

WORLD'S LARGEST VETERANS ORGANIZATION



New Jersey LEGIONNAIRE



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Autumn 2025

106th National Convention



New NJ Dept. of Veterans Affairs SAL POW/MIA Watchfire
State Baseball Champs What is Revised Legion?
2025-2026 Commander's Project Boys State \$ Increase

COMMANDER’S MESSAGE

Hello my Fellow Legionnaires,



1st Quarter Report: Service and Engagement

Since being elected commander, I have had the privilege of participating in numerous events across our great state—many of which brought me to places I might never have, otherwise, visited. It has been a busy and rewarding journey, and I am honored to share a few highlights.

June

My travels began immediately after the Wildwood Convention on Sunday, June 15. I went directly to Rider University to speak at the opening ceremony of the 79th session of NJ Boys State, joined by National Commander James LaCoursiere and Adjutant General Yvonne Mays. The following day, I continued traveling with Commander LaCoursiere, Past National Executive Committeeman Berley Hanna, National Executive Committeeman Gene O’Grady, Past Department Commander Andy Jackson and Adjutant John Baker. Together, we visited Veterans Haven North in the morning and Menlo Park Veterans Home in the afternoon.

On Tuesday, we toured Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, where we received a mission briefing and a VIP tour of the Boeing KC-46 military aerial refueling aircraft—including an unforgettable opportunity to sit in the cockpit. (A very impressive aircraft—Go Air Force!)

Later that week, I returned to Rider University to speak at the Boys State closing and graduation ceremonies. June concluded with the annual High Point Ceremony in Sussex County.

July

July was filled with events honoring veterans and promoting community. Alongside PNEC Berley Hanna, I attended the NJ Veterans Chamber of Commerce Annual Golf Outing at Knob Hill Golf Club.

Additional highlights included:

- ♦ Attending PDC Andy Jackson’s testimonial in Little Egg Harbor,
- ♦ Throwing out the first pitch at the BlueClaws game in Lakewood (with a “rag arm,” I will admit!),
- ♦ Participating in the Korean War Armistice ceremony at the Atlantic City memorial,
- ♦ Attending PNVC Chuck Robbins’ Homecoming in Toms River,
- ♦ Attending The American Legion Riders (ALR) DEC meeting in Somers Point,
- ♦ Attending The Sons of the American Legion BBQ at Veterans Haven South,
- ♦ We wrapped up the month at the Dept. Legion Baseball Finals in Wood-Ridge, where we presented awards to the Brooklawn and Cherry Hill teams.

August

In August, I took part in Sophia Dmoch’s membership town hall meeting in Keyport, followed by attending the national membership workshop in Indianapolis with the vice commanders and the membership chair.

Other key events included:

- ♦ Dept. meeting at Post 346, Neptune,
- ♦ National Convention in Tampa Bay, FL.

September

September was another eventful month, including:

- ♦ The Special Needs Kids BBQ hosted by POAC at the VFW, Brick,
- ♦ The SAL Pig Roast, Brick,
- ♦ Passaic County official visit,
- ♦ Northeast Region zoom meeting with National Vice Commander Ron LaRose,
- ♦ Official visit to Camden County,
- ♦ NJVCC Veterans Business Summit,
- ♦ Post Commander’s BBQ at Post 328, Clark,
- ♦ The SAL Watchfire Ceremony, Seaside Heights (see page 10),
- ♦ Marching in The Basilone Parade, Raritan,
- ♦ Speaking at the Bergen County Nurses Scholarship Dinner.

Looking Ahead

Each event has reminded me of the strength, dedication and spirit of service that define our American Legion Family. I give thanks and praise to my vice commanders who stepped up and represented our dept. when I could not attend an event (well done team). We look forward to continuing this journey by visiting more counties, attending more events and, hopefully, leading by example.

Cover photo taken at the 106th National Convention, Tampa, FL on Tuesday, Aug. 26. From left: Berley Hanna, Jr., NEC, National Commander James LeCoursiere, Charles “Andy” Jackson, 2024-2025 NJ Dept. Commander, donating to the National Emergency Fund.

New Jersey Legionnaire

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****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 winter issue is January 6, 2026



National Convention

Sunshine – liquid sunshine, as the locals call it – was prevalent and persistent during The American Legion’s 106th Annual Convention in Tampa, FL. Sunshine did not glint off the minarets of the University of Tampa’s historic Plant Hall (pictured above) until Wednesday.

On Monday, Aug. 25 at 7:30 a.m., the NJ Caucus met in the Garrison Room, 2nd Floor of the Hilton Tampa Downtown, the delegation’s convention headquarters, where committee chairs reported on proposed national resolutions. Highlights: no dues increase; the approval of a no-transfer rule for those under disciplinary action; and Camo Vets, a NJ business, won Small Business of the Year Award. Commander Charles “Andy” Jackson also announced the delegation raised over \$14,000 for COTA at the event held in Tampa.



The caucus was visited by Marri Krupko, (photo left) PDC Kansas, asking for support of Dan K. Wiley for 2025-2026 National Commander, and Tom Florez, (photo below) PDC and NEC Colorado, presenting the credentials of John W. “Jay” Bowen for 2026-2027 National Commander.

Delegates had the rest of the day free to explore the city’s attractions, possibly taking the free streetcar to the aquarium or historic Ybor City, while dodging showers and downpours.



2026 National Convention, Day 1, Aug. 26

National Commander James A. LaCoursiere, Jr. opened the 206th National Convention at 8:30 a.m. Scotty Hasting, army veteran, Purple Heart recipient and country music artist, performed the National Anthem along with Nancy Hays and served as master of ceremonies. While serving with the 1st Infantry Division, 4th Squadron, 4th Cavalry in Afghanistan, he was shot 10 times.



While those opening ceremonies and the presentation of The American Legion Youth Champions Awards were going on, in the hall next door, the American Legion Auxiliary President Trish Ward presented New Jersey’s own Charles Robbins, Jr. with the Auxiliary’s Patriot Award.

