

The Richard H. Stewart, Jr. Post 543, Inc. Annual Report Fiscal Year Beginning July 1, 2018

Veterans Continuing Their Service To America

The growth of Post 543 continues in its seventh year. More veterans are becoming Legionnaires in the Post, and more Legionnaires are becoming active Post members. More significantly, newer Legionnaires are serving as Officers of the Post continuing the transition beyond the founding few.

We achieved our goal of 192 members and now have 200 paid Legionnaires. This report highlights the 70+ programs, projects and events completed by the Legionnaires of Post 543 in the past year.



In Public View Throughout the Year

The Post's Legionnaires played significant roles in North Carolina's Official Fourth of July Festival in Southport, North Carolina. A Legionnaire managed the hospitality tent for the entire week-long festival. The Post partnered with a local Boy Scout troop to conduct a flag retirement ceremony, and the Post Commander kicked-off the Fourth of July Parade by reading the Declaration of Independence to the assembled crowd. The Post then marched in the parade.

The following Saturday, the Post sponsored the annual St. James Military Appreciation Day golf tournament. That event is held each year to recognize the military service of veterans living in the community as well as to raise funds for the Post's programs in support of veterans, active duty military and Americanism in the community.

After a quiet summer, Hurricane Florence forced the cancelation of the Post's annual 9/11 Remembrance Ceremony. In the storm's aftermath, the Post mobilized its resources in several ways. The Post helped the local Walmart distribute meals to those in need. At FEMA assistance locations, the Post distributed gift cards to



veterans in need of immediate financial help. Working with FEMA field teams, Post members responded to veterans in need as they were found by the field teams. And the Post's Service Officers assisted Post members in applying for aid from the American Legion National Emergency Fund. (In early 2019, the Post donated \$1,000 to help replenish the fund.)

The storm's damages also forced the cancellation of a Warrior Ride through St. James in October that the Post was coordinating, but that month the Post assisted Operation North State with a fishing tournament for wounded warriors and disabled veterans.

November is the month for Veterans and for Thanksgiving. It is also the month the United States Marine Corps celebrates its birthday. As part of that celebration, a Post Legionnaire organized a golf outing at St. James for

Marines from Camp Lejeune along with Navy and Coast Guard sailors stationed there. The club owners paid for the Marines golf. The Post paid for their meals and many Post members played with the Marines.

On the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of November, the Post conducted a Veterans Day Ceremony for residents of the Town of St. James and surrounding communities where retired Air Force Master Sergeant Howie Franklin spoke to those assembled about his experience as Chief Steward of Air Force One. Hundreds of people attended.

After the Town ceremony, the Post Executive Committee went to a local assisted living facility and conducted a Veterans Day Ceremony for veterans living there. That afternoon the Post held a picnic for all veterans in the area while at the same time participating in the local Hometown Heroes Chili Cookoff competition, involving over a dozen organizations and hundreds of people. Wives of Legionnaires made the chili, which won the "People's Choice" award.

Over the weekend, Post 543 partnered with JROTC Cadets to distribute poppies at the local Walmart.

On Thanksgiving Day, one of the Post Legionnaires arranged for two buses of Marines from Camp Lejeune to have Thanksgiving dinners in the homes of community residents rather than in the mess halls on base.

December was another busy month. We displayed our Post Christmas

Tree at the St. James Service Club' Holiday Celebration. All the other trees on display were elegantly decorated with glass ornaments, bows, glitter and lights. Ours evoked a Christmas tree in the field and was decorated with items a soldier or Marine might have with him on the line. Rather than gifts, the tree was surrounded with photos and memorabilia from our days long ago on active duty.



It reminded all who viewed it of the sacrifices made by those defending our freedom far from the comforts of the family home during the holidays. Most touching were the moments when now grown daughters of WWII veterans pulled pictures of their fathers from their wallets and shared with Legionnaires stories of their fathers.

Wreaths Across America, which the Post supports, is a nationwide effort to lay wreaths at the graves of all veterans buried in our National Cemeteries. Post 543 held a “Wreaths for the Fallen” ceremony to lay wreaths at the graves of all veterans interred in a cemetery nearby.

Also for the holidays, the Post partnered with Operation North State (ONS) to send holiday gift packages to active duty military personnel serving away from home.



The Post kicked off 2019 with its sixth American Legion Constitutional Speech Contest. This is the only such speech contest that has ever been held by an American Legion Post in Brunswick County. Two Legionnaires mentored students from two high schools who competed. Since no other Posts in District 9 held contests this year, the winner of our Post contest was declared the District winner and went on to win the Division 2 contest and place second in the Department contest.

The Post responded to the needs of those military personnel stationed at the Oak Island Coast Guard Station during the Government shutdown. During the shutdown Coast Guard personnel did not receive their pay as scheduled. Working with the Senior Chief of the Oak Island station, the Post purchased one hundred \$20 gift cards from Walmart for the Chief, on behalf of the Coast Guard Chiefs Association, to distribute to Coast Guard personnel as needed.

