



NATIONAL UPDATE

Official Publication of The Sons of The American Legion
August 1999



California, here we come Two reasons to SALute

by Paul Mesmer
National Convention Chairman

Wax your surfboard and pack a case of sun screen. The Sons of The American Legion will conduct their 28th annual National Convention in sunny, southern California this year. The convention will be held in the Anaheim Marriott Hotel's Marquis Ballroom North beginning the evening of Friday, September 3rd and concluding on Sunday, September 5th. The Marriott Hotel is located adjacent to the Anaheim Convention Center, Headquarters for The American Legion and Auxiliary National Conventions.

This year's Convention site will be a popular destination for S.A.L. members and their families. Anaheim is sometimes referred to as "the happiest place on earth" because it's the home of Disneyland. In addition, Anaheim is not far from such attractions as Newport Beach, Crystal Cove State Park, Knott's Berry Farm, Laguna Beach and the Richard Nixon Library.

A special Web page at <http://www.geocities.com/TheTropics/Paradise/9811/> contains more information about the S.A.L. National

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Flag flies over first hurdle

Constitutional amendment, H.J. Res. 33, easily passed in the United States House of Representatives June 24th by a vote of 305 to 124. The amendment reads "Congress shall have power to prohibit the physical desecration of the flag of the United States."

"The June 24th vote sends a clear message that the American people believe their values should be reflected in their laws," said Maj. Gen. Patrick Brady, Chairman of the Board of the Citizens Flag Alliance and Medal of Honor Recipient. "A nation is defined by its symbols, its citizens and its values. We have preserved one special symbol for the ages and by doing so we ensure the next generation is taught the values of respect, service and sacrifice."

The fight for a flag protection amendment (*see related story Page 7*) now moves back into the United State Senate. On March 17, 1999, S.J. Res.

14 was introduced by Sens. Orrin Hatch (R-UT) and Max Cleland (D-GA). The amendment has 58 cosponsors. In order to pass the Senate, 67 senators must vote for the measure. If that happens, the resolution would be sent on to the 50 state legislatures, where it would likely be adopted quickly and overwhelmingly. Repeated public opinion polls have shown that 80 percent of the people in this country support a constitutional amendment to allow protection of the American flag.

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Regardless of whether you choose the word *ironic* or *appropriate*, the fact remains that the Sons of The American Legion met their 100% membership goal on June 14th, Flag Day. On that day, membership in the S.A.L. surpassed 211,255. It marks the 18th consecutive year the Sons have set a new All-Time High national membership. Nearly half of all Detachments have already reached their 105% goal. At least 26 Detachments have set a new All-Time High in their own membership.

Among all Detachments, *South Dakota's* 164% (177 members) is tops, although *Oklahoma's* 163% (606) members is close behind. Among Detachments with 1,000 or more members, *Georgia* leads the way with 123% (2,955 members). Other leading Detachments include: *Puerto Rico* 146% / 41; *District of Columbia* 135% / 77; *Nevada* 132% / 124; *Mississippi* 115% / 269; *Montana* 115% / 193; *Utah* 113% / 407; *Alaska* 113% / 1,155; *Tennessee* 111% / 1,551; *California* 110% / 4,702; *Alabama* 110% / 1,431;

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Detachment N.E.C. officers formed this "Million Dollar Line" at the Spring N.E.C. Conference. Find out why in the related story on Page 7.

Why S.A.L. must reach out to America's youth

by **Byron Robichaux**
National Commander

Our country is witnessing a growing number of acts of violence in schools. This very disturbing problem has been linked to such things as a decline in moral values, break-up of the family and even court decisions which have made discipline by parents and schools increasingly difficult. Increasingly, numbers of teens feel neglected or alienated from society.

As an educator who has worked with youth for many years, I am very much aware of problems associated with low self-esteem and the feeling of not belonging. Quite often, society and schools are quick to recognize the accomplishments of athletes and other so-called "popular" students, yet fail to do the same for students who achieve in academics, the arts and other areas.

