for the post,” noted Post Commander Ted Balbierz in an interview with the *Ken-Ton Bee*.

“I am grateful to Mr. Baumgartner, not only for his service to our country as a veteran of the Air Force, but also for his dedication to the Tonawanda community in the decades that followed,” Senator Ryan said.



Wayne Baumgartner

JEFFREY W. FRENCH

Another Legionnaire enshrined in the New York State Senate Hall of Fame this past year was **Jeffrey W. French**. He was inducted by State Sen. Daphne Jordan.

A U.S. Army veteran who served in Vietnam, French a 52-year member of the Minkler Seery Post 252 in Philmont. He is past post commander and current adjutant. He has chaired the Village Memorial Day Committee for the last 10 years, as Philmont became a Purple Heart Village.

French is past county commander and current county adjutant for the Columbia

County American Legion; past district commander and current financial officer for the American Legion 3rd District; past department vice-commander; vice chairman, Department Oratorical, and vice chairman, Distinguished Guests for the Department of New York American.

On the national level, he has been a member of the National Resolutions Committee.

He also served on Columbia County Honor-A-Vet Committee, and for 17 years he was Run chairman for “SEAN’S RUN.”



Jeffrey French

GEORGE E. WARGO SR.

George E. Wargo Sr. was inducted into the 2021 Senate Veterans Hall of Fame by State Sen. James Skoufis.

A member of American Legion Post 130 in Thiells, Wargo served in the U.S. Army in the early 1950s, stationed at Fort McPherson in Atlanta, Georgia at 3rd Army Headquarters.

In 1959, Wargo was elected as Village of West Haverstraw Trustee, a position he held for 36 years. He also served as

Deputy Mayor, Parks and Recreation Commissioner, Fire Commissioner, Youth Commissioner, and a Member of the Advisory Board for the Village of West Haverstraw, and was Superintendent of Public Works for five years.

Wargo is a 60-year member of S.W. Johnson SFE #1 Fire Company.

An active member of the Knights of Columbus Council #581 since 1953, Wargo is a 4th Degree Knight.



George Wargo

STEVEN W. BOWMAN

Steven Bowman, the Department of New York's 2014 *Service Officer of the Year* and 2006 *Legionnaire of the Year*, was inducted into the NY State Senate Hall of Fame in 2021 by State Sen. Dan Stec.

After nearly two decades of service with the U.S. Air Force, Bowman's military career then shifted to a lifetime legacy of advocacy for veterans and families.

In 2004, Bowman was appointed director of the Clinton County Veterans Service Agency, where he became "a well-known figure of support for veterans and agencies

across the North Country, state and beyond," his Hall of Fame bio states.

He is past post commander, past county commander, past district commander and past department vice commander. Bowman has served on multiple Department of NY committees.

Through the years, Bowman also worked with the City of Plattsburgh and Disabled American Veterans Chapter to establish the highly regarded Plattsburgh Barracks Veterans Park and Memorial.



Steven Bowman

PETER GONG

New Hyde Park resident Peter Gong, an Honor Guard member of Lt. B. R. Kimlau Chinese Memorial Post 129, was inducted into the New York State Senate Veterans Hall of Fame for 2021 by State Sen. Anna Kaplan.

"Mr. Gong is a retired Master Sergeant who served 12 years in the United States Army and 16 years in the U.S. Air Force," the senator noted.

"After 28 years of honorable service, Ret. Master Sgt. Gong continues to give back as a dedicated member of the Honor Guard at funerals of fallen service members, is a

leader in local Chinese-American civic groups, and a vocal activist against hate crimes..."

"As a young man in the Army, Peter endured malaria, snakes, leeches, and casual racism while air-jumping into the rice paddies of Vietnam (flying more than 25 helicopter combat missions)."

Gong has participated in 175 burials – through rain, snow, and heat, seeing to the proper presentation of the folded flag to the heartbroken, or standing graveside for those who have no one to attend.



Peter Gong

JOHN J. BRADY

Levittown American Legion Post's John J. Brady was inducted into the 2021 class of the State Senate Veterans Hall of Fame by State Sen. Kevin Thomas.

He served in the U.S. Army, Army Reserve, and the Naval Intelligence Reserve Program, retiring at the rank of Intelligence Specialist 1st Class. After completing active duty, he joined the New York City Police Department, rising in the ranks to lieutenant.

