



**American Legion Post 543
General Membership Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, July 24, 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) The Commander welcomed Guests & recognized first time Veteran Visitors:
 - a. Four (4) Veterans were attending for the first time.
 - b. Five (5) Vietnam Era Veterans were honored & awarded a pin & certificate.
 - c. Special recognition of the District Nine Commander (Jim Torr) who was attending to conduct the District Audit of Post 543 – Commander.
- 5) The Commander showed the picture of the new Post 543 tent and informed the Membership that he and fellow Post Members had conducted a recruiting effort at Woodlands Park in conjunction with the Toys-for-Tots concert.
- 6) The Commander requested the Chaplain brief the Membership regarding any sick call Members:
 - a. John Holmes is still suffering from diabetes. Please keep him in your prayers.
 - b. Keep the families of Tom Balbert and Larry Clearly in your prayers as they deal with the loss of their Veterans.

- 7) The Commander conducted the Roll Call of Officers (Absent: Jim McCriskin - Excused.) Commander asked the Membership to keep Jim McCriskin in their prayers because Jim was having spine surgery.
- 8) A Quorum was declared, and the Commander officially opened the meeting. – Commander.
- 9) Remembering the American Legion Four Pillars (There are 70 Post programs that support these four pillars) – Commander.
- 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 June 26, 2024, General Membership Meeting Minutes. The motion carried, and the vote was unanimous. – Commander.
- 14) The Commander introduced Special Guest Devell “Bo” Durham who is a candidate for the Department Commander position for Calendar Year 2025. Bo introduced PDC Neville who was accompanying him on the visit to Post 543. Bo explained that he was currently visiting all the Posts to introduce himself to the American Legion State Members. He introduced pictures of his family (4 children). He outlined his reasons for wanting to run for the Department Commander position and what his vision is for the Department.

15) The Commander introduced Frank Bellini who represents the Combat Vets Association to speak about the upcoming Combat Veteran's assistance event that will be held at the USAF Recreation Center at Fort Fisher. The event is by invitation only and is estimated to service approximately 1,000 Combat Vets over the two-day event.

- a. The Commander and Steve Muir presented a \$1,000 Post 543 check to Commander Bellini to help support the Combat Vet Association event.

16) The Finance Officer Report – Mike Carton

- a. Mike introduced the July 2024 Financial Report as of 23 July 2024.
- b. The Finance Officer indicated that although the chart reflected the budget was at 1.67% spent, the actual budget as of July 24th was 2.6% spent.
- c. The Finance Officer indicated that the Post financial records had been turned over to the Audit Team and were due back to the Commander September 1st.
- d. A motion was made to approve the July 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 July 2024 Financial Report was approved unanimously.

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

- a. Gary reminded the meeting attendees that the 2025 membership renewal program began July 1st. The Post is currently about a third of the way to the yearend goal of 255 members, after only one month.
- b. 62 renewals + 17 the night of the Post Meeting on July 24, 2024.
- c. 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.

- 18) The Deputy Vice Commander, Active-Duty Support Report – Doug Pratt
- a. The Deputy Vice Commander announced the Post's support of the Coast Guard's 234th Anniversary celebration at the Oak Island US Coast Guard station. The original announced date was August 4th but due to the Coast Guard Sector's desire to participate, the date has now been changed to August 5th (Monday). Festivities will begin at 11:30 AM with lunch being served and will be supported by Post 543, Oak Island VFW, Oak Island Daughters of the American Revolution, Elks, 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 are interested in participating, they should see Bob Davis (440-371-3922) at the rear of the meeting room to sign up.
 - b. The Commander encouraged all members to visit the Oak Island Coast Guard Station and participate in this event.
 - c. The Deputy Vice Commander informed the members that the Wounded Warrior Battalion East would be conducting an Organizational Symposium at Camp LeJuene on September 6, 2024.
 - d. The Deputy Vice Commander informed the members that the Warrior Care Week is scheduled for November 19th through November 22nd this year and the Post will be providing more information on this event as the date draws closer.
 - e. The Deputy Vice Commander reminded the members that the annual Peer to Pier fishing event will be coming up in October. 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.
 - f. The Deputy Vice Commander indicated that the Active-Duty Support Committee is looking for members who want to join their team. Interested members should contact Doug Pratt at 518-441-2402.