If education is to be held in high esteem in this society, we must convince the media to give academic achievers the status of hero rather than constantly spotlighting multi-millionaire professional athletes, especially those who complain about pay or those who receive a slap on the wrist when they threaten their coach or harm their wife.

In today's society, bad news can generate quite a bit of coverage. Unfortunately, there are cases where youth have turned to violence and other negative forms of behavior to gain the attention they are not getting at home or from peers. Such negative behaviors should never be condoned by society. Ignoring them or their underlying problems will not make them go away.

The American Legion Family has a large number and great variety of youth-oriented programs. Considering recent events in America's schools, youth programs of The American Legion Family are now more important than ever. This is not the first time the Legion Family has been called upon to help our country. As a Family, we must take the lead in America to help youth so they do not feel alienated from society. We must use programs in Americanism and Children and Youth to help teach right from wrong and provide examples of true American heroes and patriots.

We face a unique problem within the Sons by having a membership which spans many decades. Divergent age groups are all a part of the Sons. It's incumbent upon leaders, often made up of older members, to provide a variety of appropriate activities and opportunities for our younger members. We should not judge any member solely by his age, but by his ability to be a responsible and productive member. We must not make any member feel they do not "fit in" or should not be a member. Remember, there is no rank among us and each serves as an equal of his comrade. Let the Sons of The American Legion take the lead in today's society to change the feeling of alienation and desperation felt by many of our youth. Let us be sure that we are working to be a part of the solution and not contribute in any way to this growing problem.

Learning and doing in the Sons

by **John Dietz**
Past National Commander

The S.A.L. has gotten very good at promoting and supporting programs for youth such as Boys State, Baseball, Oratorical, and Junior Shooting. Unfortunately, very few young S.A.L. members actually take advantage of the opportunity to become participants. Somewhere along the line, an artificial separation has occurred between S.A.L. members and their, *our*, programs. Our young members need and deserve the kind of leadership training and educational opportunities these activities provide.

Once conducted an unscientific poll by asking a group of ten young men to

answer three questions: *Why did you join the S.A.L.? What would you change about the S.A.L. if you were in charge? If you weren't already a member, what would make you want to join?*

Their responses were almost identical. Most joined because they want to spend more time with their dad, getting to know him better. If they were in charge, most would conduct more organized activities, like softball, campouts, fishing trips, coed teen dances, bowling, and biking. Finally, all said that they would join the S.A.L. if the Squadron had activities for boys and girls of all ages, from throughout the community, not just for members

only. All sought the opportunity to learn important skills, to receive training in various sports, and to interact with older age groups.

Perhaps the most startling response I received was from a 7 year old named Thomas, who told me about the plight of his friend Jimmy. Jimmy's mother is divorced and works everyday, leaving him home alone and, as young Thomas said, "he has nothing to do!" What a tragic indictment of our society that young children are left home alone with nothing to do except watch TV, play video games, or roam the streets. Such solitary situations sap young imaginations, eliminate creativity, and rob children of skills they'll need as adults to work and live with others.

We members of The Legion Family can do much to alleviate this problem.

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Sons' help sought for vet study Surf into our new Home on the Web

S.A.L. members in five states are being asked to help with a study The American Legion has undertaken in conjunction with New York's Columbia University.

In 1984, more than 12,000 Vietnam veterans participated in a study designed to provide answers to questions about the health effects of Agent Orange. Congress has authorized a follow-up study which will also be conducted by The Legion and Columbia University. Researchers are asking all veterans who participated in the first study to fill out a new questionnaire. Some have been found, but many have moved or gone on to the Post Everlasting since the first study was undertaken.

S.A.L. members in Maryland, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana and Minnesota are being asked to volunteer their efforts to help find the missing veterans. Sons are also being asked to contact veterans who have received their survey form but have not filled it out and returned it.

More information about the study is available on the Web at <http://www.legion.org/agorange.htm>.

