

The Damascus Veteran

*A Newsletter for Members & Friends of
Damascus American Legion Post 171 & Unit 171*

August 2026

Upcoming Events

Damascus Post and Unit 171

Post and Unit Meetings	Monday, September 14 Unit 7 pm, Post 7:30 pm
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Bingo Restarts!	Thursday, September 3
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Pancake Breakfast	Saturday, September 12
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9/11 Remembrance Ceremony, Baker Middle School	Friday, September 11
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Department of Maryland

Eastern Shore Region Golf Scramble	Monday, November 2
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Community

Red Cross Blood Drive, at Post 171	Friday, September 4
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From your Executive Committee this month...

- At the August member meeting, Treasurer Treena Wetsel proposed the budget for the 2026-2027 Legion year. Per our operating procedures, the Post membership will review and vote to approve the budget during the September member meeting.
- We are accepting recommendations for a quality firm to re-stripe the parking lot.
- We have started removal of fry and steam room equipment. We'll sell (at a good price) to commercial entities or donate to non-profits if they can use the equipment.
- The Post needs an Oratorical Chair as well as a Color Guard Captain.

*Taking care of veterans, and
taking care of each other*



Damascus American Legion Post 171
10201 Lewis Drive
Damascus, MD 20872
(301) 253-0769
legionpost171.org

Introducing the Post Commander

Hello, my name is Kevin O'Neill, and I am honored to have been selected to serve as the American Legion Damascus Post 171 Commander for the 2026–2027 legion year.

I earned my membership in the American Legion by serving in the U.S. Navy from 1977 to 1983 (yes, it was a long time ago!). I served aboard the USS Lewis and Clark (SSBN-644) as a nuclear-trained Electrician's Mate (EM1(SS)), completing five nuclear deterrent patrols out of Kings Bay, GA. I finished my last year and a half at the Newport News Shipyard while the Lewis and Clark underwent a refueling overhaul. After leaving the Navy, I earned my Electrical Engineering degree and went to work for the Department of the Navy performing Test & Evaluation on multiple types of surface ships, where I have worked for the last 30+ years. I had enough time underwater as a submariner, so when I went to civilian work for the Navy, I chose surface ships so I could actually see the sunrise and sunset while underway! During this time, I also earned my Master's in Systems Engineering from the Naval Postgraduate School.

I have been a member of Post 171 for 19 years and have been actively involved for the last 10.

One note about Bingo, which is held at the Post every Thursday night. If you are a player, come out and play! If you are a member, please come by any Thursday to help out. Bingo is what allows us to provide veterans' assistance, youth scholarships, support for our baseball team, and so much more.

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to seeing you at our upcoming Post 171 events.

Kevin O'Neill
commander@legionpost171.org

IT'S TIME TO RENEW YOUR POST 171 MEMBERSHIP

Post 171 won all the District 8 awards for membership last year, including a \$900 cash award! Thanks to everyone who got out there and recruited and retained.

We want to do it again!

If you haven't already renewed for the 2026-2027 year, now is the time! Contact 1st Vice Chuck Nyugen or Membership Chair Sam Baughman

From the Unit President

I recently heard a speaker refer to the "Ladies Auxiliary" when addressing Auxiliary members. That reference went away quite sometime ago when the rules were changed allowing all spouses to be members of the American Legion Auxiliary. Currently, there is a resolution making the rounds to allow all family members to become Auxiliary members.

We are excited about the coming year and everything we have planned. AND, it means more than just being "kitchen help!" It begins with membership. To accomplish activities, we need help.

Ideas include: monthly 171 dinners; expansion of the "Poppy Field Project;" scholarships; participation in the School Essay Contest; volunteers at Martinsburg VA Hospital; Damascus Community Fair Poster Contest; and our famous Bingo Extravaganza in the Spring.

Please join us on each Second Monday at 7:00 and lets get going!

Will Trotter
mdchaplain@comcast.net

MEET: Toby Zellers, Adjutant



U.S. Army — 4 Years Active Duty (Northeastern Bavaria)

- Service Summary Served in Military Intelligence, first with an Infantry Battalion, then an MI Battalion, and finally in the Division Automation Office. Work focused on intelligence support, analysis, and early automation systems.

