

**American Legion Post 543
General Membership Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, August 28, 2024**

Meeting Minutes

- 1) The meeting was called to Order at 7:00 PM – Commander.
- 2) The meeting was opened with the advancement of the colors – Post Honor Guard.
- 3) Opening Prayer – Chaplain.
- 4) The Commander welcomed the Shallotte Elks # 2854 Members:
 - a. Griff Sperry, Exalted Ruler
 - b. John O'Lear, Leading Knight
 - c. Frank Burgess, Lecturing Knight
 - d. Carolyn Garramone, Secretary
 - e. Paul Salerno, Trustee
 - f. Mary O'Lear, Chaplain
 - g. Walt Wildon, Trustee
- 5) Griff Sperry did a quick overview of how the Elks philanthropic program operates and presented a check to Post 543 for \$1,000.
- 6) The Commander introduced Steve Rice, Stop Soldier Suicide program.
- 7) The Commander introduced Ralph Gevinson, the new Post 543 Athletic Director.
- 8) The Commander requested all first-time attending Veterans to stand, introduce themselves and report which service they served in. There were two first time Veteran attendees (one from USCG and one from US Army).

- 9) The Commander requested any Vietnam War Era Veterans that had not received their Commemorative pin to please come up front and be issued the pin. There was one Veteran who received their Commemorative pin.

- 10) The Commander requested the Chaplain brief the Membership regarding any sick call Members:
 - a. There were no sick call Members.

- 11) The Commander announced the regular Post 543 General Membership Meeting was officially convened and conducted the Roll Call of Officers (Absent: Adjutant Aaron Largent - Excused.)

- 12) A Quorum was declared, and the Commander officially opened the meeting. – Commander.

- 13) Remembering the American Legion Four Pillars (There are 70 Post programs that support these four pillars) – Commander.

- 14) POW/MIA Recognition – Commander.

- 15) The Commander requested all Members to uncover and join in the Pledge of Allegiance – Members & Guests.

- 16) Preamble to American Legion Constitution – Commander and Members.

- 17) The Commander requested Steve Rice, Stop Soldier Suicide to provide his presentation before the Post Members returned to the regular business of the Membership Meeting:

- a. Steve Rice started by providing some statistics: There are 140,000 residents in Brunswick County. 14.2% of those Brunswick County residents are Veterans, representing a very high Veteran population.
- b. In NC, there are 10.5 million residents, eleven active-duty bases, and of the 10.5 million residents, 7.5% are Veterans.
- c. Steve Rice then showed a video of a family who lost their only son who suffered PTSD and committed suicide (Captain Austin Murga). The family worked with Steve Rice to develop the Captain Austin Murga Memorial Golf Tournament which will take place on September 7, 2024 at Saint James. The tournament was developed to achieve two objectives:
 - i. Raise funds to benefit the Stop Soldier Suicide program.
 - ii. Raise awareness of the Soldier Suicide problem.
- d. The Stop Soldier Suicide Program is based in Durham, NC. The program offers 7 X 24 hours, 365 days a year, no cost, confidential counseling to Veterans who suffer from PTSD. The program offers this service to both Veterans and Active-Duty personnel of all branches of service. The organization is a 501(c)3 non-profit. The goal is to reduce the suicide soldier rate by 40% by 2030, which is estimated by a Duke University study to be as high as 44 per day.
- e. Funds raised by the program are used to reach both military members and Veterans at high risk of suicide by providing suicide specific care.
- f. The Southport area, along with Saint James have been wonderful supporters of the Stop Soldier Suicide program, through the 184-player golf tournament and silent auction have become the largest fundraiser activity. The program and the Murga family thanks you and extend an invitation to join Austin's Army.
- g. Steve Rice introduced BHawk Distillery, which is a Veteran owned business, whose owner was part of the Mogadishu Black Hawk Down event. His name is Brad Halling. The product will be available in a few weeks at the local ABC stores. It is labeled as Sergeant's Valor.

