

WORLD'S LARGEST VETERANS ORGANIZATION



New Jersey LEGIONNAIRE



VOLUME 39, NO. 1

Official Publication of THE AMERICAN LEGION, DEPARTMENT OF NEW JERSEY
TRENTON, NJ

Spring 2026

Honoring Commander Channel



2026—2027 Officer Candidate Profiles

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Membership Musts

What Could Possibly Bring Two Generals & Carnac Together?

COMMANDER'S MESSAGE



My Legionnaires and Legion Family:

Traveling throughout this great state, I have had the privilege of meeting truly outstanding Legionnaires and visiting places I might never have experienced had I not been serving as commander of this remarkable organization. I will always cherish the warm welcomes I received during my official visits to the counties, the generous support for my projects and the invitations to ceremonies that truly demonstrate that the Legion Family is the real deal.

Among the many unforgettable moments this year, two stand out as lifetime memories. In January, I was deeply honored to attend Governor-elect Mike Sherrill's inauguration and inaugural ball. It was a tremendous privilege to represent The American Legion while having the opportunity to connect with past governors, city mayors and other distinguished dignitaries. It is an experience I know I would not have had without serving in this role.

Another moment that will remain with me forever was placing a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington during our visit to the Washington Conference. It was a bitterly cold day, but just before the ceremony began, I removed my overcoat, scarf, gloves—everything that had been keeping me warm. As we were led by the Honor Guard toward the Tomb, I felt something extraordinary: the cold no longer affected me. Instead, I was filled with a profound warmth brought on by the significance of the moment and the honor of the ceremony itself.

Once the ceremony concluded and we were led back up the steps, the cold returned immediately—but the memory of that warmth, and what it represented, has stayed with me ever since.



On April 12, I was honored at a Testimonial Luncheon. It was both humbling and rewarding to see members of The Legion Family from across the state come together for the occasion. My sincere thanks go to the committee for their tireless efforts in making it such a success. Thank you Dawne, Sharon, Dori, Dave,

Randy, Mike and Berley. Photo lower left: Commander Dan Channel, PNVC Chuck Robbins, Dawne Channel at the testimonial luncheon.

In closing, I want to emphasize that the year is not over yet—there is still important work to be done. The Wall of Honor project at the Menlo Park Veterans Home is underway, and I am currently in discussions with the Paramus Veterans Home (a greenhouse) and the Vineland Veterans Home (water feature) regarding when we can begin there, as well.

I would also like to take a moment to thank Lois, Tricia, Tammie, John and Judith for your continued hard work and dedication. There will be more formal opportunities to express my appreciation in the near future.

YOUR E-MAIL NEEDED

NJ Legionnaire will no longer be printed

For those of you reading this in paper format, this will be the final print version sent to those without a valid email address. If you wish to continue to receive *New Jersey Legionnaire* on a quarterly basis, it will be available on the dept. website and you will receive an email notification. Thus, The American Legion, both state and national, need your e-mail address.

As costs continue to rise, printing & mailing *NJ Legionnaire* became unsustainable. Since 2018, the cost has more than doubled, with no end to the increases in sight. Continuing a print edition would have consumed almost all of the \$5 dues increase! If you have not already done so, go to legion.org and register to include your e-mail address. If you are already registered, check the address on file. If it is no longer valid, update it. Why is this important? After this issue of *New Jersey Legionnaire*, you will only receive the newspaper electronically and it will be available on our website. We need your help to keep our costs down and keep our dept. financially strong. Update or add your Legion profile to legion.org today. You may even get a birthday message from our commander and other important info, as well.

**Cover photo taken at Commander Channel's Testimonial Luncheon.
From left: SVC Joel Bloom, Commander Dan Channel, Historian Mike Smith,
SVC David Marciano, SVC John Warhurst, SVC Kerry Long, SVC Kevin Mitchell.**

New Jersey Legionnaire

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New Jersey Legionnaire is an official publication of The American Legion, Department of New Jersey. It is published quarterly and has a circulation of 40,000.

