



Richard H. Stewart, Jr.
American Legion Post 543
St. James, NC 28461

SUBJECT: General Membership Meeting Minutes

DATE: Wednesday May 24, 2023.

LOCATION: St. James Community Center.

- 1) Call to Order: Commander Steven Ratti called to order the May 24, 2023, General Membership Meeting of the Richard H. Stewart, Jr., St. James, NC Post 543 at 7:00pm.
- 2) Presentation of Colors: The colors were then presented, saluted and put in place by the Post 543 Honor Guard, followed by:
 - a) The opening prayer by Chaplain Chuck Francka.
 - b) The Commander led the members in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.
 - c) The POW/MIA recognition was recited by Commander Ratti.
 - d) The Preamble to the American Legion Constitution was projected and Commander Ratti led the members in reciting it aloud.
- 3) Roll Call of Officers and Committee Chairs: (Ratti).
 - a) Officers Present:
 - Steven Ratti, Commander
 - Jim Hilty, Adjutant
 - Rick Sessa, Vice Commander Resource Development
 - Chuck Blackburn, Deputy Vice Commander Americanism & Youth
 - Doug Pratt, Deputy Vice Commander Active Duty Support
 - Chuck Francka, Chaplain
 - Bob Davis, Sergeant-at-Arms
 - b) Officers Absent:
 - Tammy Taylor, Historian (excused)
 - Kathleen Roth, Public Relations (excused)
 - Arthur "Doc" Liberty, Judge Advocate (excused)
 - Steve Muir, Service Officer (excused)
 - Al Lebednik, Vice Commander Membership (excused)
 - Mike Carton, Finance Officer (excused)
- 4) Sick Call: Chaplain Francka reported that Tony Simonelli was on Sick Call.
- 5) Approval of Minutes: The draft minutes of the April 27, 2023 General Membership Meeting was approved as posted on the Post website.

6) Commander Ratti invited any new members or visiting veterans to stand and introduce themselves. Two visiting veterans, the friends of members were welcomed by the membership.

7) Commander Ratti then introduced the 2023 Richie Hat Trick Scholars and their families who were in attendance. Five of the six winners were able to join us this evening: Madison Waldron, Dow Pender, Angelo Tofflemire, Isaac Soles, and Karly Satterwhite. (Evianna Merriam was unable to attend.) They were called forward one by one to be individually greeted by the members and to receive a round of applause and the Commander's personal welcome and commendations. Deputy Vice Commander for Active Duty Doug Pratt asked each of the scholarship winners to say a few words about themselves and asked each a question or two about their personal accomplishments, future academic plans, and career ambitions. Each responded graciously and with the aplomb expected of Hat Trick scholars. Commander Ratti praised the 2023 Richie Hat Trick Scholars and reminded all present that their achievements in the three areas of academic scholarship, community service, and intramural and extramural activities were in the best tradition of our Post namesake, Richard Stewart, Jr.



8) Commander's Report:

- a) Commander Ratti explained that nominations for officers' positions for FY 2024 closed at the conclusion of the April 27 general membership meeting and at that time the adjutant's position remained unfilled. Therefore, according to Article IV (Section 7) of the Post By-Laws and upon advice of the Judge Advocate, the Commander hereby called for a special election to be held on July 26 to fill the adjutant's position, which will become vacant on June 28. During the period June 28 to July 26, when the adjutant's office is vacant, a committee will be appointed to undertake the duties of the office.

The Commander then opened nominations for the office of adjutant for the special election. Rick Sessa nominated Bill Agnostak, who accepted the nomination.

- b) Commander Ratti said that the open adjutant's position had necessitated a canvas of the membership by the Elections Committee and the Commander in an effort to search for volunteers to serve as adjutant and other Post positions.

He reminded members of the many ways they could serve the Post, their fellow Veterans, active duty military, community youths and the community at large.

- c) Commander Ratti said the following members had been nominated to be delegates to the Department Convention: Steve Ratti, Mike Fegan, Jim Hilty, Philip McGhee, Steve Muir, Kathy Roth, and Rick Sessa. A motion was made, seconded, and approved to close nominations and to approve the delegation.

9) Officer and Committee Reports.

