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LEGION from page 1A

"Recognizing the service of these wartime veterans is the right thing to do and it is long overdue," American Legion National Commander Brett Reistad said. "The families of those who were killed or wounded during these wartime acts should take pride in knowing that we recognize their sacrifice and service. Moreover, we are proud to welcome any of the 6 million living veterans from the previously unrecognized periods into our organization and call them

'Legionnaires.'

Locally, this change was good news for Mike Nielsen, Commander of American Legion, Francis M Yost, Post 59 in Florence. "President Trump signed the LEGION Act a couple of months ago and they've eliminated the qualifying dates for membership in the Legion," Nielsen said. "It used to just be service during wartimes, declared wars and declared conflicts. There were a lot of spaces in between when people served that did not qualify. Over the years, I've had peo-

ple call and ask if they could join and I had to tell them I'm sorry, you didn't serve during wartime. This lets everybody know that if you were in the military and you served honorably, even for one day, you are now eligible to become a member of the American Legion."

Another aspect of the passage and signing of the LEGION Act was the support for the bill expressed by members of Congress, according to Reistad.

"In an era of partisan gridlock, Republicans and Democrats in Congress

overwhelmingly recognized the importance of allowing thousands of honorable but previously ineligible veterans the right to join the largest and most influential veteran's organization in the country," he said.

Meetings of American Legion Post 59 are held the fourth Tuesday of each month, beginning at 5 p.m. with a potluck dinner, followed at 6 p.m. by the regular meeting.

All are welcome at the Al Stapleton/DAV Hall at 21st and Pine streets in Florence.

JOBS from page 1A

Difficulties in hiring trained workers informed and inspired the creation of the Skilled to Work program, which has a two-fold purpose: education and employment. Skilled to Work's two goals are intertwined and revolve around the increasing need for trade and construction trained individuals to fill openings in these and related fields.

It is important to the program to offer younger individuals the opportunity to learn a meaningful trade with the potential to earn a good wage, specifically for those that are not college

bound.

"We now know there is a severe shortage of skilled trade workers and the current workforce is getting older," Yraguen said. "We have had 40 years of telling kids the only way to be successful is with a college career and we also now know that is not true. We need to change the conversation and we need to be more positive and more supportive of our non-college bound students."

The Skilled to Work program is more than just a job website; it is a comprehensive program that includes an internship component and an extended apprenticeship period. The program is

also focused on finding a position for a potential intern that meshes with their interests or future employment goals.

Yraguen also sought to dispel what she sees as misperception, that this generation is less interested in learning a skill and working hard than those that preceded it.

"I am here to tell you that is just not true. In reality, kids want to work. I have many high schoolers that are very interested in learning a good trade and they are not college bound," Yraguen said.

The Skilled to Work initiative is an ongoing feature on Monday night broadcasts on KEZI and there is an interactive component to the station's corresponding web page. Interested young people can look through the employers and training opportunities available and then contact the station or the company to determine if the selection will work for both parties.

The Skilled to Work site currently lists more than a dozen companies that are actively seeking employees and apprentices to fill openings in highly paid trade positions. The partnership between KEZI and these employers is unique in that

it is an initiative that crosses multiple media platforms and can be accessed on all types of devices.

Ultimately, connecting the employer to potential employees is the hoped-for end result of the Skilled to Work program.

"We really want to get the word out to parents, students, teachers and even guidance counselors that may not be familiar with the program or even the need for these workers that there are many opportunities out there that do not require a college degree and are in very high demand," Yraguen said.

The second speaker at Wednesday's meeting was Brianna Vincent, who works under the auspices of the Oregon Department of Health and Human Services (DHS) and Looking Glass Community Services works with the state on youth related initiatives.

According to Vincent, funding for the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Youth Employment Program has been increased. She also wanted Florence-area youth to know they will now be eligible to participate in the paid internship program.

"We do two programs right now. One is a job training program; it is a longer-term program that helps youth get involved in schools if they have dropped out or if they want to college. We can help them get jobs or get registered in apprenticeships or different youth programs that they might be interested in," Vincent said.

According to the county managed website, Looking Glass's program is to engage eligible youth in job preparation/training as well as to place the youth in a paid work experience that matches their interests and skill level. These can include on-the-job training; career and training guidance; help with applications, resumes and cover letters; training in financial literacy; and CPR/First Aid Training.

The TANF program does have some eligibility qualifications that are related to income and state support. Teens can participate in the program only if they or their parents are receiving state aid.

"I work with this program in partnership with DHS ... to identify teens that are interested in working," Vincent said. "What I do is meet with the teen and see what type of stuff they have done before ... then I will see what they are interested in and what they are excited about. Then I look for places in the community near to where they live and then place them at a work site."

Vincent is actively seeking teens in the Florence area to join in the TANF training program and suggests that students or their parents or guardians contact her directly to find out the eligibility requirements for participation in the program.

Vincent can be reached at the Riverfront School and Career Center in Eugene, 541-302-2554, and Yraguen can be reached at KEZI.com.

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