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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 summer issue is July 1, 2026

Dept. Convention

JUNE 10 – 13

PNVC Chuck Robbins, Chair



With spring and warmer weather upon us, it won't be long until our American Legion Family meets in beautiful Wildwood for our 107th Annual Dept. Convention, which this year will be held from June 10-13.

As your newly appointed Convention Chair, chairing this committee has been a learning experience, and I cannot say enough how grateful I am for the help and guidance of Past Convention Chair Joe Gugliuzza, Dept. Adjutant John Baker and Dept. Chief Information Officer PDC Steve Fisher in the overall planning and organizing process of this year's convention.

Know that we have an outstanding group of committee members working hard and behind the scenes to bring you the best possible convention we can.

This year's convention will kick-off on Wednesday, June 10, when delegates will be able to pick-up their convention packets and walk the convention center's great hallway visiting all of the many vendor tables on hand, to include a Deborah Healthcare screening station where various screenings can be done - all to ensure your well-being.

Also on June 10, we encourage everyone to attend a Be-the-One Veterans Suicide Awareness Seminar being held in conjunction with experts on the issue from Columbia University. This will start at 9 a.m. in Ballroom B. Following the seminar, at 11 a.m. in Ballroom B, a dept.-wide Membership Revitalization Workshop will be held by National Membership Instructor Mark Woodsmall and Dept. Membership Chair Sophia Dmoch. Fliers for both events can be found on our dept. web site and, although we encourage you to RSVP for each event so we have a headcount, you can simply sign in at arrival for each.

Other highlights of the convention beside normal business that will take place include:

- The NJ Motor Vehicle Commission's Outreach Van on site Thursday, June 11, 9 a.m.-2 p.m. where motor vehicle services can be done (Look for flier to come out in May where you can register for services to include REAL ID).

- Learn all about The American Legion's hottest new topic: "American Legion Gaming".
 - Miss New Jersey (Miss America Contest) Belle Nicholas will address the convention.
 - REVOLUTION NJ (NJ's rep for the "America 250" celebration) will speak at the convention and have a huge display on hand in the Convention Center's Great Hallway.
 - All of our American Legion Family is invited to participate in a Yoga class on Thursday morning starting at 7 a.m. in the Great Hallway. Learn how to relax and keep your body healthy through Yoga. Hope to see you there.
 - Friday, June 12 is Woman Veterans Appreciation Day in NJ and your dept. will honor our women veterans with a state of NJ Medal Ceremony. The NJ Dept. of Military Affairs will conduct the ceremony. Gov. Mikie Sherrill and Adjutant General BG Yvonne Mays have been invited to attend and speak at the convention and be a part of this ceremony. I encourage all of our female Legion members to register for this event. A flier is available on our dept. web site.
 - On Saturday, June 13, our 6th annual Be-the-One/Buddy Check 1k Suicide Awareness Walk and Breakfast will be held starting at 8 a.m. To register for the walk, see the flier on our dept. web site. It also has been circulating and been distributed in various ways. Following the walk, a sit-down breakfast will be held in the convention center for all walk registrants, which will include a patriotic celebration you will not want to miss performed by the American Bombshells. This celebration will honor America's 250th birthday and Flag Day. Members of our Legion Family can also enter an essay contest being run by our Dept. Americanism Committee titled "A Legacy of Service-America at 250." The winner will be announced at the breakfast and will receive a \$250 cash award. See flier on dept. website.
 - Lastly, our convention parade will be held on the boardwalk starting at 2 p.m. The theme for this year's parade is "America 250-Our Veterans-And Our American Legion Family!"
- We are looking forward to a great convention and seeing all of you in Wildwood. Please also know, as I mentioned, fliers for all events are on our dept. web site, and have been put out on various social media platforms. Don't forget to get your ads in for the convention booklet. See you in Wildwood!

Revised Legion Committee

NEC Eugene "Gene" O'Grady, Chair



The committee has been working hard on several items, have been meeting monthly and we are seeing progress on most issues and will continue until it's a success.

I would like to thank and recognize Vice Chair Wilson, Secretary DEC Adair, JA PDC Dunn, PNVC

Robbins, PNEC Hanna Jr., PDC Bishop, PDC Calandrillo, PDC Fisher, PDC Howarth, PDC Miller and DEC Kramer for their work all year and hope all will return to complete the mission. It was our honor to serve you and Commander Dan Channel.

