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NOVEMBER 11, 2015



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The Summit Project: Remembering Maine's heroes

by Mike Lange

David Cote has always been fond of hiking.

So while he was enrolled at Monterey (California) College in 2012, the Bangor High School graduate accepted an offer to join a Navy SEAL group scaling Mount Whitney on Labor Day weekend, the tallest peak in the

continental United States.

"What I didn't know at the time was that each SEAL was carrying a 10-pound stone in their backpack to represent a war casualty, and placed them in a crevice," said Cote, a Marine Corps major. "I thought about that for months afterward. Then it came to me that

Maine has one of the highest percentages of veterans in the country. Why not do something to recognize our latest casualties?"

Cote started the Summit Project in 2013 and the first hike took place at Mount Katahdin on Memorial Day weekend in 2014.

The latest event on October 17 drew four teams of 20 hikers each, 100 volunteers and the Patriot Guard motorcycle club to Cadillac Mt., Acadia National Park.

Unlike the original hike by the California SEAL teams, stones borne by the Summit Project hikers are engraved with the names of service members who have lost their lives on active duty since September 11, 2001.

Many stones also have stories behind them. One engraved with the name of Navy Lt. Jerry Smith, who died in a plane crash in 2007, came from his family's flower garden in Greenville and was retrieved by his brother, Eric, and mother, Fonda Smith.

"Anyone who hikes with this stone needs to know that Jerry was an athlete," wrote Eric Smith. "He loved hiking and had a very strong sense of humor. His quick wit was unmatched."

Other local service members



CAPT. JAY BRAINARD – The Atkinson resident lost his life when his helicopter was shot down in Afghanistan in 2012. Also killed was Army Chief Warrant Officer John C. Pratt.

honored by the Summit Project include Army Capt. John R. "Jay" Brainard III, 26, of Atkinson, a helicopter pilot who died May 28, 2012 in Kabul, Afghanistan.

Brainard lived with his aunt and uncle, Don and Nancy White, during his school years and graduated from Foxcroft Academy. "He loved the out-

doors," said Nancy White. "He had dreams of coming back home and having a tractor as big as Uncle White's."

When Cote visited the Whites in 2013 and discussed his plans for the Summit Project, Nancy said that they had a perfect memorial that hikers could carry in Jay's memory.

Continued on next page



SUMMIT PROJECT FOUNDER MAJ. DAVID COTE (Photo by Mike Peterson)



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ACADIA ASCENT – Nearly 300 hikers, volunteers, Patriot Rider motorcyclists and friends participated in the October 17 Summit Project at Acadia National Park. (Photo by Mike Peterson)

Continued from previous page

"Jay found a beautiful stone at Moxie Falls when he was 11 years old and brought it home and put it in our flower garden," White said. "So we had it engraved for the project."

White said that the Summit Project has meant a great deal to her and her husband.

"The people that we've met over the past two years are so devoted, so heartfelt and really truly interested in knowing who these fallen heroes were," she said. "Jay was one of those people with a giant smile who would love this tribute."

Hikers at the Summit Project

carry the stones up the mountains, then return and present them to the families of the fallen.

But that's not the end of their commitment. The Summit Project is based on what Cote describes as three "L's": Learn, Launch and Letter. "Everyone who participates is required to write a letter to the next of kin within two weeks after the hike," he said. "It's the finale to a very moving tribute."

The October 17 hike was a huge success, Cote said, even though the weather was a bit challenging. "We went from four layers down to t-shirts," he said

with a laugh. "We had sun, rain, a little hail and more sunshine at the end."

P.J. Laney of Newport volunteered at the Summit Project base camp at Acadia while her husband, Derek, hiked and carried a stone in memory of Marine Cpl. Josh Barron, who died in March 2011 at the Marine Corps Air Station in Yuma, Ariz.

"The weather sort of paralyzed our emotions that day," said P.J. Laney. "It was sunny at the start and very dark when they got off the bus after the hike. But when the hikers, Patriot Riders and volunteers formed a circle at base camp af-

terward, it was under beautiful, radiant sunshine. It was a life-changing experience for us."