In 1987, Brady joined Levittown Post

1711, serving in various officer positions including two terms as post commander. He also serves as the post's Child Welfare chairman working with several groups, including two Cub Scout Packs.

He has led annual fundraising efforts for children and adults with autism and Down syndrome.

Brady participates in Nassau County Veterans Stand Downs, visits veterans at the VA hospital, and has been a driver for the DAV.



John Brady

BIRTHDAY PARADE FOR WWII VET



WWII veteran Stanley Tauber celebrated his 102nd birthday on Dec. 31, 2021 — with a parade of friends and community members. With him is his daughter, Carol DeAngelis. Photo by Maria DeAngelis.

by THE AMERICAN LEGION

When World War II veteran Stanley Tauber turned 100 in 2019, his milestone was celebrated with a proclamation at the village board meeting in Hastings-on-Hudson, N.Y., followed by a birthday luncheon.

“Unfortunately, the pandemic did not allow for anything similar (in 2020), so we devised the birthday drive-by parade,” said Bryan Healy, commander of the Sons of The American Legion squadron at Admiral Farragut American Legion Post 1195.

The post organized another drive-by parade for Tauber on Dec. 31, 2021, after the omicron surge forced Tauber’s family to cancel a birthday luncheon commemorating his 102nd birthday. Post 1195 took inspiration from the parades the local fire department had been doing for kids who were not able to celebrate with their friends.

“We included the fire department, police department, EMS, neighbors and members of the Legion Family and VFW,” Healy said.

Healy said it was important to show appreciation to all veterans for their service, “but especially to members of the ‘Greatest Generation’ because of the sacrifice they made for our country and the American way of life.”

“For many living in 2022, the thoughts of being on a battlefield or a warship are relegated to history or the movies,” Healy added. “But our veterans have lived that story and deserve our thanks and recognition.”

FOX NEWS PROFILES LEGIONNAIRE ON VETERAN’S DAY

As the nation celebrated Veterans Day on Nov. 11, Richard Pecci, 75, a member of the New York State Senate Veterans Hall of Fame, told *Fox News* that he considered it an honor to remember all the friends he served with in Vietnam.

Many of those battlefield friends have sadly died by now, he said.

“I consider it an honor to remember, but to this day I have failed to grieve for the friends I’ve lost because in my mind they still live,” Pecci, of Hastings-on-Hudson, told *Fox News*.

“Yet I have been true to my word. I will not forget.”

“I am very proud that I served my country, that I fought to protect our freedom today,” he also said. “I have always felt that way.”

Born in 1946 in Queens, New York, Pecci was drafted at age 20. In 1967, he was sent to Vietnam as an infantryman. His 3rd Squadron 17th Air Cavalry unit’s main effort was enemy search-and-destroy missions, plus convoy support, he said. Pecci possessed such superb skills in weaponry that he was often assigned

to solo missions on the ground in war zones, sometimes for days at a time, according to documents prepared for his nomination to the New York State Senate Veterans Hall of Fame in 2018.

Today, Pecci serves as commander of Admiral Farragut Post 1195 in Hastings-on-Hudson.

After he returned from military service, he worked in food service, mail distribution and production for 38 years at The New York Times, from which he retired.

TV Helps Honor Guard Publicize Need for Members



The Monroe County American Legion Honor Guard, which pays tribute to fallen veterans more than 200 times a year, took to the airways to publicize the need for new members.

Spectrum News broadcast a feature on them on Nov. 10, pointing out that “honor guards across the country are struggling to find enough new members to attend military funerals.”

“We do have some younger members who are 50,” honor guard sergeant Bud Moran joked during the TV interview.

“The oldest member of the honor guard is 89,” the TV reported. “The

group recently celebrated its 40th anniversary. It’s a group with an extremely important job.”

“We don’t care if it’s a private or general,” said Commander Wayne Hartmann. “They all get the same.”

The news report went on to note: “On a sunny fall day at Holy Sepulchre Cemetery in Rochester, honor guard members performed the same task that they do more than 200 times a year. A final salute, paying tribute to a fallen veteran.”

Member Don Wilbert added: “A lot of veterans, they never got a thank

you, or final salute, or anything when they came out of the service. It’s pretty emotional, actually. And we always strive to do everything perfect.”