Back in The Legion convention hall, Dwight Birdwell, Medal of Honor recipient, (photo right) and Commander LeCoursiere presented the Spirit of Service Awards to members of the armed forces. Birdwell received the Medal of Honor from President Joe Biden in 2022. “The medal belongs to those killed, wounded,” he said modestly. “I’m just a custodian; I’m not a hero; those who made the sacrifice were.”



LeCoursiere then presented The American Legion Distinguished Service Medal, the organization’s highest award, to the U.S. Army, U.S. Marines and U.S. Navy in honor of 250 years of service to our country. Accepting the awards were LTG Joseph Ryan, deputy chief of staff of the army; Maj. Gen. Joseph Clearfield, deputy commander of MARCENT, USMC; and Rear Admiral Robert Nokowski, USN.

Joseph Navarrete, past national commander, Sons of The American Legion, from Squadron 72, Albuquerque, reported that over \$12 million had been donated from squadrons nationwide the past year.

After presenting the Maryland American Legion Riders with the Past National Commander William M. Detweiler Excellence Award for their donations to the National Emergency Fund (NEF), Commander LeCoursiere accepted donations to the Legacy Fund and Veterans & Children Foundation. NJ Dept. Com-

mander Jackson and NEC Berley Hanna, Jr. presented a check for \$1500 for the Veterans and Children Foundation. (photo below)



A number of speakers followed before Commander LeCoursiere gave his report to the convention, most notably Col. Tim Sheppard, president of the National State Directors of Veterans Affairs, who said he was “proud of the Be the One program. It’s not just a slogan,” he said. “It saves lives. Let’s make sure no veteran falls through the cracks. Together we can Be the One; together we can Be the Many.”

Maj. Gen. James S. Hartsell, executive director of the FL Dept. of Veterans Affairs, noted there has been a huge migration of veterans to FL and that the state passed a law that establishes Nov. as Veterans Month. “During that month, students will be taught such things as the meaning of Memorial Day and Veterans Day; what a veteran is; about the American Flag; what a Purple Heart and Medal of Honor are.”

LeCoursiere’s report was a video retrospective of his year, the events he attended and the places he visited with President Trish Ward and Squadron Commander Joseph Navarrete. He asked the delegates if they felt the LUV – Loyalty, Unity, Valor.

At 2:07, the Call for Convention was made by National Adjutant Rodney K. Rolland officially convening the 106th National Convention. Terry Abdelnour, credentials chair, announced that there were 1775 delegates plus LeCoursiere (1776), with NJ having 38.

Before adjournment, the finance chair noted that The American Legion Child Well-being Founda-

tion has provided over \$20 million to assist children. Donations were accepted for American Legion Charities, National Emergency Fund (NEF) and Operation Comfort Warriors. NJ Dept. Commander Jackson and NEC Berley Hanna, Jr. presented a check for \$1500 to the NEF.

2026 National Convention, Day 2, Aug. 27

Delegates made their way to the Tampa Convention Center seeing a sunny sky for the first time on Wednesday, Aug 27.

Following the report of the Americanism Committee, Rosie Rios, former US treasurer and chair of the America Semiquincentennial Commission, discussed plans for the USA's 250th birthday. "I was 11 years old in 1976 for the bicentennial," she noted. "I remember receiving a bicentennial quarter and I cherished it. This is going to be the largest and most inspirational celebration ever. The 2026 quarters will promote youth sports.

"America Gives will be the largest volunteer program in history, with Martin Luther King Day and 9/11 as Days of Service. From Jan. 1 to Dec. 31, 2026, we will be aggregating volunteer hours to a website for all registered agencies.

"Additionally, Our American Story will be collecting stories from all across our nation and America Waves will be honoring our flag." Go to america250.org and find NJ.

The Patriot Award was presented to Phyllis J. Wilson, CW5, USA Ret., president of the Military Women's Memorial, Arlington (photo right). "I am honored to accept the Patriot Award in a room full of patriots," she said. "I will treasure this award." In addition to her military service, Wilson is a descendent of the Mayflower and is a Daughter of the American Revolution.

Robert Edsel, author of *The Monuments Men*, gave a fascinating presentation on the grave adoptions of American service personnel in the Netherlands, including how the US government refused to aid in connecting the adopting families with the families of those buried there. The book, *Remember Us*, tells the untold story of American heroes who sacrificed their lives in WWII and the Dutch promise to forever remember them through a grave adoption program.



stands what our military is for and understands the sacrifices of those who serve and their families. We are trying hard to make America safe again."

In an energetic, animated and impassioned presentation, Douglas A. Collins, secretary of Veterans Affairs, said his "first priority is to serve the veteran. There's a new day at the VA; the metric is not how big we are, but how we serve the veterans. I don't know a veteran who is given anything," he noted. "They earned it!

"I ask why; why are we doing this? If you earned it, you deserve it. The VA is going to do better. We cut a 260,000 backlog over 125 days to under 150,000 in 4 ½ months and it's falling every day. The VA no longer works for itself, it works for the veteran. There's a new day at the VA. I will not stop fighting for the veterans of the United States. We have added extended hours in the evening and on weekends."

Sitting on the stage, he discussed veteran homelessness and suicide and called for veterans to join the fight to prevent suicide. "I am firmly convinced that if we as a society and we as a government, do not care, then the rest of the world will not give a damn about us. Everywhere you go, you've got to take the accountability for each other because if we don't, then we'll continue to lose them. One veteran suicide is too many." He concluded by saying "I'm going to do what President Trump told me to do: take care of veterans – every day."

The Chapel of Four Chaplains Legion of Honor Bronze Medallion was presented by Capt. Louis Cavaliere, USN Ret., of the Chapel's Board of Directors,

Tulsi Gabbard, (photo left) army veteran and director of National Intelligence, brought greetings from President Donald Trump. "You are in his heart and mind, for those who served and those who wear the uniform. President Trump wants to be a peacemaker; not fight in stupid wars. He under-

stands what our military is for and understands the sacrifices of those who serve and their families. We are trying hard to make America safe again."



