



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

SUBJECT: General Membership Meeting Minutes

DATE: Wednesday August 23, 2023.

LOCATION: St. James Community Center.

1) Call to Order: Commander Phillip McGhee called to order the August 23, 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 McGhee.
- d) The Preamble to the American Legion Constitution was projected and Commander McGhee led the members in reciting it aloud.

3) Roll Call of Officers and Committee Chairs: (McGhee).

- a) Officers Present:
 - Phillip McGhee, Commander
 - Bill Agnostak, Adjutant
 - Mike Carton, Finance Officer
 - Dan Bennett, 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
 - Jim McCriskin, Public Relations
 - Steve Muir, Service Officer
 - Gary Purcell, Vice Commander Membership
 - Rick Sessa, Historian
 - Arthur "Doc" Liberty, Judge Advocate
- b) Officers Absent:
 - Leo Mercado, Athletics Officer
- c) Others Present:
 - Mike Fegan, District Commander

- 4) Sick Call: Chaplain Francka: Nothing to report
- 5) Approval of Minutes: The draft minutes of the July 26, 2023 General Membership Meeting was approved as posted on the Post website.
- 6) Commander McGhee invited any new members or visiting veterans to stand and introduce themselves Ralph Gervinson stood and was recognized and warmly welcomed by the Post members.
- 7) Officer and Committee Reports.
- a) Membership Report: Gary Purcell reported that Membership cards are now available and members can now pay their dues (\$45) for FY24 effective July 1, 2023.
- b) Finance Report: Finance Officer Mike Carton presented the FY 24 Finance Report, showing spending of 17.69% percent effective 8-23- 2023. A motion to approve the report as presented was passed unanimously.
- c) Active-Duty Support: Deputy Vice Commander Doug Pratt reviewed two upcoming events that his team would be supporting:
- i) Sept 18, 2023 Fishing Trip with Ft Liberty SRU, Lead Aaron Largent, Capt. Ortiz, Boat Owner
- ii) SBHS Jr ROTC nominations due by Sept. 25, 2023, Jeff Alano, Lead
- d) Service Officer Report. (Steve Muir)
- i) Steve presented updates on some of the 13 Veterans' cases he is currently tracking.
- ii) **The deadline was extended from September 10 to September 13 for retroactive effective date. That has now passed but Veterans should still file their claims. Over \$1.8 billion has been paid out in retro benefits nationwide and \$80 million here in NC."**
- iii) VEAC will take place on Oct. 19-21 in Wilmington Please volunteer. Vet dental smiles with ECU @ Novant on Rt. 17.
- iv) - **"Several Post members attended a 2-day class on Suicide Awareness, which was sponsored by the VA. The class was held at Brunswick County Complex in Bolivia and a strong focus was on Veterans and their suicide rate, which is approximately 20 Veterans per day throughout the USA. Post is considering hosting a 2d training session for Post members and other VSOs in the county but until after the new year, early 2024. A showing of interest sheet was circulated and 6 members indicated an interest in attending he course and becoming certified."**

e) Vice Commander Resource Development: Dan Bennett reporting for the SJMAD said the proceeds from the Patriotic Concert and the Golf Tournament have not yet been tallied but preliminary indications are that the proceeds will exceed last year's record returns. Also, the Executive Committee, after considerable deliberation and consideration of the competition from other patriotic and veteran-themed golf outings at St. James, has decided to move the dates for next year's concert and golf tournament to a late-October early-November timeframe.

f) Veterans Memorial Committee: Tom Picinich said he was taking orders for new memorial bricks so they would be available by Veterans Day.

g) **Historian's report with reference to the TOSJ Entrance display case opportunity in your meeting minutes. Messr. Sessa can be reached by email and/or phone number 973 714 5253 for more further details on the display case.**

8) Special Guest Speaker: Rosie Greer Shoudy, spoke on the Toys for Tots Program. This year it will be a 2-day event in the St. James Community Center and numerous volunteers are needed.

9) Shallotte Elks Lodge, represented by:

Exalted Ruler: Susan Berardi
Leading Knight: John Olear
Chaplain: Mary Olear
Secretary: Carolyn Garramone
Trustee: Paul Salerno
Trustee: Walt Wilson

presented the Post with a check for \$1000. Paul Salerno was the impetus behind this gracious donation.

10) Commander McGhee's Closing Remarks:

a) Reminder of upcoming Post 543 events

-Veteran Smiles 25 Aug

-9/11 Remembrance Ceremony 11 Sep; 10:00 SJ Comm Ctr

-Next General Membership Meeting 27 Sep

-Soldier Recovery Unit Ft Liberty 18 Oct

-VEAC 19-21 Oct

-Pier to Pier Fishing Event 23 Oct

-Veterans Day Ceremony 11 Nov

-Saint James Club's Holiday Festival Post 543 tree and military memorabilia 7-8 Dec

-Toys for Tots 16 Dec

b) Encouraged general membership to sign up for next Suicide Intervention Course

c) Asking for members to loan challenge coins and military service memorabilia for the Challenge Coin Patriotic Tree (formally Charlie Brown Christmas Tree) 7-8 Dec

d) Asking members to loan military service memorabilia for display case at Town Hall

The next general membership meeting is September 27, 2023.

11) Closing Ceremony. Chaplain Chuck Francka offered a closing prayer.

12) Commander McGhee called for the Honor Guard to retire the colors.

13) Commander McGhee adjourned the monthly meeting at 8:58 PM.


Adjutant, Bill Agnostak


Commander, Philip McGhee