Post-Service Career

- Built a long career in technology as a Systems Engineer, Pre-Sales Engineer, and Sales Executive across major hardware, software, and cloud-computing companies. Supported U.S. Federal Government customers, with significant emphasis on National Intelligence.

Personal & Hobbies

- Met his wife, Barbara, in Germany; later moved to Maryland when she was stationed at Ft. Meade. They have three adult children.
- A passionate motorcyclist, he teaches the beginner motorcycle course at Montgomery College and has toured extensively by motorcycle across Europe, South Africa, Iceland, New Zealand, Australia, and Japan.

Welcome the new leadership of Post 171

On June 6, Post 171 installed a new set of officers. In order to get to know them, this and upcoming newsletters will include a brief bio of a leader or two.

Commander	Kevin O'Neill	Commander@legionpost171.org
1 st Vice Commander	Chuck Nyugen	1stvice@legionpost171.org
2 nd Vice Commander	Mike Wright	2ndvice@legionpost171.org
Adjutant	Toby Zellers	adjutant@legionpost171.org
Treasurer	Treena Wetsel	finance@legionpost171.org
Sergeant at Arms	Jason Peterson	Sergeant-at-arms@legionpost171.org
Judge Advocate	Fred Mitchell, PPC	Judgeadvocate@mdlegion.org
Members At Large	Obed Pellegrino Dennis St Jean Paula Gill Anita Trotter, PPC	obed.pellegrino@legionpost171.org webmaster@legionpost171.org paula.gill@legionpost171.org atrotter-ppc@legionpost171.org

Other emails to know:

Use this one to send to every EC member: ExecutiveCommittee@legionpost171.org

Jim Serritella – chaplain@legionpost171.org

Keith Midberry – service@legionpost171.org

Rentals@legionpost171.org (Used by our Rental Agent, Mary Gene Martin)

Info@legionpost171.org (Used by the external community, e.g. off the Facebook page)

Scholarship@legionpost171.org

Membership@legionpost171.org

News@legionpost171.org (for newsletter input)

Celebrate Damascus!

Post 171 Color Guard represented at the parade on July 10th.

Looking good, Ryan Arnett, Scott Dallas, Mike Wright, and Troy Wentzlaff!

That's Dennis St Jean waving from the medic jeep this year!



Thank you!

Dear Members of American Legion Post 171,

I would like to sincerely thank you for giving me the opportunity to attend Boys State. It was an incredible experience that challenged me, taught me valuable leadership skills, and helped me grow personally and academically. I am truly grateful for your support and investment in my future. Without your generosity I would not have had the opportunity to participate in such a meaningful program. The lessons I learned and the friends that I have made will last me a lifetime.

Thank you, Donovan Merola
Maryland Boys State Attendee Representing Post 171



From the Adjutant

Greetings from your new Post Adjutant! I only know a handful of our post's member's because I've been "lurking" in the background since I joined.

I met PPC Kevin Mook at Damascus Days in June 2015 where he had a table set up for recruiting. I said hello to be friendly with another veteran, and he told me about the goal of the Legion and a bit about our Post. I explained that I was pretty busy with work, kids, and life in general, and I didn't have time for another activity. At the time I was the Montgomery County Nation Chief for the YMCA's Indian Princess Program, and had previously been the Committee Chair and then an Assistant Scout Master for Troop 945. PPC Kevin suggested that I could join without getting too involved, and my dues would support a very worthy cause. The annual dues were not that much, so I signed up.

Since leaving the Army in 1987, I worked as a Systems Engineer, Pre-Sales Engineer and Sales Executive in a wide range of computer hardware, software and cloud computing companies. My customers were always the US Federal Government, with considerable focus on National Intelligence. I always commuted, with jobs in Reston, Herndon, Silver Spring, and Tyson's Corner, and customers all over the DMV and nationwide.

A few years ago, I suggested to my wife Barbara that she should join Post 171. She served twice as long as I did, bringing us to Maryland where she worked at Fort Meade all the way through Desert Shield/Storm and finally got out when our son Doug was born in 1991.

Barbara became more active in the Post before I did, taking a lead in helping plan the Post Anniversary Dinner last year. When the commander sent out a message this Spring asking for volunteers to step into leadership roles that were vacant, I decided I should give this a try! Lucky for me, our Post Commander Kevin O'Neill and PPC Anita were prior Adjutants. I hope to rely on their experience and guidance.