While the Acadia National Park trip was the season finale for this year, planning is already underway for next year's Memorial Day hike at Mount Katahdin. "We also have a get-together over the winter for all hikers and volunteers," Cote said.

Cote, who is relocating to South Portland soon, said that the Summit Project also encourages other hikes throughout the state. "Groups are encouraged to find a location and a date, pick up some of our

tribute stones and hike for our fallen heroes," he said. "But we only ask that they adhere to the guidelines, including the three 'L's.'"

Cote summarizes the Summit Project this way: "We carry their stone for a hike; we carry their story for a lifetime."

Or as Nancy White puts it, "Those hikers carry the weight that symbolizes what families are carrying every day with their loss."

For more information, visit www.thesummitproject.org or find them on Facebook.



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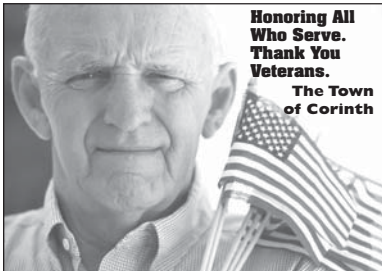


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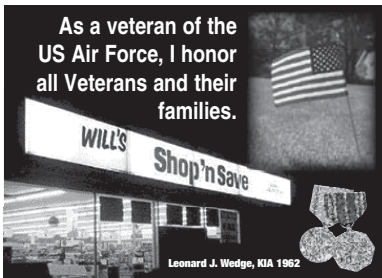
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The Town of Corinth



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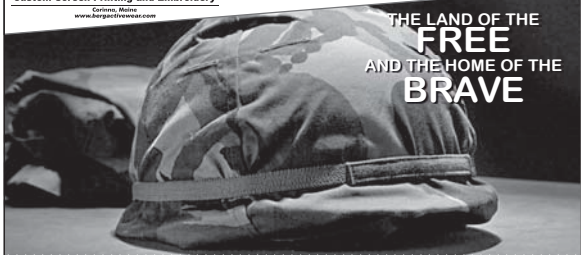
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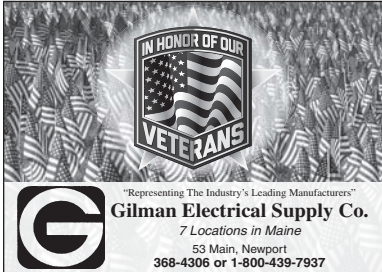
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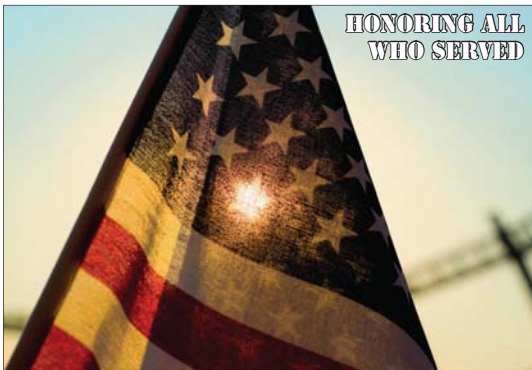
Remembering those...

who have served. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there are over 24 million veterans in the United States. Whether serving in times of peace or war, all have shown indomitable courage and spirit, which have enabled us to enjoy a level of freedom like no other. This Veterans Day, the following businesses are proud to honor veterans everywhere and salute the men and women in the area who have served our country.

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Veterans Day observances

The students and staff of MSAD 4 are inviting area veterans and the general public to attend their annual Veterans' Day Celebration on Tuesday, November 10 at 1 p.m.

"We've certainly created a tradition," said John Keane, Piscataquis Community Secondary School principal. "We've been hosting these celebrations for at least a decade. But it's a tradition that seems to have more meaning every year and it's anything but a habit—every year we create some differences."

Organizers note that this year marks the 50th anniversary of the United States' military involvement in Vietnam and they've included Vietnam veteran and former state representative Peter Johnson of Greenville as a guest speaker to commemorate the occasion. Johnson is a retired Army colonel who served in Vietnam.

