

Gasquet American Legion works to bolster its ranks

August 17, 2019



Jamie Brassard is eager to get the word out about the Gasquet American Legion, especially thanks to recent actions of President Donald Trump.

Trump signed the LEGION (Let Everyone Get Involved In Opportunities for National Service) Act on July 30, which declares the United States has been in a state of war since Dec. 7, 1941.

While the declaration honored about 1,600 U.S. service members who were killed or wounded during previously undeclared periods of war, it also opened the door for some 6 million veterans to access American Legion programs and benefits for which they previously had not been eligible.

“Congress originally set up the charter that in order to join the American Legion, you had to have served during war periods. This act opens it wide up as to who can join the American Legion,” said Brassard, the adjutant at Gasquet American Legion Post 548.

Now, new members need to have served during World War I, World War II, or from 1946 to present.

Located at 1555 Gasquet Flat Rd., about 14 miles northeast of Crescent City on Highway 199, Brassard said the Gasquet American Legion is the only one remaining in the region after the branches in Crescent City, Smith River and Brookings all closed from a lack of membership.

That's why she's planning a membership drive Sept. 11, 10 a.m.-2 p.m., at the Veterans Service Office, 810 H St. in Crescent City.

Brassard said she and her husband, James, who's the current post commander, have succeeded in boosting membership a bit since they moved to Gasquet six years ago. That membership now is 64.

Jamie Brassard has been a member for 35 years, after her service in the Marines was cut short by health issues, from 1972-74.

James Brassard served with both the U.S. Navy during Vietnam and then the U.S. Army. He retired from the military with 28 total years of service and has been an American Legion member for 41 years.

Jamie Brassard said the American Legion, established in 1919 by President Theodore Roosevelt and founded in Gasquet in 1946, has services and activities open to military veterans regardless of whether they're members of the local post. "A lot of vets don't understand that we're not just a bunch of old drunks sitting around a bar," she said. "Heck, our bar isn't even open!"

What fun the Gasquet post may be renowned for, Brassard said, is its annual raft race in July down the Smith River, an event now in its 50th year. Plus its sponsorship of two American Legion baseball teams, one for high school players and another for players under age 14.

The American Legion offers scholarships, too, such as to Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps programs, and grants, like the \$1,500 they presented to U.S. Coast Guard members who didn't receive a paycheck during the recent federal government shutdown.

Brassard is especially proud of the 3 million hours the American Legion members dedicate to volunteer programs, among them helping vets get Veterans Administration benefits "they need and deserve."

"A lot of these guys have to go to White City or Roseburg in Oregon, or Eureka in California," she said. "That's too far for them to drive.

"Brookings has a clinic, but it's always booked solid."

Brassard said she's making it her primary project this year to ensure local veterans are counted in the national Census so their numbers show a real need for getting VA help locally. That effort includes reaching out to a number of homeless vets.

"You would not believe the number of homeless vets in this county," she said. "The vets don't want people to know they're homeless. They're embarrassed that with their VA paycheck, they can't even afford to pay rent."

Regardless of whether the vets join the Gasquet American Legion ranks during the current membership drive, said Brassard, they can count on comradeship and a helping hand from the post.