

WORLD'S LARGEST VETERANS ORGANIZATION



New Jersey LEGIONNAIRE



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Summer 2026

Channel Changed to Gladden

Will You Be The Light & Part of the Posse?

Convention Report
Follow the Chain of Command
Affordable Housing Update

Your 2026-27 Officers
Post Scripts
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COMMANDER'S MESSAGE

Well NJ Legionnaires, Legion Family and Friends... Here we Go!

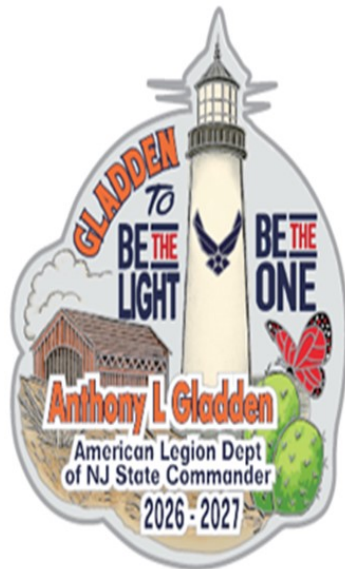


June 12, 2026, marked the beginning of our new NJ Legion year and we hit the ground running with fresh new outlooks on how we plan to move into the future. As we travel around our great Garden State, we are in awe of the amazing people and the things they are doing in the community. I can feel the spirit as we engage not only just with our Legion members, but with members of the Auxiliary, Sons of the Legion, The Legion Riders and members of the community that work along with us as we do the business of The Legion.

When we took office, we made it clear from the start that we wanted to have fun while we work hard for our organization. We introduced a new battle cry for the NJ American Legion Family. A battle cry is defined in a figurative sense, as a motto, phrase or slogan used to inspire a group. It is chanted or printed on signs to drum up support for a campaign, movement or ideological goal. **"GLADDEN to Be the LIGHT to Be THE ONE"** is our battle cry for 2026-2027.

During my inaugural address, I introduced to our NJ Legion Family my philosophy on what we are: we are Beacons of Light. I referenced a lighthouse. You see, a lighthouse is a tower or other structure containing a beacon light to warn or guide ships at sea. As the largest and best veterans service organization out there, we have always been that light. We have always been there to guide folks who need help. We are the ONES to ensure that our veterans and their families are connected to something. We have BEEN the LIGHT for more than a century. I ask that we recognize the roles we play as advocates for veterans, families, children & youth, national defense, Americanism and, what gets forgotten the most, *OURSELVES*.

Our dept. officers, our NEC and ANEC, as well as our dept. staff are ready to do what is right for our Legion and everyone associated with it. We ask that you be kind and follow directives as they are sent out. Be timely with all information we need, to ensure every post gets what they need to handle business. Keep in mind, for us to serve you, YOU will need to turn in your post officer forms, Consolidated Post Reports and any other documents required by dept. HQ. Membership needs to be done in a timely matter, as well. We average over two thousand Legion members lost every year. This greatly impacts our ability to serve our members and veterans around NJ. Our Call for action this year is **"Don't FAKE the FUNK on Membership"**. Do you want to be part of the MEMBERSHIP POSSE?



A posse is a group of people who have come together for a shared purpose, often to assist in an emergency or to hunt down a fugitive. We all can agree the decline in Legion membership is indeed an emergency. We need membership to become a Legion Family mission. We ask that all facets of the Legion Family learn what it takes to gain members for each other: Legion recruiting ALA and SAL; ALA and SAL recruiting for the Legion. We can all help to increase our entire NJ Legion Family together and stop the slide. Do we include our existing members in what we are doing? How do we do this, you ask? Time to invite folks out for some fun! And guess what? The fun can be visiting other posts and enjoying something new together with our ALA, SAL and Legion Riders. We have seen that if we have fun with members, they are more inclined to volunteer to be part of something interesting that the Legion has in one of our over 90 programs. Engaging in fun can lead to folks joining committees and volunteering to help our Legion Family. So, are you part of the **Membership Posse?**

As we travel through the state, I have addressed thousands already, with visits to NJ Boys State, High Point, Sarge Walk, America 250 Celebrations at Post 18 and Post 129, as well as social visits to a few posts. I was able to join in the celebration of SAL Member Charlie from Post 232 as he graduated from high school and left for army boot camp. I have watched this young man grow up and am glad to welcome him to the brother and sisterhood of those of us who defended our nation. I am equally proud to welcome our newest and youngest member to the NJ American Legion.

Please, be mindful that we all are part of the Legion Family for a reason. Be mindful of that reason as you do the work. I know that at times it can be trying, just remember to Keep on Pushing. So, put on your seatbelts everyone; and do not forget to enjoy the ride.

BE THE ONE

Cover photo: New Dept. Commander Anthony "Tony" Gladden (left) receives his Dept. Commander pin from PDC Dan Channel, June 12, 2026, 12:33 p.m., Wildwood, NJ.

New Jersey Legionnaire

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SEND ALL NEWS ARTICLES in Word Format & DIGITAL PHOTOS TO:
g.cooper@njamericanlegion.org, include phone number.

****Do not send anything in pdf format****

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 Autumn issue is October 1, 2026

Adjutant's Column

John D. Baker
Department Adjutant
Tel. 609-695-5418



Air Force veteran Commander Dan Channel flew all over NJ this past year maintaining sharp eyes on all posts within The American Legion, Dept. of NJ. He fulfilled his assigned mission with honor and upheld Air Force standards for all NJ Legionnaires to be proud of.

