

# *The Richard H. Stewart, Jr. Post 543, Inc. Annual Report*

## *Late May 2016 – Early May 2017*



*Post 543 Recruiting Team in Action*

With the migration of many veterans to North Carolina, specifically to Brunswick County, the Post was able to capitalize on this and successfully recruited 14 new members. We achieved our Department goal of 165 paid members in January and ended the recruiting year with 171 paid members, exceeding our established goal by 3.6%. We attribute our success to two factors: first, our Historian has done an outstanding job in drafting and getting published in numerous media

outlets the Post's contributions to both veterans and their families, as well as the youth of Brunswick County and the nation. Second, because of this media effort, veterans in the area see the value of what we do and want to be a part of an organization that fosters community involvement in supporting veterans, active duty members and local youth initiatives.

The Post leadership has long recognized the need to bring together all the veteran organizations within Brunswick County to give strength to the voice of veterans in the county. In January, the first meeting of the Brunswick County Veteran's Coalition met at the St. James Community Center. This was an initiative by the Post to accomplish the following: speak with one voice to our collective political leaders on issues affecting veterans not only in the local area but also in the nation; second, to foster a feeling of friendship and cooperation among veteran organizations within the County; and last, to share information of value to veterans. Currently, the Coalition consists of representatives from 15 veteran organizations from Brunswick County and the list continues to grow.

To keep the Post Legionnaires informed about Post activities, a monthly Newsletter was created. Every month the Newsletter is sent via email to all Legionnaires. The Newsletter chronicles the preceding month's activities as well as looks forward to future events. This was an effort to get more involvement from the Post Legionnaires as well as build a sense of pride in being a Post Legionnaire.



*Dept Commander Shore at the St. James Military Appreciation Day Golf Tournament*



Early in the year the Department Commander, Commander David Shore, attended our annual St. James Military Appreciation Day golf tournament. 196 golfers participated in the event last year. This fundraiser was preceded by a Military Appreciation Day concert which was well attended by the families of St. James. Both events were very successful as evidenced by the total revenue generated by these events.

The purpose of the events is to celebrate and honor military service and to raise funds for the Post's many programs for veterans, active duty military, their families, and the community



*Present and Past Commanders greet Miss Teen NC and Miss NC*



*Post Legionnaires prepare float*



*Post 543 Honor Guard march in 4<sup>th</sup> of July parade*

Visibility of veterans in public events is key to the success of the American Legion. The Post participated in numerous events throughout the year. In July, the Post prepared a float and had Legionnaires march in front of it at the annual Southport, NC 4<sup>th</sup> of July parade. Approximately 40,000 people viewed this parade. The Commander of the Post was invited to be the keynote speaker at a Flag Retirement Ceremony. The 4<sup>th</sup> of July Festival was co-chaired by a Post Legionnaire, the Grand Marshall of the parade was a Post Legionnaire and the hospitality room was run by a Legionnaire and his wife.

Our involvement in community affairs did not stop with the 4<sup>th</sup> of July events. The Post also participated in the Oak Island "Christmas by the Sea" and the Azalea Festival Parade in Wilmington in April. In September, an event very dear to our hearts was conducted with the St. James fire department. The master of ceremonies, Bill Morgan (a Post Legionnaire) organized and conducted an hour-long ceremony to honor those who died in the 911 attack. One of those who died is the Post namesake, Richard H. Stewart, Jr. Our Honor Guard cohosted, planned, and conducted a remembrance ceremony for the victims of 911. The Post Honor Guard also performed flag ceremonies for the City of Southport during the summer.

The Post has an obligation to pay tribute to the veterans past and present and fulfills this responsibility with conducting an annual Veterans Day Ceremony followed by an annual Post dinner. Last year's guest speaker at the Veterans Day Ceremony was RADM (Retired) Steve Ratti, USCG. Approximately 300 people attended the ceremony and Admiral Ratti's words were well received by all who attended.



*Post Honor Guard presenting colors*



*St. James Veteran's Memorial*

In May, the Post will once again execute our tribute to our fallen comrades in a Memorial Day Ceremony. Guest speakers for this event will be two married Air Force active duty Chief Master Sergeants, Michael Shane Flint and his wife Karen F. Beirne-Flint. The Post had three of our Legionnaires go on "eternal patrol" this year. This ceremony will honor them as well as all who have fallen in defense of our country.



*South Brunswick High School Students receive recognition at Post Awards Night*

The Post recognized the importance that civic organizations play in helping the Post help veterans. In March 2017 over 23 plaques and certificates were presented by the Post Commander to local civic organizations as recognition for their active support of the American Legion. At our May 2017 Awards meeting we presented three local students \$3000 from our “Richie Hat Trick” college scholarship fund. This summer our Post will sponsor four Boys’ State, and three Girls’ State candidates and four North Carolina Trooper candidates. The Post partners with several local civic organizations to provide funding for these and other initiatives to assist the youth of Brunswick County. Organizations such as the Boy Scouts, Civil Air Patrol, Horse Play Farms, Waves 4 Kids as well as worthwhile organizations all benefit from this cooperative effort within the community.

On January 7, the Post hosted an Oratorical contest. One of our Post Legionnaires worked tirelessly for four months with four candidates from two different high schools to prepare them for the contest. Three contenders received a total of \$2500 in scholarships. Our candidate won the District competition held at Post 10 later that month. He was a runner-up in the Division competition held in February. With respect to scholarships, our candidate for the Colon Furr Scholarship won the Department wide competition.