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). We are all in this together and are better together!

Thank you all for your service and what you do for The American Legion.

Membership

Sophia Dmoch, Chair



Spring is here, and our Legion's 107th convention in Wildwood is around the corner.

As of April 9, our dept. reported 27,099 members, representing 90.63% of the 2026 target goal of 29,900. Our retention rate stands at 86.51%. We are ranked 35th nationally among 55 departments and 8th

in the northeast. Unfortunately, we did not meet our 90% target goal in March or our 95% goal in April. What does this mean? If we continue at this rate, we will not reach our national target goal by May 13.

To increase our membership, we need better communication. As I mentioned in my earlier reports, OUTREACH isn't happening. Many posts still show 0 new members recruited. What does that tell me?

Membership continued on page 6

Candidates' Profiles

Anthony Gladden

Candidate for Department Commander



My name is Anthony L. "Tony" Gladden. I am a resident of Browns Mills. I am a proud Honorary Life Member of McKaig-Test-Mullen American Legion Post 455, New Egypt, Ocean County. As many of you, by now, are aware, I am a candidate seeking to be the 2026-2027 Dept. of NJ American Legion commander.

I enlisted in the US Air Force on July 5, 1988, and retired on Oct. 31, 2009, after more than 21 years of active duty. Attended Air Force Basic Military Training at Lackland AFB, Texas, and completed additional training at: Sheppard Air Force Base, TX, and Fort Leonard-Wood, MO. I am a Cold War, Panama, Gulf War and Global War on Terror era veteran. I've been Stationed at: Anderson AFB, Guam, Whiteman AFB, MO, and McGuire AFB, as well as deployed to Mombasa, Kenya and Al Dhafra Air Base, United Arab Emirates.

I have held several offices in The American Legion at the post, county, and dept. levels, to include: post commander, county commander, dept. historian, dept. executive committeeman, dept. vice-commander.

I have served on many Legion committees at the post, county, dept. and national levels to include: chair of the Dept. Sons of the American Legion Committee; vice chair of the dept. American Legion Leadership College and Moving Forward Committees; liaison to the Internal Affairs Committee for the Dept. American Legion Riders; National American Legion Media and Communications Commission.

I am, also, so very honored being a 2021 National American Legion College graduate.

For over 27 years, I have been sharing my life with Past NJ Dept. Auxiliary President, Charline Gladden. She became my bride over 23 years ago. Charline has blessed me with three daughters: Jessica, Tabitha and Teighla. We have two sons-in-law: Derby and Sean.

Our daughters have blessed us with 12 grandchildren. A grandson: Jaxon Anthony, and 11 granddaughters: Dessie, Haleigh, Karmella, Harminy, Riley,

Audrey, Paisley, Chloe, Charlie Rose, Teagan, and Adaline.

When elected, I hope to continue to "Be the LIGHT" and continue to "Bridge the Gap", by mentoring and educating our entire Legion Family on what makes The American Legion the BEST veterans service organization in our community, state and nation. Our team is very motivated to help our NJ Legion grow and influence our members to get excited about one of the many programs The Legion has to offer.

I, humbly, ask for your support for the high office of NJ State American Legion, Dept. Commander 2026-2027. Together, WE ALL can continue to be advocates for our veterans, children and the military community.

Joseph Fricker III

Candidate for Department Vice Commander



Joseph Fricker is a Panama era veteran who grew up on Long Island. He enlisted in the US Navy in 1986, serving as an Interior Communications Technician (SS) on the USS *Jack* SSN-605, before leaving the military with honora-

ble service in 1990.

In 2015, he joined Anthony Wayne American Legion Post 174, Wayne. He served many roles in the post, including adjutant and three-time commander. He is a graduate of American Legion Basic Training, NJ American Legion Leadership College Basic and Advanced classes, and is the 18th graduate of National American Legion College from the Dept. of NJ.

