

Hermiston American Legion Post hosts picnic, membership drive

Local group wants to boost membership to 125

By ERICK PETERSON
Hermiston Herald

Hamburgers, hot dogs, salads and desserts were on the menu Saturday, Sept. 25, as Hermiston's American Legion and Auxiliary Post 37 fed around 100 area veterans at a picnic in Hermiston's McKenzie Park.

The event was an outreach to area veterans. The Hermiston Legion has 106 members, and leadership would like to increase membership to 125. By offering a fun and free picnic, group leaders hoped to attract new members.

Aaron Wetterling, post commander and Marine Corps veteran, said his post is getting older. Some of the oldest members have died recently. Others are getting too frail to attend meetings. Still, there is a lot of value in this organization, he said, and it would be a shame if it were to fade away.

The Legion has an important mission, he said. Its first mission is to support and rehabilitate veterans. Suicide rates, he said, are terrible among past service members, which is why his post works with Umatilla County Veteran Services to equip needy veterans with counseling and medication. Also, they help them find resources to place homeless veterans into homes.

The Legion, Wetterling said, also promotes American patriotism. Legion members go into area schools and speak to students about their service and the importance of defending the country. They

also promote a school program in which students deliver speeches on American defense.

There also are activities in the tradition of the Legion that Wetterling would either like to enhance or revive. American Legion Baseball is one of those traditions, as is a hunter safety class.

"I love my job," Wetterling said.

Bob Daniel, fellow American Legion member and part of the cleanup crew, agreed with his commander that events such as the picnic are fun. A first vice commander and former National Guard member, Daniel said he was happy to promote the Legion. He said he saw a few new faces at the picnic, and he hoped to sign them up as new members.

Glenn Scott, veteran service officer, also was looking for new members for the Legion. In his work, he assists veterans and their families. Many veterans, he said, are unaware of the benefits they are due. Some others are unable to file for compensation which is rightfully theirs. So he works with them, getting them services through Veterans Affairs.

Some of the vets are only in need of money to tide them over to their next paycheck, and he is able to help them, too.

Lola Lopez, also a VSO, said she feels a special connection with veterans. Though she has not served in the military, she has a partner who was a medic in the Army. Also, she has a son who is in the Air Force and a daughter is in the Air National Guard.

Representing the county veteran service office

She was on the lookout at the picnic for people



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

Mark Wiggins, a member of the American Legion and Alaska National Guard, left, serves World War II Army veteran Dan Lopez during a picnic Saturday, Sept. 25, 2021, for veterans the Hermiston American Legion and Auxiliary Post 37 held at McKenzie Park in Hermiston.

who needed help applying for benefits. While they ate their lunches, she spoke to them. She said she thinks she can help some of the people she met.

Rose Johnson Gale, 70, was among those people. The Legion treasurer, she was in the Army National Guard from 1980 to 2004. She said she is a sociable person who likes to mingle, which is why she enjoys her Legion membership. Unfortunately, she said, there are only two women in the post.

Gale boasted the Legion helps the community, and she wants more people to know about it. This is especially important, she said, because of the pandemic. These days, many people are isolated and lonely.

"Things are so bad with the virus," she said. She would like to reach out to people and let them know the Legion is there for them.

Dennis Aiken, Vietnam War veteran, said communication is vital to veterans. Through community events such as the picnic, veterans can socialize and

share solutions to common problems.

Veteran suicide is a major concern of his. And he seeks to match troubled veterans up with the knowledge and resources which can save their lives. Sometimes, he brings food to people in need. Other times, he tells them about medical techniques which have been shown to help.

Cathy Stolz, president of the Hermiston Auxiliary Unit, said the Legion has a brilliant past. The national organization started in 1919, and the Hermiston group was an early member. She said she wants the group to continue so it can have this picnic and yard sales and more.

She said while the post is only for veterans, the auxiliary is open to spouses, children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and siblings of veterans.

People interested in joining the American Legion can call Wetterling at 541-720-1815. The Legion and Auxiliary meet the first Monday of every month at Agape House in Hermiston.

Life Chain links believers

By TAMMY MALGESINI
Hermiston Herald

Described as a peaceful event that bears witness to beliefs in the sanctity of life, Deanna Leonard said the annual Life Chain is Sunday, Oct. 3, in Hermiston.

"It's not a protest," the Hermiston woman said. "We're Christians praying and giving a personal witness of our beliefs."

To participate, meet at 2 p.m. in the parking lot behind Banner Bank, 101 E. Main St., Hermiston. After briefing participants, including passing out signs, Leonard said the group will spread out along North First Street (Highway 395) near Gladys and Hermiston avenues.

Kristi Smalley, who attends Our Lady of Angels Catholic Church in Hermiston, learned about the event from Leonard a handful of years ago. The regent of the Catholic Daughters of the Americas Court No. 1692, Smalley had been providing financial support to anti-abortion causes but felt compelled to do something more.

"I wanted to do something physical to hopefully help people realize how precious life is from conception to natural death," she said.

Sometimes, Smalley said, people aren't aware of available resources when faced with an unplanned pregnancy. She shared about engaging in a conversation with an expectant mother while taking a walk in her neighborhood. The young woman, Smalley said, was feeling pressure from her boyfriend to have an abortion.

"It was heart-wrenching to witness her anguish," she said. Whether it's engaging in a sort of "sidewalk counseling" or participating in an organized anti-abortion event, Smalley said it's important to let people know they are not alone and options are available.

Leonard and Smalley said they don't endorse using graphic photos or harsh verbiage. Smalley called it "a distraction," saying it takes the focus off the positive message they're trying to convey. "We're hoping to plant a seed," Leonard said.



Luke Banes/Contributed Photo

Participants of a past Life Chain event line Highway 395, Hermiston. This year's anti-abortion event will initially gather Sunday, Oct. 3, 2021, in the city parking lot behind Banner Bank.

According to the national organization's website, the event is in its 34th year. Held the first Sunday in October, the effort encourages the faith community to link together to lead the nation in prayer for the unborn. Leonard has taken the reins in organizing the Hermiston event for around 17 years. The silent and prayerful approach, Leonard said, is a non-confrontational way to express their anti-abortion beliefs.

While the signage displayed ranges from messages of support, like "Adoption is the Loving Option" and "Jesus Forgives & Heals," some are more direct, such as "Pray to End Abortion" and "Abortion Kills Children."

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"We're hoping to plant a seed," Leonard said.

For more information, visit www.LifeChain.org or call Leonard at 541-571-3592.

Lunch is On Us! October 5 & 6

October is National Cooperative Month so we're celebrating YOU! UEC members drive thru our limited contact event and pick up a free boxed lunch and gift bag that includes an energy efficiency kit with an LED lightbulb! **While supplies last*

Tuesday, October 5
Hermiston Headquarters

Wednesday, October 6
Boardman Operations Center

11:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

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