



American Legion Department of Wisconsin **8th District Fall Conference**

Fall 2016 Conference Minutes - November 05, 2016 **Post 263 – New London, WI**

1. District Commander Jim Young called the meeting to order at 0900 hours. The colors were posted and all present rendered a hand salute. The Chaplain gave an opening prayer. The POW/MIA flag was placed on the empty chair and Resolution 228 was read. Legionnaires then recited the Pledge of Allegiance and the Preamble to the Constitution of the American Legion.
2. Commander Young declared the meeting open and invited Waupaca County Commander Pope to address the Legionnaires. Commander Pope welcomed everyone to Waupaca County and wished them an enjoyable and successful conference. Post 263 Commander Jaeger also welcomed everyone to Post 263. He stressed that conferences like this were essential to keep our membership active and informed of American Legion programs and activities in the 8th District. This in turn was essential to our successful recruitment and retention of active and knowledgeable members.
3. Commander Young then asked Laurie Shaw, head of the New London Chamber of Commerce, to address the Legionnaires. Laurie welcomed the Legionnaires and presented a brief overview of New London to include local industries and ongoing activities to grow the industrial and commercial base of the city.
4. The Adjutant took a roll call of District and County officers. All officers were present or excused. He then took a roll call of the Posts. A total of Sixty six Legionnaires from twenty five Posts were in attendance.
5. Adjutant Herminath said that the minutes from the 2016 Spring Conference, two Department Convention Caucus meetings, and two recent Executive Board meetings had been posted on the 8th District websites for perusal. He asked that they be accepted. A motion was made and seconded to accept the minutes. The motion passed.
6. Commander Young introduced the guests. He then invited Department Vice Commander Clewell to speak. She thanked the Legionnaires for their hard work at their home Posts and for attending this important 8th District conference. She spoke about the Department revitalization efforts that she is involved in and strongly encouraged every Legionnaire to learn how to use the membership tools on

MyLegion.org. She outlined the membership tools available on MyLegion.org and explained how she utilizes this website to identify and recruit new members around the state. Vice Commander Clewell suggested that older Legionnaires recruit their younger, more tech savvy, Legionnaires to assist them with MyLegion.org and become involved in Post membership activities. Finally, she encouraged that all Posts report to National on the size, layout, and condition of local veteran memorials.

7. Commander Young asked Department Sons of the American Legion Vice Commander Allen Watry to speak. He highlighted the state SAL website, wisal.org, and encouraged everyone to use it as an information resource.
8. Commander Young then invited Department Vice Commander Frank Kotska to say a few words. Vice Commander Kostka spoke about membership and encouraged all present to increase their efforts in this area. He left some recruitment-related brochures and asked that each Legionnaire focus on signing up one new member.
9. Commander Young welcomed 8th District Auxiliary President Sarah Stiff and asked her to address the convention. President Stiff said she wanted to see the Auxiliary Units work with the Posts in a close and supportive relationship. She added that the Auxiliary wanted to strengthen the family ties at the Post, District, and Department level.
10. Finance Officer David Jensen gave a District finance report. He had hard copies of the report available for perusal. He also gave a report on the Shell Fund. A motion was made and seconded to accept the report. The motion passed. Today's Shell Fund collection totaled \$130.
11. District Officer Reports:
 - a. Commander Young
Gave a detailed report of activities since the Spring Conference.
 - b. First Vice Commander Fregien
Excused
 - c. Second Vice Commander Balz
Gave a summary of activities since the Spring Conference.
 - d. Third Vice Commander Jaeger
Encouraged all Legionnaires to ensure that information on American Legion activities available from Department be distributed to everyone. Legionnaires need this information to help them impress and recruit new members. We also should involve our new members in our programs and activities to keep them interested and convince them to renew their membership.
 - e. Finance Officer Jensen
 - f. Adjutant Herminath
He thanked everyone for updating their officer and post information for 2016-2017. He also asked that the Posts and Counties continue to update information on the 8th District website. He then asked for approval to renew the website subscription for 2017 at a cost of \$240. A motion was made and seconded to approve the expenditure of \$240 to renew the website. The motion passed.

