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Sons of The American Legion

THE LIBERTY

Detachment of New York



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COMMANDER'S MESSAGE...by Ed Hooke

Meet Your Detachment Commander

Edward Hooke is a 16-year member of the Sons of The American Legion. Born and raised in Connecticut, his eligibility for the Sons of The American Legion comes from his father, Eldred ("Al") Hooke, who served in the Korean War with the 930th Engineer Battalion in the U.S. Army, where he received the Korean Service Medal with three Bronze Service Stars and the United Nations Service Medal. Ed's maternal grandfather served in the Spanish-American War in the U.S. Army and is buried at Arlington National Cemetery along with his grandmother.

Ed is a member of Sherburne Squadron 876 in Chenango County. He has held numerous positions within the Sons of The American Legion, including Adjutant and Squadron Commander for Squadron 189 in Norwich, NY. He previ-

ously served a two-year term as the 6th District SAL Commander and a two-year term as Detachment Vice Commander representing the 5th and 6th Districts. Ed is also a member of the American Legion Riders, Sherburne Chapter 876.

Ed retired after 29 years with AT&T in Connecticut in 2008 and moved to Fonda, NY, where he worked for Frontier Communications for six years until his second retirement.

Ed currently serves as a board member of Hospice of Chenango County and is the President of the Volunteer Guild at the New York State Veterans Home in Oxford. He volunteers every week at the Veterans Home and was

awarded the Charles B. Rigsby VA&R Volunteer of the Year Award for 2025 at the Detachment of New York Convention in Syracuse in July 2025.

He lives in Norwich, NY, with his wife, Sophie, and their two Boxer dogs, Meadow and Izzy. Ed has two stepdaughters: Tricia, who lives in Raleigh, NC, with her husband and three children, and Jill, who lives in Norwich, NY. He thinks the world of his stepdaughters and grandchildren and feels every day like he has won the lottery.



Newly elected SAL Commander Ed Hooke introduces his officers to the Department of NY membership at their convention held in Syracuse this past July.

ADJUTANT, by Gaither E. Espey

Greetings, fellow Sons.

I hope you all enjoyed your summer and are ready for another successful year. The 2025–2026 administrative year was closed at our 52nd Annual Convention in Syracuse at the Downtown Marriott. Convention delegates congratulated and thanked Commander Joe for a successful year leading our great organization. Delegates also elected officers for the 2026–2027 administrative year:

- **Commander:** Edward Hooke
- **Vice Commander 1 & 9:** Peter Booth
- **Vice Commander 2 & 8:** Joseph Bellenger
- **Vice Commander 3 & 4:** James Prime
- **Vice Commander 5 & 6:** Rich Abel
- **Vice Commander 7 & 8:** Diman Smart
- **Chaplain:** Paul Blosser
- **Historian:** Shawn Mills

Congratulations to you all. We wish you a successful year ahead.

National Commander Bill Clancy, National Executive Committeeman David Lee, and Alternate National Executive Committeeman

Peter DeAngelis represented New York at the National Convention in Louisville, Kentucky. Twenty-six New York delegates attended to thank and congratulate National Commander Bill Clancy (NY) for an outstanding year representing our organization across the country.

The Detachment received the **2026 National Legacy Scholarship Fund Regional Donation Award**, and Detachment Historian Clarence “Ike” Bosford won the **Best History Book Contest for Detachments**. Congratulations!

The 2027 membership year is off and running. September 10, 2026 was our 25% target date. The Detachment fell short with 3,404 members, or 10.62%. The Detachment has 373 new members as of the last report. We have no problem getting new members; we seem to lose about 10% yearly. One theme this year from our National leadership is “**Every Member Matters.**” Keep your members informed about what is happening within your Squadron. Many members move, but usually the phone number stays the same. Reach out, let them know what is happening, and get that new address.

The Detachment has a new website—still the same address, **sonsdny.org**, but with a new look and eas-

ier navigation. Thank you to our Webmaster Joe Guidice Jr. and the Web Committee for the speedy work on this. If you have any suggestions, please let Joe know.