I am an avid motorcyclist. I teach the Basic Motorcycle Rider's Course at Montgomery College in Rockville. I have toured by motorcycle all over the world to include 13 countries in Europe, South Africa, Iceland, New Zealand, Australia and Japan. My next tour is back to Japan in November. I currently have two BMWs, one here and one I keep with friends in Tucson, AZ.

Please introduce yourself to me. I love chatting about world travel, Army stories, and of course motorcycling!

Toby Zellers, Adjutant Post 171

YOUR MEMBERSHIP AT WORK

Last month, Post 171 donated \$1000 to:

- Damascus Help
- No Person Left Behind
- Warrior Canine Connection
- Damascus Volunteer Fire Department



Chaplains Corner

And so the journey begins...

It's an interesting phrase, making one think about the Journey to ____ (Destination unknown?) – And so, I present to you – The Coffee Pot!!, The Kitchen, The Journey companions you pass in the morning hallway in route to the kitchen.

Yes, my friends – little did you think about it – but every day the journey begins again – sometimes with a specific destination in mind – to an office via car travel, a grocery store aisle by aisle jaunt, or even sometimes creative or adventurous like restarting your life with a wedding ceremony – now that's a new journey together AND a lifelong adventure! (You can grin here – thinking about your wedding day, your bride and/or groom and what life's journey brought you through to this point after all these years!)

Regardless of the destination, length of time, or travel method – life's journey is best traveled with a partner. The original road of life was presented to Adam and Eve as a twosome in the Garden of Eden. And as the title suggests – And the journey begins.

In modern day terms, as you are a legionnaire – your partnership with the Post involves God, Country, and Damascus Post 171, our goals are met as a team.

The Post has various activities and committees you can support. We're in this lifeboat together (Navy guys notice the terminology).... Grab an oar, row hard, and enjoy the ride, share the event and a new journey begins. You get the picture, now get in the act!

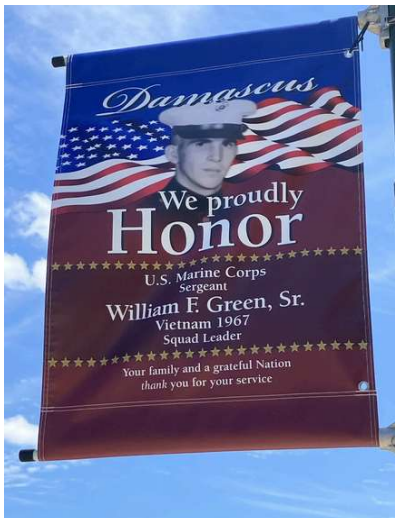


Reusing a key phrase....it fits...Bad News – Time Flies. Good News – You're the pilot!

Jim Serritella

The Hometown Heroes Banners are up in Damascus!

Thank you to the KNK Foundation for doing this for Damascus! KNK planned for and installed thirteen Hometown Heroes banners. The funds? Paid for (mostly) by the town of Damascus participation in the Damascus Mile on June 6. KNK requested that Post 171 supply the nominees for this first round. Here's a few banners. Go up town to see the rest!



MEET: Treena Greene Wetsel, Treasurer

My public service began in 1985 where I served 4 years on active duty in the Marine Corps providing maintenance, issuance and disposition of ammunition. I also spent 11 years as a reservist in the Army. There I had 2 different positions: light wheel maintenance mechanic, where I serviced and drove military vehicles that were 5 tons and below; and the other as the Chaplains Assistant.

I had a 20-year career in the federal government, where I retired as the Director of Acquisition Services providing management and oversight of a large staff of contract specialists, interns and contractors and approximately \$860 million dollars in government contracts.



Since retirement, I enjoy sewing, gardening, crafting and volunteering when I'm able.



MEET: Dennis St. Jean, Post EC At Large and Webmaster

U.S. Air Force, 1967–1974 — Computer Operations

- 1967–1969, Ent AFB (Colorado Springs): Operated IBM mainframes supporting and backing up NORAD.
- 1969–1970, Tan Son Nhut AB (Saigon): Mainframe operations for personnel, logistics, and aircraft maintenance reporting during Vietnam.
- 1970–1974, Pentagon & DCA (Reston, VA): Air Force Data Services Center; later TDY to Defense Communications Agency providing computer operations and reports on missing POWs.