- g. Judge Advocate Gorst
She did not have any resolutions to go through. However, she reminded everyone that Posts should submit resolutions if they want something changed. She then gave a report on her activities since the Spring Conference. She also spoke of a person she knows who offers fishing opportunities on his property for disabled veterans.
- h. Chaplain Theama
Spoke about a friend, a veteran, who is going through hard times. He asked if there was a place where his friend could get emotional and financial support. Judge Advocate Ghorst suggested that the veteran apply for a WDVA grant. She also offered to supply Chaplain Theama with the telephone number of a 24-hour hotline manned by veterans to provide moral support to veterans in need. District Vice Commander Jaeger added that the County VSOs are also excellent sources of assistance to veterans in need. Later in the day, Pastor Theama reported that he contacted his friend and informed him of the DVA support available to him. Pastor Theama thanked the veterans present for their advice and encouraged them to ask the DVA for help if they found themselves in emotional or financial distress.
- i. Historian Pope
Spoke about his activities since the Spring Conference.
- j. Sergeant-at-Arms Klotzbuecher
Spoke about his activities since the Spring Conference.
- k. Sergeant-at-Arms Sonnentag
Spoke about his activities since the Spring Conference.

12. County Commander Reports:

- a. Marathon County Commander Morasch
Excused – Reports given for Post 4 Athens and Post 10 Wausau
- b. Portage County Commander Vandre
Excused – Reports given for Posts 6 and 22
- c. Shawano County Commander Marien
Excused – Reports given for Posts 117 Shawano, 237 Tigerton, 287 Mattoon, and 392 Cecil.
Asked for a moment of silence in honor of Gen Cone, speaker at our Spring Conference held at Post 117, who recently passed away of cancer.
- d. Waupaca County Commander Pope
He gave a lengthy report on Post activities.
- e. Waushara County Commander Wickersheim
Excused – Reported on the formation of Operating Engineer Post 139 in Coloma. It is a closed post, the only one in the 8th District, with members located all over the state. It was formed on September 30, 2016. The Post meets quarterly and the site varies.
- f. Wood County Commander Krofta
He gave a lengthy report on Post activities. He also reported on the formation of an American Legion Family website on Facebook. He also spoke

about his work on the Department's Centennial Committee and how our Posts can participate in this celebration.

13. Commander Young then asked for the District Committee Chairman Reports.

- a. Americanism Jerome Krofta
Jim read a report from National on proper respect for the American flag. While acknowledging the right to protest, the report calls for all Legion programs to maintain proper respect for the flag. This will be passed on to participants in our programs, especially American Legion Baseball, and make all participants aware of our expectations. Adjutant Gorst asked if this would be formalized and presented to participants in our programs. Jim said he would send the Department Americanism Chairman an email on the subject.
- b. Badger Legionnaire Rick Klotzbuecher
Rick gave a short report on Department Committee activities.
- c. Camp American Legion James Jaeger
Jim gave an update on Camp American Legion. He mentioned that there are now 23 cabins at camp sponsored by different organizations. He also commented on the trail that was recently completed and how well it was done. He encouraged all Legionnaires to visit camp and check out all the great things that have been accomplished this year.
- d. Children and Youth Kathy Gorst
Kathy gave a report on Department Children and Youth Committee activities.
- e. Legislative Kathy Gorst
Kathy gave a short update on Department Legislative Committee activities.
Policy Committee Kathy Gorst
- f. Kathy updated the Legionnaires on a proposal to change the group's name to the Internal Affairs Committee which would bring it more in line with it does at the National level. This change would require a constitutional amendment. She also spoke about a request from the American Legion Riders to make a change to their manual. A resolution on membership was also reviewed and sent back to the originating post due to improper format.
- g. Convention and Activities Arien Herminath
Arien focused his comments on preparations for the upcoming Midwinter Conference. He reviewed the material available on the Department website related to registration, hotel reservations, as well as meeting and training times and locations at the convention hotel.
- h. Finance David Jensen
Dave gave a summary of the finance report from the last Department Convention.
- i. Fund Raising Rick Klotzbuecher
Rick encouraged all Legionnaires to send in their sweepstakes tickets as this is the biggest yearly fund raiser for the Department.
- j. Homeless Veterans Dan Rindt

Dan gave a summary of Homeless Veterans Committee activities during the past year.

