



National Update

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Sons' National Convention dedicated to a fallen friend

Close to 1,035 delegates came to Music City, USA for the 33rd Annual National Convention of the Sons of The American Legion. Yet, one person conspicuously absent from the proceedings was the man for whom the gathering was dedicated. U.S. "Udie" Grant, World War II veteran, long time chairman of the Child Welfare Foundation, long time supporter of the Sons, and a close personal friend of fellow Kansan and National Commander Neal Warnken, passed away earlier this summer just shy of his 81st birthday. Following an emotionally charged moment in which Commander Warnken made "Udie" a distinguished guest of the convention, Past National Commander Richard Kepler offered a motion dedicating the weekend's activities to the memory the S.A.L.'s fallen friend. The motion was approved by unanimous acclamation and "Udie's" convention badge sat on the podium through the end of business on Sunday.

A total of 48 Detachments registered for this year's S.A.L. National Convention. The largest was Pennsylvania with 172 delegates. A record high 134 guests also registered.

Delegates were treated to a long stream of special guests and speakers throughout the three-day National Convention.



Shortly after the convention was gaveled to order on Friday night, American Legion National Commander John Brieden was introduced and broke from tradition by stepping off the dais and delivering a motivationally charged talk while walking up and down the aisles of the convention floor (left).

Other Friday night highlights included a stirring memorial service and a visit from two of the Sons' favorite ladies: National Auxiliary President Katherine Morris and Honorary National Junior Auxiliary President Emma Manning (right).

Saturday was filled with another long line of special guest introductions, speakers, a host of Commission and Committee reports and the presentation of many annual awards (see list on Page 2).

While the first two days of the convention were spent looking back over a just-completed year, Sunday was the day for looking forward. Newly elected national officers for 2004-05 include:

National Commander: Michael Deacon (see accompanying story), National Vice Commanders: East – Thomas Smallcomb (NY), South – James Roberts (FL), Central – Michael Adreon (MO), Midwest – Abel Silva (TX), West – Carl Armbruster (AZ), and National Chaplain: Anthony Morgan (VT).



Sons (left, singing *God Bless America*) planning to attend next year's National Convention need to either sprout wings or learn how to swim. The 34th National Convention will convene in Honolulu, HI on August 19, 2005.



New National Commander plans to lead from the Heart(land)

"When you're born, you have family nearby. But when you choose to belong to something like The American Legion Family, no matter where you go in the country, you will always be surrounded by family. To me, this is the greatest family!"

It should not come as a surprise to hear that the newly elected National Commander of the Sons of The American Legion plans to make this a family year. Michael Deacon (left) is 53 and hails from Ames, IA Sq 37. His father is a Life Member and past Post Commander in The Legion, his mother passed away last fall and had served as President of her Auxiliary Unit. Mike's wife, Sandy, is a past Department President and all three of their children are current members of the Sons, Auxiliary and Junior Auxiliary. Look for Mike to place high emphasis on youth-oriented programs. He's set a goal of raising \$750,000 for The Legion's Children and Youth programs.



"It may sound corny, but if even one guy walks up to me at the end of my year and says he stayed involved in the S.A.L. because of our youth programs, I will know we've been successful," says the newly-minted National Commander. "I'm also going to preach better communications between the national and squadron levels."

Michael took the helm Sunday morning when convention delegates elected him National Commander by unanimous acclamation.

How to say 'thanks' to soldiers

Fort Campbell is home to the U.S. Army's 101st Infantry Division, the famous "Screaming Eagles." The fort is a sprawling 70,000 acre complex that spills across the Kentucky/Tennessee border. At some point back in the 1970's, pilots and crew members from the 7th Battalion - Chinook helicopters – decided to adopt the nearby community of Russellville, KY. For more than a decade, the soldiers took part in events like the annual



TobaccoFest, Toys for Tots and provided color guards for memorial services. Then, when the division found itself deployed overseas in Kuwait, Bosnia and most recently in Iraq, it was the community of Russellville and members of S.A.L. Sq 29 who, in turn, adopted the 7th Battalion.

"Now the community is returning the favor many times over," says Battalion Commander Lt. Colonel Ralph Sliwicki (above, presenting Screaming Eagle medallion to Indiana Alt. NEC David Siggers).

Two busloads of Legion Family members were given a daylong tour of Fort Campbell on Friday. The tour included a visit to the 101st Airborne Air Assault School (right), a briefing from one of the post's highest ranking officers, and a visit to the base museum - a building containing the artifacts of a storied fighting unit of the U.S. military. Legion Family members also had the pleasure of eating lunch with members of 101st, a meal that provided opportunities to speak directly with soldiers who have been in battle on the other side of



the world several times in the past few years. Probably the most-asked question: What can we do to help?

At the top of Lt. Col. Sliwicki's list are such things as Adopt-a-Soldier programs, letter writing campaigns and contributions of phone cards.

