

September 2011 Mailing and Legion Newsletter Article

The Sons of The American Legion, Detachment of Illinois welcome you as we enter into the cool crisp days of Autumn! I want to take just a few moments to outline some of the goals we have set for the 2011 – 2012 membership year.

In 1919, The American Legion was founded on four pillars: Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation, National Security, Americanism, and Children & Youth. Each of these pillars encompasses a variety of programs that benefit our nation's veterans, its service members, their families, the youth of America and ordinary citizens. These programs make a difference in hundreds of thousands of lives each year.

I have decided to focus our energy this year towards two of the supporting pillars of The American Legion Family; Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation, and Children & Youth.

For more than 90 years, The American Legion has acted as the nation's leading advocate for proper health care, economic opportunity and legal benefits for U.S. military veterans. As it has for decades, The American Legion continues to aggressively lobby for adequate funding of VA health care, timely access to facilities, fair rulings on benefit claims, and economic opportunities for those who have come home changed by their military experiences.

Today, as the number of discharged veterans from the global war on terrorism has surpassed 500,000, the Legion's federally chartered role to support them could not be more profound. The Legion strongly believes that a veteran is a veteran, no matter the war era, nature or location of service.

The American Legion Family stands on the front line of change in the pillar of service known as "Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation."

Some of these veterans return bearing the visible and physical scars of the War on Terrorism. These injuries run deep and effect these young men and women in many ways. This is why this year the Detachment of Illinois SONS will be raising funds in support of the **Ride 2 Recovery** program.

Mission of Ride 2 Recovery

The mission of Ride 2 Recovery is to provide our nation's injured veterans with a life-changing experience that can impact their lives forever.

Program

R2R supports Spinning® Recovery Labs and outdoor cycling programs at military and Veterans Administration locations around the US to help injured veterans overcome obstacles they face. Cycling is an important part of the recovery and rehabilitation for three reasons:

1. Cycling is an activity that is conducive to people with both mental and physical disabilities
2. Participation in the Ride 2 Recovery program helps to speed the recovery and rehabilitation process
3. Men and women experience a sense of normalcy, accomplishment, pride, camaraderie and provide relief from depression and other problems that accompany recovery and rehabilitation.

Morale, Welfare Benefits

The R2R cycling program strengthens the body and helps to reduce the experience of stress, depression and anxiety. Dozens of scientific studies have demonstrated the relationship between exercise and mood. Exercise promotes arousal and relaxation as well as improves the quality of sleep, helping the body to recover from the stress response. Cycling builds strength in a holistic manner since every single part of the body is involved in cycling.

We now know that exercise helps to generate new brains cells. Studies show that exercise actually helps the regeneration of damaged brain circuits.

I hope to raise \$5,000 in support of this program and we are attempting to organize a one day CycleFest in the Spring of 2012 to help us reach that goal! Come out and ride with me in support of these heroes!

The second pillar we will support this coming year in Children & Youth through The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation. **In this effort we hope to raise \$50,000 for the CWF!**

Child Welfare Foundation

Not all American children grow up with the same opportunities. Some face physical disabilities, parenting problems and even homelessness. For thousands, each day is a challenge marked by pain, prayer and perseverance. Many require specialized care. That is why The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation exists.

Established in 1954, the foundation was developed to collect donations from individuals who wished to contribute to the betterment of children in this country. To date, nearly \$10 million has been awarded to organizations to support worthwhile projects through the dissemination of information to both the general public and specific target groups. In 2009, the foundation awarded grants totaling \$636,869 to 19 nonprofit organizations.

The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation provides more than \$500,000 in grants each year to nonprofit organizations that work to improve the lives of young people. These grants have aided organ-donor campaigns, supported efforts to help military children cope with deployment or the loss of a parent, and funded projects that increased public awareness of Huntington's disease, autism, Reye's syndrome, meningitis, spina bifida, diabetes, cancer and other conditions. Some facts that you may not be aware of about the Child Welfare Foundation...

- Although a separate corporation from The American Legion, its Board of Directors are all Legion members from the National Executive Committee, the Finance Commission, and the Children & Youth Commission.
- The Foundation was formed to provide assistance to nonprofit organizations to educate the public about the need for the care and welfare of our nation's children.
- Tax-deductible contributions can be made directly to the Foundation with both the individual and the state receiving credit.
- The American Legion generously takes care of the majority of our overhead costs. As result, all the money donated is entered into the Trust Fund to be used for grants. Few, if any, other foundations can make that claim.

The American Legion's Commission on Children & Youth manages a pillar of service guided by three main objectives: to strengthen the family unit, to support quality organizations that provide services for children and youth, and to provide communities with well-rounded programs that meet the physical, educational, emotional and spiritual needs of young people. The commission works to provide hope for children who face health, safety, discipline or home-life challenges, and provides opportunities for young people to succeed.

The Commission on Children & Youth has focused recent attention on several important national programs, including the Children's Miracle Network, Ronald McDonald House Charities, Special Olympics, youth-suicide prevention, Halloween safety, the Family Support Network, Temporary Financial Assistance, Operation: Military Kids, and others.

The American Legion has been a staunch supporter of the children and youth of our nation since its founding in 1919. The commitment continues today for the National Commission on Children & Youth as it seeks to improve the well-being of all children.

Every generation of veterans knows that the key to the future of a free and prosperous country is held by the children and youth of today. The Legion strongly supports traditional family values, assistance for at-risk children, and activities that promote their healthy and wholesome development. While there is no way of knowing what issues will face our youth tomorrow, our survival may well depend on the quality of care, education and training that we, as parents and citizens, provide for young people today.

I have issued a Commander's Challenge to each of our 250 squadrons in the Detachment. I have asked all of them to become members of the IL SAL Century Club. I have asked for a minimum donation of at least \$25 from every squadron to either the American Legion Child Welfare Foundation or the Ride 2 Recovery program. This challenge is open to all Posts, Units, and Rider's Chapters as well.

Together we can make a difference for our Veterans and our Children; **"Guided by Tradition!"**