

**American Legion Post 543  
General Membership Meeting Minutes  
Wednesday, June 26, 2024**

**Meeting Minutes**

- 1) The meeting was called to Order at 7:00 PM – Commander.
- 2) The meeting was opened with a presentation of the colors – Post Honor Guard.
- 3) Opening Prayer – Chaplain.
- 4) Welcome Guests & recognition of first time Veteran Visitors:
  - a. One Veteran attending for first time (Frank Bellini from OKI VFW) – Commander.
  - b. Special recognition of Susan Fegan, wife of past Post Commander and past District Nine Commander.
  - c. Special recognition of the District Nine Commander (Jim Torr) who was attending to swear in the Post 543 newly elected Officers.
- 5) Paul Witmer briefed the Membership and Guests about John Fryar who was scheduled to attend for the first time as the Post's special guest. Unfortunately, John was unable to make it. John Fryar is a WWII and Korea Veteran who witnessed the Bikini Atolls nuclear detonations.
- 6) Roll Call of Officers (Absent: Steve Muir and Doc Liberty). A Quorum was declared, and the Commander officially opened the meeting. – Commander.
- 7) Remembering the American Legion Four Pillars (There are 70 Post programs that support these four pillars) – Commander.

- 8) The Commander expressed the Post's urgent need for help with management and maintenance of the Post's website and asked for Volunteers. Awaiting Membership response to the request.
- 9) The Commander asked if there were any Vietnam era Veterans present that had not received the Vietnam Veteran Recognition pin and certificate. Six Veterans were awarded their pins and certificates and recognized by the Post Membership.
- 10) POW/MIA Recognition – Commander.
- 11) Pledge of Allegiance – Members & Guests.
- 12) Preamble to American Legion Constitution – Members.
- 13) A motion was made to approve the May 22, 2024, General Membership Meeting Minutes, the motion carried, and the vote was unanimous. – Commander.
- 14) Introduction of Jim Torr, District Nine Commander to swear in the newly elected Post 543 Officers – Commander McGhee.
- 15) The District Nine Commander reviewed the reason for the swearing in ceremony and the importance of the Post Member's support of the elected Officers. The District Nine Commander swore in the newly elected Post Officers with a formal ceremony.

The newly elected Post Officers are as follows:

a. Commander:	Phillip McGhee
b. Adjutant:	Aaron Largent
c. Parliamentarian:	Doc Liberty
d. 1 <sup>st</sup> Vice Commander, Resource Development:	Dan Bennett
e. 2 <sup>nd</sup> Vice Commander, Membership:	Gary Purcell
f. Finance Officer:	Mike Carton
g. Deputy Vice Commander, Active-Duty Support:	Doug Pratt
h. Deputy Vice Commander, Americanism:	Chuck Blackburn
i. Sergeant-At-Arms:	Rick Sessa
j. Resource Officer:	Steve Muir
k. Chaplain:	Chuck Francka
l. Public Relations Officer:	Jim McCrskin
m. Historian:	Stephen Burns

16) The Adjutant reported on the Department Convention and that the election of Officers at the Department Convention resulted in a new Department Commander. The new Department Commander is Tom Cerniglia. The Convention also re-elected Dale Smith as the Division Commander. Earlier this year, Jim Torr, District Nine Commander was elected to replace Mike Fegan at a District Nine meeting.

17) The 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice Commander, Membership provided an update. The Post is currently at 103% of its goal (258 vs 250). A special thank you to the Post Members who renewed and recruited new Members. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice Commander also discussed renewals for 2025 that begins on 1 July 2024, as well the two various methods of payment: directly to the post or online at [Mylegion.org](http://Mylegion.org). American Legion National is also offering a three-year membership which locks in the annual membership fee at \$45 for the three-year period. This renewal requires payment of the \$135 upfront but guarantees no dues increase for the three-year period. This offer is only available online at [legion.org/renew](http://legion.org/renew).

18) The Finance Officer introduced the June 2024 Financial Report as of 23 June 2024.

- a. The Finance Officer indicated that although the chart reflected the budget was at 69.27% spent, he had two (2) invoices yet to pay which would put the budget at 70% for the close of the Fiscal Year. A motion was made to approve the June 2024 Financial Report and the motion was seconded. The Commander requested any comments or discussion from the Membership – there was none. A vote was taken, and the June 2024 Financial Report was approved unanimously. (Attachment 1)
- b. The Finance Officer indicated that the FY2025 Proposed Budget was \$139,965.00, it was \$1,300.00 less than FY2024. A motion was made to approve the FY2025 Proposed Budget, and the motion was seconded. The Commander requested any comments or discussion from the Membership – there was none. A vote was taken and the FY2025 Proposed Budget was approved unanimously. (Attachment 2)

19) The Deputy Vice Commander, Active-Duty Support announced the Post's support of the Coast Guard's 234<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration at the Oak Island US Coast Guard station on August 4, 2024. Festivities will begin at noon and will be supported by Post 543, Oak Island VFW, Oak Island Daughters of the American Revolution and the Cape Fear Blue Star Mothers. The menu will include hamburgers, hot dogs, watermelon and soft drinks. Each organization will field a Corn Hole team and will compete against each other at the celebration. If any of the members were interested in participating, they should see Bob Davis at the rear of the meeting room to sign up.

