

Bartlett's News Briefs

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ROLLING UP THEIR SLEEVES FOR COMMUNITY ~ THE GALLANT GAURDIANS OF PACIFICA

A salute to Pacifica's ever-serving American Legion and VFW
During the Pandemic, a grateful community also served them

BY JEAN BARTLETT



(2015 photo by Jean Bartlett)

Pacifica American Legion members Greg Stepanenko, Bob Biby, Allan Hale, Mike Meyers and Vern Alonzo take care of maintenance needs at the local Legion Hall so it is always there to serve their community.

In a 2015 *Pacifica Tribune* interview with this writer, the Executive Director of the Pacifica Resource Center defined the Posts of Pacifica's American Legion and VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars).

"The men and women of our Pacifica American Legion Post 238 and Pacifica VFW Post 10245 have Thanksgiving in their hearts all year long," Anita Rees said. "They do so much for our community."

That list of community contributions from the members of Post 238 and Post 10245 is extensive. What is listed here is but a sampling.

Since 2003, Post 238 has hosted the Pacifica Resource Center's (PRC's) monthly Family Harvest Program at their Legion Hall, 555 Buel Avenue. Qualifying individuals and families are sent home with "fresh veggies and fruits, plus many staple foods like milk, eggs, chicken, beans and rice." Along with the use of their Hall for the PRC event, Legion volunteers help distribute, bag and carry groceries. While some changes in physical support have been necessary due to the pandemic, the Legion remains 100 percent committed to this community need.

Annually, both the Pacifica Legion and VFW support Pacifica's Relay for Life by providing a barbeque lunch for all participants. This year, due to the pandemic, there was no Relay for Life event and so Posts 238 and 10245 donated the money they normally spend on participant food to the community-based fundraiser.



(2021 photo by Jean Bartlett)

Pacifica American Legion Post 238, also home to Pacifica VFW Post 10245, 555 Buel Avenue, Pacifica, CA.

Annually, the Legion welcomes hospitalized veterans who sign up to board the VA Palo Alto mobile medical van, along with their health technicians, to enjoy Pier Day.

"Pier Day is a lot of fun," said Allan Hale, the current Commander of both Pacifica Posts, as well as the Finance Officer of American Legion District 26, and the Finance Officer of the local Legion Chapter of La Société des Quarante Hommes et Huit Chevaux (The Society of Forty Men and Eight Horses) – Voiture 393.

"We provide fishing poles," Hale said. "Cheryl Jimno, owner of the Rusty Hook Bait & Tackle shop on Palmetto, used to provide us with new hooks and the bait. When she retired, New Coastside Bait & Tackle on Francisco stepped right up to help us out.

"The veterans arrive around 10:30 a.m. and are greeted with coffee and donuts, courtesy of the Chit Chat Cafe at the Pier. Then the fishing begins! We do that for maybe a couple of hours and then we all head over to the Hall for hamburgers and hot dogs, and all kinds of treats served up by our Legion's Auxiliary

(Auxiliary Unit 238). We do this in April. In 2022, when we sure hope we are back to our pre-pandemic days, the San Francisco VA Medical Center, Fort Miley, has told us they will also bring any of their interested veterans in their mobile medical van. The day is loaded with camaraderie and we all enjoy it."

A general service provided by the members of Pacifica's Legion and VFW are rides for local veterans to the hospital or to doctor appointments. Then there's Bingo at the Menlo Park Veterans Hospital. Post 238 does that bi-monthly, alternating with Legion District 26. They bring the prizes and call the numbers. They additionally do hospital visits at the Menlo Park facility.

For a number of years, Post 238 has held an annual Christmas dinner for local veterans "who might otherwise have no place to go" on Christmas Day. Along with a beautiful turkey and ham dinner "with all the trimmings," holiday music is on the speakers and the room is filled with lively conversation and hearty good cheer. Everyone is sent home with a stocking filled by the Legion's Auxiliary with oranges, candy bars, nuts and more. Legion members provide rides to and from BART. Veterans who attend come from San Francisco, South City, San Bruno and Pacifica, and sometimes farther. The event's invitation is not only for veterans. It is also for anyone who lives locally who otherwise might celebrate Christmas alone. The popular holiday dinner will resume in non-pandemic times.

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Pacifica's American Legion sponsors Scout Troops 256 (boys) and 4256 (girls), both out of St. Peter Catholic Church, as well as Pack 254 out of Ortega Elementary School. (It should also be noted that Allan Hale is additionally involved with Pacifica Troop 264 out of St. Andrew Presbyterian Church. He served as Troop 264's Scoutmaster for more than 40 years, somewhat retiring in 2011.)

"Our Post also sponsors Eagle Scout projects," Hale said. "The latest one is a rose garden memorial at our Legion Hall."



Pacifica American Legion Post 238 sponsors the Boy's State Program, held in Sacramento, and the Legion's Oratorical Program. The Boy's State Program is a participatory program for sponsored high school students where each student becomes a part of the operation of his local, county and state government. (The Pacifica America Legion Auxiliary sponsors the Girl's State Program.) The Legion's Oratorical Program is a nationwide competition for high school students where speakers must be able to present assigned and self-directed timed speeches based on the Constitution. The Oratorical Program presents "participants with an academic speaking challenge that

teaches important leadership qualities, the history of our nation's laws, the ability to think and speak clearly, and an understanding of the duties, responsibilities, rights and privileges of American citizenship." Competitors receive local level awards, with selected winners advancing to State and then to National competitions. Due to the pandemic, the Legion was not able to host the local Oratorical Program this year. But they were able to participate in the Boy's State Program.