Individuals interested in volunteering to help with the study should contact their Legion Department Headquarters.

Lessons in leadership are forged early

by **Graham Fielding Smith**
1998 Boys Nation Delegate

(Editor's Note: The following is an excerpt from an essay written by a young man who was elected Governor of Georgia's 1998 Boys State and went on to attend Boys Nation.)

There I stood in the Oval Office, shaking hands with the President of the United States of America. That significant moment consummated the experience of a lifetime. My weeks at both Boys Nation and Georgia Boys State reinforced and further defined my attitude of responsibility toward my community and my country.

As Governor, I was also afforded the opportunity to realize the responsibility that comes with the freedom of office. My intellectual knowledge of leadership quickly became experimental knowledge. I recognized that to earn and maintain the respect of others, I must lead by example. I believe that it is vital that I operate out of a personal integrity that dictates right choices. When I fail, it is my duty to take responsibility for my own actions, rather than placing blame elsewhere.

My role as Georgia's senior senator to Boys Nation further nurtured my growing understanding of what the world leader actually means. I had the opportunity to meet and lead with 96 of the most promising young men in the nation. This experience provided me with a true understanding of the productivity of unity and the destructive effects of divisiveness. As Secretary of the Senate, I grew to realize the importance of striving to nurture positive relationships through encouraging individual strengths in others, eventuating in the success of the team under my leadership. This symbiotic relationship works in that I receive the benefit of knowing I have optimized the potential of others, while they receive the gratification of accomplishing together what they could not have alone.

Abraham Lincoln once said, "I do not think much of a man who is not wiser today than he was yesterday." Boys State and Boys Nation were opportunities for which I am thankful because they moved me from head knowledge to heart knowledge in the area of leadership. Because of The American Legion's commitment to build young leaders, I am wiser today than I was yesterday.

In an effort to take advantage of emerging technologies, enhance communications and bolster membership, a new Home Page has been created for the Sons on the World Wide Web. The site, located at <http://www.sal.legion.org> is still in its infancy. It presently contains historical information, lists of officers, administrative commissions and committees, Sons-oriented Web links and answers to frequently asked questions. As the site matures, Sons at all levels of the organization will be able to use the Web site to obtain important information and transmit reports electronically.

The new Home Page would not have been possible without a great deal of work done by S.A.L. National Internet Subcommittee Chairman Tom Marsden and his son, John, who hail from the Detachment of New Jersey. The father/son team did most of the HTML coding for the site last February and March. This is the first Sons-oriented Home Page allowed on The American Legion's own Internet server.

In addition to the Web Home Page, the Sons National organization now has a dedicated e-mail address. Questions and comments about the S.A.L. can be e-mailed to sal@legion.org.

Learning, doing

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We can be leaders in providing wholesome activities for children in our communities. Let's work for those kids who slip through the cracks; who can't, won't, or don't participate in school sponsored activities, or who lack the opportunities and advantages that other children enjoy. Let's keep them busy learning and doing so they won't sit home alone.

This is our next generation of Americans and we can either work to ensure their future success or we should be held accountable for their failure.

Sons Create Waves All

The Detachment of Maine participated in this year's Children and Youth Month observance at the state capitol. On behalf of Maine's foster children, Governor Angus King (*Picture #2*) received approximately 700 duffel bags, backpacks and suitcases containing stuffed animals. S.A.L. *Squadrons from Bath #21, Belfast #42, Milinocket #80 and Sabattus #135* contributed more than half of the items in this Legion Family project.

Croton, MI Squadron 381 has had quite a bit of success in getting replies to direct mail for renewals. More than half of their non-renewed members got signed up after a pair of mailings which included a state of the Squadron list and the brochure "Why I Belong." So, how are things in Croton? Members there donated more than \$5,000 to national, state and Post projects during the past year.

Cohasset, MA Squadron 18 joined with its Legion Post to contribute Spinoza Bears to the Children's Hospital of Boston. *Massachusetts Alternate N.E.C. Tom Wigmore* and his father, Steve, made the presentations during a telethon (*Picture #1*).