With their ranks aging, finding enough honor guard members for each funeral can be a challenge.

“It’s a struggle, especially in the wintertime for the senior guys to get bundled up and stand in the elements,” Moran told the *Spectrum* reporter.

“We’ve never had a funeral we didn’t do,” said Hartmann. “It’s just a decent thing to do. And we are honored to do it.”

Oswego County Legislature Honors Legionnaire



Oswego County Legislature's Human Services Committee presented Carl Steele with a certificate. From left are Committee Vice Chair-man Bradley Trudell, District 7; Michael Yerdon, District 1; Oswego County Office for the Aging Director Sara Sunday; Steele; Committee Chairman Roy E. Reehil, District 5; James Karasek, District 22; Herbert Yerdon, District 2; and Tim Stahl, District 20.

The Oswego County Legislature in November recognized Legionnaire Carl Steele for his dedication, compassion and enthusiasm for the Oswego County community and its residents. Steele was nominated by the Oswego County Office for the Aging to

attend the New York State Older New Yorkers Day event. A 30-year volunteer, Steele has served various organizations including Orwell Volunteer Fire Department and American Legion Post 358 in Pulaski. He is a life-long resident of Oswego County; father of three,

grandfather to four and inspiration to them all; teaching them the life lesson of giving back to their community. Oswego County commended him "for the encouraging example of citizenship he demonstrates every day to make Oswego County a better place to live."

Doc Gibbs Establishes Scholarship at SUNY Fredonia

SUNY Fredonia now has a perpetual scholarship established for a deserving son or daughter of a veteran, thanks to Dr. Greg K. Gibbs, past national commander of the Sons of the American Legion. It was established through the use of some campaign funds from Doc Gibbs campaign for national SAL commander.

"Veterans themselves have the 1944 GI Bill and the recent/new GI Bill but their sons and daughters have little option in this regard," Gibbs noted. "This scholarship helps to fill that void, and is open to all children of veterans as they go through the process of admission... The scholarship is not necessarily based on scholarship or financial need, it is open to all potential applicants."

Please keep this in mind if you know of a worthy son or daughter of a veteran that is interested in attending Fredonia. They have a wide variety



of programs for students to consider and serve the greater Western NY area although students attend from all over New York state, neighboring states, and several foreign countries as well. This scholarship is open to any applicant

meeting the criteria regardless of where they reside.

For the purpose of this scholarship a veteran can be a male or female, who is serving or has served in the army, navy, air force, marines, coast guard, or merchant marines, active duty or reservists. The student can be a stepson or stepdaughter as well. The first year of the awarding is coming up in 2022. When they are applying, they need to specifically inquire about this "son or daughter of a veteran scholarship" since asking whether your mother or father has served is not a usual question on the SUNY application.

Said Gibbs: "People who have donated to the campaign have, in part, helped fund this effort. We hope that this will be awarded annually for years to come and pay dividends by helping to educate our youth, tomorrow's leaders, that have come from a tradition of military families."



Charity Ride in July 2022 in Norfolk, NY

The American Legion Riders of Norfolk Post 925 is hosting the 17th annual motorcycle charity ride on July 9, 2022 (Saturday).

“Proceeds of the 2022 Ride will be forwarded to the Americans Supporting Armed Services (ASAS) in Potsdam, NY to help them continue to advocate for more resources and help for veterans afflicted by burn pit exposure,” noted Riders Director Thomas Morrison.

The ride begins at the Norfolk American Legion Post located at State Route 56 and High Street in Norfolk. All riders depart from the post and later return for an “end of the ride” meal and festivities. There will be several stops at local veterans’ organizations. Registration starts at 9 a.m., with kickstands up at 11.

“The Legion Riders are well known and respected for their family friendly safe rides,” Morrison said.

After the ride, there will be raffles, 50-50, a poker hand, prizes, plus the tavern ham-and-salt-potato buffet dinner. Donation is \$20 per bike or \$10 for just the dinner.

Contact Legion Riders Director Thomas Morrison at 315-328-4766 or 925pres@mail.com for more information. For info on Americans Supporting Armed Services (ASAS), see www.asasus.org.