The Marine Corps League Bangor Detachment 1151 will open and close the program by formally posting and retiring the colors. The celebration includes the traditional patriotic music, student presentations and selected readings that will feature students and staff from grades three through 12.

The Armed Forces Medley Salute performed by the PCSB Band typically brings the entire audience to its feet as the school and community honors veterans and those who serve in each branch of the service.

Thanks to technology, Katie Haley, a graduate of PCSB who is now on active duty with the Maine National Guard will appear "on screen" to converse with the audience about her service.

The tribute will be held in the Piscataquis Community Secondary School gymnasium in Guilford in order to accommodate the anticipated crowd.

Refreshments will be served in the cafeteria following the program.

For those unable to attend, the program will be live streamed from the school's website (www.sad4.org). Long distance guests are encouraged to visit the site 15 minutes prior to the event to establish a connection.

In Greenville, the students and staff at the local schools have been hard at work preparing a tribute called "Salute Our Veterans" for the heroes who have served and are serving in the United States military.

The celebration will be held on Tuesday, November 10 at 1 p.m. in the Oakes Auditorium at the school and is expected to run for about an hour.

The public is invited and encouraged to attend and honor our veterans. Veterans and current military members are asked to wear their uniforms or other clothing that will distinguish them as military personnel past or present.

Guests may enter at the side door beginning at 12:30 p.m., however, if anyone requires use of the elevator, please use the rear entrance where the superintendent's office is located; students will be there to assist you.

The program includes patriotic musical selections by students from all grades, poetry readings, and presentations of student work in honor of our respected veterans.

For more information, contact Eric Sherman at eric.sherman@ghslakers.org.

Every Veteran's Day, the Three Rivers Kiwanis of Milo-Brownville

serves dinner to all local veterans and their families.

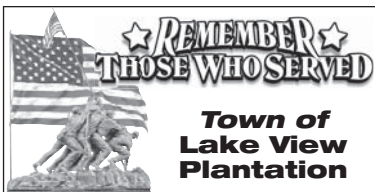
This year it will be held on Wednesday, November 11 at the Milo town hall. The doors will open at 11 a.m. and at 11:45 a.m. there will be a POW/MIA ceremony put on by the Milo American Legion Post 41. A roast turkey dinner will be served at noon by members of the Kiwanis Club.

The Penquis Valley High School Key Club and the Penquis Valley Middle School Builders Club will be on hand to help set up and serve the meal.

The Elementary Veterans Singers led by Stephanie Gillis will be providing some musical entertainment.

Anyone who would like home delivery of their meal can contact Eben DeWitt at 943-2486.

Also, at the First Universalist Church in Sangerville, there will be free lunch of soup and sandwiches served on November 11 from 11 a.m. - 2 p.m. to thank veterans for their service.



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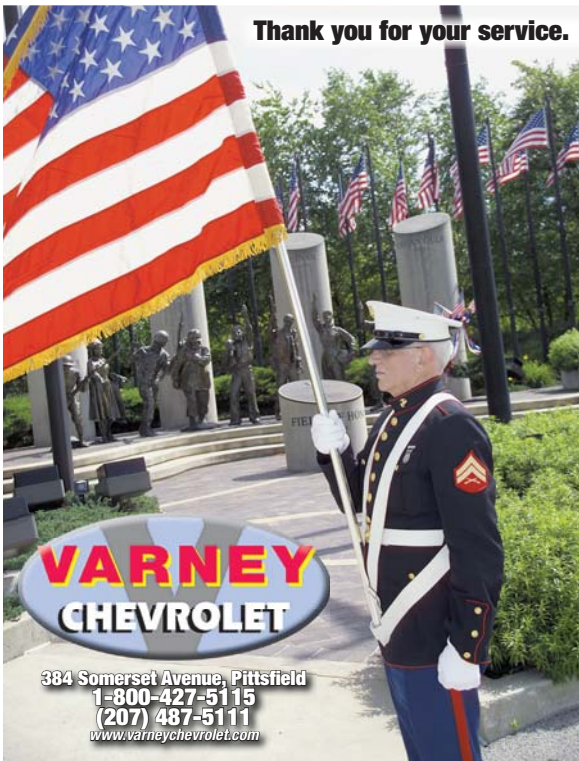
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House in the Woods offers support for vets and families

by Mike Lange

Post-traumatic stress syndrome is something combat veterans usually don't discuss in front of civilians. It's caused by a terrifying ordeal that's hard to explain to someone who hasn't been through the experience.