Look who drives the Twin Falls, ID vets van (*Picture #6*) to Boise's VAMC: None other than *National Assistant Sgt-at-Arms Lloyd Trimmer* who hails from *Twin Falls Squadron 7*.

Things are a bit more comfortable around the Post Home in *Gretna, NE*, thanks to the efforts of *Squadron 216* members. Sons purchased 28 new stools, six tables, 25 stack chairs and a half dozen new table tops for the Legion Lounge. The Squadron held a telethon in the lounge and raised \$4,000. Another \$1,200 was kicked in by the Post and Squadron adjutant. No wonder the S.A.L. has grown to 86 members in just four short years.

Want to get your name in the *Maywood, NJ Squadron 142* newsletter? All you have to do is fail to pay your dues. Names of delinquent members are printed in the monthly newsletter. On the positive side, however, the Squadron also prints the names and birthdays of its members each month. Maywood Sons also pocketed \$1,000 by washing 178 in just one sunny day in May.

John Sgro is flanked by past and present officers of *Christiana, PA Squadron 865 (Picture #4)*. Mr. Sgro donated a week in his two-



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Across The Country

bedroom Myrtle Beach, SC condominium as a prize to assist the Squadron's efforts at bringing "The Traveling Wall" to their community. Squadron members thanked him by awarding him a replica of the Vietnam Memorial Wall.

Sons in *Cuyahoga Falls, OH Squadron 281* deserve a pat on the back for the efforts to raise \$1,000 and donate it to the Child Welfare Foundation.

Members of *Leo Ryan Squadron #58 in Somerset, OH* stand beside a garden and fence (*Picture #8*) that used to be nothing but an ugly hill behind their Post home. The Squadron has undertaken a number of projects including fish fries, Labor Day activities and removal and replacement of a roof on the home of a local veteran.

Bingo! Members of the *Detachment of Indiana* host several large bingo parties each year at the Indiana Veterans' Home at Lafayette, IN (*Picture #7*). About two dozen Sons drive in from around the state and assist more than 100 veterans play more than 70 games of Bingo.

Squadrons from around the state also contribute \$1,500 worth of prizes for the games. Individual Squadrons also sponsor their own special events on other weekends throughout the year, like the chicken Bar-B-Q thrown by *New Albany #28*.

Staten Island, NY Squadron 316 members observed Memorial Day this year by visiting various monuments throughout the island (*Picture #3*). After

the tour, the Squadron provided a brunch, cooked up by 316 member and Chef Harry Kassiotis. "Our Squadron is continually committed toward showing our appreciation to those who fought for our country's freedom and values," says Squadron Commander Mike Ranieri.

When *George Washington Bentley*, last surviving Founder of The American Legion, answered the final call in early June of this year at the age of 101, S.A.L. members from *Apple Valley, MN Squadron 1776* provided an Honor Guard for his wake (*Picture #9*). Other Legion and Sons dignitaries also attended the remembrance.

Many S.A.L. Detachments conduct combined campout/conventions during the summer months each year. In June (*Picture #5*), members of the *Detachment of Indiana* camped out on the grounds of *Portage, IN Post 165*. They elected new state officers and spent many hours participating in father/son events.

Sons ride the wave of success

Continued from Page 5

One of the navy's newest Aegis class destroyers is the U.S.S. Donald Cook, named in memory of a U.S.M.C. Colonel who was a prisoner of war in Vietnam. **Woolwich, ME Squadron 21 Commander Michael Elwell** is employed at the Bath Iron Works where the ship was built. S.A.L. members asked and received permission (**Picture #11**) to donate a POW-MIA flag to the ship, along with a plaque commemorating Col. Cook's personal motto, "Faith Without Fear." The encased flag and plaque now hang in the crew mess and another POW-MIA flag flies above the \$800 million warship's decks, the only vessel in the U.S. Navy to fly the POW-MIA flag.