2021 CHARITY RIDE RAISED \$8,217

The 16th Annual Charity Ride hosted by Norfolk American Legion Riders Chapter 925 raised \$8,217 for Project Lifesaver in 2021. This is a program that helps provide GPS location for the elderly, children, and people with special needs who get lost. First Vice Director Harry Caringgi (retired St. Lawrence County Sheriff's Deputy) presents check to St. Lawrence County Sheriff Brooks Bigwarfe. Also in picture are ALR Director Thomas Morrison, Kevin Moriarty, Lori Queor, Sharon Palmer, Chuck Downey, Jim Palmer, Julie Chapman, Mike Villeneuve, Bob Queor, Mark Terrance, Retired Sheriff's Detective Tom Caringgi, Sheriff's Deputy Patrick Chapman, Marilyn Derouchie, Chirs Peacock, Bobbi Peacock, Steve Sedlock, Terry Peterson, and Donna Peterson.



Vice Chancellor Dr. Mike Haynie speaks at the dedication of the Daniel and Gayle D'Aniello Building, home of the National Veterans Resource Center in Syracuse, N.Y., on Wednesday, Nov. 3. Photo by Holly K. Soria/The American Legion.

SU's Veterans Resource Center Dedicated

by JEFF STOFFER, *The American Legion*

Central New York American Legion members Lawrence L. Behling and James R. Bass, both of whom served in the U.S. Armed Forces during the Vietnam War, considered for a moment the transition-support system available to them when they were discharged.

“There was no support mechanism,” said Behling, a Navy corpsman from 1970 to 1976. “The VA hospital was here. We checked at the VA hospital when we got discharged to see if we were eligible for anything. Then, we stopped at an American Legion post and signed up and talked there.”

“It was kind of terrible for me,” said Bass, who got out of the Air Force in

1967 and later served in the New York Air National Guard. “Especially for African-Americans, it was very difficult for me to get a job, even though I had a college education.” Now the Onondaga County American Legion commander, Bass, who used the GI Bill for three college degrees, is optimistic about the brand-new \$62.5 million National Veterans Resource Center that was officially opened Nov. 3 on the Syracuse University campus.

“I think it’s fantastic,” he said, adding that he is looking into ways to better connect The American Legion locally with the national center.

Bass and Behling joined hundreds

who filled the K.G. Tan Auditorium for two hours of celebration, reflection, a challenge from the university president, greetings from former U.S. President George W. Bush, a Q&A session with Medal of Honor recipient Britt Slabinski and multiple reasons from the program’s founder why such a center is necessary today for America.

Syracuse Vice Chancellor for Strategic Initiatives and Innovation Mike Haynie planted the seeds for the center with one small program in 2006, which evolved into the JP Morgan Chase-funded Institute for Veterans and Military Families in 2011.

Continued on next page.



National Veterans Resource Center

Syracuse University image

Continued from previous page.

More than 150,000 veterans and military-connected families have since been served by the institute, with emphasis on education and entrepreneurship, but with multiple other arms, including nationally respected and applied research on veterans, benefits services, ROTC support, mental health programs and more. The IVMF now reaches veterans across the country and at active-duty military installations in eight different nations.

U.S. Small Business Administrator Isabella Casillas Guzman, which recently presented a \$5 million grant to the NVRC, spoke of the importance of advancing veterans in business education and careers.

“The impact that veteran small business owners have in our economy is great,” she said. “There’s 1.76 million small businesses owned by veterans in the United States, and one in 20 employer firms are veteran-owned. They have 4 million employees that they support. They contribute over \$1 trillion to our economy. They have a true impact on our communities.”

The institute’s success record – including a 92% business survival rate

for its veteran entrepreneurs – led to creation of the National Veterans Resource Center, which has been operating for over a year, awaiting the November celebration that had been delayed 18 months by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The biggest question Haynie said he has heard during the last 15 years is, “Why create an academic facility focused on veterans and their families? When I hear that question and read between the lines, I think what I am really being asked is, ‘Why should I care?’”

The former U.S. Air Force Academy management instructor answers in two ways. “First, we should care because, if I can borrow a quote from Thomas Jefferson, ‘A nation, as a society, forms a moral person. And therefore, every member is morally responsible for society.’ I can’t imagine a more morally troubling decision that a society can make than a decision to wage war. Following Mr. Jefferson’s logic, all members of that society are morally accountable for the costs and consequences associated with that decision.”