The Fall D.E.C. Meeting call has gone out. The meeting will be held on **Saturday, October 31, 2026**, at the Canasawacta Country Club, 261 County Route 44, Norwich, NY 13815. A Meet & Greet is planned for **Friday night, October 30**, at the Norwich American Legion Post 189, 29 Sheldon Street, Norwich. The full meeting call is on the website. All members are welcome to attend.

Pre-submitted vouchers for those eligible are due by **October 9, 2026**.

Save the date: Mid-Winter is scheduled for **January 15–17, 2027** at the Albany Marriott on Wolf Road in Colonie.

Gaither E. Espey
Detachment Adjutant
SALAdjutant@nylegion.org

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The Millennium is a national e-newsletter published monthly by Sons of The American Legion. It includes local and national SAL stories and reports from SAL leadership.

Sign up to receive an emailed copy!

ADJUTANT ETC. by Robert J. Avery

National SAL Commander William “Bill” Clancy presided at the 54th Annual National Convention

held in Louisville, KY last month. In his outgoing remarks, he delivered a strong message about the future of our Legion Family. Reflecting on his year, he challenged the Sons to think beyond their own programs and take a greater role in strengthening The American Legion as a whole—recruiting eligible veterans, welcoming younger generations, and giving them meaningful reasons to become involved. We want to thank our fellow New Yorker “Bill” for all his hard work and dedication in leading our over 400,000-member organization. In closing, Bill remarked, **“I leave this position, but my service doesn’t end.”**

At the Convention, our Detachment received a Citation for donating \$1 per member to the Child Well-Being Foundation. New York was also awarded a Certificate for the highest donation to the Legacy Scholarship in the Northeast Region. Additionally, we received the **Best Detachment History Book Award**.

Thom Skelley from Texas, a 21-year member of the SAL, was elected National Commander for 2026–27. He has held numerous leadership positions and earns

his SAL eligibility through the service of his father, William M. Skelley Sr., who served in the Pacific Theater during World War II from 1941 to 1945. During his remarks, Skelley reminded the audience that **“every member matters. That’s not just in the Sons, that’s not just in the Legion, that’s not just in the Auxiliary, that’s not just in the Riders. Every member matters.**

They matter to somebody. They may not matter much to the organization, but that’s our fault as leaders. We need to engage them more, ask what their passion is, bring that out of them, so that they’re able to serve more.”

Now is the time to get going on your membership renewals and recruitment efforts. Let’s have another banner year! The 2027 membership cards have been mailed out. Don’t forget that members can use the **QUICK Renew** option online at *Legion.org/SAL-Renew*.

2026–2027 Renewal Postcard Mail Dates

- **1st Notice:**
Sept. 28–Oct. 2, 2026
- **2nd Notice:**
Jan. 25–29, 2027
- **3rd Notice:**
April 26–30, 2027

At the 2026 American Legion National Convention, del-

egates adopted new membership eligibility language for the American Legion Auxiliary—expanding eligibility and allowing more family members to join the ALA.

These revisions allow individuals the potential to be members of both the Sons of The American Legion and the American Legion Auxiliary. The Legion’s National Judge Advocate has confirmed that this dual membership does **not** constitute a conflict of interest with The American Legion. The eligibility changes are effective immediately. Updated membership applications, brochures, and additional resources are available at ALAforVeterans.org.

Following is the updated text from The American Legion reflecting the revised eligibility provisions for membership in the American Legion Auxiliary::

OFFICIAL LANGUAGE

Section 2. Membership in the American Legion Auxiliary shall be limited to: (1) Grandparents, parents, siblings, spouses, and direct or adopted descendants within two degrees of consanguinity of members of The American Legion; and (2) Grandparents, parents, siblings, spouses, and direct or adopted descendants within two degrees of consanguinity of all service-members who served in either of the following periods: April 6, 1917, to November 11, 1918, **See Adjutant page 4**



Children & Youth by Wayne Ainslie

I would like to start out by giving you some numbers from the Squadron Consolidated Reports. The Detachment of NY received 105 reports from Squadron active in C&Y programs. The total dollars raised was \$143,550 and total volunteer hours was 10,185.

