



**American Legion Post 543  
General Membership Meeting Minutes  
Wednesday, October 23, 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.
- 5) The Commander informed the Membership that there was Korean War 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary pins available and that he would like to recognize any Korean War Veteran by awarding a Commemorative pin to them. Tom Maher, a Post 543 active Member came forward and was presented the Korean War 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemorative.
- 6) 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.

- 7) The Commander requested the Chaplain brief the Membership regarding any sick call Members:
  - a. The Chaplain informed the Membership there was no sick call report.
  
- 8) The Commander indicated that he would like to recognize the State Port Pilot newspaper for its outstanding support over the years. He requested Jim McCriskin (Post Public Relations Officer) to come forward and read a Post proclamation, along with the recognition of Morgan Harper, Editor of the State Port Pilot. The Commander presented Morgan Harper with a "Special Media Excellence Award".
  
- 9) The Commander requested Steve Ratti (former Post 543 Commander) come to the podium to present information on the Heroes Memorial Golf Tournament that took place in September. Steve introduced Heroes Memorial Golf Tournament Chairman: Ray Ventura and Treasurer: Jim Rizzo. Steve provided a brief overview of the golf tournament and how it supports local charities through auction items, donation and funds raised. Chairman Ventura presented the Commander with a donation check of \$3,605 for the Richard H. Stewart, Jr. Charitable Foundation.
  
- 10) The Commander invited Chuck Blackburn (Deputy Vice Commander – Americanism) to the podium to inform the Membership about the Post 543 Boy's and Girl's State Delegates program. Chuck presented pictures of the two girl delegates (Olivia Pelton and Katherine Key). Olivia was unable to attend due to a conflict in schedules. However, Katherine was in attendance and spoke about how much she enjoyed the opportunity to attend Girl's State, as well as how much she learned during her visit. Chuck then reviewed the Boy's State delegates who were Nicholas Love, Jackson Scott and Connor Walls. Nicholas Love was unable to be in attendance due to a conflict in schedules. Connor Walls and Jackson Scott informed the Membership of their experiences at Boy's State, how much they enjoyed the learning, as well as how it has inspired them to recommend the program to other students. Overall, it was a very good experience for both girls and boys.

- 11) Chuck Blackburn ,then briefed the Membership on Post 543's support of the charity Matthews Ministry and how the Post helps to provide winter wear for needy children in Brunswick County. Chuck invited Lynette Lowrimore to the podium to speak about Matthews Ministry and their efforts to clothe Brunswick County needy children with winter clothing. The Commander presented Lynette with a \$1,000 check to support the winter clothing program.
- 12) The Commander announced the regular Post 543 General Membership Meeting was officially convened and conducted the Roll Call of Officers.
- 13) A Quorum was declared, and the Commander officially opened the meeting. – Commander.
- 14) Remembering the American Legion Four Pillars (There are 70 Post programs that support these four pillars) – Commander. The Commander recognized Steve Muir for his recent appointments at both Department and National levels. He also recognized all the Volunteers who supported the Peer to Pier Fishing Event that was hosted by the Operation North Star program.
- 15) POW/MIA Recognition – Commander.
- 16) The Commander requested all Members to stand, uncover and join in the Pledge of Allegiance – Members & Guests.
- 17) Preamble to American Legion Constitution – Commander and Members.
- 18) A motion was made to approve the September 25, 2024, General Membership Meeting Minutes. The motion carried, and the vote was unanimous. – Commander.

19) The Finance Officer Report – Mike Carton

- a. The Finance Officer informed the Membership that he would cover three topics in his Finance Report:
  1. The October 2024 Finance Report
  2. Post expenditures by pillars
  3. The FY25 Budget Mid-Year review.
- b. The Finance Officer reported that the current budget was 31% spent and was on target with the projections. Post is still receiving invoices associated with the Saint James Military Appreciation Day event but there shouldn't be too many outstanding invoices remaining.
- c. The Finance Officer presented a slide showing expenditures according to the four pillars that the Commander had referred to earlier. The slide reflected what had been budgeted and what had been spent to date against each of the four pillars. The Finance Officer explained the levels spent on each of the budgeted amounts.
- d. The Finance Officer informed the Membership that the budget review process starts November 1<sup>st</sup> and explained the timeline, with the objective being the January 2025 ExCom and General Membership approval.
- e. A motion was made to approve the October 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.

20) The 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice Commander, Membership Report – Gary Purcell

- a. Gary indicated that five members had renewed their membership prior to the start of the meeting and that the Post had now achieved 65% 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 170 paid members going into the night of the Post Meeting on October 18, 2024. Eighty-seven active members have not yet been renewed. Gary requested that Members in attendance advise and prompt their brother members to renew their memberships as soon as possible.

- 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.