But at House in the Woods, a vet with PTSD can find camaraderie as well as comfort.

"We understand each other," said Deane Smith of Dixmont, who served in the Navy in Vietnam in the 1960s. "It was quite an eye-opener for a farm kid. You don't think about anything but the mission."

House in the Woods was founded by two families from Lee who lost sons in Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2007: Paul and Deanna House's son, Joel; and Bill and Quie Emery's son, Blair. The two soldiers died from combat-related injuries only six months apart.

In 2010, the couple started providing hunting trips and outings for veterans at no charge, thanks to donations from sports outfitters, lodging and camp owners all over the state. They host everything from turkey hunts to a disabled veterans' controlled moose hunt. Participants can also go four-wheeling, play golf, fish and participate in other recreational activities based on their abilities.

Although the House's home served as the unofficial main office for the program, the couple and their supporters started seriously thinking about a permanent home last year. "In May 2014, I said we were ready for a building," Paul House recalled. "But I had no idea where the money was coming from. Within a few months, the help and funding started coming in. It's amazing."

Numerous businesses and in-

dividuals have chipped in with cash, supplies and labor to help make the dream become a reality. "I hesitate to name names (of donors) because I'm afraid I might exclude somebody," House said. "But rest assured they'll be recognized and honored."

Once completed, the 90-foot long lodge on the outskirts of Lee will have a large living room with a gas fireplace, commercial kitchen, six bedrooms, an upstairs apartment and an indoor archery range and extra bunks with showers and restrooms in the basement.

The walls and trusses are mostly up, the metal roof is being installed soon and House said he hopes the building will be "buttoned up before snow flies."

With a permanent lodge, House in the Woods can also offer more in-house programs along with small game hunting in the area, House said. "We're looking at basket-making and snowshoe making classes, cooking, first aid and hunters' safety courses," he said. "We just want to make it more convenient for veterans and their families."

House said that barring any unforeseen circumstances, the lodge will be ready by next summer "and definitely in time for fall bear hunting season. We're also working with veterans' organizations to get the word out."

Larry McManus of Addison was diagnosed with PTSD after serving in Afghanistan in 2003 and in Iraq in 2005-06. He met Paul House at the Maine Sportsmen's Show and said that they "kind of made a bond right there."

McManus has participated in bird and bear hunts, took a Maine Guide course and also assists House with some of the outings. "I've gotten to know Deane



UNDER CONSTRUCTION – House in the Woods, a retreat for veterans and their families, is taking shape in Lee. The program has served over 500 veterans since 2010. (Deanna House photo)

(Smith) over the past few years, too, and I can't say enough about Paul (House). He's like a big brother to me," McManus said. "I can call him up anytime and he'll help me get through some bad stretches."

McManus said that that House in the Woods was dedicated to the memory of two soldiers who lost their lives in combat "really hits home with us."

Smith met the Houses at an

ice fishing derby at Great Pond in Aurora a few years ago and took an interest in the program right away. "We went on a turkey hunt, and then I got more and more involved," he said. He's now on the organization's board of directors.

Smith, like many other combat vets, didn't realize he had PTSD until several years after he left the service. "Once I started working with other Vietnam

veterans, they told me right off that I had it," he said. He then sought treatment at Togus Veterans' Hospital "and they do an outstanding job," he said.

Smith said the goal of House in the Woods is quite simple. "We want to help bring them back to where they were before the war," he said.

For more information, visit www.houseinthewoods.org or find them on Facebook.

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Veterans groups look for ways to attract younger members

by Mike Lange

Maine has one of the highest percentages of veterans in the United States, but the population of former service members is getting grayer – and so are the rosters of the state's veterans' organizations.