In Sept. 2018 he joined the Passaic County American Legion Committee as the county adjutant. In 2021, he became county vice commander; in 2023 he was elected county commander. He has represented Passaic County on several dept. committees, including American Legion Riders, Americanism and Oratorical. He, also, is a participant on the Passaic County American Legion Ritual Team. On the dept. level, Fricker currently serves as the Chair of the American Legion Riders committee, as well as the Credentials Committee for the dept. convention.

He is a dual member of the Sons of the American Legion with Anthony Wayne Squadron 174 and rides with Chapter 174 of the American Legion Riders.

The Lincoln Park resident has been married to his wife Donna for 32 years, has two children and one grandson.

Joseph is a passionate advocate for The American Legion Family and our causes, and with the support of his fellow Legionnaires, he hopes to bring that same passion to the role of Dept. Vice Commander.

Randy Grizzard

Candidate for Department Vice Commander



Randy Grizzard is an 18-year Legion member who joined Post 209, Scotch Plains in 2009 through his US Army service. In 2013, he transferred to Post 3, Westfield, joined Squadron 3 under his father's membership in 2015, and has been post commander since 2016.

During his time as commander, Grizzard has improved the post's financial outlook and membership. He also plays a big part in the day-to-day operations by keeping everything running smoothly, making sure everything is done, from regular maintenance and inspections to the weekly cleaning.

He has attended both the dept. and national conventions for the last six years, and has attended the NJ Legion College for 10 years, taking every class at least once, except for chaplain. Upon return, he easily shares and utilizes the knowledge he gained with his post's officers and members.

Randy served as Union County adjutant from 2016 to 2018 and is currently Union County DEC. He proudly served as master-at-arms for PDC Dan Dunn and PDC Larry Bishop.

Ezell Jackson

Candidate for Department Vice Commander



Ezell Jackson is a lifelong community leader, who is passionate about supporting veterans, seniors, youth and those in need.

A US Army veteran and retired Federal Law Enforcement Officer, Jackson has served with the Dept. of Justice, ICE and the

US Marshals Service. He leads as commander of Slade-Valentine American Legion Post 336 and holds multiple chaplain roles in Burlington County. With degrees in law enforcement, criminal justice, management and interfaith studies and chaplaincy, Jackson is also an ordained Interfaith minister and active in local church leadership. He continues to serve in Burlington through faith, education and community service.

Frank Landis

Candidate for Department Vice Commander



Frank Landis is a distinguished veteran and dedicated community leader whose career is defined by over 27 years of military service and an unwavering commitment to The American Legion.

His military journey began in 1996 when he joined the US Army. Throughout his tenure, he served in both active-duty and the Army Reserves, demonstrating a versatile commitment to national defense. In 2008, he was deployed to Iraq for a tour exceeding one year. After nearly three decades of service, Frank retired from the army in June 2023.

Parallel to his military career, Frank has become a cornerstone of The American Legion. He first joined in 2012 at Burlington County Post 294, Pemberton, where he rose to serve as post commander (2016–2017). In 2017, he transferred to Ocean County Post 455, New Egypt, serving as post commander (2018–2021) and finance officer since 2022. His leadership extended to the county level, where he served as county commander (2023–2025). A graduate of the 2024 National American Legion College, Landis has chaired the Dept. Americanism Committee since 2023 and served on the NJ Leadership College staff. His reliability and presence are well-known, having attended every dept. convention since 2014 and every national convention since 2021.

His commitment to preserving the organization's history was notably demonstrated through his work on the Dept. Centennial Committee, where he held the specialized responsibility of the Centennial Time Capsule. This project ensured that the dept's 100-year legacy was properly preserved for future generations of veterans to discover.

Currently, he serves as the Dept. American Legion Riders Director (2025–2026). In this high-profile role,

he provides state-wide oversight for the Riders Program, serving as the primary liaison between local chapters and dept. headquarters. Throughout his term, Frank is leading with the theme "Building our Legacy... Together," emphasizing unity and the collective responsibility of mentoring the next generation of leaders.

Beyond his service, Frank's greatest pride is his family. He has been married to his wife, Lara, since February 1998. They are the parents of three children, Jennifer, Micheal, and Frank Jr., and the proud grandparents of granddaughter, Margaret.