- k. Hospital Ron Miller
Ron reported that there are some 500 volunteers at King Veterans Home serving the 690 veterans living there. He said they offer tours every day for those who would like to learn more about the facility. Ron said he had received \$4,000 in donations with more donations coming in to support Operation Hope, this year's Christmas program at King. He added that the Wreaths Across America program at King was scheduled for 17 December.
- l. King Day Pilgrimage Jean Balz
Jean reported that the King Day Pilgrimage will be held on June 18th, Father's Day. The parade will take place at 1300 following the chicken dinner. Post membership cards will also be passed out at this event and posts should have a representative present to pick them up.
- m. Membership Darla Porter
Darla gave a summary of the Membership Committee report at the last Department Convention. She gave an update on the approval of the merger of two Milwaukee posts to create one strong post. Darla reviewed comments by Department Commander Daniel Seehafer on the value to District Commanders encouraging their Legionnaires to promote membership activities. She also informed the Legionnaires of the recent revitalization efforts in Districts 7, 8 and 9. Revitalization efforts were also carried out in other districts. Finally, she reported on membership training that will be available at the Midwinter Conference. This will include training on the use of mylegion.com and the information available there to assist us in our recruitment efforts.
- n. National Security Jean Balz
Jean gave a short summary of national security-related activities. She also said there was a Wisconsin state website that provided advance information on dates when the flag should be flown at half-staff.
- o. POW/MIA Ron Miller
Ron reported on several recent repatriations of remains from WW II.
- p. VA&R Dan Rindt
Dan gave a review of activities at recent meetings of the Department VA&R Committee. He mentioned that everything was computerized these days and it is very important to follow procedures when filing disability claims. Dan said there was need for more suicide hotline support for veterans here in Wisconsin. Furthermore, there is talk of doing away with the 37 County VSO officers and that is unacceptable. He also praised the work done by the VA, VFW and American Legion advocates in Madison on behalf of veteran's claims.
- q. SAL Dan Rindt
Dan reported that 6 of the 109 SAL Detachments in Wisconsin were at 100% as of the October Fall Conference. The Shawano Detachment was the first

Detachment in the 8th District to reach 100% this year and the Clintonville Detachment was only 2 members short of 100%. He praised the work done by the SAL in support of Legion activities. Dan added that The Wisconsin SAL reached 100% last year and the Fond du Lac Detachment won the National Children and Youth award.

r. American Legion Riders

Bob Boehm

Bob spoke about the Riders collection of donations for the Wreaths Across America program to purchase and distribute 6,700 wreaths at the cemeteries at King Veterans Home on 17 December. He said the 8th District now had around 50 riders and is always looking for more. Bob reported that the Legacy Ride prior to the National Convention raised a little more than 1.25 million dollars. He outlined many other veteran's related activities that the Riders participate in. He spoke glowingly about Rider work on the fish shack at Camp American Legion.

14. Commander Young introduced the main speaker, Amber Nikolai, who spoke as a veteran and American Legion members on her activities on behalf of veterans. She said she was not here to talk about King and will not answer any questions related to King. Amber is currently working toward a master's degree in mental health.

Amber opened by saying that most health care professionals are not prepared to meet the needs of veterans. She gave examples of traumatic situations that scarred returning veterans and made it difficult for them to readjust to normal civilian and family life. She also commented on the lack of training and preparation on the part of family and loved ones to help the veterans cope with their "moral injuries."

She said that standardization of the treatment of such injuries does not work. One size does not fit all. Veterans must be treated as individuals with specific injuries (physical, mental, emotional) that require specific diagnosis and care.

Much has been learned of what is truly important to veterans by listening to comments they made while on their deathbeds. The truths expressed at such times should be studied and incorporated in the treatment of veterans in distress.

Veterans often under report pain. They under report the pain of the loss of a loved one, of comrades in arms, they hide trauma and don't speak about their true feelings. Then they react to a trigger, a comment, location, sound or action that brings their pain out in the open. What veterans say they need more than anything is validation of their feelings and to develop trust in people who understand what they are going through. The worse thing for a veteran in distress is to be placed in the hands of health care providers who do not know or understand what he or she is going through.

Veterans in distress are often subjected to a loss of control, life in a small plain room and medication to treat unwelcome attitudes or actions. This is what they get when what they need is someone to walk with them through their journey.

How can we be a better advocate for such people? Amber said that rather than just bang her head against a wall, she has created a 501-C3 to build a ranch on 60 acres of land near Wisconsin Rapids that was donated to her for this purpose. Why a ranch?

Veterans in distress often hate cities, crowds, and confined spaces. Why animals? They provide comfort and therapy, are loyal and safe. Amber plans to have comfort horses and dogs on her ranch and provide veterans in distress with an environment that is safe and free from triggers. In conclusion, Amber stressed that she wanted to make a difference and, in her mind, this is a good start.