These are great numbers for the 105 reporting Squadrons, only 27% of the Detachment Squadrons, imagine what these figures could be if we could get 50% or 75%. I know that we push and push to get this number better, but it seems like every year it still comes in at a disappointing number. Somehow, we need to drive

this home on the membership level. I don't know how, but everybody needs to try harder.

Please use the national guide line of donating \$1 per member to CWF.

My goal for next year for every Squadron to try and do something for the Children & Youth in their community.

For God & Country
Wayne Ainslie,
C&Y Chairman



Adjutant from pg. 3

and any time after December 7, 1941, who, being a citizen of the United States at the time of their entry therein served on active duty in the Armed Forces of any of the governments associated with the United States during either eligibility period and died in the line of duty or after honorable discharge; (3) grandparents, parents, siblings, spouses, and direct or adopted descendants within two degrees of consanguinity of

all servicemembers who were in the Armed Forces of the United States during either of the following periods: April 6, 1917, to November 11, 1918; and any time after December 7, 1941, who served on active duty in the Armed Forces of the United States during either eligibility period and died in the line of duty or after honorable discharge; and (4) those women who, of their own right, are eligible for membership in The American Legion."

Thank you to all of our members for everything they do each year in support of our Nation's veterans. Wishing your Squadron a terrific year ahead!

Robert J. Avery National
Assistant Adjutant Detachment
Adjutant Emeritus

BE THE ONE

Membership—Jim Prime

2026 Membership Summary

As of August 21, 2026, the Detachment of New York stands at **31,677 members**, or **96.96%** of our goal. We need **998 members** to reach our national goal.

As for Detachment-required reports for 2026:

- **298 SDRs (78%)**
- **240 OCFs (63%)**
- **120 CSRs (31%)**

Also, don't forget that members can use **QUICK Renew** online at: Legion.org/SAL-Renew

2027 Membership

Gentlemen,

The 2027 membership cards were mailed out in August.

I know it's always a slow start for membership at this time of year. Now is the time to get busy. We missed our 25% goal by about

ing by reaching out to everyone to renew now!

Whether it's done by your own Squadron, county, or district, get those membership notices mailed out. **Membership is the life-blood of our organization.**

Is your OCF on file at Detachment? If not, get it done today. This form provides necessary information to contact your Squadron's leadership and must be updated every year.

Track your members' volunteer hours and donations for your SDR throughout the year. Keeping a log makes it easier to complete the report in May.

Squadrons that complete the required reports are recorded on the Detachment membership report.

Membership goals this year are more reasonable than in the past. Last year we only had two districts over 100%. This year my

4,000-plus members, so let's get mov-

hope is that we will do better. I'm looking forward to meeting the **October 14th goal of 35%**. Let's do this!

National Membership Target Dates

- **35%** – October 14, 2026
- **45%** – November 12, 2026
- **55%** – December 9, 2026
- **65%** – January 13, 2027
- **85%** – February 10, 2027
- **90%** – March 10, 2027
- **95%** – April 14, 2027
- **100%** – May 12, 2027
- **105%** – July 29, 2027

(National Convention Delegate Strength Report)

2026–2027 Renewal Mail Dates

1st Notice: Sept. 28–Oct. 2, 2026

2nd Notice: Jan. 25–29, 2027

3rd Notice: April 26–30, 2027

Jim Prime
Membership Chairman

New York American Legion Family College

American Legion College of New York is a weekend immersion into the Legion's programs, structure, and the issues facing the largest veterans' organization in the country.

As a Legion College, it is open to members of **The American Legion**, the **American Legion Auxiliary**, the **Sons of The American Legion**, and the **American Legion Riders**.

Applications will be available soon for the **2027 American Legion Family College**, to be held at **Morrisville State College**. They can be found on the De-



partment website at nylegion.net under *News & Events*, then *American Legion Family College*.

The 2027 session will be held at Morrisville State College from **June 4th to 6th, 2027**.

Legion College fosters leadership skills among Legion Family members as they work in teams to solve problems they may face in their home post, unit, squadron, or chapter. The curriculum covers a wide array of topics, including leadership and communication; Americanism; Children & Youth; MyLegion.org; legislation; constitution and bylaws; duties of local officers; media relations; and membership.

Class size is limited to the **first 100 Legion Family members** registered.