He noted that with less than 1% of the U.S. population serving in the mili-

tary, most of society is disconnected from what it means to serve, especially in wartime. “For the small minority of Americans who fight those wars, when they come home and require some care and support, those needs are too easily dismissed,” he said.

Through the center, Syracuse University is fulfilling what he calls a “citizenship obligation” to the minority of Americans who step forward to protect a nation that rarely understands them, when in uniform or afterward.

Haynie recounted a story at an airport after two young uniformed soldiers were applauded before they took their seats on a plane. When one passenger was especially zealous in her cheers, Haynie asked her if she understood that veterans were confronting severe job-placement issues, mental health problems and high suicide rates. She did not believe him. Everyone had just shown the soldiers so much appreciation and was certain all veterans received similar, unqualified support. He explained that difficulties most often come after the uniform is put away.

A young Marine Corps veteran named Tim, seated behind Haynie, had

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heard the conversation and thanked the Syracuse professor. Tim had served five years, three of them in combat theaters. Once out, Haynie explained, “his plan was to go to school and get a degree. He seemed ashamed to tell me that he lasted two months on his college campus. He said he just didn’t fit in. He had been trying to find a job but no luck so far. And he was on his way to a VA hospital in a different city hoping that the doctors could help him stop the ringing in his ears so he could get more than a few hours of sleep at night.”

Most significant in Haynie’s opinion, was that Tim sadly admitted, “Since I’ve been home, I feel anonymous.” A combat veteran is telling me that in the context of all the hardship he has endured, and will in the future, what weighs upon him most now that he is home, among the very people who sent him to war ... is that he feels anonymous.”

While assisting veterans and military-connected families with career transition is a key purpose of the center, an underlying theme is bridging the gap of understanding between veterans and those who never served.

The commitment to welcome and support veterans, Chancellor and President Kent Syverud said, has made Syracuse a better school. “In the last decade, Syracuse University has become a place where academic research and education and outreach come together to benefit those who have served,” he told the crowd. “We have been formally recognized as the best private university in the United States for veterans and military-connected service members and their families. Along the way, we have discovered that serving veterans and military families makes Syracuse University better in countless ways. In becoming the best private university for veterans, we are now a different, better and more di-

verse university that has so much more to give to the world.”

The next decade, he added, presents another opportunity.

“The question is, ‘What’s next after 10 years of coming so far?’ I have a realistic suggestion and challenge. It’ll take a lot of work. It’ll take the support of all us here tonight, supporters and many of our successors. In 2031, let’s not be the best private university for veterans, military-connected service members and their families. Let’s simply be the best university of any kind in the world for those who are serving or who have served. Let’s be the best university for vets, period. I really think we can do this, and if anyone around here doubts that, they should just look around. Look at what’s been achieved in just 10 years.”

Retired Navy SEAL Commander Mike Hayes and Medal of Honor recipient Slabinski closed the dedication event with a conversation onstage about their training and multiple combat experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq and how their lives in service so dramatically differed from anything else in civilian life.

At one point in the conversation, Hayes asked his friend who served 25 years in the Navy, “When you were their age (college), could you ever have imagined how your life had unfolded?”

“No,” Slabinski said. “I think all of us are in that same boat. Absolutely not. You don’t know where life is going to take you, but what a great ride it was.”

“When I was that age, I didn’t really ever imagine I could be a SEAL,” Hayes explained. “I think the real message and the meaning and the lesson for all the students associated with IVMF, what you can’t imagine today is imminently possible tomorrow. So, when you’re sitting on campus and you see the president or the CEO of JP Morgan or a Medal of Honor (recipi-

ent), that can be you. If you listen to the chancellor or Dr. Haynie and the challenge of what this organization can be, I promise you this organization will flood America with leaders. It’s going to happen. That’s why the celebration today, Day One, is such a celebration.”

The value of the center was perhaps best summed up when Army ROTC cadet Isabella Lee, a senior, told the crowd she came to Syracuse as one person and is soon to come out completely different and better, due to military training and support at the center.

“This program put me through the most uncomfortable challenges I have ever faced in my life, but I came out on the other side not the insecure and unsure kid that I was, but the confident, strong and determined leader that I am,” she said.

