



American Legion Department of Wisconsin
8th District Fall Conference

Fall 2019 Conference Minutes –October 26, 2019
Post 492 – Rothschild, Wisconsin

1. Commander Jean Balz called the meeting to order at 0900 hours. The colors being in place, all present rendered a hand salute. The Chaplain gave an opening prayer. The POW/MIA flag was placed on the empty chair by the Sergeant at Arms and Resolution 228 was read by Commander Balz. The 1st Vice Commander led the Legionnaires in the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance. The 2nd Vice Commander then led the attendees in the recitation of the Preamble to the Constitution of the American Legion.
2. Commander Balz declared the meeting regularly convened and invited the Marathon County Commander to the podium to welcome the attendees.
3. Commander Balz introduced the guests.
4. She then invited Sons of the American Legion Department Vice Commander Watley to the podium. He expressed his appreciation for the Auxiliary members being in attendance to hear his report. He reported that the Josh Dog program had been shut down because the founder of the program retired and retained the trademark. The Sons are now looking into a new program based on the distribution of Deployment Kits. All Josh Dog donations made to date that have not been expended will be rolled over to the new Deployment Kit account. The new program will be run by the Department of Wisconsin for the Department of Wisconsin. He then gave an overview of SAL activities. SAL national dues have been raised and this will impact all levels of the organization. SAL is also looking into starting up a National PUFL program. He added that Squadrons are now able to do online renewals. Finally, he said the recently passed LEGION Act authorizes the relatives of new Legion members to join the SAL.
5. Adjutant Herminath proposed that future conference attendance reports to taken from the host post registration list rather than a verbal roll call. A motion was made and seconded to open discussion. After discussion, it was decided to vote the motion down. It was determined that a verbal roll call provided 8th District officers with a better idea of the number of Legionnaires from each county and post in attendance.
6. The Adjutant took a verbal roll call of district and county officers. All officers were either present or excused. He then took a verbal roll call of Legionnaires in attendance. A total of 50 Legionnaires representing 22 posts were present.

7. Commander Balz said the minutes from the 2019 Spring Conference and the two most recent Department Convention caucus meetings were posted on the 8th District website for perusal. She asked that they be accepted. A motion was made and seconded to accept the minutes as posted on the website. The motion passed.
8. Department Vice Commander Eirlitz was invited to the podium to speak about the American Legion College. He encouraged the districts, counties, and posts to sponsor the basic, intermediate, and advanced courses offered. All that is needed is to get 15 students together and collect \$25 per student to cover the registration fee along with the breakfast and lunch offered by the host post. He stressed that training should be one of the highest priorities of the American Legion. The above training provides an excellent overview of the history of the American Legion in less than two hours. The course itself is free, but there is a charge of \$5 for the graduation pin. He reviewed the information covered in all three courses and added that this information was also available on the department website, wilegion.org. He stressed that SAL, American Legion Auxiliary, and Riders are welcome to attend the above training sessions. Finally, he announced his candidacy for 2020 Department Commander. He said he is interested in promoting ongoing Department of Wisconsin initiatives in the areas of finance, legislation, and communications.
9. 8th District Finance Officer Fregien gave a finance report. He had hard copies of the finance 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 was passed. A motion was then made and seconded to donate today's shell fund collection and all but \$100 in the Shell Fund account to the Recreation Fund at King Veterans Home. The motion passed.
10. Former 8th District Commander Ron Fregien then presented thank you gifts to the officers who worked with him over the past two years. He also presented plaques to former Finance Officer David Jensen and current Adjutant Arien Herminath, both having completed ten years of service to the 8th District.
11. District Officer Reports:
 - a. Commander Balz: Reported on her recent activities. She reminded the Legionnaires of the 8th District website and encouraged them to review and update the post and county officer contact information listed there. She also encouraged the Legionnaires to submit their award nominations on time.
 - b. 1st Vice Commander Burg: Excused
 - c. 2nd Vice Commander Melton: Reported on his recent activities.
 - d. 3rd Vice Commander Zachowitz: Reported on his recent activities.
 - e. Finance Officer Fregien: Encouraged posts to pay their 8th District dues in a timely manner.
 - f. Adjutant Herminath: Asked for approval to renew the website subscription for 2020 at a cost of approximately \$300. A motion was made and seconded to approve the expenditure. The motion passed.
 - g. Judge Advocate Gorst:
 - h. Chaplain harn:
 - i. Sergeant at Arms Young:
 - j. Sergeant at Arms Elter:

12. County Commander Reports:

- a. Marathon County Commander Syring: Reported on post activities.
- b. Portage County Commander Miller: Reported on post activities.
- c. Shawano County Commander Marien: Reported on post activities.
- d. Waupaca County Commander Melton: Reported on post activities.
- e. Waushara County Commander Miller: Reported on post activities.
- f. Wood County Commander Krofta: Reported on post activities.

13. District Committee Chairman Reports:

- a. Americanism/Career Academy/Fundraising: Ron Fregien
- b. Camp American Legion: Mathew Harn reported that camp had chartered American Legion Post 1925. This led to a discussion of ongoing construction and upgrade projects, to include associated timing and financial issues.
- c. Children and Youth: Ron Fregien reminded post officers to be careful not to file Children and Youth activities under Americanism.
- d. Convention Activity: Arien Herminath
- e. Finance and Fundraising: Former Department Commander Jim Reigel reported that the Department is trying to raise 20 million dollars as an endowment fund to be used to support its two most expensive programs, the Service Office in Milwaukee and Camp American Legion. The interest received from the endowment fund would enable Department to fund the above two programs. Jim outlined the long-term collection strategy to fund the endowment. Jim also outlined the short-term funding strategy for the endowment. He stressed that membership numbers are going down and endowment funding of our major programs is essential if we are to maintain our current level of service to Wisconsin veterans.
- f. Homeless Veterans: Jim Young
- g. King Veterans Home: Jim Young
- h. King Day Pilgrimage: Jean Balz reported that there will be a meeting on 4 November to discuss the 2020 program. The program will be on Father's Day as usual, but the traditional chicken dinner will probably be done away with to avoid any chance of a patient choking on the meal. More information will be provided at the 2020 8th District Spring Conference.
- i. Legion Riders: Henry Brumber
- j. Legislative and Resolutions: Kathy Gorst reviewed legislation currently working its way through the State Legislature. She said regular updates of Legislative Committee activities are available through Department and invited Legionnaires to sign up to receive the updates.
- k. VA&R: Jim Young
- l. National Security: Jim Young
- m. MIA/POW: Jim Young
- n. Religious Emphasis: Mathew Harn

14. District Program Director Reports:

- a. A&G Scholarship: Arien Herminath

- b. Badger Boys State: Jean Balz
- c. Baseball: Jerry Krofta
- d. Boy Scouts: Ron Fregien
- e. County Youth Government: Arien Herminath
- f. Oratorical Program: Jerry Krofta
- g. SAL Liaison: Arien Herminath