On June 12, a KC-46 flew over Wildwood and did a refueling run, as Commander Channel relinquished his flight to fellow Air Force veteran Anthony "Tony" Gladden, who will continue the mission of overseeing The American Legion, Dept. of NJ for the 2026/27 Legion year.

Commander Gladden is a 17-year member of Post 455, New Egypt, Ocean County. His theme is "GLADDEN TO BE THE LIGHT TO BE THE ONE", while challenging all members "DON'T FAKE THE FUNK ON MEMBERSHIP".

In addition to Commander Gladden, your officers for the 2026-2027 Legion year are as follows:

NEC: Eugene O'Grady (232-Ocean),
ANEC: Michael Wilson (19-Hudson),
DVC: Joseph Fricker (174-Passaic) Dist. 1: Bergen, Essex, Hudson, Passaic, Union,
DVC: Dennis Duddie (170-Bergen) Dist. 2: Hunterdon, Morris, Sussex, Warren,
DVC: Randy Grizzard (3-Union) Dist. 3: Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, Somerset,
DVC: Ezell Jackson (336-Burlington) Dist. 4: Atlantic, Burlington, Cape May, Ocean,
DVC: Frank Landis (455-Ocean) Dist. 5: Camden, Cumberland, Gloucester, Salem,
Adjutant: John D. Baker (120-Hunterdon),
Chaplain: Geraldine McManus (228-Passaic),
FO: Larry Platt (5-Union),
Historian: Jeffrey Golden (87-Middlesex),
JA: Daniel Dunn (87-Middlesex),
MAA: Joseph Lapointe (455-Ocean),
SO: Judith Morales (227-Passaic).

The following dates and locations have been approved for upcoming DEC meetings at 9 a.m.:

Aug. 15 Post 455, New Egypt,
Oct. 17 Post 129, Toms River,
Dec. 5 Post 148, Hightstown,

Feb. 6 Post 336, Burlington,
Apr. 10 Post 455, New Egypt,
Jun. 9 Wildwoods Convention Center 3 p.m.

On behalf of the entire Dept. of NJ, we thank PDC Channel for a great year and we wish Commander Gladden blue skies and fair weather.

Revised Legion

NEC Eugene O'Grady, Chair



On behalf of the committee, we would like to congratulate all the officers who served under Past Department Commander Dan Channel. It was a pleasure to serve with you during your successful term.

To Commander Anthony Gladden and his newly elected officers, we are here to serve you in the new roles which you have assumed. We look forward to working with you and to strive to improve our NJ American Legion.

There will be no changes to the committee, and I thank the following for remaining in their roles, Vice Chair Michael Wilson, Secretary DEC Andrea Adair, JA PDC Dan Dunn, PNVC Chuck Robbins, PNEC Berley Hanna Jr., PDC Larry Bishop, PDC Frank Calandrillo, PDC Fisher, PDC Ted Howarth, PDC Ray Miller, DEC Will Kramer.

As always, if there are any suggestions or concerns, feel free to submit using the proper chain of command. To be clear, submit it through your post commander who will forward to your county commander. The county will submit it via the dept. executive committee person (DEC). All violations of the chain of command will be addressed swiftly.

We are all in this together and are better together. Thank you all for your service and what you do for The American Legion.

Chain of Command Policy & Procedure

We have all served in the military, so we all should know what the "chain of command" is and means, especially with regard to solving an issue or complaint. To provide guidance to post members on how to delineate authority and reporting relationships and to ensure that all members adhere to the

established chain of command when performing their assigned duties this guide was established.

APPLICABILITY

These procedures shall apply to all post, county and dept. members, volunteers, office staff and interns, and any others who provide and conduct business on behalf of The American Legion, Dept. of NJ.

For the purpose of this procedure, the following definitions apply:

CHAIN OF COMMAND: An official hierarchy of authority that dictates who is in charge of whom and whose permission must be sought for official actions to be taken. The line of succession, authority and reporting obligation, which all post members regardless of position within the dept. must follow.

A chain of command is an aspect of organizational structure that is meant to show a clear line of responsibility from the top position to the bottom. A chain of command is established so that all post, county and dept. members know whom they should report to and what responsibilities are expected at that level.

Organizational Charts

An organizational chart is a visual communication tool that starts at the post level and follows through the chain of command to the dept. level. The organizational chart of The American Legion, Dept. of NJ is:

LEVELS OF AUTHORITY

- ⇒ Post Commander
- ⇒ Post Adjutant
- ⇒ Post Judge Advocate
- ⇒ County Commander
- ⇒ County Adjutant
- ⇒ County Judge Advocate
- ⇒ Department Adjutant
- ⇒ Department JA
- ⇒ Department DEC

PROCEDURES

1. All issues at the Post level will stay within the post, there are procedures in our constitution and bylaws as well as the *Officer Manual*, which is online and available for download, of the procedures to bring members up on charges or to suspend the charter of a post. **AT NO TIME IS ANY MEMBER ALLOWED TO CONTACT THE NATIONAL JUDGE ADVOCATE; THEY MUST REACH OUT TO THE COUNTY OR DEPARTMENT JUDGE ADVOCATE.** The post commander or post adjutant is expected to provide each member with clear lines of responsibility and maintain communication at all levels.