The American Legion, founded in 1919, is the oldest chartered veterans' organization in the country and is open to anyone who served on active duty during wartime. The Veterans of Foreign Wars is open only to those who served in a combat zone.

In most cases, veterans who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan are eligible to join either organization.

But many aren't taking advantage of the opportunity.

"If you can find a way to attract younger members to the Legion, I'd love to hear it," said Steve Colbath, commander of the Corinna Post. "We've got a strong post, but there aren't going to be many of us left a few years down the road."

Colbath, 69, served two tours in Vietnam and is 100 percent disabled after being wounded by a land mine. He also has some heart problems due to exposure from Agent Orange. "I keep as busy as I can, but I have to pace myself a little more now," he said.

At a recent Corinna Post meeting, Colbath asked the members who attended to go home and write down some ideas on how to get new blood in the post and encourage greater participation. I hope they took me seriously."

The state organization has also taken notice.

Pete Johnson of Greenville was elected first vice-commander of the Department of Maine American Legion in June, and said attracting new members was also the major item on the state organization's agenda.

"We formed a new committee of post-Desert Storm veterans with our service officer at Togus, Amadeo Lauria, as senior advisor," Johnson said. "The purpose is to find ways to bring these folks in."

This year, there are four posts in Maine led by Afghanistan and Iraq war veterans and the state chaplain, Matthew Jabaut of Lewiston, also served during that era.

Johnson, a former state representative and Greenville School committee member, has been a member of the Cecil R. Cole Post for 13 years and served eight terms as post commander. "We recently signed up an Afghanistan veteran who was medically discharged after being wounded," Johnson said. "He's very interested in our youth programs like Boys' State and the oratorical contest."

But Johnson noted that while it's easy to find veterans in a small town like Greenville, it's much harder in larger communities. "Because of privacy laws, the military won't release a list of recently-discharged veterans," he said. "So you have to go out and find them."

Chad Perkins, commander of the Bernard Jones American Legion Post in Brownville, and his wife, Dolly, the post finance officer are taking a slightly different approach.

"We've revived the Sons of the American Legion (SAL) Squadron and are recruiting more auxiliary members," said Dolly Perkins. "While we have a limited number of veterans in the community, we do have people who are eligible for membership in the other two organizations."

SAL members are males of all ages whose parents or grandparents served in the U.S. military and were eligible for American Legion membership while the mother, wife, daughter, sister, grand-daughter, great-grand-daughter or grandmother of Legion members or those eligible for membership can join the auxiliary.

The Brownville American Legion recently moved into the more spacious Brownville Alumni Association building which has served as the town's community center for years.

The Legion holds weekly bingo games and rents the hall for a modest fee for social events, but donates the use of the building for fundraisers and municipal functions like firefighters' training sessions, said Dolly Perkins.

The post is also a cosponsor of Brownville Days and the annual sled dog races and assists needy families, arranges for rides to the Togus V.A. Hospital for vets with medical needs and awards scholarships every year. "In order to be successful, you have to be visible in the community," said Chad Perkins.

But another problem with veterans' organizations in rural areas like Piscataquis County is that many people who graduate from high school "go into the service and don't come back here when they get out," said Johnson. "They go where the money is."

Still, Johnson said that the American Legion's "market penetration" in Maine is exceptional: 22 percent compared to the national average of 12 percent. The data is based on the percentage of eligible veterans who join the American Legion.

Colbath said that if enough younger members join the Corinna Legion, it will give his post an incentive to offer more activities. "We don't have a bar, but I'm not sure that's keeping them away," he said. "Young people don't want to hang around with a bunch of old farts. But the World War II and Korean War veterans are getting mighty scarce and Vietnam vets aren't far behind them."

Chad Perkins, who's in his mid-40s, takes a more optimistic view, however. "When we serve our community, we're also serving our veterans," he said. "Age is no barrier."