- h. Lowes Home Improvement is a huge supporter of Veteran programs. They hire 26,000 Veterans.
- i. The silent on-line auction will be available from September 1st to September 15th.
- j. Steve Rice suggested that if any Member knew of a Veteran or Active-Duty soldier suffering from PTSD, please refer them to the program. Again, it is confidential and no cost counseling.
- k. Steve Rice discussed the NC program called HBOT (Hyperbaric Oxygen Treatment) for Heroes located in Durham. The program treats PTSD and traumatic brain injuries. The state of NC is funding the program for Veterans. So far, the program has seen some great progress.

18) A motion was made to approve the July 24, 2024, General Membership Meeting Minutes. The motion carried, and the vote was unanimous. – Commander.

19) The Finance Officer Report – Mike Carton

- a. Mike introduced the July 2024 Financial Report as of 28 August 2024.
- b. The Finance Officer indicated that although the chart reflected the budget was at 12.02% spent, on track and on budget.
- c. The Finance Officer indicated that the Post's largest expense during this reporting period were support of the Marines for the Thanksgiving busses which was \$4,000 (for two busses) and Support of a Veteran who is housed at Terra Bella Nursing Home.
- d. The Post 543 Financial Audit is being wrapped up and the Commander should have the report shortly.
- e. A motion was made to approve the August 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 August 2024 Financial Report was approved unanimously.

20) The 2nd Vice Commander, Membership Report – Gary Purcell

- a. Gary reminded the meeting attendees that the 2025 membership goal assigned by Department is set at 264 paid members. Gary explained that this is a very ambitious goal since the Post lost 9 of its members last year.
- b. The Post currently has 139 paid members going into the night of the Post Meeting on August 28, 2024. This represents about 53% of the goal. However, an additional 10 to 15 members renewed at the August 28th meeting which will help increase the current membership numbers.
- c. The Post also lost 3 more members who passed away in July of this year.
- d. Gary recognized the six new members who had been added since the first of July 2024.
- e. Several ways to renew your membership:
 - i. Cash or check at monthly General Membership meetings.
 - ii. Mail (or drop off) check to Vice Commander-Membership
 - iii. Pay online via credit card for 1 or 3 years.
 - iv. One year at **Mylegion.org** (\$45)
 - v. Three years at **Legion.org/renew** (\$135) - three years-no increase.

21) The Deputy Vice Commander, Active-Duty Support Report – Doug Pratt

- a. The Deputy Vice Commander introduced Steve Claiborne who outlined the plans to develop and submit the JROTC and Civil Air Patrol Cadet of the Year packages to Department no later than December 1st.
- b. Steve Claiborne also outlined the support plans for the Marines for Thanksgiving dinner at Saint James. Two Marines for each hosting family will be arranged again this year. Currently working on getting the word out in the Saint James Community in an effort to sign up families. A sign-up table will be set up at the upcoming Patriotic Concert in the Park. The number of Marines to be hosted is currently set at 110 Marines.
- c. Steve Claiborne outlined the Wounded Warrior Mini-Trials and Warrior Care week support required by the Post at Camp LeJuene. The dates have changed with the new dates, now December 19th to December 22nd.

- d. The North Carolina USO has requested our Post support their USO Turkey Bowl event at Camp LeJuene on November 22nd.
- e. Dan Bennett reminded the members that the annual Operation North Star Peer to Pier fishing event will be coming up on October 21st through the 25th. Our Post 543 support day is Monday, October 21st. Last year, this event drew over 1,000 Veterans to participate, with many of them requiring assistance. The Post encourages its members to get involved and help where possible. A sign-up sheet will be made available.