Major membership awards were dominated by the depts. of France and Hawaii.

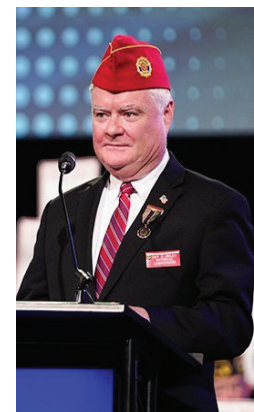
Two amendments to the constitution of The American Legion were considered. Resolution 11 from the Dept. of Minnesota resolved that in Article II, Section 2, the word nonpolitical be changed to non-partisan. That was rejected. Resolution 19 from the Dept. of California resolved that a member undergoing any disciplinary action can not transfer to another post until it is resolved. That resolution passed.

Before adjournment at 12:57 p.m., it was announced that 68.52 % of posts submitted the Consolidated Post Report with 13 depts. at 100%.

2026 National Convention, Day 3, Aug. 28

This day The American Legion transitions to a new National Commander. Dan K. Wiley (photo right), a PUFL member of Byron H. Mehl Post 23, Leavenworth, KS, was unanimously elected. The Air Force veteran served during the Panama conflict. He has a bachelor's degree in business from the College of Great Falls, Montana, and attended law school at the University of Kansas. He has served his home state as a municipal judge and district court judge. He helped establish and presided over the Leavenworth County Veterans Treatment Court. He is also a member of the Sons of The American Legion.

Continuing Be the One, the Legion's suicide prevention program, is one of Wiley's priorities for the upcoming year. The others are his slogan "Better



Together"; The American Legion legislative agenda; the Veterans and Children Foundation; celebrating America's 250th birthday; and what he said are the three Cs: communication, community and camaraderie.

Wiley's theme of Better Together focuses on the American Legion Family. "I am a big believer in the American Legion Family," he said. "Those posts that are successful are the ones that are inclusive and not exclusive. They're the ones that operate in unity with the units, squadrons and chapters. Those are the successful posts: the ones that care about the mission and helping each other. Taking care of one another."

Watch the election on YouTube at <https://www.legion.org/about/leadership/nationalcommander>.

Also elected were Sons of The American Legion National Commander William "Bill" Clancy III and American Legion Auxiliary National President Pam Ray.

The 107th American Legion National Convention will be held in Louisville, KY, Aug. 28 to Sep. 3, 2026.



2025-2026 NJ Dept. Commander Dan Channel (left) and 2024-2025 NJ Dept. Commander Charles "Andy" Jackson at the National Convention.

NOV. 11, 2025

THANK YOU, ALL!

BE THE ONE

Revised Legion Report

NEC Eugene "Gene" O'Grady



I would like to thank all our NJ Legionnaires for your support that elected PDC Mike Wilson as Alternate National Executive Committeeman (ANEC) and me as National Executive Committeeman (NEC). The NEC and ANEC are chair and vice chairman of the Revised Legion Committee.

Our committee's purpose is to advise the Dept. Executive Committee (DEC) and recommend changes to all operations in the dept. to ensure proper operation. To be short, our main purpose is to work for the good of The American Legion and adapt to the present environment, as well as see and administer any actions deemed necessary for the future. The committee is staffed by members with great experience and I am confident that we will be able to make our dept. the best that it can be!

With that said, the Revised Legion Committee has hit the ground running. We have met numerous times since the National Convention in Tampa. A dept. staff meeting was held and now we will conduct quarterly meetings to discuss the changes to be implemented.

Unfortunately, many changes will be implemented due to current conditions. These changes will affect all and, until much needed relief is seen, all of these will be submitted to the DEC for approval.

In closing, I would like to thank the committee for the hard work and input to improve the greatest veteran organization. Also, thanks to Finance Officer Platt and the members of the Finance Committee who have been working hard and closely with us, for all of us!

Membership

Sophia Dmoch, Chair



Legionnaires of NJ, you are making a tremendous impact on membership this year. As of Sep. 30, our dept. reported a total of 16,682 members, 55.79% of the 2026 target goal of 29,900, ranking 35th nationwide out of 55 depts. and 7th in the Northeast.

We exceeded our target ahead of schedule. Please, continue to try to increase membership, as the next goal will be more challenging. The first week of Oct., the second renewal notices were sent out, which should boost our numbers and help us reach our third target goal, scheduled for Nov. 13th. We need everyone to come together and conduct outreach in their communities, especially during Veterans Day. If your post can offer a complimentary membership on Veterans Day, it would be a great way to thank a veteran for their service. Team Channel is here to support you in any way possible.

The dept. vice commanders have confirmed dates and locations for their district training. For all details, please contact your dept. vice commander assigned to your district, or follow us on Facebook or Instagram. Don't hesitate to reach out if you have questions or need help. As one Legion dept. said, the Four Pillars of the American Legion can only stand if they have a strong foundation: MEMBERSHIP. Without members, our programs weaken, our voices diminish and someone else will take our place.

Former Coca-Cola CEO Brian Dyson said "Value has a value only if it's value is valued." Let's value what we've built. Let's grow it. Let's protect it. Be the foundation — renew, recruit and stay engaged.

<https://legion.org/renew>, #inspire #engage#

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.