15. Commander Balz invited Darla Porter, Department Membership Committee Chairperson, to the podium. She congratulated the 8th District for currently leading the Department of Wisconsin in membership at 70.56%. Darla reviewed several activities of the Fall Membership Conference and said copies the American Legion 2930 list will be handed out at this conference. She asked that the information on the list, also available on the Department website wilegion.org, be taken back to the posts and used to contact potential members. She spoke about the recent change to the Preamble to the Constitution of the American Legion. Darla also reviewed the training that will be offered at the upcoming 2020 Mid-Winter Conference. She then spoke about the recently approved Legion Act which opened up eligibility for the American Legion to approximately six million veterans. Darla added that the Communications Committee is working on preparing posters outlining the new guidelines that posts can place in public locations and reach out to potential new members. She then mentioned several changes related to the American Legion Auxiliary. For example, eligibility wording has been changed from wives to spouses. Men are now eligible to join (and have joined) the Auxiliary here in Wisconsin. Membership requirements have also been changed to permit membership only down to granddaughter rather than great granddaughter (two levels). Great granddaughters already in the system will be allowed to remain members as long as their memberships remain current. Darla reviewed the membership incentives offered by Department. This information is also available on the Department website. She then reviewed membership incentives offered by National. She outlined the Department's strategic plan for membership, to include how to greet new members, integrate them into post programs and activities, and develop a follow-on retention program. She also spoke about a two-day Membership Workshop held in Indianapolis each August. Darla added that the Department would like to see membership rallies held in every District, preferably early in the membership year. Finally, Department would like to hold a membership open house twice a year. The Department-wide open house held this year focused on fun and was referred to as March madness. The next open house will be held in the Fall of 2020 and does not have to take place in Portage. Darla pointed out that there is a template on the Department website on how posts can turn the information in their CPR reports into a press release for the local community. This is to facilitate the ability of posts to connect with their communities and their fellow veterans. She spoke about how she was recruited into the American Legion in 2009 and how she had to be contacted and informed of what the post was doing in the community. She also spoke about the importance of buddy checks and suggested that the Legion birthday and Veterans Day are good times to reach out to veterans. Buddy checks are important to retain a connection with members who have not attended meetings in a while. Perhaps all they need is a ride. This led to a discussion of how we

can help our fellow veterans. The discussion also covered younger veterans and stressed how time is precious to them. Younger veterans need to feel they are making a difference in order to retain their membership. In conclusion, Darla stressed that we have to make our meetings fun and posts should focus on several programs that they can do well.

16. Commander Balz outlined District 8 membership accomplishments. District 8 is in 1st place in the Department at this time. She recognized New London Post 263 as the top post in the District, Waupaca as the top county, and Marion, Rudolf and Vesper Posts for their accomplishments. In recognition of their accomplishments, Commander Balz presented American Legion coins to the above county and post commanders present.
17. Commander Balz commented that last year in Wisconsin 6,300 veterans committed suicide. She added that Department Commander Wischer wants to institute a Suicide Training and Awareness Committee. Eighth District 1st Vice Commander Mark Melton will serve as Vice Chairman of the Committee.
18. Commander Balz asked for any old business. There was none.
19. Commander Balz then asked for any new business.
 - a. Adjutant Herminath asked for approval to spend up to \$300 to renew the 8th District website for the coming year. A motion was made and seconded to approve the expenditure. The motion passed.
 - b. Commander Balz said the 8th District needed a candidate to fill the 3rd Vice Commander position. 1st Vice Commander Burt had to resign his position due to professional work obligations. Becky Laumann was nominated to fill the vacant 3rd Vice Commander position. A motion was made to close nominations and Becky was elected unanimously.
 - c. New London Post 263 offered to host the 2020 8th District Spring Conference on 16 May.
 - d. Commander Balz reported that the Blue Water Navy bill was recently changed to include service within 12 miles of land.
 - e. Commander Balz also spoke about how to respond to disruptive activity at post meetings. She reminded the posts that the Sergeant at Arms is there to maintain order. If a Legion member is being disruptive or exhibits conduct unbecoming, posts are to document the behavior and counsel the member. Posts should try to get signed documentation related to the behavior and the action taken by the post at the time. It may be necessary to document the activity over time to justify formal action. While a disruptive member can be escorted out of a meeting, the post should be aware that he/she may be suffering from dementia or emotional problems rather than malicious intent. She stressed that post documentation (in post minutes or other records) of the disruptive activity was essential to formal action being taken against a disruptive member.
 - f. A motion was made to donate \$500 to the Legion Riders for the purchase of wreaths for the Wreaths Across America program at King Veterans Home.

20. Commander Balz asked if there was anything for the good of the American Legion.
21. Commander Balz called on the 8th District Chaplain for prayer, followed by removal of the POW/MIA banner from the empty chair by the Sergeant at Arms. She then led a salute to the colors and declared the 2019 8th District Fall Conference adjourned.

Arien Herminath
Adjutant