

Photos: Patriotic Flag Day Celebration As Southold American Legion Welcomes New Officers

By Lisa Finn (Patch Staff) - June 15, 2016

SOUTHOLD, NY - Patriotism filled the hearts of those in the crowd of more than 200 who turned out on Flag Day at the American Legion Griswold Terry Glover Post 803 in Southold for installation dinner of 2016 executive officers.

The event honored Charles J. Sanders, commander elect, as well as outgoing Commander George R. Sullivan and Interim Commander Earl Brock. Also feted were 50-year members Robert Villa, Ken Dickerson and Henry Santacroce.

Surveying the packed room, Sanders said the turnout "was truly amazing," and meant a lot to Legionnaires. He kicked off the evening by giving a history of Flag Day.

Sanders said when our nation was founded, forefathers could never have imagined technology such as television or radar or putting a man on the moon. All of what we've accomplished, he said, is "only possible because of our freedoms — the freedom to dream." Chaplain Jeff Chagnon led the group in prayer and took time to remember the victims of the Orlando tragedy.

Southold Town Supervisor Scott Russell said, of the Flag Day event, "It was an important night. It is fitting that was held on Flag Day and only a few weeks after Memorial Day. We were able to honor the men and women who never made it home and tonight we were able to honor those who did. We should show them our gratitude each and every day."

After dinner, Past National Vice Commander Bob Neville led the installation of officers. New officers include Commander Charles J. Sanders, First Vice Commander Jeff Chagnon, Adjutant David DeFriest, Finance Officer Ray Terry, Sgt. At Arms Joe St. Pierre, and Service Officer David Braslow.

Former Commander Awards were given to George R. Sullivan and Earl Brock by Russell and Angela Noncarrow, legislative aide for New York State Assemblyman Anthony Palumbo.

Sanders spoke of the four pillars of the American Legion, the organization's primary focus, including Americanism, national security, veteran affairs, and, in his opinion, a critical branch, children and youth, he said.

Sanders was deployed twice in Afghanistan, in 2010 and 2012, and most recently, at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba, with the joint task force detention operation, returning home in January, 2015.

As incoming commander, his mission focuses on four lines of effort, including membership, financial stability, a building program, and community outreach, he said.

Executive Board awards were distributed, and Major Bill Grigonis, head of the Southold-Mattituck-Greenport Navy Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps, or NJROTC, as well as Senior Chief Petty Officer Charles Turner and his wife, Felicity were also honored for their work with young people.

Southold Town Councilman Jim Dinizio said it was heartening to see the crowd attend an American Legion event, when many posts are struggling to recruit a new generation. Sanders, he said, "has a lot of energy" and will bring new membership to the fold.

Southold Town Councilmen Bob Ghosio and Bill Ruland, Town Councilwoman Jill Doherty, Highway Superintendent Vinny Orlando, Assessor Kevin Webster,



Government Liaison Denis Noncarrow and Police Chief Martin Flatley also attended the event.

Joseph St. Pierre, who made each of the poppies in the memorial field by hand, said the night was particularly meaningful. "It's just a great gathering of my brothers," he said. Of the many, many hours he spends caring for the grounds and building, he laughed. "They're going to put a room here for me." Work is ongoing on the parking lot and curbs outside, he noted.

St. Pierre's wife Donna said the large group present Tuesday was "exciting. We're turning over a new leaf here." With new membership needed, the Flag Day event was a harbinger of good things to come, she said.

Students from Mattituck-Cutchogue, Southold and Greenport schools were awarded scholarships by Former Commander Tom Reese.

Flag Day, Sanders said, holds deep meaning in the United States. "As Ronald Regan said, there is no stronger symbol of our American values and what we stand for than the American flag. And for it to be in any way tarnished, by people stepping on it or burning it in public, is a very poor example of our First Amendment rights."

Great things have been happening at the Legion recently, including a "Memorial Field of Poppies" lovingly created by Southold's Griswold-Terry-Glover American Legion's Auxiliary Unit 803 to honor veterans.

No one in the room, however, forgot the sacrifices made by the many who've given their lives to protect the nation's freedoms. At the front of the room stood a table with an empty chair, draped with a jacket adorned with a silhouette that read, "You are not forgotten."

NOTE: Charles Sanders is a Licensed Associate Real Estate Broker with Town & Country real Estate.