2. All post, county members shall adhere to the chain of command and attempt to resolve issues at the dept. level.
3. All posts and counties are to adhere to these procedures when reporting incidents and concerns to their respective post commander, post adjutant, post judge advocate or county commander, county adjutant or county judge advocate within the chain of command of each post or county, as set out in the organizational chart.
4. Members shall adhere to verbal and written directions communicated through their designated chain of command in the performance of their duties.
5. All members must understand, recognize and determine when official communications and transactions must be cleared through the proper chain of command. When in doubt regarding this requirement, the member shall consult with their post commander, post adjutant or post judge advocate as indicated on the organizational chart.
6. Employees seeking to file a complaint against an immediate member or member of the post command shall submit their complaint to the next supervisor in their chain of command as indicated on the organizational chart.
7. Delegation of authority: If the post commander is absent from duty or is otherwise unable to carry out their duties and responsibilities, then the post vice commander shall be the appropriate designee. The delegated designee shall not have the authority to make decisions regarding personnel or major program changes.
8. For complaints involving sexual harassment, employees shall follow the Sexual Harassment Procedures available on dept.'s website or in the officers manual in charges against an individual member or members.
9. Failure of an employee to follow these procedures may result in further disciplinary action such as "unbecoming a member of The American Legion".

Membership

Sophia Dmoch, Chair



My fellow Legionnaires, it's been an honor and a privilege to serve as your membership chair this past year under Dept. Commander Dan Channel's leadership and Team Channel. I sincerely thank him for this opportunity and ap-

pointment. Team Channel did an excellent job focusing on their roles as the membership experts throughout their districts.

As of June 28, our dept. reported 28,032 members, representing 93.75% of the 2026 target of 29,900. Our retention rate stands at 90.59%. We are ranked 41 nationally among 55 depts. and 7th in the northeast. Unfortunately, we only achieved four of our target goals and have not reached our final goal of 100% by May 13. We fell short by 1,868. What does this mean? It suggests that posts relied solely on their current membership rosters to renew members and did not actively pursue outreach opportunities within their communities.

If we continue at this rate, our membership will keep shrinking each year, making it even harder for posts to sustain their programs. As of Sep. 30, 2024, there were 295,749 veterans living in NJ, but we still can't reach our yearly goal, which is significantly lower than the actual number of veterans in our state. We need to think outside the box and contact our team for assistance.

Does membership ever stop? The answer is "NO." Although we didn't reach our final goal by May 13, please continue processing memberships whenever you receive a renewal or a new member. If we pick up those phones, hit the streets and use your elevator speech to explain why they should join The American Legion, we can achieve next year's goal.

Membership cards are out; do not hold them; either process them online immediately or mail them in the traditional way. The preferred method is to process them online, so we get instant credit toward the membership goal for the new year.

Team Gladden is eager to start their membership training throughout the dept. Please, be patient, dates of membership workshops are forthcoming and will be posted once dates and locations have been confirmed.

For further assistance or training needs, don't hesitate to contact the membership team. Upon request, they will come to you. They are making a collaborative effort to support everyone's membership needs. Additional resources are available on mylegion.org, and materials can be obtained from emblemsales.org.

In closing, remember: BE THE ONE to break the chain of veteran suicide:

- ❖ To ask a veteran in your life how they are doing.
- ❖ To listen when a veteran needs to talk.

- ❖ To reach out when a veteran is struggling.

It takes just one person to help save a veteran's life. You can be the one. To learn more, go to www.betheone.org.

Affordable Housing for At-risk/Homeless Veterans

Jim Scanlon, Chair



To our American Legion leadership, community partners, donors and stakeholders:

On behalf of The American Legion, Dept. of NJ Committee on Affordable Housing for Homeless, At-Risk and Aging Veterans, I want to express my sincere gratitude for your continued part-

nership and commitment to those who have served our nation.

After careful consideration, we have made the decision to postpone the 2026 American Legion Seventh Annual Symposium on Providing Affordable Housing for Homeless, At-Risk and Aging Veterans. Rather than holding the symposium this year, we will reschedule the event for 2027. This decision was not made lightly. Our committee has reached a pivotal point in its mission. Over the next 18 months, our full attention and resources will be dedicated to raising the capital necessary to complete six affordable veteran housing developments currently being built on American Legion properties throughout NJ.

Our priority is clear: to finish what we started.

These developments are more than construction projects. They represent a promise to veterans who are homeless, at risk of homelessness or facing the challenges of aging without stable housing. They are investments in dignity, independence and hope, providing permanent homes where veterans can live safely and with the respect they earned through their service.

The progress we have achieved, to date, has only been possible because of the extraordinary commitment of our community partners, elected officials, veteran service organizations, philanthropic foundations, financial institutions, developers, volunteers and individual donors. Your belief in this mission has transformed an ambitious vision into projects that are becoming a reality.

As we move forward, we, respectfully, ask for your continued support. Whether through financial contributions, sponsorships, grants, professional expertise or

introductions to prospective partners, your involvement will help ensure these six projects reach completion and begin serving veterans in need.

When we gather, again, in 2027 for our annual symposium, we look forward to celebrating, not only innovative ideas and partnerships, but the successful completion of projects that will change lives for generations of veterans and their families.

Thank you for standing beside us in this mission. Together, we are creating lasting solutions to veteran homelessness and demonstrating what can be accomplished when communities unite in service to those who have served us all.

National Media Respects and Supports NJ

Bob Looby, PDC

National Honorary Member of the Employment & Homeless Commission



The title of this article is a profound statement, but is substantiated by the many Employment & Homeless legion.org post, magazine articles and within annual reports. There have been 79 articles since we re-engineered the

dept. committee, including for this year, four regarding employment, the dedicated Casino Career Fair, and three relating to our homeless endeavors, the Atlantic City Stand Down. See the communications published by dept. HQ for further details and listed below.

