



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

July 2017--June 2018

Veterans Continuing their Service to America

The growth of Post 543 continues in its sixth year. More local veterans are becoming Legionnaires in the Post, and more Legionnaires are becoming active Post members. This, in turn, has allowed the Post to engage in more projects in service to the Community, State and Nation.

Our efforts to strengthen the Four Pillars of the American Legion have been recognized at both the national and community levels. We have received Recognition of Post Excellence from the National Commander of the American Legion and recognition of our programs to enhance the lives of those living in Brunswick County from the Brunswick County Sheriff's Foundation.

We achieved our goal of 173 Legionnaires by Veterans Day, 2017, and ended the year with 180 paid Legionnaires. This report summarizes 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 began its year with its Legionnaires taking significant roles in North Carolina's Official Fourth of July Festival in Southport, North Carolina. A Past Post Commander managed the hospitality tent for the entire festival, the Post Adjutant spoke at the Flag Retirement Ceremony, and the Post Commander kicked-off the Fourth of July Parade by reading the Declaration of Independence to the assembled crowd. And 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 Post programs in support of veterans, active duty military and the community. Retired Air Force Major Steve McLeary, Executive Director of the Special Operations Warrior Foundation, was the guest of honor.



Post 543 is named after Richard H. Stewart, Jr., one of the first casualties of the War on America that began on September 11, 2001. Rich was working in the World Trade Center and lost his life that day. Many people now living in our community were working in New York or working in the Pentagon that day. Some were first responders. So, it is important that together with the St. James Fire Department, we conduct a 9/11 remembrance ceremony each September. Hundreds of community residents attended.

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, our Post's 2nd Vice Commander organized a golf outing at St. James for Marines from Camp Lejeune along with some Navy and Coast Guard sailors stationed there. The club owners paid for the Marines' golf. The Post paid for their meals, and many Legionnaires played golf with the Marines.

On the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of November, the Post conducted a Veterans Day Remembrance Ceremony where retired Army General Don Parker addressed those assembled. Again, hundreds attended. That night the Post held a Veterans Day dinner to celebrate our military service. During the day the Post also participated in the local Chili Cook-off Competition, involving over a dozen organizations and hundreds of people, where wives of Legionnaires made chili for the competition.



On Thanksgiving Day, our 2nd Vice Commander arranged for two buses of Marines from Camp Lejeune who were just out of Basic training 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's Celebration of the Holidays. All other trees at the celebration 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. 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.

Wreaths Across America is a nationwide effort to lay wreaths at the grave of all veterans buried in our National Cemeteries. Post 543 initiated what will be an annual ceremony to lay wreaths at the graves of veterans interred at a cemetery nearby.



Also for the Holidays, the Post marched in the Oak Island Christmas parade and partnered with Operation North State (ONS) to send holiday gift packages to active duty personal from North Carolina serving away from home.

The Post kicked off 2018 with its fifth 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. This year high school juniors from two Brunswick County high schools competed.

In March the Post was honored at the Brunswick County Sheriff's Office *Diamonds and Denim Ball* for providing services to enhance the lives and wellbeing of veterans and other citizens of Brunswick County. Later in the month the Post supported the Cape Fear Council, BSA's Leadership Breakfast.

Between those two events, the Post "went fishing." Legionnaires provided financial support and the boots on the ground for the USMC Wounded Warrior Regiment's "American Experience" for wounded warrior-athletes from around the globe participating in the Marine Corps Trials at Camp Lejeune. The day off from competition to go fishing took place at Ocean Crest Pier on Oak Island.

In March, Post 543 Legionnaires assisted in the VA's *Veterans Action Experience Center* held in Wilmington, NC. Two Post members served on the event committee and other Post members volunteered at the three-day event that helped 750 veterans.

In May, the Post Honor Guard presented the Colors at the St. James Service Club's one woman show, *Rosie the Riveter; We can do it*, where a well known actress portrayed this iconic American.