Bedford, TX Squadron 379 donated nearly 11,000 book markers to 18 area schools. School district representative Donna Camoth (**Picture #10**) receives the markers from **Texas Detachment N.E.C. Jim Kehler (right)** and Post 379 Finance Officer Bob Harris. The book markers also serve as a six inch ruler and have an American flag, Eddie Eagle and the Pledge of Allegiance on one side. On the other side are Legion and Child Welfare emblems and the slogan "Say No To Drugs." The book markers were printed by The Legion's Department of Kansas thanks to a \$24,000 grant from the Child Welfare Foundation.



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Deadline

If you have articles/photos for the next issue of the **National Update**, they must reach us by:

October 15, 1999

Here's another Squadron who is using the CWF-funded, Kansas Legion-produced bookmarks. **McPherson, KS Squadron 24** provides the bookmarks to each school in the county. Proceeds from the Squadron's "Men's Night" helped fund a contribution to CWF. It also helped purchase 183 stuffed toys that were given to the county sheriff's department to be provided to children in distress. "Just Say No To Drugs" pins are being made up and given to the local DARE program.

The **Detachment of Nebraska** is promoting a buddy system as a way of encouraging attendance at Squadron, District and Detachment meetings. Detachment Commander David Rippe encourages those who know they will be attending a meeting to call one other person and offer to pick him up on the way. If the second member starts attending more often, make a call and find a third rider, then a fourth then....

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Send your news and pictures to us here at:

National Update Newsletter
c/o Mike Pipher
612 Knightridge Rd #35-C
Bloomington, IN 47401

material can also be sent in via e-mail to mpipher@indiana.edu.

Sons now known as Million Dollar Men

by Jeff Sunday
National CWF Chairman

Once again, Sons have set a new record for annual contributions to the Child Welfare Foundation. Donations in 1998-99 totaled more than \$181,800, an increase of \$14,333 over last year's contributions and represents an average donation of 85-cents for every member of the Sons. The Sons accounted for 44% of all donations to the Child Welfare Foundation this year.

Just as significantly, the amount raised in 1998-99 puts the S.A.L. over the \$1 million mark in contributions since our organization first became involved in the Child Welfare Foundation 11 years ago. The million dollar mark was reached on Sunday, May 2nd. As delegates to the Spring N.E.C. Conference were lined up to present CWF checks to National Commander Robichaux (**see picture Page 1**), The Detachment of Michigan's check for \$5,000 pushed all S.A.L. totals

over the platinum mark.

The Detachment of Colorado is once again the nation's per capita leader. The Detachment's \$10,606 amounts to a \$6.11 donation for each member. Other outstanding per capita totals included Texas' \$3.66 average, New Mexico's \$2.38, Delaware's \$2.21, West Virginia's \$2.05, Idaho's \$1.94 and Arizona's \$1.90.

By far, the Detachment with the deepest pockets this year was Ohio, which contributed nearly \$33,200 to the CWF. Other large donations came from the Detachments of: Texas (\$17,291), Michigan (\$15,365), Indiana (\$11,539), Pennsylvania (\$7,902), Minnesota (\$6,778) and Maryland (\$6,404).

1988 was the first year the S.A.L. contributed money to the CWF. Nearly \$40,000 was donated in that first year. It took just six years before annual contributions were twice that amount, then another three years before it doubled again. The rallying cry for this next year's goal is "**2,000 in Y2K!**"

Legion Commander blasts White House

Calling on the Clinton administration to be consistent, American Legion National Commander Butch Miller has condemned the Clinton administration for lobbying against a flag-protection constitutional amendment. Various polls conducted over 10 years have shown consistently that 80 percent of the American people support the amendment. Forty-nine state legislatures have passed resolutions supporting the amendment.