- * [In 10th year, New Jersey stand down continues to help homeless veterans | The American Legion.](#)
- * [Hundreds attend New Jersey casino career fair | The American Legion.](#)
- * [Department of New Jersey part of annual Casino Career Fair | The American Legion.](#)
- * [New Jersey wants to help end veteran homelessness nationwide | The American Legion.](#)
- * [Department of New Jersey creating more housing for homeless, at-risk veterans | The American Legion.\)](#)
- * [Annual stand down coming to Atlantic City | The American Legion.](#)
- * [Department of New Jersey part of annual Casino Career Fair | The American Legion.](#)

National gets it right by supporting our national leading efforts for many years with our 2026 dedicated Casino Career Fair with the following excerpt from a legion.org post, "Some 400 jobseekers attended the 9th Annual NJ Casino Career Fair, an event which the Dept. of NJ has managed since the beginning. This was another successful career fair for our vets and families, which has drawn over 1,600 job seekers in its nine years. Thanks to many, including our partner the NJ Casino Control Commission Chair James Plousis and team, and ongoing partner providers the NJ State Parole Board, the VA, DVA, Camden Catholic Charities and more." All nine AC Casinos participated with over 1,200 job openings.

Additionally, they reported: "This year's South Jersey Regional Stand Down helped 108 veterans with employment information, VA benefits and more. This was the 10th year for the event, created and presented by the Dept. of NJ. This year's event took place May 20 at the All-Wars Memorial Soldiers Home, Atlantic City. Along with Legion support, providers including the national and state Dept. of Veterans Affairs; Catholic Charities; the state's Casino Control Commission, Parole and Dept. of Corrections (NJDOC) Military and Veterans Committee; doctors and clinicians; and more assisted veterans with benefits claims, housing options, clothing and more. As with veteran suicide, homelessness is an ongoing mission, said Past Dept. Commander and founder of the Stand Down Bob Looby." This event is now chaired by Patricia Tatum, president of the South Jersey Regional Stand Down, and Atlantic County DEC. We are so grateful for all volunteers, with the leading groups of escorts and ambassadors, including Walmart with 24, NJ DOC 14, Elks 13, Legion Family with 9, UPS with 5, and many other individuals. Additionally, Walmart has been the largest financial donor to our event for seven years, previously recognized several times by dept.

Those national recognitions also include 26 Hiring Our Heroes Career Fairs with the US Chamber of Commerce, the most in The Legion; an additional 15 Resource Fairs by dept. teams; and two dedicated Career Fairs for NJ DOC. Add 10 Atlantic City Stand Downs (now a 501c3); nine dedicated Casino Career Fairs; 24 Boots To Business Workshops (most in The Legion); seven Mobile Stand Downs; and others. All these equate to 116 events with 11,485 veterans supported. They also result-

ed in six national first place Gutty Homeless Awards and two national first place Large Employer of the Year (first of two with 400 Longshoremen hired), also the most in The Legion, and the most national first place awards in NJ ever.

As a member of the NJDOC Military Services Liaison Committee, we will conduct and facilitate a repeat of our benefit fairs for correction officers and civilian staff (400+) employed by the DOC at their nine prisons. The first two fairs were on April 23 at DOC's HQ in Trenton, and Southwoods State Prison on June 11. Northern State Prison is scheduled for July 23, Bayside Sept. 24, with the remaining dates to follow.

We, again, will meet, mentor and present resources to soldiers in the Medical Hold Unit, awaiting discharge, for the fifth session on June 27, Sea Girt. We, including the VA's from Wilmington, Philly, NJ, and other providers, have now met with about 250 National Guard members offering all earned benefits, mental health, including housing and employment support. Pat Carney, VA Wilmington Peer Mentoring, Camaraderie and Support Program, spearheads this initiative. We will, also, continue our Keep Our Veterans Alive/Be the One (KOVA/BTO) events with the three VA Medical Centers' Community Engagement, Partnership and Suicide Teams, including monthly meetings, incorporating the national Governor Challenge initiative to prevent veteran suicides.

The Governor's Challenge is progressing, under the leadership of Dr. Sam Hayes, DVA, within three Priority Groups (PG). They include PG1, Identify Service Members, Veterans, and their Families and Screen for Suicide Risk, led by me; PG2, Promote Connectedness and Improve Care Transitions, led by VA Wilmington's Pat Carney and Jaime Kazmarck; PG3, Increase Lethal Means Safety and Safety Planning, led by NJ DHS. PG1's mission is to contact every agency which may encounter veterans and furnish them with pertinent questions for their mental health and suicide risk factors and needed services.

Future planning includes:

A Mobile Stand Down in Oct.; further DOC Correction Officers Benefit Fairs at Northern State Prison on July 23; Edna Mahan in August; Bayside State Prison on Sept. 24; Mid-State, Garden State, East Jersey, ADTC, NJ State Prison, TBD.

Other Stand Downs we support are South Jersey (Cherry Hill) on Sept. 24; Newark on Oct. 17.

As published in a previous Employment, Homeless & Education policy, it is the responsibility of every member, post and county to implement these award-winning programs. If you need any assistance, please contact me anytime.