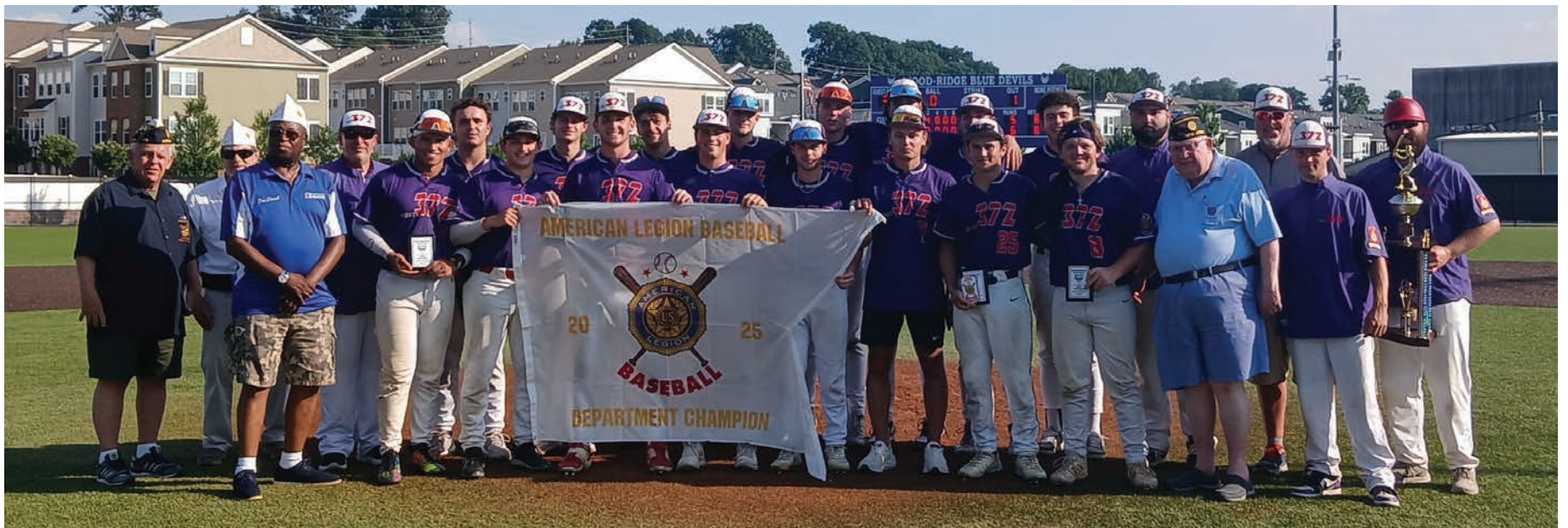
Baseball Report

PDC Frank Calandrillo, Chair



The 2025 baseball season is completed at the dept. level. This season marked the 100th anniversary of American Legion Baseball.

For the second year we did not officially have district tournaments. Each league ran a play-off tournament and the winner of



each of the four play-off rounds moved to the state Final Four. The following teams made it to the Final Four: Allentown, Whitehouse Post 284, Cherry Hill Post 372 and Brooklawn Post 72.

We accepted the Finance Committee's request to save some funds and we managed a four day double-elimination pool play at the Wood-Ridge Athletic Center. We had challenges of long thunder and lightning warnings that kept us off the field for safety, and the schedule had to be reset. Monday's Championship Day hinged on the results of the first game that day as Cherry Hill was 2-0 and Brooklawn had one loss. In the end, Cherry Hill Post 372 won the match-up 6-5 against Brooklawn Post 72 and advanced to the Mid-Atlantic Regional in Maryland. This is Cherry Hill's first ever State Championship, (photo above) and a very special one to be the Centennial Baseball Champions.



From left: Dept. Commander Dan Channel, MVP Anthony Alessandrini, Baseball Chair Frank Calandrillo.

Many thanks to Commander Dan Channel for attending the game and assisting in awarding the trophies to Cherry Hill and Brooklawn. The MVP for the series was Cherry Hill's Anthony Alessandrini. Congratulations to all!



From left: Dept. Commander Dan Channel, Coach Kyle Bordner receiving championship trophy, Baseball Chair Frank Calandrillo.



From left: Dept. Commander Dan Channel, Coach Dennis Barth, Brooklawn Post 72, receiving the runner-up trophy, Baseball Chair Frank Calandrillo.

Mid-Atlantic Regional: Joe Cannon Stadium, Ridge, Maryland

The Regional Tournament started on Aug. 6. Cherry Hill Post 372's first game was against Wheeling, WV. Cherry Hill won the game 6-4 on three hits; Noah Harvey had a home run; Josh Litsky got the win.

On Thursday, Aug. 7, Cherry Hill met Cecil County, MD, with the combo of Anthony Alessandrini, Matt Korbich and Aiden Emrigh on the mound. Brett Chiesa homered; and doubles by Luis Sanchez, III, Brett Chiesa and Jake Barletta added to the eight hits to score 11 runs against in an 11-6 game. Matt Korbich got the win.

Going into Friday's game, Aug. 8, against Hazelton, PA, Cherry Hill is now 2-0 in the tournament. Josh Litsky got the win in another gem for Cherry Hill, with an 11-2 score. Pennsylvania had six hits against the slugging Cherry Hill team which had 16 hits, with great small-ball play and bases loaded multiple times. Doubling were Brett Chiesa, Noah Harvey and Chris Aherns. Jake Barletta and Chris Aherns each led with three hits. Josh Litsky pitched six innings for his second regional win. Great team play!

Cherry Hill moved onto Saturday with a 3-0 record to meet New Castle, DE, with a 2-1 record. Brett Chiesa, Andrew Bechtel, Chris Aherns and Brian Martello had singles and Noah Harvey had two hits in the game, scoring three runs. Delaware had 6 runs on ten hits to win the game. Ricky Orlandini pitched a great complete game for the team, but received the loss.