Dennis Duddie

Candidate for Department Vice Commander



Dennis Duddie originally hails from the Bronx. He is a member of a very unique group of veterans who served in two branches of the military. He proudly served in the US Navy from 1992 to 1994 as a damage control man. His duties included ship stability, firefighting, fire prevention, and chemical, biological and radiological warfare defense.

After his enlistment in the navy, he went on to serve in the NJ Army National Guard from 1994 to 2001 as a medical specialist in the 2nd Battalion, 113th Infantry Regiment, Riverdale.

After a four-year break in service, he returned to the Army National Guard from 2006 to 2010 as a medical specialist in the 1st Battalion, 114th Infantry Regiment, Woodbury.

While serving in the National Guard, he worked as a police dispatcher for the Borough of North Arlington from 1998 to 2003 and the Borough of Fair Lawn from 2000 to 2004. He also served as an emergency medical technician with the North Arlington Volunteer Emergency Squad from 1994 to 1999. He has always accepted the challenge of a demanding career in EMS and the combat medical service. He is known by many as a "first responder's first responder" for his outstanding service to his community and for putting the needs of others over his own.

Most recently, he was nominated to serve a fourth term as commander of Rochelle Park American Legion Post 170. He is also the Bergen County American Legion commander and the dept. chair for EHE.

The Legion post has thrived under his leadership and is constantly collaborating with other organizations for the mutual benefit of Bergen County veterans and their families. He assists veterans with benefit claims and helps homeless veterans find a permanent residence. He is always in the community trying to see how he can improve the lives of his fellow veterans.

Affordable Housing

James Scanlon, Chair



This Committee has undertaken a critically important mission: to develop affordable housing on American Legion owned properties across six locations in NJ, while also revitalizing and rebuilding the associated post homes. These efforts represent a thoughtful and strategic approach to addressing veteran homelessness while strengthening local American Legion infrastructure.

Dedicated project managers are advancing well-conceived and actionable plans in the following communities: Hoboken, South Amboy, Montclair, Emerson, Gloucester City and Westfield. Each project is designed to provide safe, supportive housing for the men and women who have honorably served our nation, while also creating new community space for service providers and veteran-focused programs.

These integrated services are essential to ensuring long-term stability, dignity and successful outcomes for our veterans.

These projects are not simply construction initiatives, they are investments in recovery, independence and the future of those who have sacrificed so much in service to our country.

Anyone interested in the specific stages of development at any of our six locations should feel free to contact me directly.

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BE THE ONE

Membership continued

Those posts rely solely on their current membership roster and don't seek outreach opportunities within their community.

On Wed., April 8 I held a virtual meeting on membership, and only seven counties participated. We need to do better as a dept., as membership is the core of our existence. It starts with us getting the information out to our posts.

The post data reports were sent out, but many posts mentioned they never received them. I can't pinpoint exactly why some posts didn't get them, but if your post officer forms weren't updated, that could be one reason. Keep in mind that these dept. forms are used for more than just mailings.

Another issue is our mail system. There seems to be a disconnect with it, lately. I reviewed all the post data reports received to ensure accuracy. If the wrong per capita was annotated, it was corrected. Any missing post data reports were completed and sent by the dept.

As a reminder, at the Oct. 18, 2025 DEC meeting, we approved and voted to increase our dept. membership dues, effective July 1. The dept. membership per capita will increase by \$5 for the 2027 membership year. The breakdown is \$23.50 for national and \$16.50 to the dept. The dept. had one of the lowest per capita rates in the nation. This gave all posts plenty of time to notify their members before they received their post data report, allowing them to increase their dues as needed.

At our upcoming convention, National American Legion Instructor Mark Woodsmall will conduct a class on revitalization on Wed., Jun 10, at 11 a.m. in Ballroom C, Wildwood Convention Center. Contact me if you would like to attend.

I hope everyone has been working on their Consolidated Post Report (CPR). The report is now live on myLegion.org. Remind your posts again. If a post chooses to submit their consolidated report using this method, it is recommended that they keep working in "draft mode" until they approach the submission window (April through June). I will track every CPR for the dept. and issue certificates again for 100% submission by a county. The fillable PDF for this year's CPR has been posted to legion.org and is now available for download. You can check the updated forms at CPR: Organization, Membership & Awards Publications

For further assistance or training needs, don't hesitate to contact the Channel Membership Team.