“Among the tangle of schoolwork, training and extracurricular activities, this new facility that stands today provided a little bit of comfort to me. It was a place to stay between classes, to meet, to work – and to rest up. It can be stressful being a cadet in uniform, marching around campus or studying in a library and feeling just slightly out of place.

“But what really makes the NVRC special is that it’s dedicated to our servicemembers and their families, which makes it a very personal matter to me. My family has served for generations. We have seen what freedom costs. Soldiers do not just pay with their lives. They pay with missed children’s soccer games and school plays. They pay with their peace of mind and sleepless nights that are caused by PTSD, and they pay with every service-connected injury and every moment spent away from loved ones, fighting for the freedom of our nation.

“I am so proud to stand here today as a student of an institution that is ready to pay it forward.”

REMEMBERING PEARL HARBOR



Long Island Legionnaires render salutes during their Pearl Harbor remembrance ceremony at Calverton National Cemetery. Photo by Alek Lewis / RiverheadLOCAL

by ALEK LEWIS, RiverheadLOCAL

Members of the Long Island veterans community held a memorial service remembering the attack on Pearl Harbor on its 80th anniversary on Dec. 7 at Calverton National Cemetery.

At the cemetery's Pearl Harbor monument, about two dozen people watched as a 48-star U.S. flag was raised and then lowered to half-staff in memory of the more than 3,500 Americans killed or wounded in the early morning attack by the Japanese Empire on Dec. 7, 1941. The surprise attack came without a declaration of war.

Jim Lynch, chaplain of the American Legion Pearl Harbor Memorial

Legionnaires across New York took time to remember Pearl Harbor on its 80th anniversary. This is one example of ceremonies that took place.

Post 1941 of Port Jefferson, recounted the events of the attack, which was, as President Franklin Roosevelt put it, “a date which will live in infamy.”

“Today, help us to remember the heroes of Dec. 7, 1941, many of whom never lived beyond that day of infamy,” Lynch prayed. “Help us remember those who were killed so suddenly that they had no chance to prove themselves. Help us remember the survivors and the family members who are

dependent upon us to keep alive the memory of their fallen comrades.”

Roby Johnson, commander of the Suffolk County American Legion, said that although the day's events were horrific, it “galvanized this country to make us the great country that it is. We stood up against tyranny. And it started in Hawaii at Pearl Harbor, but continued through World War II, where we fought against Adolf Hitler and his Nazi regime.”

Congresswoman Honors Pearl Harbor Survivor



Crowley-Barnum American Legion Post 25 in Mohawk hosted a special event in December honoring Thomas Strayer Nelson of Ilion, a 100-year-old Pearl Harbor survivor. Congresswoman Claudia Tenney (*center in photo*) presented his family with an official copy of the congressional record recognizing his heroism. She also presented the Nelson family with an American flag that had flown over the U.S. Capitol. Nelson was a 19-year-old sailor assigned to

the USS Wasmuth in Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, when the Japanese launched their attack, Tribune News Service reported. “He immediately jumped into action to defend the Wasmuth, its crew and other lives. Nearly a year later, the Wasmuth, a World War I destroyer that was converted to a minesweeper in 1940, was knocked off its tracks by two mines in the Pacific. The Wasmuth sank, but its 134-man crew was rescued, in large part due to Nelson’s efforts.”

MILFORD POST IS COVID TESTING SITE

MILFORD -- Milford American Legion Post 1566 became one of new state-run COVID-19 test sites on Dec. 29.

And it was busy from day one. Otsego County Board of Representatives

Chair David Bliss told the *Oneonta Daily Star* that 250 people were tested Dec. 29. That translated to about 30 per hour, he said.

“There was a steady stream of people all day,” Bliss told the newspaper.

“While I was there I saw people of all ages getting tested.”

The site offered both the rapid and PCR (polymerase chain reaction) tests. It was open Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 8 a.m. to

5 p.m. and Saturdays from 8 a.m. to noon.

The Milford testing site was one of 13 sites that Gov. Kathy Hochul announced would be set up around the state to address the surge in COVID-19 cases.

PARADE CELEBRATES VET’S 100TH BIRTHDAY

A drive-by salute celebrated Legionnaire Herbert Rosenberg’s 100th birthday at his Long Island home in Rockville Centre.

The World War II veteran survived over a year in Nazi captivity.