Sunday, Aug. 10, was an all or nothing game against Chesapeake, VA. Virginia won the earlier game, defeating New Castle 13-2. Chesapeake then played Cherry Hill the same day. Cherry Hill had six runs on seven hits to Chesapeake's ten runs on 15 hits. Contributions made by Brett Chiesa with a double and an RBI; Noah Harvey's walk and a run scored; Jordan Henriquez with a triple and an RBI; Jake Barleta had two hits and scored; Grant Fornier had a stolen base, a walk, a double and 2 RBIs. Mason Kelleher had a hit and a walk, and Brian Martello added a hit and an RBI. Pitchers Anthony Alessandrone was given the loss in a great game, with a huge comeback effort in the bottom of the sixth inning, with pitching help from Matt Korbich and Aiden Emrich. Cherry Hill lost to Chesapeake in a 10-6 final to be the runner-up in the Mid-Atlantic Regional. Hold your heads high! Little did you know that you played against the team who would become World Series Champions.

Congratulations to Head Coach Kyle Bordner, coaches Art Alessandrone, Andrew Fisher, Ben Garino, John "Bo" Gray and Alex Injaian. Cherry Hill Post 372 is proud of you and the first ever State Championship title in this Centennial Celebration of 100 years of American Legion Baseball.

World Series, Shelby, North Carolina

The World Series Tournament got a late start when all the games on Thursday, Day One, were canceled due to downpours that left the field unplayable. Schedules were revamped and play resumed. Championship Tuesday was between Post 554 League City, Texas, and Post 280, Chesapeake, VA (Mid-Atlantic Regional Champion). Chesapeake Post 280 defeated League City Post 554 by a score of 5-0. Congratulations to Post 280 Chesapeake for their World Series win!

And That's the Ballgame!

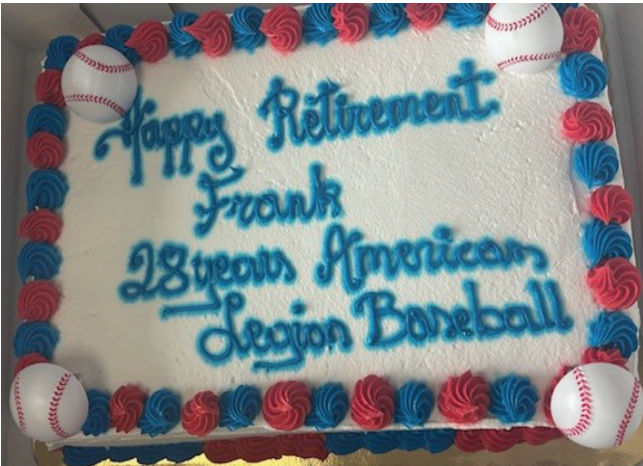
In baseball language, so to speak, as the 2025 Centennial Season is officially over, it's time for me to clean out the dugout, shut off the stadium lights and retire the scorebooks. I will officially hang up the chairman's hat and finally retire those tournament director shirts to another purpose. I will be stepping down from leading this wonderful, fulfilling program as of Oct. 1, 2025, when my appointment has concluded. I have been very passionate about the baseball program since I first got involved in 1997, working games, running the Bergen Passaic League as president, then as a member of the Dept. Baseball Committee, as Dept. chair for 14 seasons, and finally as a National Consultant with the National American Legion Baseball Committee. I am proud of the young men who have partici-

pated in this program over the 28 years I have been involved. The program evolved from carbon paper rosters to a computerized National Baseball database of names, teams, stats, background checks and abuse awareness training classes. This program has a profound impact on the lives of these young men, especially the comradery, respect and character necessary, and the team-building skills it offers. Brenda's favorite story is the young lad who chased foul balls for \$5 and hot dogs per game. Last we heard, he's working on Wall Street. Other players have entered careers as neurosurgeons, successful businessmen, members of the military, and some have also chosen to come back and coach their former team. Many others have come back to say hello and to bring us up-to-date on what they are doing now. We are so proud to have watched these young men grow. They became part of our "Bonus Family." It is my Grand Slam!

Thank you to the past dept. commanders for re-appointing me for 14 years. I offer my best wishes to the next chair. It has been a great honor and privilege to have been appointed Dept. Baseball Chair by the last 14 commanders. I feel that for the dept. to move forward, all committees and programs need to be turned over to the next generation of future leaders.

To my wife Brenda, no more sitting under a tent for a week at a time in the hot sun. Thank you for making sure I had all my paperwork together for the tournaments, ordering the trophies and plaques, and taking pictures. We can have our Julys back!

Commander Dan, I've stepped up to the plate for 28 years, and I now intend to take an intentional walk! Thank you, everyone! Ball game over! Legion Baseball Wins!



THANK YOU, FRANK!

Boys State
PDC Theodore Howarth



From left to right: PNEC/Trustee Vice President Berley Hanna, Jr.; Boys State Governor Zayden Lalani, who was a self sponsored delegate from Moorestown, Camden County; PDC/Trustee President Ted Howarth; Boys State Senator Vincent Price from Colts Neck, sponsored by Monmouth County; Lt. Governor William Capizzi Abraham from Little Falls, Passaic County, sponsored by Post 238; Commander Dan Channel; and Director Dave Bagatelle.

The above delegates spoke at the annual trustee's meeting on Sep. 25 informing the trustees of what Boys State meant to them and thanking The American Legion for running this program. After the delegates spoke, President Howarth continued the meeting with the nominations and elections of the trustees whose terms had expired. The agenda also included a report from John Migaleddi, president of the Boys State Foundation and how they assist our program. Since 2002, the foundation has donated well over one million dollars in cash, in-kind donations and consulting time. An example: the foundation pays for the shirts worn during sports and the picnic on Friday for the delegates and Legion members. With all of this in mind and prices continuing to rise for insurance, food, lodging, etc., the trustees had to vote for a \$25 increase in delegate fees, making the fee \$325 per delegate in 2026.

Important Phone Numbers

Menlo Park Veterans Home	732-452-4100
Paramus Veterans Home	201-634-8200
Vineland Veterans Home	856-405-4200
Doyle Veterans Cemetery	609-738-2400

CONNECTIVENESS & TRAGEDY CAUSATION PREVENTION - MOVING FORWARD!

