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No poppies for Veterans Day, but Veterans of Foreign Wars keep up most programs

By Sora O'Doherty

Like almost everything else, 2020 has been a challenge for the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Post 8063 serves Lamorinda and Walnut Creek out of the Veterans Building in Lafayette, but the building has been shut down for the past 12 months, according to Terry Murphy, Service Officer and past Post Commander.

The VFW ordinarily raises funds to support its activities by the sale of poppies on Memorial Day and Veterans Day, but this year, that has not been possible. Not only is it not allowed, Murphy says, but he would not want to jeopardize the members, most of whom are veterans of World War II and the Korean War. In addition, the Post has held no meetings. However, it is continuing with its two national scholarship programs, Voice of Democracy, an audio essay competition for high school students, and Patriot Pen, a writing contest for middle school students. The only program eliminated for 2020 is the Teacher of the Year, owing to the difficulty of evaluating teachers outside the classroom.

VFW Post 8063 is a sponsoring VFW Post and awards a local scholarship. The national first-place winner of the Voice of Democracy, a recorded patriotic themed audio-essay, will receive a \$30,000 scholarship. Plus, additional scholarships from \$1,000 to \$16,000 will be awarded. Each year, more than 51,000 high school students from across the country enter to win their share of more than \$1.9 million in educational scholarships and incentives awarded through the program. The theme this year is, "Is This the Country the Founders Envisioned?"

The theme for this year's Patriot's Pen is "What is Patriotism to Me?" Each year more than 138,000 students (grades 6-8) enter the contest for a chance to win their share of more than \$900,000 in state and national awards. Each first-place state winner receives a minimum of \$500 at the national level, and the national first place winner wins \$5,000 and an all-expense-paid trip to Washington DC.

Entries for both contests were due by the end of October and are under consideration now. Anyone wishing to make a contribution to the Veterans of Foreign Wars, in lieu of poppy sales, may make a donation to VFW Post 8063, PO Box 1025, Lafayette CA 94549.

There is also a GoFundMe drive for the Lafayette Veterans Memorial Center. The building, located at the intersection of Mt. Diablo Boulevard and Risa Road in Lafayette, is about 12 years old and replaced an older one built in the 1930s. The building is owned by the county and is operated by a building board with a professional manager. The building is leased to the veterans and two groups call it home: The American Legion Post #517 and Veterans of Foreign Wars Post #8063. All the monies need to run the building come from the building being utilized by the public and functions as a quasi-community center and in times of need as a cooling/charging station (during blackouts). In times of threats it is designated as a secure place for children and others, including everyone at Temple Isaiah.

Before the pandemic, the veterans were quite successful and used funds in excess of their need to do upgrades to the building (about \$100,000 for efficient lighting) to support local veterans help projects (East Bay Stand Down, Concord Veterans Center, Marines Memorial, disaster relief for veterans and others), local scouting and to provide the granite memorial at the building to all veterans lost since 9/11. There was a plan to use some of the funds to install a generator that would have provided the power needed during the PSPS blackouts, but with the loss of revenue during the pandemic, those funds were needed just to keep the lights on, doors open, trash picked up, landscaping done, alarms/insurance payed for and the building managed.

According to Murphy, "The GoFundMe drive is our way to ask the public for a little help to keep this Memorial alive so it will be there for the veterans of the community and those returning from their service to our country. We hope to replace what we had and if possible continue doing the upgrades and supporting our veterans." The GoFundMe page is located at www.gofundme.com/f/a2ydb9-help-our-vets.

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