The birthday parade included Rockville Centre firefighters, Nassau County police and veterans.

“I’m in tears; I never expected anything like this,” Rosenberg told the *Long Island Herald*.

Frank Colon, commander of Rockville Centre American Legion Post 303, helped organize the event for his fellow post member.

He told the *Long Island Herald* about the many incredible experiences of

just listening to Rosenberg’s story.

“He’s an inspiration,” Colon said. “He’s like a treasure chest of history of this country, which we need to continue.”

FALLEN DUNKIRK HERO'S DOG TAG FOUND

by JOHN D'AGOSTINO, Dunkirk Post-Journal

DUNKIRK — A piece of history tied to a fallen World War II Dunkirk native has been found by a museum in Maryland. The dog tag of U.S. Army Pvt. Frank Acquavia was one of about 10 found on Corregidor Island in the Philippines by a counselor who works for a Christian organization in the Philippines.

According to Butch Maisel, founder and curator of The Center for Military History that is part of the Boys Latin School of Maryland in Baltimore, the tags were then given to a Christian missionary from the United States, who then gave them to Maisel for his museum. Maisel reached out to The Post-Journal knowing that these items need to go to the families.

Former **American Legion Post 1344** in Dunkirk on Lake

Shore Drive West was named after Acquavia, who died May 10, 1942, as a prisoner of Japan. His body was never recovered. He had been serving with the 59th Coast Artillery Regiment, according to the book, "No One Forgets," which was written by George Burns III and Richard Titus. Acquavia lived at 53 E. Second St., and was the son of Mr. and Mrs. Rocco Acquavia.

He was captured in Corregidor during the opening days of the war in the Pacific. "The Japanese herded some Americans down to a seaplane landing area," the book noted. "Frank went to retrieve or find food that was hidden at their battery. A Japanese guard spotted him and opened fire with a machine gun killing him instantly. This was witnessed by Jim Rossoto of Fredonia."



VALLEY STREAM POST HOSTS 'ANCHOR' DANCE

Valley Stream American Legion Post 854 hosted residents from the Town of Hempstead's ANCHOR program for a night of dinner and dancing in November, *Long Island Herald* reported.

ANCHOR stands for Answering the Needs of Citizens with Handicaps through Organized Recreation.

For 40 years, the American Legion has held the ANCHOR dance for handi-

capped teens and adults. Boy Scout Troop 116 and Girl Scout Troop 99 helped to prep the banquet hall for the dance and dished out refreshments to guests.

Post Vice Commander Jose Santana told the news-

paper: "This is the American Legion... We support these children and these adults, and we support anything that has to do with the community. We love our community."

ADAMS LEGION HELPS PACK DINNERS FOR SENIORS

ADAMS, N.Y. - Community members showed love to senior citizens in the South Jefferson area, *WWNY TV* reported on Dec. 4.

At **Don Rounds Ameri-**

can Legion Post 586 in Adams, volunteers packed more than 400 bags of goodies for the "Sixtown Chamber Senior Citizens Dinner."

Each bag contained a

turkey dinner, a card and ornament, and a cookie.

The delivered dinner is the legacy of the late Helen Whitney, who started delivering Christmas dinners to shut-ins 45 years ago.

"Her family and the South Jeff Chamber of Commerce continue that tradition with the help of volunteers and donations..."

The meals were delivered by 30 volunteer drivers.

PDC JOHN SAMPSON ENTERS POST EVERLASTING

Past Department Commander John B. Sampson, 72, of Salamanca died January 25, 2022 at Olean General Hospital after battling both dementia and sundowners syndrome.

“John will be missed,” noted Department Adjutant James Casey, “but we have his lifelong dedication to veterans as a service officer and his dedication to the cardinal principles of the American Legion to remember him.”

John served in the U.S. Navy from August 1967 through February 1972, with assignments on the USS Freemont, APA44, and at the Randolph Air Force Base in San Antonio, TX as part of a joint military com-

mand. He was honorably discharged with the rank of 2nd Class Personnel Man (E5).

He made his mark as an accredited director of Veterans Affairs with the Veterans Service Office for Cattaraugus County, holding the position for 22 years.

