



# Up To Now!

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## ENCLOSED FOR COMMANDERS

Enclosed for Post Commanders is a letter and nomination form from Department Employment Committee Chairman Gary Warne of Aberdeen for nominations for the 2008 American Legion Department of South Dakota Employer of the Year for Hiring Veterans Award. There are three categories for this award: Small – 50 or fewer employees, Medium – 51-200 employees, and Large – 201 or more employees.

The deadline for submitting nominations is November 2, 2007.

We encourage all Posts to investigate the employers in your community and ensure that deserving employers who are employing veterans are given the opportunity to be recognized through your Post by nominating them for this prestigious award. The awards will be presented at the State Convention in Watertown in June 2008. The employer selected in each category as the recipient of the Department award will be nominated for the National Employer of the Year Award for Hiring Veterans provided that there are greater than 10% veterans employed by the business.

Also enclosed for Post Commanders is the brochure announcing American Education Week, November 11-17, 2007.

The American Legion, a co-founder of American Education Week, has a long-standing interest and commitment to American education. The American Legion believes a strong education program is important and significant in maintaining American traditions and instilling in our young people a sense of personal obligation and responsibility. All Posts are encouraged to sponsor an event in your local schools to recognize your local educators and publicize American Education Week.

American Education Week is an excellent opportunity for your Post to announce your local Educator of the Year. Forms for nominating a local educator for the SD American Legion Educator of the Year Award are available from Department Headquarters in Watertown.

Also enclosed for Post Commanders is a brochure from The American Legion Committee on Education entitled "A Guide for Parents & Students – Higher Education, Your Stairway to Knowledge". This brochure contains valuable information and guidance for parents and students who are approaching graduation from high school or entrance into institutions of higher learning. Posts are encouraged to make this brochure available to members of a local high school senior class or others in the community who may be contemplating continued education through college or vocational school.

The American Legion is dedicated to the pursuit of quality education for all students and firmly believes that "no student should decide he/she cannot afford to continue his/her education beyond high school." This brochure is designed to assist the student and the parents to understand that assistance is available and to point out some of the resources that can be used.

## NATIONAL COMMANDER'S VISIT

National Commander Martin "Marty" Conatser of the Department of Illinois visited the Department of South Dakota during the period September 24-September 28. Department Commander Gary Watts wishes to express his appreciation to all the South Dakota Legionnaires who contributed to making this visit successful.

National Commander Conatser spoke to Legionnaires in Hot Springs on Monday, September 24 when Battle Mountain American Legion Post 71 sponsored a fish fry.

On Tuesday, September 25 he visited with veterans at Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home in Hot Springs and toured the facility. National Commander Conatser participated in the dedication of the recently renovated Barber Shop at the Veterans Home and he was a guest of the home at a cookout that noon. That same afternoon, he visited the Hot Springs VA Healthcare Facility, toured the Domiciliary, and spoke to a group of veterans who were undergoing substance abuse treatment and rehabilitation. That evening, he was the guest of the SD National Guard at a cookout at Camp Rapid and enjoyed the company of several young (and some not so young) National Guard members.

Wednesday, National Commander Conatser accompanied Department Commander Watts, NEC Evenson, Adjutant Boyd and immediate Past Department Commander Gunner Baatrup, when the leadership of The American Legion Department of South Dakota paid its initial visit on newly appointed South Dakota Adjutant General Stephen Doothen at Camp Rapid.

National Commander Conatser subsequently toured the facilities of A&A Engraving of Rapid City and was briefed on The American Legion commemorative rifle that they have been licensed to produce. Following that tour, National Commander Conatser was the guest of Rapid City Post 22 for a luncheon. The National Commander spoke to Legionnaires in attendance following lunch.

Later, the traveling party visited Crazy Horse Memorial near Custer and were treated to a ride to the top of the mountain. What a view – what a sculpture. That evening, following dinner at the restaurant at Mt. Rushmore National Memorial, National Commander Conatser, Department Commander Watts, NEC Evenson and Department Vice Commander Halverson were all honored during a tribute to veterans by the Legionnaires of numerous Posts from Shannon County. Each of the above mentioned officers was presented a "star quilt" and National Commander Conatser and Department Commander Watts were presented medals on behalf of the Native American Veterans of Shannon County.

Thursday morning the traveling party went to Sturgis and visited the Black Hills VA Healthcare System facility at Ft. Meade. The group spent approximately an hour meeting with Director Peter Henry and then were provided with a tour of the facilities. The group had lunch with the veterans in the nursing home unit at Ft. Meade; interspersing themselves with the veterans so that each veteran had the opportunity to speak with someone from the traveling party.

National Commander Conatser stated that it was apparent that the veterans were very pleased with the healthcare they are receiving.

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ing in South Dakota and that the administrators of the facilities and The American Legion have a great relationship.

Thursday afternoon, National Commander Conatser visited the Black Hills National Cemetery. Friday morning he boarded a plane and departed South Dakota enroute to Texas.

Again, Department Commander Gary Watts wishes to express his appreciation to all those who worked so hard to make the National Commander's visit to South Dakota so successful.

### **VETERANS FORUMS TO START**

The American Legion Department of South Dakota's Veterans Benefits Outreach Forums has been finalized and the forums will commence October 15<sup>th</sup> at Bennett County American Legion Post 240 in Martin. Department Service Officer Warren Aas of Watertown will conduct all of the forums with the assistance of several guest speakers in each location.