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 a weeklong Flag Lowering Ceremony at the Waterfront Park in Southport, beginning July 28th through August 3rd. The event starts each evening at 7:30 PM and lasts about 15 minutes. Bill encouraged all members to join the local community in observing and participating in this worthwhile event. Bill reviewed the process of the ceremony.

b. Bill Morgan reviewed the Saint James Military Appreciation Day activities and informed the members that he and Past Post Commander Steve Ratti 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
- Golf Tournament

These two events represent 85% of the annual funds raised by the Post. Bill encouraged members to get involved and help raise donations through volunteering in their neighborhoods or soliciting businesses for donations. Paula Kayla has form letters and envelopes members can use to solicit donations. Checks can be made out to the RHS Charity which is a 501(c)(3) charity – businesses prefer a 501(c)(3) donation for tax purposes. Bill explained the Neighborhood Captain structure for solicitation of donations, how the program is structured and the responsibilities. The initial start effort of solicitations will begin September 1st. The SJMAD program really needs the members' help in making this year a tremendous success.

c. Bill Morgan invited Tom Bednarczyk to display and explain the various clothing items that will be sold as part of the fundraising for the Saint James Military Appreciation Day events. Bill reminded the members that 100% of the funds associated with the sale of the SJMAD clothing would be donated to the Post. None of the funds go to the Clubs of Saint James. Tom displayed the Men's and Women's styles of golf clothing, and it was well received by the members.

The colors are a solid blue for all clothing:

- Men's short sleeve & long sleeve golf/polo shirts
- Women's short sleeve & long sleeve golf/polo shirts
- Women's sleeveless golf/polo shirts
- Unisex Men's & Women's long and short sleeve wind shirts
- Unisex half zip wind shirt

d. Bill Morgan informed the members that the Post had recently added a formal firing party to its ceremonial services of the Honor Guard. The Firing Party possess M1903 Springfield rifles through a generous consignment by the family of a member of Post 543 who passed away earlier. The Post 543 Honor Guard Firing Party had recently performed successfully at two funeral ceremonies, which were well received by the families of the deceased.

e. Bill Morgan announced special recognition certificates to be awarded to the following Honor Guard members for outstanding contributions to the mission of the Honor Guard:

- Kirk Davis for initiating a wreath and service flag program for Veterans buried in the Cape Fear Memorial Gardens located on the Southport-Supply Road (Highway 211).
- Paul Witmer for IT and Audio/Visual support of the Post and the Ceremonies team for the past 10 years.
- Doug Pratt for outstanding support of the Post's participation in the three (3) annual parades (NC 4th of July Festivities parade, Veteran's Day parade in Wilmington and Oak Island Christmas Festival parade).
- Bob Davis for Firing Party leadership and support. Bob maintains the rifles, arranges and leads practices and leads the firing party team at funerals and ceremonies.

20) The Sergeant-At-Arms Report – Rick Sessa

- a. Rick reviewed the success of the annual North Carolina 4th of July Festival and expressed the Committee's appreciation for the continued Post 543 support.
- b. Rick informed the members that the Commander's speech at the 4th of July ceremony at the Waterfront Park in Southport was a huge success and encouraged the Commander to please share his speech with the Post members when the opportunity presented itself.
- c. The Flag Retirement Ceremony performed at the Waterfront Park by the local Boy Scout Troop was a big hit with the festival attendees. They performed the traditional retirement of the flag and destroyed it with a fire at the Waterfront Park.
- d. Rick mentioned that he would be looking at organizing a day trip to Fort Liberty (Bragg) soon and encouraged the members to watch for the event announcement via a Commander's message e-blast.
- e. In closing, Rick reminded the members of the Concert in the Park event that will take place in September. He encouraged members to purchase their wristbands early.

21) Resource Officer Report - Steve Muir

- a. The update on the 96-year-old WWII & Korean Navy Veteran is the permit process is almost completed for the renovation of his trailer. Solstice Construction has been diligently working on the permit process and has run into several issues relating to the septic tank age and the slow Brunswick County Health Department approval. The major upgrades to his trailer will make his life much more manageable.

b. Steve informed the members that he will meet the week of July 29th with the new Secretary of Veteran's Affairs who was appointed last April. The meeting is anticipated to be a meet and greet. The newly elected Department Commander has requested Steve attend the meeting. Steve was informed he will be the new Chair for the NC Department Legislative Commission on issues of concern to Veterans.

c. A few of the North Carolina Military and Veteran's Affairs primary areas of responsibilities are:

1. Manage the North Carolina State Veteran's homes. Four of them are now left open since the Fayetteville facility closing.
2. Manage the State of North Carolina Veteran cemeteries.
3. Publish the Annual Resources Guide which is now available only online – no longer available in hard copy.
4. Oversee fifteen state service centers (VSO's) that work for the State, not the County.
5. They also run a couple of committees:
 - A. Governor's Working Group on Veteran's issues
 - B. North Carolina Military Advisory Committee
 - C. Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs

d. It is important for the American Legion to show the flag at the State level. Perhaps the best way is to invite the Department Commander to one of our monthly Post meetings so he can truly see our Post and how it's matured.

