

**American Legion Post 543
General Membership Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, September 25, 2024**

Meeting Minutes

- 1) The meeting was called to Order at 19:00 Hours – Commander.
- 2) The meeting was opened with the advancement of the colors – Post Honor Guard.
- 3) Opening Prayer – Chaplain.
- 4) 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 Air Force and one from US Army).
- 5) 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 were no Veterans present who had not received their Commemorative pin.
- 6) The Commander requested the Chaplain brief the Membership regarding any sick call Members:
 - a. Rick Sessa indicated that Mike Morrison who was part of the original charter passed away this week and asked for a moment of silence. A moment of silence was observed. The charter was draped in black in honor of this member's passing.
 - b. The Chaplain informed the Membership there was no sick call report.
- 7) The Commander announced the regular Post 543 General Membership Meeting was officially convened and conducted the Roll Call of Officers (Absent: Finance Officer Mike Carton and Deputy Vice Commander Chuck Blackburn - Excused.)

- 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) The Commander requested all Members to stand, uncover and join in the Pledge of Allegiance – Members & Guests.
- 12) Preamble to American Legion Constitution – Commander and Members.
- 13) A motion was made to approve the August 28, 2024, General Membership Meeting Minutes. The motion carried, and the vote was unanimous. – Commander.
- 14) The Finance Officer Report – Commander McGhee (Mike Carton – Absent)
 - a. The Commander informed the General Membership that he had received the 2023 Financial Audit report and although there were some minor administrative issues, the Finance Officer had already resolved. He thanked all the Members who had been involved in the audit. Some redacting needs to be done and the audit report will be posted to the website.
 - b. The Commander introduced the September 2024 Financial Report and asked to have a motion made to approve it.
 - c. A motion was made to approve the September 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 September 2024 Financial Report was approved unanimously.

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

- a. Gary indicated that five members had renewed their memberships prior to the start of the meeting and that the Post had now achieved 60% of the Department assigned goal of 264 paid members. Gary explained that this is a very ambitious goal since the Post lost several of its members last year.
- b. The Post currently has 158 paid members going into the night of the Post Meeting on September 25, 2024. Ninety-eight active members have not yet renewed. Gary requested that Members in attendance advise and prompt their brother members to renew their memberships as soon as possible. There were 17 previous members who did not renew in 2024.
- c. Gary reviewed the various ways to renew your membership:
 - i. Several ways to renew your membership:
 - Cash or check at monthly General Membership meetings.
 - Mail (or drop off) check to Vice Commander-Membership
 - Pay online via credit card for 1 or 3 years.
 - One year at **Mylegion.org** (\$45)
 - Three years at **Legion.org/renew** (\$135) - three years-no increase.
- d. Gary Purcell introduced a new member addition to the Membership Committee. Teresa Brookover, who was with the US Air Force Intelligence organization.

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

- a. The Deputy Vice Commander introduced Dan Bennett, 1st Vice Commander who reviewed the Operation North Star Peer to Pier fishing event coming up on Monday, October 21st where Post 543 would be serving as the host for that day. Dan Bennett indicated he would be passing around sign-up sheets for volunteers and that any member who volunteered would truly enjoy the experience. Those who volunteered last year indicated that it was very enlightening and enjoyable to spend a day with these 1,000 heroes who participated over the weeklong event.

17) The Honors and Ceremonies Report - Bill Morgan/Steve Ratti

a. Bill Morgan introduced Steve Ratti (past Post commander) who recognized Rick Sessa and his team for the outstanding job they did coordinating the Saint James Military Appreciation Day Patriotic Concert on Saturday, September 21st. Steve also 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.

b. Registration for the upcoming Saint James Military Appreciation Day Golf Tournament opened on Monday, September 23rd. One hundred Fifty-two golfers were signed up by 15:00 hours on September 25th. That leaves openings for six more foursomes, with registration closing on September 30th. Emails will then be sent out to tournament registrants, informing them that they are in and providing instructions. Steve Ratti outlined the cost of registration of \$100 per golfer and what the prizes and benefits are. He also outlined the sequence for registration and the priority of acceptance based upon your participation in the event.

c. The two events (Concert and Golf Tournament) 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. One of the Members in the audience indicated the quality of the SJMAD clothing he bought was excellent and that the long sleeve shirt purchased was a nice navy blue.

e. Steve Ratti indicated that he had attended a dinner for the Secret Service. The organization committed to donate their proceeds from their golf tournament that will be held the weekend of September 28th to the Richard H. Stewart Jr. Foundation. The lead was provided by the Post Commander.