*Richard J. Thomas receives District 9 Oratorical Award*



*Steve Muir accepting award from the Post Commander*

To enhance the comradery within the post, several social events were conducted. As mentioned earlier the Post Commander hosted a Veterans Day dinner, our entertainment chairman arranged for a social gathering for the Army/Navy football game and we had a “Spring Fling” BBQ at a facility in St. James. At the Spring Fling the Commander was honored to present to Steve Muir, the Assistant Service Officer for the Post, on behalf of the Director of the National Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Commission with a *Citation for Meritorious Service*.



*South Brunswick High School JROTC Air Rifle Team A*

Prior to the date the South Brunswick High School opened its doors for regular school, the Post taught a one-week basic marksmanship course to interested cadets from the Junior ROTC associated with the school. The Army Senior Instructor of the JROTC, a Post Legionnaire, and the Commander of the Post taught topics such as gun safety, basic marksmanship principals, and sportsmanship. This year's air rifle team was very successful in the various competitions it entered. The team finished a respectable 36<sup>th</sup> out of 157 teams who participated in the 2017 American Legion Sporter Air Rifle Competition. The cadets from the "Cougar Battalion" also competed in the Orion Air Rifle competition and finished 2<sup>nd</sup> in its Division which consists of teams from six states. In the Army "Best of the Best" competition the team finished 18<sup>th</sup> out of 53 teams invited by the Army nationwide to participate. They concluded the season with an impressive first place out of 16 teams from the local area.

Our involvement with South Brunswick High School did not stop with supporting the rifle team. Two of our Post Legionnaires planned and coordinated with the JROTC Army Senior Instructor at the school to arrange for a variety of subjects to be taught to the cadets during the school year. Several Post Legionnaires and veterans taught military history, time management, financial management and other life skills to these young cadets.



As we are all aware, the holiday season can be a period of joy and happiness for the family. However, in some cases it can be a period of sadness to those in need. We are all inspired by our quest to assist servicemen and women at any time but especially during the holiday season. One of our Post Legionnaires has established an excellent rapport with the Wounded Warrior Battalion – East located at Camp Lejeune, NC. Some enlisted men and women are financially challenged for various reasons and unable to give their families a good Christmas. The Post provided funding for this Post Legionnaire to go up to Camp Lejeune and, with the aid of the Battalion, identify several service men and women who needed our help in making this a good Christmas. As a result, we could provide food and gifts for five families who were in need.



*Charlie Brown Christmas Tree*

Another new event in which the Post participated was the St. James Service Club annual “Celebration of the Holidays”. A Post Legionnaire came up with an idea to display a “Charlie Brown Christmas Tree” as a symbol of what most of us remember of Christmas Trees we had when deployed in combat zones. The tree was decorated with dog tags, P-38s, pictures of Post Legionnaires during Christmas in Vietnam, rank insignia and other military related artifacts such as a helmet, bush hat, maps etc. It was interesting to see how much attention this tree received. Additionally, the Post sent Christmas Cards to over 50 individuals and organizations which had supported our Post throughout the year.



*2016 Post Christmas Card*



*Post Legionnaires preparing to serve at the "Chili Cookoff"*

Another annual event which the Post participates is the Chili Cook-Off where the Post entered the competition with a “Boilermaker Chili”. A recipe the Post Commander gave to the “Chili Chicks” of the Post. These are wives of the Post who dedicate a tremendous amount of time to assist the Post in community affairs. This year the Chili Chicks did a terrific job and their efforts were rewarded by placing first in both the overall competition as well as the organization/restaurant category. The judges were members of the WWAY TV station.

At the last Department Convention held in July, the Post had the honor and distinction of having both the Commander of the Year, Rick Sessa, and the Adjutant of the Year, Gary Crowden. They received their respective awards from the Department Commander, David Shore. The Post also received the “God and County” award in its category and the St. James Women’s Club also received recognition for the work they have done for the local community. This organization was nominated by the Post for the excellent work they have done to promote the welfare of children in the community.

Prior to Christmas, the Post collaborated with Operation North State in identifying and provided funding for 30 active duty North Carolina personnel to receive “Christmas Boxes”. Operation North State had to cancel the “Peer Fishin” event due to Hurricane Mathew. It was the right decision especially when you saw part of the Oak Island Pier disappear into the ocean. The Post responded to an urgent request from its CEO, Terry Snyder, and approved the expenditure of \$500 to help veterans who were adversely affected by the flooding.





*Mrs. Julia Montgomery, Folds of Honor, accepts check from Post Commander*



*Mr. Bauer from the Wounded Warrior Battalion*

The Post invited several guest speakers to our monthly meetings. There was a speaker from the Folds of Honor, an organization to which the Post donates a substantial amount, a speaker from Special Operations Warrior Foundation, another charity organization which we contribute to, a speaker from the Brunswick County Veteran assistance office to keep us up-to-date with what is transpiring with the Veterans Affairs and Mr. Bauer from the Wounded Warrior Battalion who gave an excellent briefing on Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome/Traumatic Brain Injury.



Our District Commander and member of our Post, Tom Cerniglia, along with 3 members of our Post and other American Legionnaires assigned to Posts within the District planned, coordinated, and executed with 102 volunteers from various American Legion Posts within the District a Veterans Benefit Action Center at American Legion Post 10 in Wilmington. The Veteran's Affairs in Winston-Salem sent several Veteran Service Officers to assist 766 veterans/family members in filing claims, settling claims, and/or providing information on status of existing claims. The result was the distribution of approximately \$1.8 million. The event was so successful that the VA has offered to conduct another event next year in the area.

This has been a very active year for the Post. We strongly believe our efforts have projected a very positive image of the American Legion within the community but more importantly we feel confident that our Post Legionnaires have contributed significantly to improving the lives of our veterans, their family members, and the youth of Brunswick County. We know there is more to be accomplished and we will strive in the coming months to continue to seek out veterans and the youth in Brunswick County who need our help. Our commitment is to help veterans and the citizens of Brunswick County who need our assistance.