In March the American Legion celebrated its 100th anniversary. The Post Commander wrote an op-ed piece describing how the basic principles behind the founding of the American Legion are alive today in the community programs like those of Post 543. The article ran in three newspapers.

In April, the Post had a table at the Southport Spring Festival to distribute poppies and solicit new members. Later in the month the Post provided volunteers for the VA's *Veterans Action Experience Center* held in Wilmington. This three-day event helped 750 veterans.

At the end of May, the Post conducted the annual Memorial Day ceremony attended by hundreds of community residents. Partnering with Cadets from the Civil Air Patrol the Post distributed poppies at the local Lowes Home Improvement Center.

Post 543 in the Schools

Post 543 has developed programs with four schools in Brunswick County: South Brunswick Middle School, South Brunswick and Brunswick Early College High Schools, and Brunswick County Community College.

At South Brunswick Middle School, we support the **AVID** Program for **Advancement through Individual Determination**, which encourages students from families whose backgrounds did not include college educations to prepare in high school to go to college themselves. Legionnaires from Post 543 speak with the students to demonstrate how going to college helped them in their military service and careers beyond.



The Post sponsors the Robotics Team at

Brunswick Early College High School, and Legionnaires from the Post mentor students there in preparation for the Constitutional Speech Contest. The Post also sponsors juniors there for Tarheel Boys and Girls State and for the NC Trooper Program.

The Post supports students at South Brunswick High School through mentoring of students preparing for the Constitutional Speech Contest, sponsoring Juniors for Tarheel Boys and Girls State and for the NC Trooper Program, and awarding the Richard H. Stewart, Jr. Scholarships to graduating Seniors.

The Post supports the Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps at South Brunswick High School. Legionnaires teach over twenty separate courses

as guest instructors on topics ranging from Time Management and Personal Finance to the Constitution and Bill of Rights and the histories of wars involving the United States from World War I. The JROTC Battalion's NCOIC wrote an op-ed published locally describing the positive impact the Legionnaire-Instructors have had by increasing student classroom participation while reducing dropouts to zero. He observed that the school leadership fully embraced the Legion's support and other teachers in the school have asked if the Legion's instructors could help in their own classes.

The Post supports the JROTC Rifle Team with financial assistance and coaching. The Post provides the American Legion Scholastic Excellence and Military Leadership awards for the Battalion.



The Post's work with Brunswick County Community College is focused on helping veterans who are students there. The Post initiated the **PAVE** Program there several years ago: the **Partnership to Advance Veteran Education**.

Veterans attending the college have tuition and fees paid by the VA, but many have a hard time making classes because the demands of part-time work off campus needed to meet other expenses don't fit well with class schedules. **PAVE** provides funds to the Brunswick County Community College Foundation to hire veterans to work on campus doing jobs that not only don't interfere with classes but often involve work that coincides with their studies.

Post 543 nominated a nursing student from Brunswick County Community College who won a North Carolina Colin Furr Nursing Scholarship.

Behind the Scenes

Contributing to the growth in membership of the Post and its ability to serve is the comradeship among the Post's Legionnaires. This is strengthened through our monthly meetings and social gatherings.



The topics for Post meetings varied from approving the budget in July to developing responses to Hurricane Florence in September to presentations by representatives and beneficiaries of the Folds of Honor and Special Operations Warrior Foundations in October and November.



An initiation ceremony for new members and quinquennial members was the focus of the January meeting. Presentations by our Colin Furr Scholarship winner and a participant in the **PAVE** program were made in February. Presentations by both candidates for Department Commander were given in March.

The May meeting was devoted to officer elections and our annual recognition of our Boys State/Girls State Delegates and Our Hat trick Scholarship winners.

Our social events included a summer beach party, our Veterans Day Picnic, an Army v. Navy game viewing party, an Armed Forces Day picnic in May and a patriotic concert in June.

Very much behind the scenes is the work of our Veteran Service Offices, helping veterans in and outside the Post, but whose work is never publicized out of respect of the privacy of those they help. Throughout the year our VSO's helped veterans on matters dealing with the VA and other agencies as well as finding ways the Post could help individual veterans in need.

Veterans and their families beyond those living locally are helped by the Post's contributions to the Fisher House of Charleston, the Folds of Honor and Special Operations Warrior Foundations, and the Wounded Warrior Project.

Also behind the scenes, but open to the public as well is our website, NCPost543.org. It keeps the Post members and public apprised of Post news, developments and coming events. It is updated several times each week, and this year won the North Carolina Department award for best Post website.

The reason an American Legion Post exists is so the Post and its Legionnaires can continue to serve America through the Four Pillars of the American Legion: Americanism, supporting a strong National Defense, serving Veterans and Children and Youth. The programs of Post 543 supported all four pillars during the past year.

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