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

a. Rick Sessa thanked all those who attended the Patriotic Concert in the Park on Saturday, September 21st. The funds received from the concert was \$19 more than last year. A special shout out to Jim McCriskin for his efforts to get the word out.

b. Rick 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 on October 26th.

- 16:00 hours to 18:30 hours
- BYOE (Bring your own everything)
- Military Trivia Contest

2. Veterans Day Celebration

- Saint James Woodland Park Pavilion
- Potluck/Covered Dish Venue
- November 10th
- 15:00 hours to 17:00 hours
- Apple pie and Pumpkin pie furnished by Post

3. Brunswick Community College Nurses Training

Jimmy Buffett Tribute Show

- 50 seats have been reserved in the sold-out show
- A portion of the ticket cost goes to funding BCCNTE
- Saturday, December 14th at 19:00 hours
- Odell Williamson Auditorium on the BCC Campus
- Contact Rick Sessa to reserve your tickets (38 left)

4. Post 543 Annual Members Recognition, Remembrance
& Charter Dinner – January 22, 2025

- Saint James Community Center
- 18:00 hours
- More details to follow.

5. Valentine's Day Dinner Theater Trip

- February timeframe
- Currently working on details
- May rent a bus so everyone can travel together
- Currently looking at perhaps a murder mystery event

6. Fort Liberty Day Trip

- March timeframe
- The Post Commander will host the trip
- Looking at renting a bus
- Spend the day touring Fort Liberty

19) Resource Officer Report - Steve Muir

a. Steve Muir informed the Membership that he was currently working 8 active cases and had just taken on a 9th case with Jim McCriskin that came to their attention that evening (September 25th). Most of the cases are associated with the PACT Act claims. He was excited to share with the Membership that he and Jim McCriskin were recently successful in helping a DIC case resolved where the widow just received \$35,000 in back pay, going back to September 1, 2022.

b. Steve shared that the VEAC that took place from September 12th to September 14th in Cary, NC was very successful. Over 1200 Veterans were seen, including several Veterans from Post 543. In fact, one was seen on Saturday and received a medical exam packet for an appointment the following Tuesday. The VA has subcontracted several outside agencies and the process time has improved dramatically, as evidenced in our Member's case.

c. Steve Muir informed the Membership that there will be a 2025 VEAC event held at the Armory in Wilmington, NC in May 2025. The team has begun planning the event and will be looking to Post 543 Members to volunteer to help with the event. If you are interested in helping at the VEAC event, please contact Steve Muir to get your name on the list. It's a very rewarding experience to assist these Veterans get the help they deserve. If any Member has a claim pending, please see Steve because the claim could be resolved at the VEAC event in May. The VA approval rate for claims is at 71% recently.

d. The planning, along with the work getting permits and coordination with the contractor for the 96-year-old WWII & Korean Veteran's home remodel is now complete. The work is scheduled to begin on October 7th. However, much needs to be done prior to the work beginning. We will be setting up tents at the site on October 4th. On October 12th, there will be a completion celebration from 13:00 hours to 16:00 hours. The address is 1192 Barefoot Bay Place, Supply, NC. Many dignitaries and Congressional members will be present for the celebration. Come join us for this historic event.

e. The VA budget shortfall has been resolved temporarily. The Congress approved a \$3 billion release of funds on Friday, September 20th. The shortfall occurred due to the lack of understanding regarding the number of claims that would be processed, especially as the qualifying conditions expanded to include a wide variety of exposures. More than 1.1 million claims were processed over a 10-month period. Also, there has been an additional 413,000 new Veterans enrolled in the VA Health system.

f. Steve Muir informed the Membership that at the Patriotic Concert in the Park on September 21st, a Member of our Post and the Veteran's Committee on Oak Island informed him that his committee had approved donating \$1,000 for support of the 94-year-old Korea Navy Veteran at Terra Bella. Our Post, along with the Owner of High Tide Aviation have been providing financial support for this Veteran to remain in this assisted care facility.