Kofoet Honored

Bob Looby, PDC

Secretary, South Jersey Regional Stand Down



We were proud to honor Bernie Kofoet (center) on May 9 at Legion Post 281, Gloucester Twp. for his extraordinary work with the dept.'s and Camden County Employment and Homeless Committee's efforts since April 2013. This is when we conducted the first of three Hiring Our Heroes career fairs at the Camden Bank Center, after several preceding US Chamber of Commerce and Legion events across the state. Bernie's efforts were further compounded with his leadership and physical work with the Atlantic City stand down for nine years. He was the draftsman for the COVID related mobile stand downs, to efficiently locate 20+ service providers at every event, and the SJRSD volunteer chair, along with partner and incoming National SAL Vice Commander Henry F. Hasselhan. He also reinvigorated the Camden County veteran organization committee serving all county vets. Bernie, Jane Babli and the Camden Legion Family, also led all dept. counties with homeless veteran data for our six National First Place Homeless Awards. I could continue, but I think you, the readers of this article, get the idea of Bernie's value-add to our vets and The American Legion. Bernie Kofoet is one of those advocates who can never be replaced! Patricia Tatum (right in photo), Atlantic County DEC and chair of the South Jersey Regional Stand Down partnered with the presentation.

2026 Convention Report

The Dept. of NJ's 107th Convention in Wildwood was one of the warmest in many years with temperatures in the low 90's, perfect for beach goers, as well as the 387 delegates assembled in the air conditioned conference hall. Commander Dan Channel called the convention to order with standard ritual at 8:30 a.m. on Thursday, June 11.

Following addresses of welcome from Louis M. Belasco, director of the Greater Wildwood Tourism Improvement & Development Authority and Joseph Franco, Jr., deputy mayor of the Borough of Wildwood Crest, Adjutant John Baker read the Official Call to Convention at 9:09 a.m. Credentials Committee Chair Robert Newell reported that of the 634 allowable delegates, 387 were registered.



Miss New Jersey Belle Nicholas (right in photo with Commander Channel), sang the National Anthem, then addressed the delegates. At the age of six her dream was to be a Broadway star. To that end, she attended James Madison University earning Bachelor of Arts in Musical Theatre. She explained how being diagnosed with a condition that caused her to unexpectedly pass out and the stress of graduating from West Deptford High School "created an anxiety and depression loop for me, which led to an intense battle with suicidal thoughts. Mental health became a huge factor in my story around this time, an obstacle that I overcome time and time again. Since then, I have learned how to manage my anxiety. Three words saved my life," she said, "I need help. Upon graduating from James Madison, I found my heart in a different place. I loved theatre, but I was feeling called to work in mental health. I left my childhood dream behind, and began to formulate a new one." She received a PhD from Widener University in the Institute of Graduate Clinical Psychology. She founded the program Shout Our Struggle. It is now a statewide initiative reaching over 5,000 people in just four years.

Lawrence Schmidt, chief development officer of RevolutionNJ, then explained the role of the

group in telling the story of NJ in the American Revolution. It is a multi-year celebration. Learn more at www.rev.nj.org.

Paul Evans of American Legion Gaming discussed using gaming to get younger veterans into The American Legion. "We need to engage younger veterans. Traditional methods don't resonate with all generations." Not only is the group looking to make gaming a program of The American Legion, but also trying to start an on-line post!



In his report on public relations, Chair PDC Steve Fisher (right), played a message from National Commander Dan Wiley and presented Carl Ostergaard (center), Post 228, Springfield, Union County, with the newsletter award.

Membership awards were next, presented by Chair Sophia Dmoch and National Membership Coordinator Mark Woodsal. The Golden Bowl went to Passaic County, a Chicken in a Bucket Award went to District #3 SVP John Warhurst. Post 401 received the 110% Award.

Karen Flaherty-Oxler, director, VA Philadelphia, encouraged everyone to enroll with VA Healthcare. "Philadelphia gets a five star rating," caring for over 69,000 veterans, she noted. "We are here for you, and to support each of you and your families."

Robert Buccino, commander of the Disabled American Veterans thanked the crowd "for all your hard work. As commander I had two goals: improved parking at East Orange (VA hospital) and transportation."

The report of the Sons of The American Legion (SAL) Committee began with a video about the SAL and Robert Phillips, NEC, bringing greetings from National Commander William "Bill" Clancy III and introducing National Vice Commander of the Northeast Region Jeremy Re-

bel. Committee Chair Anthony Gladden introduced Henry Hasselhan as leading candidate for SAL national vice commander and, that at the spring meeting, Jeffrey Hicks was deemed a candidate for SAL national commander.

Following the SAL, Auxiliary President Trish Muller greeted the delegates, discussed her state project in a few words and introduced NEC Margaret McMahon and her officers.

Program honors were next.



Boys State: From left, Commander Dan Channel, Senator Christopher Kahwaty, Senator Vincent Price, Lt. Gov. William Capizzi, Gov. Zaydan Lalani, PNEC Berley Hanna, Jr.



Baseball: Past Chair PDC Frank Calandrillo (center) was recognized for his years chairing the committee by PNEC Berley Hanna, Jr. (left) and Commander Dan Channel.



Scouting: Parker DelSasso (center), Troop 76, Ringwood was named Eagle Scout of the Year. Pre-

sending the award was DVC John Warhurst (left) and Vice Chair David Snody.



Education & Scholarship: Thomas Ryan Scholarship winner was Jayden Connors (center), Post 79, Burlington. From left DVC John Warhurst, Acey Wilburn, VC Hector Quinones, Ezell Jackson.



Oratorical Contest: Winner was Diya Ranjun (center), Post 87, Woodbridge. From left: DVC John Warhurst, Chair Carl Ostergaard, Post 87 Commander Jeffrey Golden.



Safety: Loyka Challa was the winner of the Dr. Richard Stockton Safety Poster Contest. The blind student was sponsored by Post 401, South Brunswick. From left: DVC John Warhurst, Loyka, Bhavani Akula, Chair Joseph Becker.

George Diem Safety Essay Contest was won by Ella Thompson, sponsored by Post 528, White Township.