All Veterans Forums will start at 7:00 p.m. The forum will cover about 25 VA benefit topics and show approximately 130 slides that will help to explain these benefits. The forum is designed for the sole benefit of the veteran, the veteran's spouses and family members. The intent is to help those individuals better understand the VA benefits and the process to acquire those benefits.

The schedule for the forums is shown below:

- Oct 15 – Dist 9 – American Legion Post 240 – Martin
- Oct 16 – Dist 13 – Community Center – New Underwood
- Oct 17 – Dist 12 – American Legion Post 315 – Box Elder
- Oct 18 – Dist 11 – American Legion Post 255/Community Center – Bison
- Nov 5 – Dist 8 – American Legion Post 179 – Reliance
- Nov 7 – Dist 6 – American Legion Post 261 – Ethan
- Dec 10 – Dist 14 – American Legion Post 78 – Leola
- Dec 11 – Dist 10 – American Legion Post 135 – Gettysburg
- Dec 12 – Dist 5 – American Legion Post 92 – Redfield
- Jan 7 – Dist 1 – American Legion Post 266 – Tea
- Jan 8 – Dist 2 – American Legion Post 138 – DeSmet
- Feb 4 – Dist 4 – Community Center – Britton
- Feb 5 – Dist 3 – Community Center – Clear Lake
- District 7 – To Be Announced

All Legionnaires, their spouses and other veterans should be encouraged to attend The American Legion Department of South Dakota Veterans Benefit Outreach Forum closest to their home. This is a valuable, educational opportunity to possibly learn about benefits you are eligible for that you were previously unaware of. Don't let this opportunity pass you by. The forums are free and open to everyone.

Refreshments will be served during and after the forums and informational handout materials will be available for the attendees to take home to keep for future reference.

### **COMMANDERS CALLS ARE COMPLETED**

Department Commander Gary Watts of White completed the final Commander's Call on Saturday, September 29 in Conde. This was the last of a series of 7 Commander's Calls that were held at various locations across the state of South Dakota during the past month.

Attendees were presented with up-to-date information on a variety of topics which included many of the programs and projects of The American Legion. Unlike District Meetings, these Commander's Calls focused on several lesser-known programs and projects of The American Legion.

Department Commander Watts briefed attendees on his "Keep

the Dream Alive" program for the coming year. Department Membership Chairman Gary Wolkow of DeSmet provided up-to-date membership statistics on this years membership campaign and statistics on the past year performance of the Department with regard to market penetration, percentage of members by war era, percentage of veterans from each war era who died during the previous year, overall renewal rate for the Department for the previous year, and percentage of non-renewals from each war era for the previous year. Wolkow noted that we often hear about the number of deaths in a Post – but not many Posts talk about the number of members that they failed to retain. He showed statistics that substantiated that the Department is losing more members to non-renewal than we are to death.

NEC Paul Evenson of Sioux Falls (member of the Garretson Post) spoke about a handout that was provided to all participants that gave summaries of many of the Positions and Programs of The American Legion. Evenson spoke briefly about the Legislative Agenda of The American Legion for the coming year and the importance of Legionnaires communicating with their elected representatives on these issues. Additionally, Evenson commented on the importance of "mentoring" to the future of The American Legion – how mentoring is a tried and true method to help to identify the future leaders of this great organization.

### **2007 FALL DISTRICT MEETINGS ARE UNDERWAY**

The 2007 Fall District Meetings of The American Legion have begun. The schedule for District Meetings that have been provided to State Headquarters thus far include:

- Dist 1 – Sept 29 (completed)
- Dist 2 – No information available
- Dist 3 – Oct 18<sup>th</sup> in Watertown
- Dist 4 – Oct 11<sup>th</sup> in Waubay
- Dist 5 – No information available
- Dist 6 – Oct 30<sup>th</sup> in Mitchell
- Dist 7 – Oct 14<sup>th</sup> in Springfield
- Dist 8 – Oct 4<sup>th</sup> in Herrick
- Dist 9 – Oct 6<sup>th</sup> in Midland
- Dist 10 – Oct 15<sup>th</sup> in Gettysburg
- Dist 11 – Oct 18<sup>th</sup> in Bison
- Dist 12 – Oct 20<sup>th</sup> in Piedmont
- Dist 13 – Nov 4<sup>th</sup> in Hermosa
- Dist 14 – Oct 15<sup>th</sup> in Java

### **MEMBERSHIP UPDATE**

2008 membership stands at 16,570 or 63.79% of the 2008 membership goal.

Department Commander Watts has received a call from National Vice Commander Don Hayden of the Department of Minnesota. The National Vice Commanders have received a challenge from National Commander Marty Conatser and the winner of the challenge will be the National Vice Commander whose region has the highest percentage of membership turned in to National Headquarters by the Fall Meetings in Indianapolis.

Commander Watts is asking all Posts to transmit any and all membership that they have received to reach Department Headquarters by Tuesday, Oct 9<sup>th</sup> so that it can be processed and transmitted to National to be there in time to be counted for this challenge. This is our chance to show the National Vice Commander that we are "Keeping the Dream Alive" and "Making it Happen". Make sure your Post does its part to help our National Vice Commander win this challenge.