FIRST VICE-COMMANDER – Peter B. Johnson of Greenville is the first vice-commander of the Department of Maine American Legion. (American Legion photo)



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HONORING VETS
 – Tisbury Manor Chapter NSDAR (National Society of Daughters of the American Revolution) will hold its annual Veterans' Day observance on Sunday, November 8 at 1 p.m. at the Monson Town Hall. The ceremony is a joint event with the Towne-Holmbom American Legion Post. Refreshments will be served after the brief ceremony. Pictured are participants from the 2014 observance. (Contributed photo)

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Free Veterans Dental Clinic

Steinke & Caruso Dental Care in Dover-Foxcroft are offering a free Dental Clinic for Military Veterans who need dental treatment and have no dental insurance, on Wednesday, November 11. Appointments for the clinic will be 3 to 6 p.m. until all slots are filled.

For more information or to schedule an appointment, call 564-3455.

American Legion est. 1919

The American Legion was chartered by Congress in 1919 and evolved from a group of war-weary veterans of World War I into one of the most influential nonprofit groups in the United States.

Membership swiftly grew to over 1 million, and local posts sprang up across the country. Today, membership stands at over 2 million in 14,000 posts worldwide. The posts are organized into 55 departments: one each for the 50 states, along with the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, France, Mexico and the Philippines.

Hundreds of local American Legion programs and activities strengthen the nation one community at a time. American Legion Baseball is one of the nation's most successful amateur athletic programs, educating young people about the importance of sportsmanship, citizenship, and fitness.

The Heroes to Hometowns program connects local Legionnaires with recovering wounded warriors and their families, providing a variety of support activities.

The Legion raises millions of dollars in donations at the local, state and national levels to help veterans and their families and to provide college scholarship opportunities.

Anyone currently on active duty serving the United States honorably anywhere in the world, or who has served honorably during any of the following eligible war eras, is eligible to become a member of The American Legion.

August 2, 1990 to today (Gulf War/War on Terrorism)
December 20, 1989 to Jan. 31, 1990 (Panama)

August 24, 1982 to July 31, 1984 (Lebanon/Grenada)
February 28, 1961 to May 7, 1975 (Vietnam War)

June 25, 1950 to January 31, 1955 (Korean War)

December 7, 1941 to December 31, 1946 (World War II)

Many Legion posts also have very active ladies' auxiliaries and the Sons of the American Legion squadrons that support and promote the aims of the organization.

There are approximately 20,000 Legion members in Maine.

For more information, visit www.mainelegion.org online or contact your local American Legion posts in Greenville, Monson, Guilford, Sangerville, Dexter, Corinna, Dover-Foxcroft, Milo or Brownville Junction.



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Northern Maine Veterans Cemetery

U.S. Senators Susan Collins and Angus King announced recently that the Northern Maine Veterans' Cemetery in Caribou will receive \$861,232 from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

With the closest National Veterans' Cemetery more than 450 miles away in Bourne, MA and the closest State Veterans' Cemetery nearly 250 miles away in Augusta, this grant is critical to providing continued service for 7,795 Veterans and their families in Northern Maine.

"Preserving the hallowed grounds where those who answered the call of duty are laid to rest is a solemn responsibility," Senators Collins and King said in a joint statement. "This funding will support the Northern Maine Veterans' Cemetery in Caribou so that it can continue to serve Maine's Veterans and their families."

In total, the grant will fund the development of approximately one acre including the construction of an access drive, 90 preplaced crypts, columbaria with 576 niches, landscaping, irrigation and supporting infrastructure.



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Poliquin introduces bill to make ARCH program permanent

MAINE – Maine's Second District Congressman, Bruce Poliquin, introduced the Helping Our Rural Veterans Receive Health Care Act recently. Congressman Poliquin released the following statement: "Maine is home to many Veterans who answered the ultimate call of duty to protect our freedoms and liberties.

"As Maine's Second District Congressman, and a member of the Veterans Military Caucus, I have been working to help ensure our Veterans receive the health care and benefits they were promised, earned and deserve.