- a) Membership Report: The Commander reported on behalf of Al Lebednik, who was excused while traveling. According to the NC Department, we have achieved 250 members or 96 percent of our goal of 259 members for FY 2023.
- b) Finance Report: Finance Officer Mike Carton presented a slide showing the May Finance Report and expenditures of 70.35 percent of the FY23 budget to date. A motion to accept the report was approved without dissent.
- c) Honor Guard: Bill Morgan presented a slide reporting on the forthcoming Memorial Day Ceremony.
 - i) The Memorial Day Ceremony (May 29, 2023) will commence promptly at 1100 hours in front of the Veterans Memorial. The guest speaker will be Admiral Karl Shultz, 26th Commandant of the Coast Guard. In the event of inclement weather, the ceremony will move inside the Community Center.
- d) Athletics Officer: Leo Mercado presented a complete report on the upcoming Brunswick Post 543 American Legion Senior Baseball Team regular season.
 - i) The Brunswick 543 team will be managed by Steve Lanier; the Head Coach will be Derek Astoske, and Assistant Coach Roman Dilgard. The team will play in the South Division of the Area II Conference. A total of 14 regular season games are scheduled, with the home opener is set for May 29, 6:00PM at South Brunswick High School. Playoffs are scheduled for July 3-7.
 - ii) Leo thanked all of those who had volunteered last year and signed up this year. He indicated several volunteer openings remained for positions such as public address announcer, scoreboard operator, concessions, and at the gate.
 - iii) Sponsors were also needed. He welcomed any and all donations, including simply attending the games and making a \$5 donation at the gate.
 - iv) Leo concluded by reviewing the purpose of American Legion baseball, including the personal benefits to the youth that play the game, to inculcate a better understanding of the American way of life and to promote the principles of 100 percent Americanism, to instill a sincere desire to develop within themselves feelings of citizenship, sportsmanship, loyalty and team spirit. Legion baseball also aids in the improvement and development of the physical fitness of our country's youth and builds the nation's future through our youth. Plus the community also benefits by providing youths with a positive and well-disciplined environment in which to play baseball, by helping youth develop self-confidence and build self-esteem, by promoting teamwork, good sportsmanship, physical fitness, and good citizenship. Finally, the Post benefits, since Legion baseball supports two of the American Legion pillars - Americanism and Youth Programs. It also promotes and enhances Post 543 throughout Brunswick County.

- e) Service Officer Report. Paul Witmer reporting for Steve Muir reminded the members of the forthcoming event at Lowe's Hardware, scheduled for Saturday, May 27th 0845 to 1600 (later rescheduled to May 29) when we will distribute Poppies again, with support of JROTC and CAP cadets.
 - i) To illustrate the importance of the Poppy and its significance to Memorial Day, Paul Witmer played an American Legion video of actor James McEachin providing a special, very moving reading of "In Flanders Fields," the poem by John McCrae that inspired the Poppy as the symbol of sacrifice after WWI, recited at the 2017 Veterans Inaugural Ball.

- f) House & Entertainment Committee: (Rick Sessa).
 - i) Rick commented on planning for the Patriotic Concert (June 10), stating that wrist bands were now on sale (\$10 each). Meals could also be purchased in advance from Gourmet-To-Go. There will also be a 50-50 raffle. Mike's Garage Band is ready with some new songs.

- g) Active Duty Support: (Doug Pratt)
 - i) Doug reported that because of our past support, the Post has been invited to attend the Wounded Warrior Battalion Each change of command ceremony at Camp Lejeune on June 23, 2023.
 - ii) Doug and his group is working with the Fort Bragg Soldier Recovery Unit to arrange a fishing trip for four wounded soldiers and invited anyone with a fishing boat who would be interested in volunteering to host such a trip to contact him.
 - iii) Preparations are underway for a cook-out to help the US Coast Guard celebrate their anniversary on August 4, 2023..

- h) Elections Committee (Doug Pratt)
 - i) Doug Pratt presented the slate of candidates nominated for the Post offices:
 - Commander: Phillip McGhee
 - Adjutant:
 - Finance Officer: Mike Carton
 - Judge Advocate: Arthur "Doc" Liberty
 - 1st Vice Commander Resource Development: Dan Bennett
 - 2nd Vice Commander Membership: Gary Purcell
 - 2nd Vice Commander Active Duty: Doug Pratt
 - Deputy Vice Commander Americanism: Chuck Blackburn
 - Chaplain: Chuck Francka
 - Public Relations Officer: Dr. Jim McCriskin
 - Service Officer: Steve Muir
 - Historian: Rick Sessa
 - Sergeant-at-Arms: Bob Davis

A motion was made by Doug Pratt that, since the above slate of officers recommended by the Elections Committee and endorsed by the Executive Committee now stood unopposed, they be elected by unanimous consent with the adjutant casting one vote as required under the By-Laws. The motion was approved without dissent. Commander Ratti congratulated Commander-Elect Phillip McGhee and the officers of FY2024.


10) Inputs from Members and Closing Remarks: Commander Ratti thanked the officers for their reports and asked for inputs from the members:

- a) Tom Picinich, reporting for the Veterans Memorial Committee, said renovations to the sidewalks and the installation of new bricks were now complete and space was now available for another five hundred memorial bricks.
- b) Mike Fegan, District 9 Commander thanked the officers and Legionnaires of Post 543 for their outstanding efforts in arranging and hosting the May 9th meeting of District 9 at the St. James Community Center, helping to make it the best meeting of the year.
- c) Commander Ratti reminded members of the Memorial Day Ceremony (May 29) and the Patriotic Concert (June 10) in the Woodlands Pavilion.
- d) We will install new officers at our next meeting, June 28.

The next general membership meeting is June 28, 2023.

- 11) Closing Ceremony. Chaplain Chuck Francka offered a closing prayer.
- 12) Commander Ratti called for the Honor Guard to retire the colors.
- 13) Commander Ratti adjourned the monthly meeting at 7:56 PM.


JAMES HILTY
Adjutant


STEVEN H. RATTI
Commander