"Soldiers always enjoy getting mail from back home and they really don't care who it comes from," says Lt. Colonel Tony Fish, Deputy G3 101st Airborne Division. He also cited the importance of the Army's FRG (Family Readiness Group) which operates very much like The Legion's own Family Support Network. "Contact the FRG on any base and they will find ways for you help."

Perhaps the most compelling words of all were offered by



PFC Louis Monari (left), whose boyish looks hide the fact he's already been to war. "Sometimes it's hard for families to make non-military friends. The FRG helps out all they can, but sometimes I think my wife would like to spend time away from the base. But it's hard when you don't know people. One other thing would be if, maybe, somebody could arrange for dinners for couples away from

the base. Y'know, maybe a romantic dinner so a guy and his wife can get away from the kids for a while and spend a romantic evening out." A native of Christopher, IL, Louis and his wife have one daughter and other child on the way. They are one of 800 Fort Campbell couples expecting babies exactly nine months following the division's return from Iraq.

Sons get some of the best news

Three S.A.L. publications have been singled out as some of the best newsletters in the entire American Legion Family. The American Legion National Press Association (NALPA) conducts its annual "Best Papers" contest and hands out awards at the National Convention. *The Ohio SALute* published by the Detachment of Ohio has been judged the best non-American Legion computer generated newsletter in the country and will receive the George W. Hooten Plaque at a banquet Monday night. *National Update*, the official newsletter of the S.A.L. placed second in the same category. The Detachment of Indiana's *7th District News* placed third in the non-American Legion single sheet newsletter category. Dan Wall, Past Detachment Commander of Michigan, won first place for his editorial about the state's first female veteran lost during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Meanwhile, Ed Magers (TX) and Allen Liebau (MI) have been elected to the NALPA Executive Board and will work to promote better communications throughout The American Legion Family. Magers has also been elected President of TEXALPA this year.

Solving a weighty problem

Leave it to a member of the Sons to come up with a win-win solution to two problems. National Children and Youth Chairman Joe Gladden (MD) wants to lose a few notches off his belt. He also wants to raise more money for Legion youth programs. The solution: "Pounds for Pennies - 50 or 500 Pledge." From his current 276-pound stature, Joe pledges to lose 50 pounds by next March and is taking pledges from those who think he can't. If he slims down to 225, all of those pledges come due. If not, he'll pay \$500 out of his own (somewhat smaller) pants pocket. See an S.A.L. member to obtain a pledge form and help tip the scales for kids!

New Trophy has 9/11 roots

What used to be known as the S.A.L. Americanism Award is now called the Gerald Atwood - Edward Beyea - Raymond York Memorial Award. The newly named award was presented for the first time during Saturday's convention session. Gerald Atwood and Raymond York were New York City firemen killed while trying to rescue people trapped in the World Trade Towers on 9/11. Edward Beyea worked in one of the towers and also perished that fateful day. All three were members of the S.A.L. Raymond York's parents were invited

to Nashville this week and were present on stage to participate in the award ceremony.

"I feel very proud when I think that these guys chose at some point to be members of our organization," said Americanism Chairman Raymond Giehl, Jr.

Those who receive this award are given replica pictures of the trophy, which remains on display at the National Headquarters in Indianapolis.

A Host of Awards handed out

Membership

Hartline Award (Detach w/ most squadrons) - Pennsylvania

Houten Award (greatest % increase in membership)

Category 1 - Montana

Category 2 - Iowa

Category 3 - Texas

Category 4 - Florida

Category 5 - Pennsylvania

Highest renewal percentage by region

East - Rhode Island (94.41%)

South - Mississippi (86.44%)

Central - Wisconsin (93.52%)

Midwest - Nebraska (87.19%)

West - Idaho (87.29%)

Largest Squadron - York, PA Shiloh Sq 791 (1,178 mem)

Americanism

Atwood-Beyea-York Memorial Award

Detachment - Georgia

District - 9th District, Georgia

Squadron - Sq 251, Duluth, Georgia

Children and Youth

East - Gold Star, MD Sq 191

Central - North Webster, IN Sq 253

South - East Point, GA Sq 51

Midwest - Love Field, TX Sq 453

West - Arlington, WA Sq 76

Squadron - Duluth, GA Sq 251

District - North Central District, MD

Detachment - Maryland

Child Welfare Foundation

Nation's largest per capita - Alabama

East - Vermont Central - Ohio

Midwest - Colorado

West - Washington

Garland Murphy Award (largest donation) - Ohio

East - Pennsylvania

South - Alabama

Midwest - Texas

West - Arizona

Community Service

Scrapbook Winners

Squadron - Marietta, OH Sq 64

District - 22nd District, Pennsylvania

Detachment - California

Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation

Kirby Kepler Award (best Squadron rehab report)

Jonesboro, GA Sq 258

Allen I. O'Brien Award (best District report)

4th District, Georgia

Earl Webster Award (best Detachment report)

Maryland

Charles B. Rigsby Award (Volunteer of the Year)

William P. Ferguson, California

Historian

History Book Award

Squadron - Beverly, OH Sq 389

Detachment - Maryland

Color Guard

Wichita, KS Sq 401