"40 percent of the 22 million Veterans in the United States live in rural areas. To help our rural Veterans, in 2011 with bipartisan support, Congress created a pilot program known as project ARCH (Access Received Closer to Home). This program selected 5 hospitals in rural areas across the Country to enter into contracts with the VA so that our Veterans could receive health care closer to home. This program has proven to be a major success.

"That's why I introduced the Helping Our Rural Veterans Receive Health Care Act to help make the ARCH program permanent and expand the program to more rural hospitals across the Country. By allowing our rural hospitals to enter into pre-negotiated contracts with the VA, more of our rural Veterans, and their families, will receive the benefits and health care they truly deserve.

"With so many VA programs under scrutiny for mismanagement, it's important that we expand the programs that are successful and common sense.

"As Maine's Second District Congressman, I will continue to support bills that will help ensure our Veterans, and their families, receive the health care and benefits they were promised, earned and deserve."

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Veterans of Foreign Wars was instrumental in establishing VA system

The Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) traces its roots back to 1899 when veterans of the Spanish-American War (1898) and the Philippine Insurrection (1899-1902) founded local organizations to secure rights and benefits for their service.

Many arrived home wounded or sick. There was no medical care or veterans' pension for them, and they were left to care for themselves.

Some of these veterans banded together and formed organizations with what would become known as the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

After chapters were formed in Ohio, Colorado and Pennsylvania, the movement quickly gained momentum. By 1915, membership grew to 5,000; by 1936, membership was almost 200,000.

Since then, the VFW has been instrumental in establishing the Veterans Administration, creating a GI bill for the 20th century, the development of the national cemetery system and the fight for compensation for Vietnam vets exposed to Agent Orange and for veterans diagnosed with Gulf War Syndrome.

In 2008, VFW won a long-fought victory with the passing of a GI Bill for the 21st Century, giving expanded educational benefits to America's active-duty service members, and members of the Guard and Reserves, fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan.

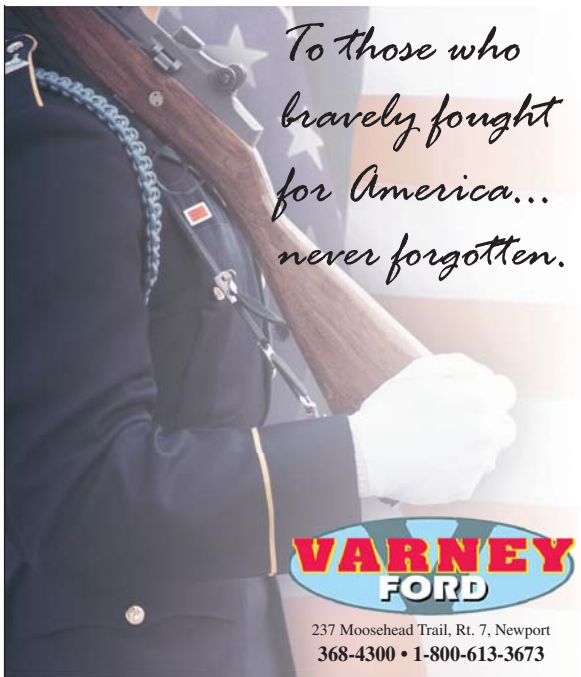
The VFW also has fought for improving VA medical centers services for women veterans.

Besides helping fund the creation of the Vietnam, Korean War, World War II and Women in Military Service memorials, the VFW in 2005 became the first veterans' organization to contribute to building the new Disabled Veterans for Life Memorial, which opened in November 2010.


Any service member who has received a campaign medal for overseas service; served 30 consecutive or 60 non-consecutive days in Korea; or ever received hostile fire or imminent danger pay, is eligible to join the VFW.

There are approximately 9,000 VFW members in Maine. The closest VFW in the Penquis Region is the Shirley B. Carter post in Dexter.

For more information, visit <http://mainevfw.org>.



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COURTHOUSE FLAG – After an absence of several years, an American flag was raised on the Piscataquis County courthouse recently. The bare flagpole caught the attention of some residents this summer, so county commissioners authorized the funds to purchase an all-weather flag, hardware and lighting system. (Eastern Gazette photo – Mike Lange)