e. Steve expressed his concern that the VA has announced a major shortfall of its budget (\$15 billion). However, he explained that many factors have impacted the budget which includes but not limited to the increased disability compensation approval rate associated with the PACT act.

f. Other budget impacts are the VHA (health) and VBA (benefits) have both staffed up dramatically (20,000 additional employees in VHA alone).

g. Steve also informed the members that the Supreme Court ruled last year that Veterans can collect against 2 different versions of the GI Bill at the same time. That alone added a few hundred million dollars to the deficit.

h. Steve indicated he hoped to be able to give a more detailed update on the VA status at the August or September Post meeting. He feels the VA shortfall announcement might be a ploy to get even more dollars in Fiscal Year 2025, which begins October 1st. VA originally requested \$370 billion which is a 13% increase from 2024. The good news is Congress historically has given more than what the VA has asked for.

i. Steve recommends Veterans taking a “wait and see” approach to the issue of the VA’s budget shortfall. Historically, this kind of issue has a way of working itself out through the annals of Congress.

j. Steve shifted gears and briefly reviewed the Neighborhood Captain structure and responsibilities and encouraged members to get involved. He indicated the processes and documentation are all in place and that the SJMAD Committee has made the activity of collection donations fairly simple.

22) Post 543 Historian Report - Stephen Burns

a. 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. Doug Pratt has provided a WWII Navy uniform 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.

b. Stephen also indicated that he has been organizing a Vietnam era Nurses dinner. He is working with the local VA office, as well as Saint James Community publications to identify those nurses who might have served during the Vietnam era and get word to them about the event.

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

24) The Commander solicited any additional input or comments:

a. Chuck Blackburn announced that Matthew's Ministry has partnered with the Jersey Subs shop on Oak Island to raise funds. If a person donates \$3.00 to Matthew's Ministry, they get a free sub sandwich. Chuck had a sizeable number of coupons to give away and suggested if anyone is interested, see him at the back of the room after the meeting.

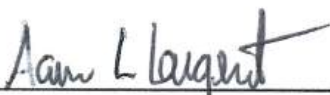
b. A member announced that Homer Wright had passed away on July 22nd. This was the first time the Post had heard about it. The Commander indicated he would do more research and put out a message via e-blast to the Post members.

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 20:22 hours. – Commander



Aaron L. Largent
Adjutant



Phillip E. McGhee
Commander



Upcoming Events

NC
Post
543

August 2024

- Flag Lowering Ceremony at Southport Waterfront Park (7-28-24 to 8-3-24) nightly at 7:30 PM.
- Honor Guard Maintenance of Flags at the Cape Fear memorial Park on Supply -Southport Road.
- Coast Guard's 234th Birthday Celebration at the OKI Coast Guard Station (8 -5-24)
- Post ExCom Meeting at the Saint James Community Center (8 -12-24)
- The Post 543 General Membership Meeting at the Saint James Community Center (8 -28-24)

REMINDERS:

- ★ • The SJMAD Concert in the Park has been moved to 9-21-24
- The SJMAD Golf Tournament has been moved to 10 -9-24.

35



RICHARD H. STEWART JR. AMERICAN LEGION POST 543
July 2024 Finance Report

NC
 Post
 543

PROPRIETARY INFORMATION

BUDGET CATEGORY	FY 2025 MEMBERSHIP REPORTING	Income		Expenses		% Executed
		Budget	Actual	Budget	Actual	
1.0	VETERAN SERVICES	\$ 3,500	\$ -	\$ 13,190	\$ -	0.00%
2.0	VETERAN SUPPORT	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 8,700	\$ -	0.00%
3.0	DEFENSE	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 11,400	\$ 77	0.67%
4.0	AMERICANISM	\$ 5,250	\$ -	\$ 11,150	\$ -	0.00%
5.0	YOUTH	\$ 6,000	\$ -	\$ 20,900	\$ -	0.00%
6.0	HONORS & CEREMONIES	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 8,000	\$ 765	9.56%
7.0	POST OPERATIONS	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 22,650	\$ 1,214	5.36%
8.0	POST FINANCE	\$ 14,050	\$ 4,410	\$ 9,465	\$ 288	3.05%
9.0	RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT	\$ 104,359	\$ -	\$ 20,000	\$ -	0.00%
10.0	VETERAN MEMORIAL	\$ 3,000	\$ -	\$ 2,300	\$ -	0.00%
11.0	POST ATHLETICS	\$ 3,806	\$ -	\$ 12,210	\$ -	0.00%
	GRAND TOTAL	\$ 139,965	\$ 4,410	\$ 139,965	\$ 2,344	1.67%

PROPRIETARY INFORMATION