19) The Honors and Ceremonies Report - Bill Morgan

a. Bill Morgan, the Honors and Ceremonies Chair informed the members that the Post Honor Guard will be participating in and supporting the annual 9/11 remembrance ceremony at the Saint James Community Center, beginning at 10:00 hours on September 11th. Bob Gleason of the Saint James Fire Department will be the Guest Speaker and will talk about what happened after the attack on 9/11, what it took to recover. The Honor Guard will be presenting the colors and firing the salute with the firing party, along with the traditional ringing of the fire bell. The ceremony will also feature the bagpipes and taps by the Honor Guard Buglers.

b. Steve Ratti reviewed the Saint James Military Appreciation Day activities and informed the members that he and Bill Morgan are co-chairs of the event. The Saint James Military Appreciation Day is the Post's major annual fundraising event and consists of two (2) parts:

- Concert in the Park – Pavilion at The Woodlands (rescheduled to September 21st)
- Golf Tournament (Scheduled for October 9th at Members Club)

c. The SJMAD Treasurer report reflected \$100,000 in funds raised and that \$100,000 will be expended. We are not there yet regarding the amount of funds raised to date. These two events represent 85% of the annual funds raised by the Post. Steve Ratti encouraged members to get involved and help raise donations through volunteering in their neighborhoods or soliciting businesses for donations.

d. Three sources of revenue:

1. Business donations represent 19% of the revenue raised.
2. Neighborhood donations represent 58% of the revenue raised.
3. SJMAD clothing sales represent 8+% of the revenue raised – 100% of the sales revenues (not just profit) is provided to SJMAD from the sales of the SJMAD clothing by Troon.

e. Paula Kayla (our SJMAD Business Development Coordinator) has form letters and envelopes members can use to solicit donations. Checks can be made out to the RHS Charity which is a 501-C3 charity – businesses prefer a 501-C3 donation for tax purposes. The SJMAD program really needs the members' help in making this year a tremendous success.

f. Saint James neighborhoods have been divided up into 7 different solicitation areas for SJMAD donations, with all other neighborhoods outside Saint James as area 8.

f. Contact any of the SJMAD Committee members to volunteer or refer a business that might be willing to donate.

20) The Sergeant-At-Arms/Entertainment Committee Report – Rick Sessa

a. Rick Sessa informed the Members that the Entertainment Committee is working hard to plan some new and exciting activities for the Post membership.

1. End of Summer Celebration Beach Party
2. Valentine's Day Dinner Theater Trip
3. Fort Liberty Day Trip

b. Rick Sessa thanked Bob Davis for his assistance each month in setting up the meeting room, as well as thanking Mark Lieberman for providing the refreshments and snacks.

c. Rick Sessa reminded the members of the Concert in the Park event that will take place on September 21st. Wristbands are \$15.00 and available at the Saint James Community Center on September 5th and September 10th. Sales of the concert wrist bands will also be offered at the Saint James Marina Breezeway on September 6th, starting at 5:00 PM and September 13th, starting at 5:00 PM. On September 20th, wristbands will be available for sale as a last chance opportunity at the Woodlands Park from 2:00 Pm to 4:30 PM.

d. Rick Sessa recognized Dave Haley and Mike's Garage Band for their support of the SJMAD concert for over 15 years.

21) Resource Officer Report - Steve Muir

a. Steve Muir informed the meeting that the American Legion has 1.6 million members and is a resolution-based organization. This means that every item the Legion does starts with a resolution at the Post level, goes to the District level, then to the Division level, then to the Department level before making its way to the National level. Steve Muir indicated he is now the Department Legislative Committee Chairman and that he wanted to brief the Post Membership on the procedures involved.

c. Some of the legislative initiatives the Legion is working on are more pay for E-1's through E-4's and better housing for active-duty members, improving Veteran Health Care processes, as well as pay for the USCG during government shut-downs. Other initiatives include improving the transition for troops who are transitioning from military duty to civilian life, protecting the flag and addressing soldier suicide.

d. The way Post 543 Members can get involved is to sign up for the Grassroots Action Center at Legion.org. If you sign up for alerts, this will provide you with all action items and an easy one step way to send a message to your two Senators and your Congressman.