Post-Military Career

- 1974–1983: GS-7 computer operator at DCA, Reston, working on Honeywell mainframes.
- 1983–2007: Chief of Computer Operations, U.S. Secret Service, overseeing mission-critical systems and transition to servers/PCs.
- 2007–2013: Full-time grandparent daycare for three grandchildren.
- 2013–Present: Part-time Wegmans Produce.
- 2018–Present: Grandparent daycare again for two younger grandchildren.
- 2025: Joined Post 171, using computer expertise to support members.

Reliable go-to for Windows PC help — dedicated support and user education.



MEET: Michael Lynn Wright, 2nd Vice and Building & Grounds

U.S. Navy, 1979–1985 — Missile Technician

- Served aboard USS John Adams (SSBN-620, Gold Crew) as a Missile Technician.
- Fully qualified submariner in one patrol, earning Dolphins and a Captain's Commendation.
- Qualified as a Weaponeer, standing watches in the Missile Compartment, Fire Control, Sonar, and Torpedo Room.
- Completed advanced weapons qualifications: Roving Patrol, Assistant Launcher Control Officer, and Launcher Control Officer.
- Scored in the top 7% Navy-wide on PTEP testing; meritoriously advanced to MT2.

Post-Service Career

- Joined VITRO (Silver Spring, MD) as an electrical engineer creating One-Function Diagrams for the Submarine Fleet; hired on the spot after demonstrating system mastery.
- Transitioned to Computer Support, beginning a long IT career.
- Later joined NIH as an IT technician, serving in DCRT, NIDA, and NEI.
- Retired after 34 years of federal service.



Hobbies & Skills

- Lifelong computer enthusiast — building, designing, and troubleshooting systems.
- Hands-on problem solver with broad skills in computers, plumbing, electrical, networks, and automotive work.
- Known for patience, persistence, and willingness to help anyone with technical issues.
- Recognized at NIH for exceptional user support and dedication.

The 2026 Department of Maryland Convention is in the books!

Convention Theme: The 250th Anniversary of the United States

Post 171 Representatives: Kevin, Anita, Fred, Mike, Toby, Chuck, Will, and Sandy.



Resolutions passed, relevant to the Department, included wording concerning the term of office for Region, District, and Department Executive Committee members, as well as conditions under which they can more easily be removed from their positions. Mostly this has to do with dereliction of duty...some "white hats" and Regional representatives take the honored position but then don't attend any meetings or accomplish anything. This blocks the spot from someone who wants to do both!

The Convention attendees also discussed a National resolution to remove gender obstacles as pertains to membership in the Auxiliary. The changes would allow all family members of service veterans to join the Auxiliary. We'll see if this passes in the upcoming National Convention.

Fred Mitchell was re-elected to the position of Department Judge Advocate. Congratulations, Fred!

MEET: Jim Serritella, Post 171 Chaplain



US Air Force, 1961–1965

Received a Congressional appointment to the Air Force Academy but ultimately served as an enlisted airman after not passing the final acceptance test.

Worked as a Systems Analyst / Computer Programmer, the junior member of a worldwide logistics-automation team led by a protective O-6 Colonel. The job meant constant travel: get a call, grab the go-bag, get on a plane, and fix the problem. Assignments included US Training Command (Lackland AFB), Headquarters USAFE (Lindsay Air Station, Wiesbaden), and TDY to 17 bases across the U.S., Panama, and Europe.

Post-Service Career

Joined UNIVAC (now UNISYS), continuing the same automation work. Between late Air Force service and early contractor life, Jim rarely slept in the same bed for more than 60 days. Earned an American Airlines 100,000-mile certificate in just 18 months.

Became an analyst, programmer, and consultant in 1969, spending 50+ years in systems work, proposal management, and major contract development. Wins ranged from a \$500K single-person contract to a \$1B intelligence-community award for a team of four prime contractors and 27 subcontractors.

Today Jim is retired after the passing of his wife, Betty, in January 2025. He is active in St. Paul Catholic Church, American Legion Post 171, and his local community.

American Legion Post 171 Damascus, Maryland

Website: legionpost171.org

Facebook: [Damascus American Legion Post 171](https://www.facebook.com/DamascusAmericanLegionPost171)

Instagram: [Post171baseball](https://www.instagram.com/Post171baseball)

Department of Maryland: mdlegion.org

National American Legion: legion.org