Americanism Report ... by Herman Downer

This year, the number of applications for the Cerullo Scholarship was low, with only four new applicants. The 2025 winner, Christopher Mozzillo, applied for his first of three follow-up scholarships, and the 2023 winner, MacKenzie McDaniels, applied for her final follow-up scholarship. The **2026 winner is Myah Ouderkirk of Camden, New York.**

The number for **Flying Flags for Heroes** so far for 2026 is **11,348**, with still time to report for this year to count at National Convention. Great job by those who have reported—New York hasn't reported in a few years. Reminder: there is a new website for reporting, www.flyingflagsforheroes.org.

The **2026 Department of New York Junior Baseball Tournament** will begin play on **Friday, July 31, 2026**. This year marks the first time the Junior State Tournament will be hosted in **Rochester, New York**. The tournament will feature six teams in pool play, including representatives from the five districts across New York State that participate in the Junior program, along with a team from the host post, **Greece Post 468**.

The Championship Game will be **Sunday, August 2nd at 2:00 PM**. The New York State Champion will advance to the **Northeast Junior Regional Tournament**, beginning **August 7, 2026**, in **Manchester, New Hampshire**.

The **2026 Department of New York Senior Baseball Tournament** will begin play on **Saturday, July 25, 2026**, marking the second consecutive year the State

Tournament will be hosted in the Rochester area. This year's format will again be an eight-team double-elimination tournament featuring the district champions from our six districts, the runner-up from the district with the most registered Senior Division teams, and our host, **Greece Post 468**. The Championship Game will be **Wednesday, July 29 at 10:00 AM**. The New York State Champion will advance to the **Northeast Regional Tournament**, beginning **Wednesday, August 5, 2026**, in **Shrewsbury, Massachusetts**. The Northeast Regional Champion will proceed to the national stage in **Shelby, North Carolina**, competing in the **American Legion Baseball World Series** against the finest teams from across the nation.

Boys' State took place at Morrisville State College from **Saturday, June 27 to Thursday, July 2**. This year, approximately **518 young men** graduated from Boys' State. The Boys' State Governor signed **29 bills** into law and vetoed **7**. If you have spare time and would like to help shape the future of a young man's life, they are looking for more SAL volunteers.

The **Department Oratorical Contest for 2026** was held on **March 7, 2026**, at the Crowne Plaza–Desmond Hotel in Albany, New York. This year's winner was **Heyan Chung**, a junior at Vestal Senior High School. The **2027 Department Contest** is scheduled for **March 6, 2027**, at the same location. The National Contest is also seeking SAL volunteers.

Scouting awards to be presented this year include **Eagle Scout of the Year: David Clearwater**, and

Adult Scouter of the Year: Kearie Baumgartner. Kearie will be the **first Girl Scout Leader** to receive this honor in the Department of New York.

The **Essay Contest** has unfortunately gone by the wayside. I had a computer crash that resulted in the loss of all files. I searched old documents on the website and found nothing. Thanks to Bob Avery, who located the original documents, I will be recreating them and hope to begin promoting the contest again. For those unfamiliar, there are **two Essay Contests**:

- **Grades 1–5:** Topic — *"What America Means to Me"*. One winner per grade receives **\$100**.
- **Grades 6–8:** Topics — *The United States Bill of Rights, The United States Declaration of Independence, or The United States Constitution*. One winner across all three grades receives **\$300**.

On a personal note, I once again thank the Detachment of New York for having confidence in me as the Americanism Chairman and recommending me to serve as a Consultant for the National Americanism Commission. I will be traveling to the National Convention in Louisville, Kentucky, to attend the Americanism Meeting and represent the Detachment of New York.

Herman Downer Jr.
Americanism Chairman

VA & R Report ... by Peter Chambrone

VA&R Report

On behalf of the Detachment of New York, members of the VA&R Commission, and fellow SAL members, I would like to personally thank **Jim Coates** for all of his lifetime contributions to The American Legion, the Legion Family, and especially the Sons of The American Legion.

We are currently working on several VA&R recognitions and will present them at the **Fall DEC Meeting 2026**.