A member of Hughes-Skiba Post 535, he held positions at all levels of the Legion. He was past-president of the NYS Veterans Service Office Association and a founder of the Cattaraugus-Allegany Joint Veterans Council volunteer-run service. He had been named to the NYS Veterans Hall of Fame by Senator Cathy Young.



NEW BASEBALL CHAIRMAN APPOINTED

by GREG GAETA

The New York State American Legion Baseball Program has a new chairman -- Mike Macchione of Adrean Post 625 in Utica.

This is news because for the past 30 years, there have been essentially two men that have held this position. William Salisbury (Utica Post 229) was Department Baseball chairman for 15 years until his death in 2006, then Bruce Mayfield (Brounshidle Post 205) took over in 2008 for a 13-year run.

Mike is no newcomer to American Legion Baseball, having been involved

with the Adrean Post 625 program for more than 45 years. For a number of years Mike and Adrean Post hosted the state tournaments at Murnane Field's Donovan Stadium in Utica.

In a farewell message, Bruce thanked coaches, managers and Legionnaires for their “dedication to American Legion Baseball and our youth of New York.”

He praised Junior Program Director Greg Gaeta, Senior Program Director Rob Fitzpatrick and offered special thanks to departing Vice Chairman



Joe Flynn. Both Bruce and Joe extended their best wishes to the new chairman and his staff.

GRAND ISLAND POST, METHODIST WOMEN DONATE TO VA

Patients at Buffalo VA Hospital enjoyed gifts of toiletry items in time for Christmas, thanks to the efforts of Trinity United Methodist Women (UMW) and Grand Island American Legion Post 1346.

The effort was organized by Trinity UMW and supported by Post 1346.

Packed in decorated gift bags, the items included toothpaste, toothbrushes, deodorant, lip balm, Kleenex, wipes, body lotion shampoo/body wash, combs and shaving cream.

The bags were assembled at Pat Shaw's home along with Ellie Zarbo, Baye Ellison, Sheila Colan, Anastasia Pikas, Sharon Nichols, Margaret Giles, and Mina Atkinson.

The Trinity UMW has been doing this since 2005 and has delivered more than



FROM LEFT: Post Service Officer Jim Sharpe, Post Commander Ray DeGlopper, Pat Shaw, Sheila Colan and Rich Bonarek. Not shown is Dan Brown who delivered the decorated bags to the VA hospital.

3,000 bags to the VA Hospital.

“The women are to be commended for such a worth-

while commitment,” noted Post Service Officer Jim Sharpe.

“Typically, this is done

four times a year with the American Legion Post 1346 donating to this project over the past few years.”

LEGIONNAIRES BECOME ‘OLD NEWSBOYS’

SYRACUSE -- Members of Mattydale American Legion Post 1832 turned into “Old Newsboys” on Dec. 10 and 11 to raise money for the 90th annual Hope for the Holidays fundraiser, which raises money to buy

toys, books and food for The Christmas Bureau’s annual pre-Christmas giveaway.

The primary method of collecting money is for teams of people to “sell” special editions of The Post-Standard

in return for donations at locations throughout Syracuse and its suburbs.

The newspaper quoted circulation operations director Tom Brown as saying that Mattydale American Legion fielded one of the larger teams.

CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION AT STRATTON VA A SUCCESS

American Legion Virgil E. Deyo Post 1327 and Auxiliary Unit 1327 of Prattsville, along with a multitude of other volunteers, made the 20th Annual Christmas Celebration at the Stratton VA Medical Center in Albany, “a successful show of love and appreciation for hospitalized veter-

ans,” *hudsonvalley360.com* reported.

Even though they were not allowed to visit patients in person with the COVID upsurge, a contingent brought gifts to the VA on Dec. 13, “supplying their every wish and stocking their crafts and entertainment centers”.

Those making the trip to the VA included: “Arnold and Diana Jaeger, Johannes and Marianne Krauss, Cathy Martino and Dana Hommel, Gerri Barry, Laurie Gustin and Patty Gustin (three Auxiliary members from Conesville) and Bob and Ginny Gurley.”

Salute to Veterans



The Department of New York was back in formation for the 2021 Veterans' Day Parade in New York City. BELOW: Department Commander Frank LaMarsh and Past Department Commander Frank Peters take a moment with one of the Tango Alpha Lima podcasters prior to the start of the parade. Photos by Holly Soria / The American Legion.