PDC Bob Looby



Companies, agencies and organizations fail unless they move forward, as with the dept.'s Moving Forward Sub-committee's process. Those that do not take those initiative-taking steps are doomed to failure, maybe a slow death, but certainly extinction. Connectiveness with our military and veterans, thereby avoiding those homeless and suicide tragedies, must be initiative-taking, one-on-one, including families and innovative programs. Therefore, this article will outline several new efforts to continue connectiveness and tragedy prevention.

We've, recently, been introduced to various new programs based on our statewide vigorous efforts including the DOL's OBTT (Off Base Transition Training); an offer by the Philadelphia 76ers to hold two veterans game nights; an invitation to participate in training on Ft. Dix, Oct. 17 – 19; and an offer to partner with a renowned chef for physical, mental and emotional wellness program. This article will, also, summarize ongoing programs still connecting with our vets including the Boots To Business Workshops; homelessness; our support of the NJANG Medical Hold unit, Sea Girt; and sponsorship of golf training, 9-hole round and awards banquet in partnership with PGA Hope and the VA Wilmington Peer Mentoring, Camaraderie and Support Program.

OBTT extends the dept.'s Transition Assistance Program (TAP) to veterans; veterans currently serving in the National Guard and Reserve and their spouses, at locations other than active military installations. The pilot includes NJ and will expand to no less than 20 states and 50 locations in the five-year pilot period. OBTT aims to improve employment-related outcomes in areas with high veteran unemployment.

OBTT consists of a series of modular, employment focused workshops tailored to allow attendees to take control of their careers, meet their employment goals, maximize their career potential and increase the health of the national economy. These workshops are offered in-person or virtually. Targeted areas are Mercer and Burlington counties, with more to come.

The 76ers' marketing dept. contacted me in Aug., after hearing of our Be the One and associated KOVA

(Keep Our Veterans Alive) programs, and offered to conduct two fund raising and awareness games in 2026. I thought that we should include veteran homelessness as part of the events, as one of the many causations of veteran suicides, which they agreed. Given the proximity of Camden County to Philly, and their HQ and training facility is in the city of Camden, I contacted Bernie Kofoet, chair of all veterans organization County Advisory Board to assist. We will have three blocks of 50 seats each in the lower level, upper middle and mezzanine ends for the Jan. 7 Washington Generals and March 15 Portland Trailblazers games. The website will be live mid-Oct., and our dedicated flyer will be distributed thereafter throughout the dept. The VFW, Dept. of NJ will be our partner to ensure widespread success.

Our invitation, participation and presentation at Ft. Dix was well summarized by the BN CO for their Oct. 17 – 19 training, "It has been so hard to get support for suicide prevention and homelessness in PA/NJ." We will be joined by the VA Wilmington Peer Mentoring, Camaraderie and Support Program, a National VA pilot program, but now publicized throughout the VA and in national mental health publications.

The chef and founder of Green Genius and a proud army veteran contacted me through our long-standing partnership with the SBA, centering on using food as a tool for healing, supporting physical, mental and emotional wellness, especially within the veteran community. Our research is continuing and could be another worthwhile connection to a specific niche of veterans.

Our second series of Boots To Business Workshops with the SBA concluded in Sep. with sessions at Post 28, Absecon, Atlantic County, facilitated by DEC Patricia Tatum; and Post 170, Rochelle Park, Bergen County, hosted by Commander Dennis Duddie. DEC Pat is working two other venues in the county to continue these workshops for vets who would like to start their own business or enhance an existing one. We have now conducted 32 workshops, the most in The Legion!

The homeless veteran tragedy continues in NJ despite the \$MM's in federal and state grants distributed. And again, the calls from the National VA's Home Front (homeless) hotline have been resurrected and again all NJ calls referred to me - 17 since the summer issue of this newspaper. We all should have a part in the resolution by being connected and developing new and value-added programs which will attract our vets and their families. The common com-

plaint from the vets is the number of times they are referred from many providers to others without assistance. Many fake providers are in name only, which we cannot replicate. If we receive a call – we own it, until resolved internally or by others with follow up.



We will, again, meet with and present resources to soldiers on hold for a medical discharge for the third session on Oct. 25 in Sea Girt. We, including the VA's from Wilmington, Philly and NJ, and other providers, have now met with about 200 guard members offering all earned benefits, including housing and employment support. Photo left: Pat Carney, Legion member and VA Peer Support Supervisor addressing the last session.

WOW, what a partnership with the PGA, and the VA Wilmington Peer Mentoring, Camaraderie and Support Program's counselors, at the prestigious and one-of-a-kind, at the Union League National Golf Club, Swanton, on Oct. 8. This was our third outing and awards banquet attracting and connecting with 75+ veterans!

Lastly, and just as important, connect with and assist our military on the JB-MDL, through Mike Schaeffer's Food Warriors initiative. This includes the upcoming "Turkey Drop". Check out the details at www.militarysupportalliance.org or contact Mike directly at michael.a.schaffer1949@gmail.com. Mike's initiated total blessed program saves lives through connectiveness and preventing homelessness and the other causations of suicide! Thank you, Mike & team!

BEING CONNECTED IS NOT A SLOGAN, BUT A PROACTIVE "MOVEMENT"!



On Sep. 18, PDC Looby received several awards for his veteran suicide and homeless initiatives in front of 250 attendees on the Battleship New Jersey. These include the SpectraCare Foundation's Medal of Honor, a NJ Senate and Assembly Joint Resolution, and a Camden County Proclamation.

Post Scripts
POST 331

Donations Galore

Because of the generous giving of the residents and businesses of Cape May County, especially those of the local communities of Avalon and Stone Harbor, American Legion Post 331 was able to donate a seven passenger mini-van to the residents of Veterans Haven South (VHS). The van was purchased from Chapman Ford, Egg Harbor Township.