Americanism: Community Service Award was presented to Post 524, Cape May. From left DVC John Warhurst, Michelle Miller, Jack Hagan, Chair Frank Landis.



Americanism: From left, Chair Frank Landis, Michelle Miller, Law Enforcement Officer of the Year Theodore Kot, Jr., Roselle Park, Commander Dan Channel.



Americanism: From left, Michelle Miller, Chair Frank Landis, Msgt. Jose Galera, recipient of the Dept. Medal of Valor, Commander Dan Channel.

Employment, Homeless & Education: Chair Dennis Duddie announced that the Dept. of NJ won the 2026 Michael Guty Award from national. He presented awards to Matthew Maxwell, DVOP Award; Ingrid Macias, LVER Award; Kristi Connors, Local Office Award; Francesca DiPaola, Homes for Veterans, EHE Committee Homeless Prevention Award.

Affordable Housing: Chair James Scanlon presented awards to DVC Joel Bloom, SAL Commander William Murphy, Col. Dennis Dougherty and Cecilia Gonzalez, USVA Medical Center, Wilmington, DE.

At 1:37 p.m., Adjutant Baker opened the floor for nominations for officers for 2026-2027. PDC Charles "Andy" Jackson nominated Anthony "Tony" Gladden for department commander, as did PDC Daniel Dunn. Nominated for department vice commanders were Dennis Duddie, Joseph Fricker, Randy Grizzard, Ezell Jackson and Frank Landis.

The Friday, June 12 meeting was called to order by Commander Channel at 8:32 a.m. First up was PDC Jackson, chair of the Children & Youth Committee, who reported that SAL members will be able to apply for Temporary Financial Assistance (TFA) funds and that the allotment has been increased to \$2500. He also reported that the Dept. of NJ raised \$93,000 for Children's Organ Transplant Association (COTA) last year, including \$10,000 at the national convention in Tampa.

Rick Lofgren of COTA announced that NJ was the top dept. in the U.S. for fundraising and that COTA's 40th anniversary was April 2026. He introduced Joe (left in photo) and Sandy Mount and their son Ethan (center), helped by COTA.



The Mount's addressed the convention three years ago. Sandy gave an update on Ethan and noted the huge expenses facing families without COTA's help. "By lessening the burden on families, you improve their lives, reduce stress and even reduce divorces." A special edition New York Yankees 100th Anniversary American Legion Baseball cap was auctioned off for \$340. Winner was Louis Osorio, Post 99, Kearny, Hudson County (photo above right).



That day, \$64,464 was donated to COTA.

Hospital Committee awards were presented by Walter Zjawin. Pictured below are, from left, Commander Dan Channel, Middlesex County Commander William "Bill" Baum, Chair Walter Zjawin, Post 87 Commander Jeffrey Golden.



Finance Committee Chair Larry Platt explained the financial challenges faced, including starting the year with a \$200,000 deficit resulting in program reductions. "There is no deficit projected for next year," he said.

Vincent Solomeno, commissioner of the NJ Dept. of Veterans Affairs, noted that Gov. Mikie Sherrill was the first woman veteran to lead a state in the U.S. He said that the new Dept. of Veterans Affairs was an elevation and has a different perspective on delivering services to veterans and their families. He pointed out that the BG William C. Doyle Veterans Memorial Cemetery was the busiest state veterans cemetery in the U.S. "In NJ, it's a law that veterans get top priority for available Section 8 housing. The Bringing Veterans Home program has enabled the state to achieve "functional zero" for homeless veterans, meaning fewer are becoming homeless than getting housing. "Homelessness is

not going away," he added, "but it's manageable. In a state whose motto is "Liberty & Prosperity" there's no reason a veteran should not have a place to sleep overnight." Solomeno (right in photo) and BG Derek Routt presented Commander Channel with the NJ Civilian Commendation Medal.



Gov. Sherrill proclaimed June 12 as Women Veterans Recognition Day in NJ. Before a special ceremony presenting over 25 women veterans with various state military service medals, BG Derek B. Rault, commander of the NJ Air National Guard thanked The Legion for the impact of the Be the One program and added "today we say a special thank you to our women veterans."

Election of officers commenced at 11:45 a.m., with Adjutant Baker casting a single ballot for all nominees. New officers were installed by NEC Eugene O'Grady at 12:33 p.m.



Past Auxiliary President Charline Gladden places the Dept. Commander cap on her husband, new Dept. Commander Anthony "Tony" Gladden, as his sister, Inetha, looks on.

Outgoing Commander Channel's remarks: As I stand before you for the final time, I'm filled with gratitude, humility and pride. Serving the veterans, service members and the communities of this great state has been one of the highest honors in my life. This past year has been a journey of service, fellowship and unwavering commitment to the principles upon which our organization was founded. Togeth-

er we have strengthened our posts, welcomed new members, supported our youth programs, advocated for veterans, and continued our mission of service to God and country. No accomplishment during this term belongs to any one individual. Every success reflects dedication of our county commanders, post commanders, post officers, committee members, the volunteers and the entire American Legion Family. Your hard work, sacrifice and devotion have made our achievements possible.

As I reflect on my years as commander traveling throughout this great state, I had the privilege of meeting outstanding Legionnaires and visiting places I never would have experienced had I not been entrusted with the leadership of this remarkable organization. Along the way, I was reminded of President Dwight D. Eisenhower's words, "The supreme quality for leadership is unquestionably integrity." Leadership is ultimately about how we show up for one another and the values we demonstrate every single day.