"When the president's place in history was in the hands of members of Congress, the administration wanted the 'will of the people' to prevail, because the polls showed most Americans wanted him to finish his

presidency," Miller says. "All we want is for the Clinton administration to be consistent in this regard. If the polls can save the presidency, then the polls can save our flag."

Miller and other Legion officials are enraged at the president's flip-flop; Clinton supported protecting the flag when he was a presidential candidate while addressing The American Legion National Convention in Chicago in 1991.

"Our founding fathers did not permit desecration of the American Flag. The flag was protected in its role as an incident of our sovereignty."

"A piece of cloth — of no value? Is that their position? God help our nation if it is their final testament that the flag that may drape the coffins of some of our sons and daughters is just a piece of cloth in their eyes."

Membership record

Continued from Page 1

Massachusetts 109% / 3,270; **West Virginia** 108% / 2,565; **Delaware** 108% / 881; **Maine** 108% / 2,091. The world's largest Detachment continues to be **Indiana** with 29,056 members (102%).

"People out there really do believe in all of the programs and issues The American Legion Family has backed and supported for many years," says National Commander Byron Robichaux.

Sons asked to dig deeper into their pockets of god will

National Commander Robichaux is urging all S.A.L. members to find some additional space in their hearts and work toward generating more money for a number of projects important to veterans.

Sons have already contributed \$32,000 this year toward the National Emergency Fund (**see Picture #12 on Page 6**), which provides direct relief to Legion Family members who have been the victims of natural disasters such as floods, fires and catastrophic weather. This year's NEF goal is \$50,000.

Funds for the World War II Memorial to be built in Washington, D.C. have been running a little slow. "We could use a little work in this area," says Robichaux. If donors to the World War II Memorial want their contributions to be credited as coming from the S.A.L., they need to send that money to the following address: Brian O'Hearne, National Adjutant 10 Luther Rd. Burlington, MA 01803. The Spring edition of the National Update carried a story and pictures of the monument which is proposed to honor the "Heros of Democracy." Tom Brokaw, NBC television network news anchor and author of "The Greatest Generation" has referred to the men and women of that era as a "temple of can do."

Anaheim readies for S.A.L.

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Convention and surrounding opportunities for fun. Department hotel information can be found on the Web at <http://www.legion.org/cv99hot.htm#2>.

One of the most popular and colorful events connected to the National Convention is the annual National Color Guard Contest. This year's contest will be held at 8:00am on Saturday in Hall B of the Anaheim Convention Center.

All delegates to the National Convention must be registered together with their respective Detachments. Individual delegate registrations will not be accepted. Detachments should register at the North Registration Desk outside of the North Hall Ballroom in the Anaheim Marriott Hotel. Registration hours will be Friday from 1:00pm to 5:00pm, Saturday from 8:00am to 3:00pm and Sunday from 7:30am to 8:30am.

On Saturday evening (Sep 4th), Newport Harbor's American Legion Post 291 will host a "Welcome to California" Beach Party and Luau Dinner from 4:00pm to 10:00pm. The price of \$20/\$12 (adults/children) will include a Polynesian style dinner, Polynesian dancers, live music and dancing.

The weather in Anaheim is expected to be very hot. Nevertheless, the Convention hotel is air conditioned and all delegates should be in proper dress while attending Convention sessions. "A coat and tie is preferred, especially when receiving awards on the stage," says National Adjutant Brian O'Hearne. "However, trousers, shirt and shoes are certainly acceptable. What we want to do is discourage our adult members from wearing tank tops, shorts or shower clogs. Many important visitors will be attending our sessions and we want to be at our best."

Newsletters!

A collection of S.A.L. newsletters will once again be displayed at the National Convention. To have your Squadron, District or Detachment newsletter included, mail it to:

Convention Newsletters
c/o Mike Pipher
612 Knightridge Road #35-C
Bloomington, IN 47401

Flag amendment

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Updated information about the fight to gain a flag protection amendment can be found on the Citizens' Flag Alliance Home Page on the Web at <http://www.cfa-inc.org/>

The Sons of The American Legion

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