Accepting the 2023 Chrysler Pacifica van on Tuesday, June 24 from Past Post Commander Tom McCullough and Trustee Jon Ready were VHS representatives: Donshea Joyner, assistant superintendent, Tori Hill, facility coordinator and Shawn Hopkins, fleet manager. The van will be used by VHS to transport residents to and from employment and medical appointments and various other activities. Post 331 has been a long-time supporter of Veterans Haven South with previous donations of an outside patio and various other facility enhancements.

Veterans Haven South in Winslow Township is a NJ Dept. of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMAVA) veterans’ home for homeless veterans. Its Veterans Transitional Housing Program provides long-term psychological, social and vocational rehabilitation to transition the veterans into permanent housing. The home has approximately 100 resident veterans in its transitional program.

In a ceremony at the Middle Township High School, Post Commander Tom McCullough, on behalf of the members of American Legion Post 331, presented a \$7,000 donation to representatives of the Middle Township High School Navy National Defense Cadet Corps (NNDCC). Post 331 has been an active supporter of the Cadet Corps for several years. These funds are used by the Corps for visits to our service academies, military installations and other military-

orientated field trips. For the first time, Post 331 also presented a Naval Cadet Achievement Award of \$1,000. The award was presented to Cadet Lieutenant Commander Katie Grayson as the most improved cadet. The NNDCC program at the high school is managed by Staff Sergeant William Neill, USMC, Ret.



Photo above: Post 331 Commander McCullough Greets Navy cadet members during Post 331 donation presentation. From left: Sr. Chief Petty Officer R. Walker, Lt. T. Moffitt-Ivens, Lt. Cdr. K. Grayson, Cdr. P. Woodrow.



Legion members also presented donations to the Citizens/Veterans Advisory Committee (CVAC) at its annual luncheon at Alfie’s Restaurant, Wildwood. Pictured, from left: Post 331 members Jim Betz, Dick Herb, S.A.L. Squadron 331 Bill Spaeth, Jr., and Post 331 Tom McCullough presenting donations to CVAC Chairman Johnnie Walker.

Post 331 Commander Tom McCullough along with Chaplin Jim Betz and Trustee Dick Herb provided a check for \$15,000. Sons of the American Legion Squadron 331 First Vice Commander Bill Spaeth,

Jr. provided a check for \$2,500. The donations were presented to Johnnie Walker, CVAC chair. CVAC’s mission is to promote awareness of veterans’ needs and to identify proper resources for referrals that support those needs to change and enhance the lives of our veterans.

The American Legion members of Post and Squadron 331 have been providing donations to CVAC for a number of years to help in providing support to county veterans in the areas of homelessness, transportation and veterans benefits.



In Oct. 2024, the Northern Lights were actually visible in Cape May County. Here’s the view over Post 331.

VA Medical Centers

Lyons, NJ 908-647-0180
East Orange, NJ 973-676-1000

2025-2026 Department Commander's Project

Commander Channel has chosen a very worthwhile project that will enhance the lives of our hospitalized veterans. Let's Channel our Energies and Tune into this Project.

At the NJ Veterans Memorial Home, Menlo Park, a Wall of Honor within the home on which a plaque will be placed when a resident passes away. Cost: \$25,000 - \$30,000.

At the NJ Veterans Memorial Home, Paramus, a wheelchair accessible outdoor space with greenhouse where the residents can plant flowers and vegetables. Cost: \$40,000 - \$45,000.

At the NJ Veterans Memorial Home, Vineland, a water feature (fountain), which will provide a peaceful sanctuary. The sight and soothing sound of water have been known to reduce anxiety and create a calming effect on residents. Cost: \$25,000 - \$30,000.

For a total of \$90,000 - \$105,000. Make a donation to the project when Commander Channel makes his official visit to your county or send a check donation to The American Legion, Dept. of NJ, 171 Jersey St., Bldg. 5, Floor 2, Trenton, NJ 08611. Write Commander's Project on the memo line.

SAL POW/MIA Watchfire



With about 200 in attendance at the Sons of the American Legion's 35th Annual POW/MIA Watchfire, Seaside Heights, Past Detachment Commander Mike Arner of Leonardo Squadron 338 reflected on the night, "Honor, sacrifice, loneliness, and sorrow for the men that are missing and families that long for their return."

The event honors New Jersey's prisoners of war (POW) and missing-in-action (MIA) service members throughout American history. It is held each year on the weekend of POW/MIA Recognition Day, the third Friday of Sep.



It starts at 7 p.m. with ceremonies and speeches, followed by dinner and the reading of New Jersey's missing. The Watchfire continues for 12 hours, until its conclusion at 7 a.m. the next day. Throughout the overnight, a huge bonfire on the bay-side of Seaside Heights is continuously fed, representing a light being shined to help those POWs and MIAs find their way home.



Pictured above are Rich Hodum and Carl Albern, Jr., both past detachment commanders.

It is a night focused on remembering and honoring the service of the over 1,000 soldiers, sailors, Marines and airman who, since World War II, never made it home. The numbers of those unaccounted for personnel are staggering, currently at 83,000 nationally since World War I. The Detachment's Watchfire is one small way for our state and country to pay tribute, in memoriam, to their service and sacrifice.

"May the Watchfire only grow better and stronger," said Past National Vice Commander Tom Marsden, from NJ, "as it reminds America to never forget and bring them home."

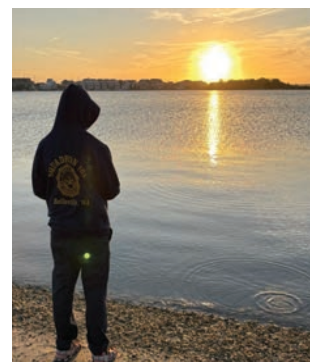
A truly emotional evening, to be sure. After an opening ceremony which included an explanation of the POW/MIA Missing-Man Table, the POW Flag, poems and readings, veterans from throughout the state read the names of NJ's missing, noting their branch of service. For some, it even has a heavier impact as they knew or served with names on that roll.