20) The Commander reviewed the history of Post 543's involvement in the American Legion Oratorical Speech events. He outlined how Post 543 has become a role model for hosting Oratorical events and has now hosted Post, District and Division Oratorical events at the Saint James Community Center. Two key contributors have been the driving force behind the huge success of these events: Mike Fegan (Past Post 543 Commander and District Nine Commander) and Jim Hilty (Past Post 543 Adjutant).

a. A special thank you went out to Mike Fegan's widow for Mike's leadership and mentorship as part of the program. The Commander and the Deputy Vice Commander, Americanism (Chuck Blackburn) introduced Sue Fegan (Mike Fegan's wife) and presented her with a certificate of appreciation for the work and legacy of her husband in support of the Oratorical program.

b. The Commander and the Deputy Vice Commander, Americanism (Chuck Blackburn) introduced Jim Hilty and presented him with a certificate of appreciation for the work and legacy he has contributed to support the Oratorical program.

c. With approval of the Post 543 ExCom Members, the following scholarship designations have been adopted:

- i. The Mike Fegan Oratorical **Gold** Scholarship
- ii. The James Hilty Oratorical **Silver** Scholarship
- iii. The Post 543 Oratorical **Bronze** Scholarship

21) The Sergeant-At-Arms Report provided the following update:

a. The Sergeant-At-Arms announced the Cape Fear Purple Heart Dinner scheduled to take place on Friday, August 2, 2024, at 5:00 PM in the UNCW Burney Center, Wilmington. If any of the Post Members know of a Purple Heart recipient, please contact edabbey@hotmail to register. All Purple Heart recipients and two guests will receive free tickets to the dinner.

b. The Sergeant-At-Arms announced the North Carolina 4<sup>th</sup> of July Festival's Salute to Veterans event. The event will feature performance by the musical group ***"Letters from Home"*** on July 2<sup>nd</sup> at 5:30 PM at the Waterfront Stage in Southport. All Veterans will have access to the facilities at the North Carolina 4<sup>th</sup> of July Festival's Hospitality House located at the Southport Community Building. Parking will be limited but parking can be accessed at Franklin Park, with Members and their guests utilizing the trolley to traverse the distance to the waterfront.

c. The Sergeant-At-Arms also informed the Membership that the North Carolina 4<sup>th</sup> of July Festival will conduct its annual Naturalization Ceremony for upwards of 125 new citizens on July 3<sup>rd</sup>. The ceremony will be held at Fort Johnston Garrison Lawn, beginning at 2:30 PM. Music will be provided by the 440<sup>th</sup> Army Band and followed by the Amuzu Theater Singers. The Keynote Speaker will be Peter Hans, President of University of North Carolina System.

22) Mark Ferris, Post 543 Member and President of the Sea Notes Choral Society informed the Membership of the upcoming 2024 Patriotic Concert to be held Saturday, June 29<sup>th</sup> and Sunday, June 30<sup>th</sup>. The concert will take place at the Brunswick Community College Odell Williamson Auditorium, beginning at 3:00 PM each day. Special center floor seating will be furnished for all Veterans. You can pick up tickets for the concert by visiting the Post 543 will call table in the lobby of the Auditorium. The concert is free. Pictures of local Veterans will be displayed on the big screen prior to the concert.

23) The Commander stood in for the Service Officer (Steve Muir) who was absent:

- a. The VA has expanded health care coverage for Veterans exposed to toxins and other hazards, either abroad or stateside effective March 6<sup>th</sup>. Veterans can now enroll in VA Healthcare without filing a claim for benefits.