A year ago I stood before you with humility and asked for your support to strengthen and grow the Dept. of NJ's Legion Family. At that moment, I hoped I was the right commander at the right time. Looking back I understand more fully the weight of that responsibility and the trust you placed in me; and I believe I was the right commander at the right time. This past year brought significant changes. We experienced some growing pains and we were required to make some difficult decisions, including raising dues, reducing dept. costs, and navigating the retirement of dept. service officer and my friend Ken Connors. He thanked his officers, staff, wife and Union County.

To new commander Gladden, you have my full support and best wishes.



PNEC Berley Hanna Jr. places the ceremonial cap on new Dept. Commander Anthony "Tony" Gladden.

Commander Gladden's acceptance speech: I ask you to picture a single beam of light cutting

through a night so thick you can barely see your own hands. That beam does many things and does them well. It guides, Guides us to a safe direction. It warns. Warns us of the dangers around us. It saves. Saves us from the darkness and gives us hope.

This Beacon of light comes from a lighthouse. A lighthouse is defined as a tower or other structure displaying or flashing a very bright light for the guidance of ships in avoiding dangerous areas and follow certain routes.

Now imagine if our New Jersey American Legion and Family organizations, was that lighthouse. If all the support we offer were Beams of Light. If every member, Legion, Auxiliary, Sons and Riders as a whole, were all beacons out in the darkness guiding our members, the community, children and, especially, veterans. If we all stood tall and solid, tall and solid, like that lighthouse. Do You know, we all have the power to be that beam; to be that beacon; to be that lighthouse, casting the light into the darkness. How can we do this you ask? I ask you all to be **"GLADDEN to Be the LIGHT"**.

The word gladden is a verb. "Gladden" is defined as the act of making someone glad or bringing someone joy and delight.

The word light is a noun. "Light" is defined as the natural agent that stimulates sight and makes things visible.

We can do this when we choose to "Be the ONE" and choose to be "Gladden to Be the Light".

The Ask

Time Is of the essence. I will say it again. Time is of the essence. I use this phrase, not as a slogan. I say this as an urgent truth.

My father told me time and time again as I was growing up "Time is of the Essence". As a kid I never understood the lesson he was trying to teach me.

I recall one Christmas my father gave me a watch. It was a TIMEX wristwatch. Remember their tag line: "It takes a licking and keeps on ticking". So now, picture this, I was a young boy in elementary school, this is like 1977 or 78. I was 7 or 8 years old. I was a tiny bodied boy with a large head. I was shaped like a spoon. I thought the watch made me a big boy. I wore that watch every day. My wrist was so small it did not fill the watch band. Nevertheless, wear it I did and proud I was. My father often would ask me "What time is it?" I would look at that TIMEX watch on my tiny little wrist and proudly read back the time. He would reply "Time

is of the essence." Of course, I would repeat this phrase back to my daddy, "Time is of the essence." The 7 or 8-year-old me had no idea what it meant, but I repeated this back with the conviction of a young boy enamored with his father. One day daddy asked me "What time is it?" I looked and my tiny little wrist and my TIMEX watch was not there. Man, I tore my bedroom apart looking for that TIMEX watch, but I never found it. I was devastated. I was heartbroken. As a grown man, thinking back, I imagine that my watch had to have slipped off my small wrist. I, this 7 or 8-year-old boy had literally lost TIME!

My father continued to instill in me that time was of the essence. What does time is of the essence mean? What it means is that every second counts, there's no time to waste. It's a race against time, time waits for no one, we all must act without haste, act with intelligence, and act with conviction.

The people who need our guidance are the folks who seek and need direction, those veterans who need reconnection. None of them can wait for our hesitance. Every delay steals a chance to be the light to educate, to heal, to restore purpose and to give hope. We must educate ourselves now, and, then, we must teach those who need it most.

We must continue to Bridge the Gap, reach out now, as **TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE**.

Educate to Empower

My parents were both big on education. They would say to my sister and me "Education is the key". We must always strive to be educated and to pass along what we have learned. We must use our experience to teach those that do not have experience. To educate is not to fill heads with facts. It is to light the fires of curiosity. We must educate someone how to navigate the storms and then hand them a lantern of their own. This will empower them to educate others.

Education must be practical, meaningful, compassionate and immediate. We teach skills and we teach dignity. We teach a story, and we listen to a story. When we educate with a sense of urgency, purpose and open hearts, we can build more light-houses.

Honor Veterans Through Service

Veterans are beacons of light. Veterans ALL carried burdens, that many that have not served, find hard to imagine or understand. Veterans have all navigated storms, many that we cannot or will not name.

To honor veterans, we must listen first, support second and never forget to include them, always. We must offer our fellow veterans, as well as our entire American Legion Family, mentorship. We all need to learn, then pass it along. We are only as strong as our weakest link. Strive to become stronger and then strengthen those around you. As my mother would say..."WE ARE BETTER TOGETHER".

Remember that no one understands a veteran like a veteran. We must share our resources. We must teach our Auxiliary, Sons of the Legion and our American Legion Riders how to sit with veterans and their families, listen to their stories until they feel whole again. Teach them how to talk with veterans. Teaching them these skills will inherently make us "Better Together". Conversely, we must also learn from our Auxiliary, Sons and Riders, as well. Trust that they can teach us what makes them a special part of what we do. This is how we shine the light to those who have walked with us. This is how we support the families that have supported us, the veteran.

Gladden to Be the Light

We must be "Gladden to be the Light", because light heals what secrecy fractures. Light reveals paths. Light invites people in and offers them a safe haven. "Gladden to be the Light" means choosing joy in service. It is choosing hope, instead of apathy. It is answering urgent calls, with steady hands and open hearts. This is being the essence in time.