"This year we sponsored two students from Pacific Bay Christian School (formerly Alma Heights Christian Academy), for the Boy's State Program," Hale noted. "Because of the pandemic, we didn't interview the students directly. We let the school do that. In addition, the students had to do their parts online."

Boy's State sponsorship is \$500 a student. Next year the Legion hopes to sponsor three students.

"This year, we were also really busy with the Legion's Buddy Check program," Hale said. "We call members to see how they are doing, let them know what their local Legion is up to, and see if they need anything. If they don't answer the phone, we write them or knock on their door."

The Buddy Check program is a way to check in on any local veterans, members of the Legion or not.

"If you need help and don't know where to go or who to ask, we hope to offer the assistance you need.

"The thing about our posts here in Pacifica is if you call us and it's something we can do, we will do it. For instance the Legion and the VFW will participate in memorials for veterans. If a local family wants it, we can participate in a Color Guard at the gravesite."

Back in 2016, the Pacifica Police Department expressed a strong desire for a police dog, and so American Legion Post 238, VFW Post 10245 and Legion Auxiliary Unit 238, began the serious task of fundraising. "Debbie Smyser, who was then President of our American Legion Auxiliary Unit, was really the key to making it happen."

Typically it costs \$20,000 for every K9 to enter the force and it was no different in Pacifica. Together, these local veteran organizations raised enough money to provide the Pacifica PD with two police dogs.

"But we didn't do it alone," the current Commander underscored. "We had lots of help from the community. We are here to serve but nine times out of ten, community support helps us get the job done."

How does the Legion and VFW raise money?

"We rent the Hall out," Hale said. "Along with the Legion and the VFW, the Hall gets a lot of use from local groups which include: the Lions Club, the Native Sons of the Golden West, the Pacifica Garden Club and we have two different quilting groups which meet here. We also have some dinners and social events that bring in contributions. We definitely raise funds from our safe and sane fireworks booth.

"For years we have had our annual fundraising fireworks booth in front of May Szeto's Kenny's Café on Crespi Drive. I can't say enough about May. First of all, her food is fantastic and she is so generous to the American Legion. She lets us park our booth in front of her restaurant for free. Of course we run into her restaurant to buy meals while we are working the booth, but all of us do that anyway, not just the week we sell fireworks, and darn if she doesn't give us discounts!

"We always place four people a shift, and there are three shifts, daily for a week, beginning at 9 a.m. and ending at 8 p.m. We do all the setup and take down. It's work but it's rewarding work. The fireworks sales help us help others."

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"We were hugely helped this year during the pandemic," Hale said gratefully. "We really got some needed things done. Freutel Roofing came and fixed our roof for nothing. We got new windows from Dial Glass. We got a whole new back bar put in. We got a new oven and the inside of the Hall painted – all

this from Pacifica businesses. We got new metal front doors from Minton Door Company, not a Pacifica business, but Pacifican Chuck Michaelson works for them and he put the doors in for nothing.

"People reached out to us in a big way. In September or October, I hope to have a dinner for all these kind people. They kept us alive."



American Legion and VFW Commander Allan Hale at home in front of a wall of awards. (2021 photo by Jean Bartlett)

The local Legion no longer sponsors American Legion Baseball. They did that for decades but then the insurance got to be way above their budget. Several years back they did sponsor a local youth through the American Legion Junior Shooting Sports program.

"She was a rifle shooter," Hale said. "She worked out of the shooting range in Westlake and she was really good. She rose up through the local competitive Legion ranks and kept going."

Can Pacifica's American Legion and VFW use any help?

"We'll never say 'no' to help," Hale chuckled, "which includes donations. The more funds we have, the more community needs and youth programs we can participate in. There's also the matter of our website. Any help there would be much appreciated."

Members of Pacifica's American Legion and VFW "always open Pacifica's annual Fog Fest Discover Pacifica Parade." The VFW Color Guard presents annually in the City of Pacifica's 4th of July Celebration at Frontierland Park as well as at the Memorial Day event at Chapel by the Sea.

"It means something being a member of the Legion or the VFW or both," Hale said. "It's companionship of experiences. We have all experienced the same amount of BS. But nobody tells war stories, at least not in a big crowd. They tell humorous things that happened but they don't relate incidents. In a smaller group over coffee, you might get a little more of that. But there's an understanding even in what is not discussed, and that provides comfort."

The Daly City-raised Hale ended up, under age, in the Coast Guard on an ammunition ship in Korea during the Korean War. When his age was discovered, he was sent home to finish high school. Following his graduation, he returned to the Coast Guard where he did helicopter and ship rescues. Along with his

Korean stint, the Chief Quartermaster would serve a total of eight years with America's oldest maritime defenders.

"One of our Legion sayings is, 'Still Serving America.' That's what we are all about."

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(Jean Bartlett photo)

Pacifica American Legion Post 238, July, 2021.



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