Amber then answered numerous questions about her plans for the ranch and listened to many statements of support by the attendees related to points made in her excellent presentation

15. Commander Young called for the District Program Director Reports:

- a. A&G Scholarship Arien Herminath
Arien spoke about the benefits of the online program to the 4,000 high school students, 267 from the 8th District, who participated last year.
- b. Badger Boys State Dan Rindt
Dan reported that next year will be the 75th anniversary of Badger Boys State and around 885 boys are expected to participate. The program will be held in July and the cost is \$250 per boy. All posts are encouraged to participate in this program and Legionnaires are welcome to visit and/or volunteer to participate as they are always looking for help.
- c. County Youth Government Day Arien Herminath
Shawano and Waupaca Counties sponsor programs that reach around 200 students each year. He encouraged everyone to support such valuable and successful Americanism programs.
- d. Baseball Jim Young
He reported that Wisconsin has a total of 221 American Legion Baseball teams and ranks 4th in the nation for number of teams. He gave an overview of last year's results at the 5 levels of competition. New rules agreed on include limiting the number of pitches a pitcher can make in a game, vice the number of innings he can appear in.
- e. Boy Scouts Lyle Frieberg
Lyle encouraged all posts to support Boy Scout activities in their area and to sponsor a group if possible
- f. Blood Donor Jim Young
Jim said that there would be a blood drive at the upcoming Midwinter Conference at Ho Chunk and to come prepared to give.
- g. Shooting Sports Jim Young
Jim spoke about the results of last year's program including the winners at the various shooting levels.
- h. Oratorical Jerry Krofta
Jerry said the 8th District Finals would be held on January 28th at the Marden Center at King with a back-up date of February 4th if needed. The Department Finals will be held on February 11th at Ripon College.

Contestants must be certified, so report the names of your participants. The District and Department Finals are open to the public.

16. Commander Young asked for a motion to approve the District and County Commander Reports, District Committee Chairman Reports and District Program Director Reports. A motion was made and seconded to accept the reports. The motion passed.

17. Unfinished Business:

- a. Commander Young said the Manawa Post has submitted a bid to hold the 8th District Spring Conference at Bear Lake on May 13, 2017. He added that we have not yet received a bid to hold the 2017 Fall Conference. The District would like to hold a joint Fall Conference if possible and is looking for a Post to host such a conference.
- b. Commander Young reported that the Spencer, Marathon and Coloma Posts were at 100% and thanked the Commanders for their efforts.

18. New Business:

- a. Jim Reigel mentioned that Congress had recommended a 2.1% pay raise for the military for the coming year. The President had countered with a 1.6% pay raise for the military. The Congress must override the President to get the military pay raise back up to 2.1%. Jim asked that all Legionnaires contact their congressional representatives and urge them to support the higher pay raise for the military.
- b. A Legionnaire spoke about a 3-day Diabetic Weekend experience he attended at a Camp American Legion this past year. He was very positive about the experience and encouraged the 8th District to support such donation funded programs as they serve our veterans with excellent health care programs and expert advice. A motion was made and seconded to donate \$200 to the Diabetic Weekend program at Camp American Legion. The motion passed.
- c. Dan Rindt made a motion that the 8th District donate \$500 to support the candidacy of Denise Rohan for National Commander. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.
- d. There was a discussion of the feasibility of the Wausau Post making a bid to host the 2022 Department Convention. The Wausau Post is currently studying the possibility. A motion was made and seconded to support a Wausau Post bid, if it is deemed, feasible to host the 2022 Department Convention. The motion passed.
- e. District Finance Officer David Jensen was asked to pass around a collection container for a free will offering to support the candidacy of Denis Rohan and the incoming National Auxiliary President, who is also from Wisconsin.

- f. A motion was made and seconded to designate \$214 that the 8th District had available to support the King Veterans Home Christmas to Operation Hope. The motion passed.
- g. Commander Young then gave a briefing on the upcoming Midwinter Conference at Ho Chunk. He gave the dates as 20-22 January and outlined the meeting times and training sessions scheduled.
- h. Commander Young reported that all Honor Flights were accepting applications from Vietnam veterans.

19. For the good of the American Legion:

- a. Kathy Gorst introduced a new member, Deborah Johnson, a Navy veteran.
- b. Jim Jaeger initiated a discussion on how to increase the number of posts that attend meeting like the Spring and Fall Conferences. Commander Jim Young commented that we should also consider how to increase attendance at our county meetings. It was generally agreed that holding county meetings once every three or six months is not a good thing. It was also generally agreed that meeting every two months is a good goal to work toward.

20. There being no further business to come before the meeting, Chaplain Theama gave a closing prayer. The Sergeant-at-Arms retired the POW/MIA flag from the empty chair, the colors were retired, and Commander Young declared the meeting adjourned at 1500 hours.

Submitted by: Arien Herminath, 8th District Adjutant