b. Steve informed the members that the Post is working with a 92 year old Korean War Navy Veteran, in conjunction with Jessica Ward (Owner of High Tide Aviation at the Jetport) to help with his assisted living expenses at Terra Bella Nursing Home. Although the Veteran receives Social Security and VA benefits, he has a shortfall of \$520 a month uncovered expense for his monthly cost at Terra Bella. The Post 543 ExCom approved issuance of a \$3,000 check to cover several months of the uncovered expense at Terra Bella until other arrangements can be made for this Veteran.

c. Steve Muir gave an update on WWII and Korean War Navy Veteran in Holden Beach. The building permit has finally been issued and Solstice Builders is supposed to start the work within the next 30 days. Work will include 13 sub-contractors, working on his 33-year-old trailer for up to 3 weeks in order to make it convenient and livable again. Steve Muir is also working with the local VA office to find out why this Veteran has yet to have been contacted by the VA for him to schedule his compensation medical exams.

d. Steve Muir is currently working six other Veteran cases.

e. The Veteran's Smiles Event was very successful. Although only 26 Veterans were treated to free dental care, the event had great media coverage and Post 543 got some great exposure for our donation. American Legion Post 68 and the Elks from Calabash joined Post 543 in supporting this very worthwhile event. The total donation to the Veteran's Smiles Foundation was \$7,000. The Post 543 Commander was also able to provide Vietnam Era Commemorative Pins to several of the Veterans receiving the free dental care at the event.

22) Post 543 Historian Report - Stephen Burns

- a. Stephen Burns started off by asking a trivia question of the Membership: How many Members knew that the first US Army nurses to serve in Vietnam was the year 1956? These nurses were sent to Vietnam to teach hygiene and health, not treat any wounded.
- b. Stephen Burns indicated that the search for Vietnam era nurses and health care providers is still ongoing. Although the task is a herculean one, progress is being made. The Historian is working with several websites and other organizations to determine location of local Veterans who have served in this capacity.
- c. The Military Memories Showcase located in the Town Hall for Saint James is currently transitioning to US Navy memorabilia, effective July 1st. If you have US Navy memorabilia you would like displayed, please contact Stephen directly at stephenburns436@gmail.com or 910-477-2926. Doc Liberty will be providing several items to be displayed in the case. Please encourage your friends and neighbors to visit the display and contribute any Navy Veteran memorabilia they might have.

23) The Commander reviewed the upcoming events list with the Membership (attachment 2).

24) The Commander solicited any additional input or comments:

- a. Rick Sessa indicated that he would accept "honor system" wrist band admittance to the concert if a Member had purchased a wrist band previously but had lost them after the concert had been rescheduled.
- b. Tom Bednarczyk announced that he had some of the SJMAD clothing samples and would make them available to look at after the meeting at the rear of the meeting room.

c. Tom Picinich mentioned that memorial brick sales were still underway and that an uptick in sales recently has been very good. He reminded Members of the process for ordering bricks in memory of their loved ones who served in the military.

d. The Commander offered the Membership five (5) brand new American Legion shirts he had received from attendance at conventions and had them at the back of the meeting room.

e. The Commander mentioned that he and Rick Sessa had attended at talk at UNCW in Wilmington to hear Bryan Holman talk about his experience at Abby Gate in Afghanistan during the evacuation. The Commander has invited Bryan to come talk to the Membership about his experience and will be announcing that date in the near future.

26) General Membership Meeting Closing Prayer – Chaplain

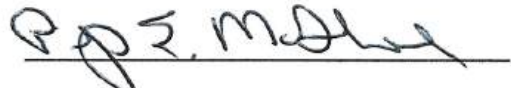
27) The Post 543 Color Guard recovered the colors. – Commander

28) The Commander's closing remarks (until we meet again) - Commander

28) The General Membership Meeting closed at 8:22 PM. – Commander



Aaron L. Largent
Adjutant



Phillip E. McGhee
Commander