VA&R Activity Summary (as reported on submitted CSRs)

(107 out of 385 Squadrons reporting)

- **VA Medical Centers and Facilities:** \$38,605 and 821 volunteer hours
- **State Veteran Facilities:** \$11,846 and 989 volunteer hours
- **National Veteran Assistance Day:** \$600 and 367 volunteer hours
- **Operation Comfort Warriors (OCW):** \$2,118 and 163 volunteer hours — total value \$5,458.87
- **Fisher House:** \$2,275 and 96 volunteer hours
- **Other VA&R Projects:** \$73,749 and 8,015 volunteer hours
- **Homeless Veterans Support:** \$6,476 and 727 volunteer hours
- **Troop and Family Support:** \$33,978 and 4,567 volunteer hours

Totals for VA&R:

\$169,647 and 17,745 volunteer hours Grand Total Value: \$594,296.80

Joseph Santa Croce Award

This award recognizes outstanding service in support of hospitalized, elderly, or chronically ill Veterans in VA Hospitals and Homes throughout New York State.

This year's recipient, **J. Bruce Ruthven**, exemplifies the highest standards of volunteerism and community leadership.

Bruce's commitment to supporting Veterans at the **Canandaigua Veterans Medical Center** stands as a remarkable testament to the true spirit of service. Over the past year alone, Bruce has contributed **more than 173 volunteer hours**, demonstrating both dedication and the profound impact one individual can have on the lives of Veterans.

As a **Red Coat Ambassador**, Bruce welcomes visitors and provides compassionate assistance to Veterans, including escorting them to appointments by wheelchair when needed. His frontline service ensures that Veterans feel respected, supported, and cared for from the moment they enter the facility.

Beyond his ambassador duties, Bruce serves as a **Deputy Representative**, attending quarterly meetings that strengthen communication between the VA and community partners. These meetings help identify needs, share updates, and improve the network of support for Veterans.

Bruce also coordinates the **annual holiday gift distribution**, a cherished tradition that brings comfort and joy to Veterans and their families. This year, Bruce and the Sons of The American Legion in Phelps provided gifts and assistance to **nine Veterans and**

their families. His efforts helped generate **over \$12,000** in donations this past year. Additionally, Bruce supports community barbecues whose proceeds benefit the VA.

Bruce's multifaceted involvement shows how dedication, leadership, and compassion can profoundly enhance the lives of Veterans. His service inspires others to step forward and support those who have sacrificed so much for our nation.

Volunteer Impact (Convention to Convention)

- **VA Hospital Service:** ~20 hours/week → **1,040 hours annually** Value at 2025 volunteer rate (\$34.79/hr): **\$36,181.60**
- **Veteran Programs at The American Legion:** ~10 hours/week → **520 hours annually** Value: **\$18,090.80**

Combined Annual Volunteer Impact:

1,560 total hours Estimated value: \$54,272.40

It is with great honor that we present the **2026 Joseph Santa Croce Award** to **J. Bruce Ruthven**.

Walk-a-thon

Chris Cirillo Impact: approximately **\$48,000** (additional funds still being reported)

For God and Country
Peter Chambrone



Squadrons in Action

Share The Pride-Build the Pride



Squadron 1682 (New City - Rockland County) held their 9th annual Clam Jam fundraiser on September 12th. The event was a great success, with the Squadron raising over \$4,800 that will be donated to veterans service organizations in the Hudson Valley. The Squadron has raised over \$37,000 over the course of the 9 years of the event.



Squadron 184 from Hudson, NY marching with the Columbia County legionaries at the Columbia County fair on Saturday, September 5th.

Lt to Rt. is Wally Maxwell, Assemblyman Scott Bendett, Mike Race, Allen Porccica, Larry Porccica, and Squadron Commander John Crosby.

Have some news or event you'd like to Share??

Squadron Commanders, County and District Commanders, ALL members of the Sons, please let us know what you are doing and what you have accomplished in pictures and in words. We don't need long essays, just captions to pictures showing your members in action. (PLEASE: Send pictures in .JPG or .PNG format, and make them individual image files, not in collage or combined formats). SEND SUBMISSIONS TO PR CHAIRMAN Bruce Ruthven: jbruce457@gmail.com