20) Post 543 Historian Report - Stephen Burns

- a. Stephen Burns indicated that the search for Vietnam era nurses and health care providers has not gone well. The task was a herculean one, and the progress has been frustrating. The Historian is working with the Sergeant at Arms to determine the feasibility of developing a plan to start up a Sons of the American Legion charter as part of the Post. This will be discussed at the next ExCom meeting, prior to any further developments.
- b. 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. A special shoutout to Mark Leiberman for helping. The Post now has enough memorabilia to stock the display case and will most likely leave the Navy items displayed until March 2025. Thank you to all those who participated.

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

24) The Commander solicited any additional input or comments:

- a. The Commander thanked the Honor Guard and the Ministry Team for all they do.
- b. The Commander asked Bill Morgan to speak a few minutes regarding the upcoming golf tournament and if he needed help with preparing the signs and installing them the day of the tournament. Bill outlined the process of assembling the signs at his home, as well as what it takes to get the signs transported to the holes and installed at the course. Assembling the signs will take place on October 8th from 14:00 hours to 16:00 hours. If any member would like to volunteer to help either with the signs or at the course the day of the tournament, please get in touch with Bill or Dan Bennett.

c. The Commander requested Rick Sessa to speak a few minutes regarding the Marines Thanksgiving dinner event which takes place each year, sponsored by Post 543. Rick indicated that last Thanksgiving, the Post rented 4 buses to transport the young Marines from Camp LeJeune to the Saint James Community Center. The Marines were met by their community sponsoring families who spent the evening with them, eating dinner and getting to know them. It is a very worthwhile event each year, providing a great opportunity to support these young Veterans who are away from their families during this holiday period. Rick presented copies of the Coastal Magazine that was in the State Port Pilot newspaper the previous week. It had a great featured article on this Thanksgiving event sponsored by Post 543. He offered extra copies of the magazine to any Member that wanted one. Sign up sheets will be available at the October 2024 General Membership Meeting.

d. The Commander requested Bill Morgan to provide an update on the Veterans Day Ceremony to be held at the Saint James Community Center on November 11th, beginning at 11:00 hours. Bill Morgan explained the significance of the celebration taking place on the 11th day of the 11th month at 11:00 Hours. The guest speaker for this ceremony this year will be Lieutenant General Lucky (retired US Army). Each service flag will be presented, and the service songs played. A continental breakfast will be offered that day from 9:30 hours to 11:00 hours at the Saint James Community Center by the Town of Saint James. Bill Morgan asked Doug Pratt to update the Membership on the Veterans Day parade. It will take place in Wilmington on November 9th, with the people participating to carpool from the Saint James Community Center to the Cape Fear Community College parking lot in Wilmington. They will then load the participants on to the trailer and position it along the parade route at its assigned spot. More information will be presented at the next General Membership Meeting.

e. 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. The Commander thanked Tom for all his hard work in getting the bricks ordered and installed.

f. Jim McCriskin noted that the upcoming events list for November reflected the November General Membership Meeting date was incorrect due to the Thanksgiving Holiday. The Adjutant committed to correct the date in both the presentation and the meeting minutes to reflect November 20th as the correct November General Membership Meeting date.

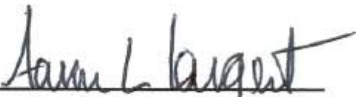
g. The Commander reminded the Membership that the next General Membership Meeting will take place October 23rd at 19:00 hours at the Saint James Community Center.

26) General Membership Meeting Closing Prayer – Chaplain

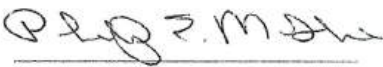
27) The Post 543 Color Guard recovered the colors. – Commander

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

28) The General Membership Meeting closed at 20:13 Hours. – Commander



Aaron L. Largent
Adjutant



Phillip E. McGhee
Commander