At the end of the Month, we conducted our annual Memorial Day Ceremony. The guest speaker was Hon. Larry Hall, Secretary of the North Carolina Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. He and Post Commander Mike Fegan laid a wreath at the St. James Veterans Memorial.

In June the Post sponsored an outdoor *Concert for Military Appreciation* featuring the music of Mike's Garage Band that was attended by hundreds of St. James families.

The red poppy became the official memorial flower of the American Legion in 1920. It symbolizes the blood shed by those who fought for our country in World War I and later wars. Post 543 distributed poppies three times this past year to remind all of the sacrifices that continue to be made in defense of our freedom.

Perhaps the most visible of our Legionnaires are those in our Honor Guard. They lead the Post in parades, present our National Colors at community gatherings as well as at our meetings and, most importantly, render final honors at the funeral and memorial services for Veterans throughout Brunswick county.



Post 543 in the Schools

Post 543 has developed programs with four schools in Eastern 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. *AVID* is the acronym for **Advancement through Individual Determination**, and the program encourages students whose family backgrounds did not include college to prepare in high school to go to college themselves. Legionnaires from Post 543 speak with the students to demonstrate how their going to college helped them in their military service and careers beyond.

The Post sponsors the Robotics Team at Brunswick Early College High School, mentor's students there who wish to compete in the Constitutional Speech Contest and sponsors juniors for Tarheel Boys and Girls State and for the American Legion of North Carolina Department Student 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 the Student Trooper program, and awarding the Richard H. Stewart, Jr. Hat Trick scholarships to graduating Seniors.

The Post supports the Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps at SBHS. Legionnaires teach twenty separate courses as guest instructors on topics ranging from Time Management, Decision Making and Personal Financial Management to the Constitution and Bill of Rights and the histories of wars involving America beginning with WW I. The Post supports the JROTC Rifle Team with financial assistance and coaching.



Our work with Brunswick County Community College focuses on helping Veterans who are students there. We initiated the *PAVE* Program there several years ago. *PAVE* stands for **P**artnership to **A**dvance **V**eterans **E**ducation. Veterans attending college have tuition and fees paid for by the VA, but many have a hard time going to college because the part time work off-campus they need to do to cover their other expenses often interferes with class attendance. *PAVE* provides funds to the Brunswick County Community College Foundation to hire veterans to work doing on-campus jobs that not only don't interfere with classes but often involves work that coincides with their studies.

Post 543 nominated a nursing student at Brunswick County Community College for the North Carolina Department's Colin Furr Nursing Scholarship, which she won.



Behind the Scenes

Contributing to the strength 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.

Attendance at our meetings grew throughout the year. We had guest speakers at most of our meetings. They included LTG Michael Linnington USA (ret), CEO of the Wounded Warrior Project; Col. Russell Burton USMC, Commanding Officer of Marine Corps Air Station, New River; Cmdr. Robert Mohr USCG, Captain of the *USCGC Diligence*; Ms. Susan Goodrich, Program Head of the Single Marine Program at Camp LeJeune; Kim Munley, President of Step up for Soldiers; student veterans in the *PAVE* program at BCC; the winner of the Colin Furr Nursing scholarship; and Carolyn Moss of the NC Department of Commerce.

Our social events included our Veterans Day dinner, an Army v. Navy Game viewing party, tables at the Diamonds and Denim Ball, a picnic in April, and an outing to Myrtle Beach to see *Letters from Home*, the Grammy winning singing duo who performed to honor veterans, active military and their families. (All social gatherings were paid for by the Legionnaires who participated; no Post funds were used.)



Very much behind the scenes is the work of our Post's Veteran Service Officers. It must be so by necessity for confidentiality for those assisted. Throughout the year our VSO's helped veterans and their families inside and out of the Post on matters dealing with the VA and other public agencies.

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



Behind the scenes, but open to the public as well, is our website, NCPost543.org. Updated several times each week, it keeps the Post members apprised of Post news, developments and coming events.

Serving America through the Four Pillars of the American Legion is the overarching purpose of Post 543. Although we accomplished much last year, there is more we can do and plans are already well underway for next year.