Upon request, we will come to you. We are making a collaborative effort to support every post through additional workshops and district revitalizations. Additional resources are available on mylegion.org, 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.

The Target Remains

PDC Bob Looby

National Honorary Member of the Employment & Homeless Commission



The quote "Target remains, I repeat target remains" is a pivotal moment in the movie Independence Day, where the characters are faced with a critical situation involving a target that has not been destroyed. This quote encapsulates the urgency and determination of the characters as they continue to fight against the alien threat. In our battle, the characters are us and the threat is veteran suicide!

VA recently released the *National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report*, which analyzes veteran suicide from 2001-2023, the most recent year for which data is available. The report shows there were 6,398 suicides among veterans in 2023, down from 6,442 in 2022. The average number per day fell slightly, to 17.5 in 2023 from 17.6 in 2022. Therefore, THE TARGET REMAINS!

As previously reported in this newsletter and my presentations, the 61% majority of veterans who died by suicide in 2023 were not receiving VA health care in the last year of their life. Suicide rates are elevated for veterans aged 18 to 34 years and those with certain risk characteristics, including homelessness, unemployment, criminal justice involvement, food insecurity, health problems, including pre-military disposition and pain. Among veterans who died by suicide from 2021 to 2023 and whose deaths were reported by VA suicide prevention teams, the most frequently identified risk factor was pain. In Nov., VA announced it housed the largest number of homeless veterans in

seven years, a critical improvement as homelessness looms as a major factor in veteran suicide. Here in NJ, we have additional resources to combat homelessness, in addition to SSVF, HUDVASH, Veterans Haven North, Veterans Haven South, and now BVH (Bringing Our Veterans Home). But one of the largest hindrances is rent arrears, \$500,000 documented by one NJ grantee over a two-year period. We must accept and consider this as a suicide causation, and preventable. All the above is helpful, but not destroying The Target.

In NJ, a common method of suicide is suffocation, which includes hanging. This method is consistent with trends seen across other states where suffocation often ranks as the most utilized method, particularly among younger populations. Firearms are the second most common method, despite being the leading method nationwide due to accessibility and lethality. These trends reflect data from state and national organizations focused on suicide prevention.

The longest in duration, statewide public and private initiative is Keep Our Veterans Alive (KOVA), which was initiated late in 2020 when it was determined that there was no NJ-wide veteran suicide awareness program. Its purpose is suicide awareness throughout the public and private sectors and connecting NJ's veterans with education of the contributors of that tragedy through homelessness, unemployment, criminal justice involvement, mental health and food insecurity. The governor's office was contacted to enlist their support during 2020, subsequently being the instigator of the now Governor's Challenge nationwide program for that awareness. Then in March 2021, KOVA was framed, designed and the first version of the Strategic Plan & Guiding Document was issued. The first meeting followed in April, with NJ DMAVA, major veteran service organizations and others participating. Its list of "champions" grew including eight veteran organizations, the three VA medical centers serving NJ within VISN 2 and 4, Wilmington, Philadelphia and NJ, several state agencies, prosecutor offices, sheriff's depts., the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention and more. It has continued with four statewide and 12 regional education and awareness sessions conducted with veterans and their families. Every NJ veteran is its market, including, now, the returned deployed NJ Army Guard soldiers. KOVA's ongoing leadership is the referenced VA's Community Engagement and Suicide Prevention coordinators. 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 this author; 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.

Other action items to destroy The Target continually include:

- Make physical contact with every veteran we encounter, especially those non-members. Carry the VA's SF-180 with you for their registration, see: Request Military Personnel Records Using Standard Form 180 | National Archives.
- "Sell" The American Legion to them, not for the sake of membership numbers, but our programs – then, hopefully, membership and an active member will be nurtured.
- Use the steps outlined in the VA's S.A.V.E. and Legion's Be the One programs. See VA S.A.V.E Training, and Be the One | The American Legion.

Recognize signs of distress.