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

- a. The Deputy Vice Commander reminded the Membership that the Veterans Day Parade in Wilmington was coming up on November 9<sup>th</sup>. The Post is encouraging as many as possible to participate. The uniform for the day will be the blue Post 543 polo shirt and blue Post 543 ball cap. The plan is to depart via carpool from the Saint James Community Center at 8:30 AM on November 9<sup>th</sup> and drive to the Wilmington Dram Tree Park. The participants will meet the Post 543 Veterans Day Parade trailer and board it there at Dram Tree Park. The trailer will depart with the participants on board at 9:30 AM and drive to the staging area at the Cape Fear Community College. The participants will decorate the trailer with buntings and flags beginning at 10:00 AM. The Veterans Day Parade begins at 11:00 AM. Refreshments and a light breakfast for the parade participants are usually available at the parade staging area. After the parade, the trailer will transport the participants back to Dram Tree Park to remove the decorations and carpool back to Saint James Community Center around 12 Noon.
- b. Active-Duty Support will be working with the USO to provide Thanksgiving fixings for the Camp LeJeune Marine families. This will take place on November 22<sup>nd</sup>.
- c. Active-Duty Support has planned to support the Thanksgiving Dinner event for Camp LeJeune which usually includes 110 US Marines. The program includes local families signing up to host a couple of these young Marines in their homes for Thanksgiving dinner. Participating local families from the past have indicated they enjoy this event as much as, if not more than the Marines. To volunteer, Members need to contact Rick Quashne at 910-233-6418 or Steve Claiborne at 910-269-5554.

22) 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 21<sup>st</sup>. The funds received from the concert were \$4,700. A special shout out to Jim McCriskin for his efforts to get the word out and for Mike's Garage Band for their support.

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 26<sup>th</sup>.

- 15:00 hours to 17:00 hours
- BYOE (Bring your own everything)
- Military Trivia Contest – prizes will be awarded.

2. Veterans Day Celebration

- Saint James Woodland Park Pavilion
- Potluck/Covered Dish Venue
- November 10<sup>th</sup>
- 15:00 hours to 17:00 hours
- Apple pie and Pumpkin pie furnished by Post
- Invite any other Veteran you may know.

3. Army/Navy Game at Bella Cucina Restaurant in Southport.

Game starts at 3:00 PM so please arrive at 2:30 PM. Then that evening after the game, the Brunswick Community College Nurses Training Jimmy Buffett Tribute Show will take place. There are still 25 tickets left out of the 50 that have been reserved in the sold-out show. Remember that a portion of the ticket cost goes to funding BCCNTE. Again, that's Saturday, December 14<sup>th</sup> at 19:00 at the Odell Williamson Auditorium on the BCC Campus. Please contact Rick Sessa to reserve your tickets (25 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

#### 23) Resource Officer Report - Steve Muir

- Steve Muir gave an update on the WWII/Korean Veteran's remodel project with Solstice Builders. The project is complete except for a few minor punch list items. The Post and Volunteers got great coverage from the local media, with many of the print media to do articles and pictures on the project in the very near future. Steve thanked the Post Volunteers and Post photographers for their support of the project.
- Steve shared that there is supposed to be a 2.5% COLA increase in Veteran's compensation effective 12-21-24. Steve is hesitant to share more information until the charts are published by the VA.
- Steve Muir indicated that he was able to speak to five Veterans at the Peer to Pier Fishing event on Monday (October 21<sup>st</sup>) and will be following up with each of them in the coming weeks.
- The Oak Island Veteran's Committee of the Elks Lodge has approved a \$1,000.00 for the Korean Veteran located at the Terra Bellum nursing home.



e. Steve Muir confirmed that he had received a formal letter from the American Legion National Commander, congratulating Steve on being appointed to serve on the National Security Council. The Post is pleased to have Steve represent our region at this National level. Steve's first participation in a zoom meeting with the council proved to be very informative and enlightening regarding the national security threat to our nation today and what role the American Legion can perform. Steve will be sharing that information with the Membership at one of the future Membership Meetings.

f. Steve Muir informed the Membership that he will be representing the Post at the State Legislative Committee meeting at the Department Fall Convention in Raleigh October 25<sup>th</sup> & 26<sup>th</sup>.

24) The Post Commander reminded the Membership that Oak Island is still taking donation of items in support of Northwest North Carolina. You can drop off your donations at building 801 next to the Oak Island Pier. The Commander encouraged any Member who could help to do so as quickly as possible.

The Commander also reminded the Membership that early voting was underway and if any of the Members knew of a Veteran who needed transportation to vote, please let the Commander know and he will help find transportation.

25) The Commander reviewed the upcoming events list with the Membership. He reminded the Membership that there will NOT be a Membership Meeting in December.

26) The Commander solicited any additional input or comments:

a. 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.



b. Tom Picinich informed the Membership of a Knights of Columbus Fundraiser Dance at Saint James Community Center on Saturday, November 2<sup>nd</sup> from 6:00 PM to 9:00 PM. Mike's Garage Band will provide the music. Wrist bands are \$25.00. 50/50 Raffle tickets are 1 for \$10.00 and 3 for \$20.00. It's BYOE to the event (food and drink). Money raised will help Marines at the Wounded Warrior Battalion, Naval Hospital Battalion and other deserving families at Camp LeJeune. Contact Rich Baytosh at 440-666-7196 or Ted Audet at 401-527-8688 or Peter Vagell at 215-584-0331. Donations are also appreciated.


b. The Commander reminded the Membership that the next General Membership Meeting will take place November 20th at 19:00 hours at the Saint James Community Center.

27) General Membership Meeting Closing Prayer – Chaplain


28) The Post 543 Color Guard retired the colors. – Commander

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

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



**Aaron L. Largert**  
Adjutant



**Phillip E. McGhee**  
Commander