



The Four Pillars of the American Legion

By Mike Fegan

It began with 18 Veterans in the fall of 2011. Now it has grown to over 170 Legionnaires. “It” is American Legion Post 543 serving St. James, Arbor Creek, Winding River, Palmetto Creek and other nearby communities. This Post has no legion hall; it has no bar yet it has grown ten-fold in six years because of its unwavering commitment to the Four Pillars on which the American Legion was founded in 1919: Americanism, National Security, Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation, and Children and Youth.



Americanism programs include the *Constitutional Speech Contest*, designed to deepen local high school students’ appreciation for the U.S. Constitution; Participation in the *Southport Fourth of July Festival*; Sponsorship of the annual *Memorial Day and Veterans Day observances for the St. James Community Center*; and Maintains *the Veterans Memorial in the Town of St. James*.

National Security efforts include support for active duty military and their families at Marine Camp LeJeune, Coast Guard station Oak Island, Operation North State for servicemen and women from North Carolina serving overseas, and Operation Comfort Warrior. However, most of the Post’s efforts involve support for Veterans.



Support for Veterans includes providing ramps, rails, home repairs and transportation assistance for local disabled veterans, sponsoring the Veterans Work Study Program at Brunswick Community College, providing Military Honors for Veterans of St. James and Brunswick County, and helping local veterans navigate the complexities of the VA’s services through the Vet-to-Vet Program.

Recently a unique extension of this service took place when some 25 Legionnaires from Post 543 joined with Legionnaires from other Posts in the Cape Fear region and partnered with the Veterans Administration and State and county Veterans Services Officers to host a Veterans Benefits Action Center (VBAC) in Wilmington. Over three days, 766 veterans were seen at the VBAC to help them resolve their issues or answer complex questions concerning VA benefits. Officials from the Veterans Health Administration and Wilmington Health Care Center enrolled Veterans in MyHealthVet and VA medical care programs. VA claims examiners authorized \$1.8million in payments for deserving veterans in North Carolina. A Korean War Veteran who had spent 14 years pursuing his case was awarded back pay of over \$ 86,000. A homeless female Veteran received a total disability rating, enrolled in medical care for treatment and medication, and met with a VA housing specialist who assisted her in finding housing with a HUD/VA grant

Programs for Children and Youth include teaching enrichment classes to JROTC students at South Brunswick High School, and sending Brunswick County high school students to Boys State and Girls State, where they practice the process of democratic representative government. It also includes Legionnaires serving as proctors for tests at SBHS.



These are just some of the day to day activities of the Legionnaires of Post 543 made possible through the generosity of members of the St. James community, who make it possible for veterans to continue their service to America.