With hundreds of pallets donated from a local company, in a pit on the beach lined with a donated "burn box", the fire reaches fifteen feet tall all night, being visible to the entire Barnegat Bay area. The Watchfire, though, has not always been held in Seaside on the water. It began in 1990 at Garret Mountain outside Paterson.



The fire has always been stoked by Sons and volunteers throughout the night, who stand vigil in memory of the missing.

The event is unique – not being held anywhere else in the national organization – and was attended this year by the newly elected Sons of The American Legion National Commander William "Bill" Clancy III on his official visit to The Garden State. National Commander Clancy participated in feeding the fire, as well, tossing pallets into the bonfire.



At 7 a.m. the next morning, those who stayed up all night, along with others, rallied again to end the vigil with a closing ceremony and prayer. The hope was that with this POW/MIA Watchfire, the Detachment of NJ brings awareness to the

fact that so many gave their all in service to their country – and never made it home.

"The Watchfire to me is a very somber occasion," said Watchfire Chairm Rich Hodum. "It is a way to keep the public apprised of the POW/MIAs that are still unaccounted for and for the country to not give up hope that someday they all will be returned."



At the Watchfire, from left: Dept. Commander Dan Channel and vice commanders Joel Bloom, David Marciano and John Warhurst.

Consolidated Post Reports

When The American Legion national commander testifies before Congress, the Consolidated Post Report (CPR) data is used to provide numerical data of what the collective American Legion is doing. He reports the hours, dollars and numbers of participants to show in quantifiable ways how our organization lives up to its motto of Veterans Strengthening America.

We need to report our accomplishments in our communities. In 2025, only 4 counties in NJ had 100% submission of CPRs from their posts. For 2021-22, only about 67% of our more than 12,200 posts nationally submitted reports; about the same as last year. The CPR is how we know more than 3,700 posts conducted Buddy Checks last year.

The federal charter requires the national organization to report to Congress on the activities of the corporation during the prior calendar year. The CPR is essential in collecting the data to compile this report to Congress.

Every post is doing something in their community. It is important that post leadership reports what they are doing to show our impact. The post may fill out a CPR by using the CPR paper copy distributed by the Dept. of NJ or the form on mylegion.org. That has the capability to keep a running total and save the data until you're ready to submit.

The CPR shows the many ways Legionnaires are making differences in their communities and beyond. American Legion posts around the world give millions of hours, raise millions of dollars and influence millions of lives each year.

We have heard the same old refrain for years: "We don't do things to get credit or publicity." Well, if a pat on the back, a plaque or an article in this newspaper was your only reason for supporting The American Legion's Four Pillars, and contributing to the well-being of your comrades and your community, then I would question your motives. You may not seek credit or publicity, but public knowledge of your actions will give a positive image to your post, creating an interest, making unaffiliated veterans want to join you.

The CPR is a synopsis of your community involvement; it reflects your post's impact on your community and how important you are to your community. Combined with the report of all the other posts, it shows how important we are to our communities in NJ and nationwide. It allows our state and national commanders to go before our legislators, and give them hard statistics about The American Legion's impact on our state and nation.

The CPR isn't just a public relations vehicle; it is not for "atta boys" or pats on the back; it isn't for recognition; it is to show the strength of The American Legion and the effort every Legionnaire puts in every day to support our veterans, our troops, our communities and our great nation, and to ensure that every elected official knows it.

The form may be completed either online at legion.org or by paper copy. It's not rocket science. So, why didn't your post submit it last year?

ALL WILMINGTON VA 4- DIGIT EXENSTIONS CHANGED TO 5-DIGIT EXTENSIONS

All existing extensions will remain
the same, with an additional "3"
added to the front.

For example when calling, dial: 1-800-461-2511 then
your extension 3-XXXX

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration
Wilmington VA Medical Center

Gov. Murphy Signs Legislation Establishing NJ Dept. of Veterans Affairs

On Sep. 11, 2025, Gov. Phil Murphy signed legislation that would establish a new cabinet-level Dept. of Veterans Affairs, reorganizing the existing Dept. of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMAVA).

"Veterans have selflessly fought for our hard-earned freedoms as Americans," said Murphy. "By establishing a dept. solely dedicated to the needs of veterans, we will continue to ensure they have a seat at the table and direct access to the support and resources they deserve. Our veterans and their families deserve nothing less."

"This realignment is a deliberate step toward strengthening operational efficiency, enhancing service delivery, and ensuring focused leadership in support of our veterans and military communities," said Brigadier General Yvonne L. Mays, The Adjutant General of NJ and commissioner of the NJ Dept. of Military and Veterans Affairs.

The law takes effect 120 days after enactment, allowing for anticipatory administrative actions, and maintains existing services for veterans without creating new programs or appropriations.

Under this bill, the newly established dept. will focus exclusively on veteran-related matters, such as delivering housing, health care, mental health services, and benefits for veterans and their families.

Murphy also announced that Vincent Solomono is his intended nominee for commissioner for the Dept. of Veterans Affairs once the law takes effect.

The prime sponsors of the legislation were Senator Joseph Vitale, Senator Joseph Cryan, Assemblywoman Cleopatra Tucker, Assemblyman Robert Karabinchak and Assemblywoman Annette Quijano.

"With the creation of a NJ Dept. of Veterans Affairs, the state now joins other states in elevating the voice of veterans in public programs and policy," said Dan Channel, commander of The American Legion, Dept. of NJ. "The selection of Vincent Solomono to lead this important organization as its acting commissioner is an outstanding one for the veterans of NJ. He is extremely qualified to transform state-delivered veteran benefits and services. The American Legion, Dept. of NJ looks forward to working with Mr. Solomono and his team in ensuring our veterans are aware of the many state programs and services available to them, while also keeping him informed of the top issues and concerns they face."



New Jersey

LEGIONNAIRE





Non-Profit Organization

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Deadline for winter issue is January 6, 2026

Groundbreaking for the new Emerson American Legion Post 269 with 4 Apts. For Veterans