Call to Action

Will you join us and stand as a lighthouse? Choose Be the Light.

- * Teach one skill every month to those who need it.
- * Reach out to a veteran and listen without agenda.
- * We ask you all to move one Legion program from plan to action before the year ends.

If you leave here with one resolve, let it be this: time will not wait for us. The Legion asks us to be the One. I say Be the light and be the light now. Being the Light will allow us all to Be the One.



Commander Gladden (left) received a gavel plaque from Louis Belasco, director of the Greater Wildwood Tourism Improvement & Development Authority.



From left: PDC Daniel Dunn, DVC Joe Fricker, Service Officer Judith Morales, DVC Dennis Duddie, Adjutant John Baker, DVC Randy Grizzard, Commander Anthony Gladden, DVC Frank Landis.

POST SCRIPTS

Post 43



The American Legion "Frank Patterson" Post 43, Florham Park, hosted several dozen active-duty members of the Marine Corps for a reception and cookout following a large-scale USMC ceremonial demonstration that took place at the high school in the neighboring town of Madison.

The July 2 event featured a performance by the 2nd Marine Division Band out of Camp Lejeune, NC; the USMC Silent Drill Platoon out of Marine Corps Barracks, Washington, D.C.; and a static display of the massive CH-53E "Sea Stallion" helicopter and a VH-22 "Osprey" tiltrotor aircraft.

After the event, the Marines went to the nearby Frank Patterson Post 43 for a BBQ, during which they paid tribute to long time post member, who served as former commander, vice commander and

adjutant, Bob Holtz, a proud USMC veteran whose name is inscribed on a plaque at the bar.

Pictured left, members of the 2nd Marine Division Band at the Post 43 pub following their musical performance in Madison. At far left, Post 43 Commander Andrew Dutton trades stories with the leathernecks and makes sure their cups remain full of ice-cold water and soda.

Post 232



The members of John Wesley Taylor American Legion Post 232 are proud to congratulate Victoria Valentic, granddaughter of former NJ Dept. Historian Robert Padavano, on being selected as a recipient of a 2026 American Legion Dept. of NJ education scholarship. In addition, Victoria was awarded the John Wesley Taylor Post 232 scholarship, presented by members of American Legion Post 232, Barnegat, Ocean County. Pictured, from left NEC Gene O'Grady, Robert Wilson, Post 232 Scholarship Committee chair, Victoria Valentic,

Robert Padavano, and Ocean County DEC Hector Quinones.

Post 524

Ocean City's Morvay-Miley-Cruice American Legion Post 524 welcomed three military families to "America's Greatest Family Resort" on Sunday, July 12th, for a week of fun and festivities courtesy of the post's Rest & Relaxation Program.

The families were given the use of a free condominium for the week, and a multitude of gifts from local Ocean City businesses as a way to say, "Thank you for your service and sacrifices."

"American Legion Post 524's Rest & Relaxation Program began in 2013 as a way to pay tribute to servicemen and women for sacrifices made during their time in the military," said Joe Masington, co-chair of the R&R Committee. "Whenever military personnel are deployed, their families also share in that deployment and we support their efforts as well."

Following a police and fire department motorcade and an escort into town by the Legion Riders, the families were honored during a noontime welcoming ceremony at the American Legion.

dinners and local gift baskets courtesy of the Ocean City Chamber of Commerce and the local business community. The Cape May County Zoo donated free admission passes.



The Henke Family, from left: MSgt Cynthia Henke, daughter Magnolia, TSgt Justin Henke, son Cooper.

"Post 524 is proud to welcome this year's R&R families," said Jerry Bonner R&R Committee co-chair. "We thank all our members – Veterans, Auxiliary and the Sons of the American Legion for their many contributions to these deserving, patriotic families."



The Pecson Family, from left: USAF Senior Airman Mary Jane Pecson, daughter Luna, daughter Lucia, husband Ralph.



The Laberdee Family, from left: son Harper, US Navy Officer Terry Laberdee, daughter Raven, Alicia-Clark Laberdee and son Nathan.

During the ceremony, members of The South Jersey Quilts of Valor Foundation presented personalized, handmade quilts to the service members. The pattern and stitching will represent the United States Air Force and United States Navy designs.

Ocean City Mayor Jay Gillian presented the families with a ceremonial key to the city. They also received free beach and parking passes, restaurant

Buddy Check



PDC Mike Babli (center) has been in an assisted care facility for a while. Recently, he was paid an official Buddy Check visit by, from left, PNVC Chuck Robbins, DEC Hector Quinones, PNEC Berley Hanna Jr, PDC Dan Channel, ANEC Mike Wilson and NEC Gene O'Grady, all giving the Be the One finger. If you would like to Buddy Check Mike, do so at:

m.babli@njamericanlegion.org,

mcbjr248@aol.com,

or drop him a card at: 2254 Auburn Avenue, Atco, NJ 08004.

Yabba Dabba Doo, Commander!

Bringing the Light to High Point



One of Commander Gladden's first ceremonies was at the 77th Annual Service at the High Point State Park & Veterans Memorial on Sunday, June 28.



New Jersey

LEGIONNAIRE



BE THE ONE

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Deadline for Autumn issue is October 1, 2026

2026-2027 Officers



From left: Taking the oath of office are Vice Commander Frank Landis, Vice Commander Ezell Jackson, Vice Commander Randy Grizzard, Vice Commander Dennis Duddie, Vice Commander Joseph Fricker III, Department Commander Anthony “Tony” Gladden.