Have meaningful conversations.

Encourage self-help.

Arm yourself with resources, using the above.

Now, for ongoing employment and homeless planning, see the flyer mailed to all posts for our Eighth Annual Casino Fair, attracting close to 1,200 job seekers in the past for further distribution. This, I believe, further demonstrates NJ as the leading employment Legion dept. since we reengineered the Employment & Homeless Committee in 2011 with 91 statewide fairs and Stand Downs, with 10,533 participants, and receiving six National Homeless and two Large Employers of the Year awards. Casino Control Commission Chair James Plousis is our co-founder for this career fair, as well as instigating and partnering with Operation Reentry when he was NJ State Parole Board Chairman in 2010. He has also been published in several national Legion publications.

We will manage and conduct our 10th Annual SJRSD (South Jersey Regional Stand Down), under the leadership of DEC Pat Tatum and team, attracting 1,400 veterans plus another 444 at our mobile events in the past.

We had a nice 7-year "run" as a project assisting our incarcerated veterans, but not funded for this

year. We inducted, interviewed and provided support to 907 vets in all nine state prisons, providing 407 DD214's, facilitated 230 claims, food and clothing to 183, placed 214 in housing upon release, plus 28 in Home For the Brave, Camden, and 31 in Veterans Haven North.

As a member of the NJ Department of Corrections (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 fair was on April 23 at DOC's HQ, Trenton; the second will be at Southwoods State Prison on June 11. Planning is also proceeding to take our incarcerated veterans mentoring services to the federal prison at Ft. Dix. This is being facilitated by Rich Liebler, Legion member, and recipient of our second National Employer of the Year with Sansone Auto Mall.

We, again, met, mentored and presented resources to Soldiers in the Medical Hold Unit, awaiting discharge, for the fourth session on March 28 in Sea Girt. We, including the VA's from Wilmington, Philly and NJ, and other providers have now met with about 250 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 KOVA/BTO (Keep Our Veterans Alive/Be the One) 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.

All these tragedies and causations is a community effort – not solely by one veteran organization or agency, but forging a real partnership to destroy the "Target(s)". Partner with the organizations who are the forerunners with suicide awareness, such as The Legion's initial Buddy Check, Be the One Campaign, and Past VFW State Commander Barbara Kim Hagemann's grant funding to their NJ posts. But, you, individually, can also be part of the solution and not wait for an organization to take the lead. Attack and remedy the suicide causations such as homelessness, unemployment, mental health issues, criminal justice involvement, and food insecurity. BEING CONNECTED IS NOT A SLOGAN, BUT AN INITIATIVE-TAKING "MOVEMENT" AS WITH KOVA, BTO and more!

Veteran Suicides, Will It Ever End! That is a profound and perceived negative statement. Yes, it will mostly end, but only with more cohesive and community effort.

107th Birthday with BG Mays, George, Carnac



Following a sumptuous breakfast at the 107th American Legion Birthday gathering at Brick Post 348 on March 7, speakers included BG Yvonne Mays, The Adjutant General of NJ; General George Washington, commemorating America's 250th anniversary; and Dean Joseph Imperato with the All Knowing—All Seeing Carnac the Magnificent.



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Deadline for summer issue is July 1, 2026

Oratorical Contest Winners



The Department Oratorical Contest was held Saturday, March 28, at Post 25, Milltown. Competition began at 10 a.m. Five exceptional orators, representing five districts, competed.

In photo, from left: Andrew Hadley, 2nd place, Donovan Catholic High School, grade 12, sponsor George P. Vanderveer Post 129, Ocean County; Liana Lemoine, 3rd place, Cedar Creek High School, grade 10, Kenneth B. Hawkins Post 61, Atlantic County; Department Commander Dan Channel; Diya Ranjan, 1st place, Woodbridge Academy Magnet School, grade 12, Woodbridge Post 87, Middlesex County; Morgan Covington, 4th place (tie), Union High School, grade 12, Connecticut Farms Post 35, Union County; Ellie Kim, 4th place (tie), Northern Valley Old Tappan, grade 10, Norwood Post 272, Bergen County; Oratorical Contest Chair Carl Ostergaard.