Exposures now include burn pits, sand, dust, chemical exposure, contaminated water, firefighting foam, radiation, asbestos, lead paint, etc. Go to [VA.gov/PACT](https://www.va.gov/PACT) or call 1-800-MYVA411 for more information.

b. Post members should consider signing up for the Grassroots Action Center on the American Legion website ([Legion.org](https://www.legion.org)). It's one of the easiest ways to contact the two NC Senators or Congressman Rouzer to express your interest in proposed legislation.

c. The current NDAA calls for \$923.3 BILLION for Defense, with a 4.5% raise in pay for the military.

e. Poppy Distribution at LOWE's Hardware on Saturday May 25<sup>th</sup> and Sunday, May 26<sup>th</sup> broke all prior records – over \$3,500 raised for Veteran's support. Huge thank you to all the Volunteers. We also got great press coverage.

f. The Post Veterans Assistance Team has had twelve contacts in the last month with four referrals coming from BCVSO. In addition, several new PACT Act inquires, a Camp Lejeune water contamination case and several Veterans needing financial assistance.

g. The VA has now surpassed 1,000,000 claims processed since August 10, 2022, of the 1.6 million received. The average disability rating granted has been a 70% rating. Also, an additional 142,000 Veterans have been enrolled in the VA Health Care program because of the PACT Act.

h. Post 543 recently donated a new refrigerator to the Oak Island Senior Center which provides meals, services and entertainment for many local Veterans. Post 543 is proud to be able to assist as part of this support network.



24) The Commander reported on the status of the Post 543 search for a new Webmaster to maintain and manage the Post Website. The Commander solicited anyone who might be interested to text or email him or the Adjutant to express their level of interest. The Commander also reviewed the links on the current website and how to access through links to the various American Legion organization's documents found there, including the Post's documents.

25) The Commander stood in for the Honors and Ceremonies Committee Chair (Bill Morgan) who was absent:

- a. The Post will again participate in the 2024 Southport July 4<sup>th</sup> parade. The Post Banner will be carried in front of the Color Guard, followed by a trailer containing seats for the Members and guests to occupy during the parade. Those who wish to participate should gather at the Walmart parking lot in Southport, ready to board the trailer no later than 9:00 AM. The Commander informed the Membership that a sign-up sheet was at the rear of the room.
- b. The Commander reviewed the Honor Guard activities for the month of June which included flag raising on the Battleship North Carolina, where Civil Air Patrol Cadets were trained on raising and lowering the American flag, as well as how to fold the American Flag for presentation. Other June activities included or will include funeral honors for Past Post Commander & District Commander Mike Fegan, funeral honors for a Korean War Veteran, the Sea Notes Patriotic Concert where the Color Guard will present flags, and finally, participation in the Southport 4<sup>th</sup> of July parade.



26) Post 543 Historian Report:

- a. The outgoing Post Historian (Rick Sessa) provided an overview of the upcoming Southport July 3<sup>rd</sup> North Carolina 4<sup>th</sup> of July Festival event where the Post 543 Commander (Phillip McGhee) will be featured as the Keynote Speaker. The event will be held at the Southport Waterfront Park Stage located at 146 East Bay Street in Southport. Parking is available at the BCC, with trolley service to the waterfront.
- b. The Military Memories Showcase located in the Town Hall for Saint James is currently transitioning to US Navy memorabilia, effective July 1<sup>st</sup>. The newly elected Historian (Stephen Burns) will be assuming the responsibility for managing the display. If you have US Navy memorabilia you would like displayed, please contact Stephen directly at [stephenburns436@gmail.com](mailto:stephenburns436@gmail.com) or 910-477-2926.

27) The Commander reviewed the upcoming events list with the Membership (attachment 3).

28) Frank Bellini (Commander of the Oak Island VFW) was invited by the Commander to provide the latest update regarding efforts to bring a VEAC event to the Southport/Oak Island area.

- a. Currently, the dates for this event are October 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>, 2024. The event is scheduled to take place at the Curry Beach Air Force Recreation facility and the goal is to service over 500 Veterans. This event will be evaluated as a pilot program for targeting specifically Combat Veterans.
- b. The 9/11 Memorial Trailer will be visiting the Southport/Oak Island area Saturday, June 29<sup>th</sup>, arriving Southport around 3:00 PM. It will contain one of the large beams from one of the twin towers. The public is welcome to visit and pay tribute to this tragic event.

29) General Membership Meeting Closing Remarks – Commander

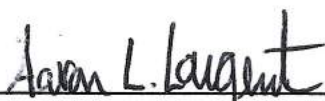
- a. Thank you to the new Members for joining Post 543 and helping us achieve our goal of 100%. Thank you to the guests for attending and thanked District Nine Commander Jim Torr for performing the swearing in ceremony for the new Post 543 Officers.
- b. The next Post 543 General Membership Meeting will be held on July 24, 2024, at 19:00 hours.

30) The Commander solicited any additional input or comments from the Membership. There were none.

31) General Membership Meeting Closing Prayer – Chaplain

32) The Post 543 Color Guard recovered the colors. – Commander

33) The General Membership Meeting closed at 20:00 hours. – Commander



**Aaron L. Largent**  
Adjutant



**Phillip E. McGhee**  
Commander