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### **American Legion post celebrates 75th anniversary**

By **DAVID EMANUEL** Staff Writer

Bowie's Disney-Bell Post 66 of the American Legion celebrated its 75th anniversary recently, and it was an event that went far beyond a normal dinner, according to Adjutant J.D. Larson.

"This was more than speeches and frivolity as it recognizes the sacrifices made by our servicemen and women since 1919 to protect our nation and ensure the freedoms that we enjoy each and every day," he said.

Legion Department of Maryland Commander David Schaaf also participated in the ceremonies honoring the veterans.

Twelve residents of Charlotte Hall Veterans Home attended and were recognized for their contributions to the country. They represented military service from World War II, Korea, Vietnam and the Global War on Terrorism.

Also honored for lengthy support of American Legion programs were Post 66 Commander Tom Murphy (40 years), George Thornberry (50) and Clyde Durst (60).

Recognition of military members listed as prisoners of war and missing in action is an integral part of post functions, and a major highlight this year's program was the presentation of a Certificate of Appreciation to post member and Pearl Harbor survivor Jack Wagner.

Indeed the 75th anniversary theme, "Heritage and Heroes," was evident.

"This was a really good event. I enjoyed it," said Wagner. "It means a lot to be honored like this."

Wagner, who was a speaker at a recent ceremony in Greenbelt, said he likes to instill in people "just what the situation was at the time of my experiences during World War II and what occurred with us, and how we handled it."

And the importance of patriotism.

"I would like to see more of a government where the people

can really get together and talk," he said. "I think the biggest problem that I see is that the government does one thing and a lot of the people over there think completely different. My son and I, a Republican, we argue quite a bit. I personally don't think they needed to go into this war. When I talk to the people that I used to fly with, they feel the same way. Afghanistan, yes, was a necessity, and they should have stayed there to complete the objective. It's just not working in Iraq."

As with all war veterans, especially of earlier wars, many of the them aren't around anymore.

"Unfortunately, so many have died," he said. "To this day, I still think about Dec. 7. I have several bad occasions and I still remember. I have a very close friend who lives in Tennessee, a former pilot. I talk to him every couple of weeks, and we talk about this and that, and our experiences. You keep in pretty close contact. You have to."

Said Schaaf, "What made this celebration particularly memorable were the Charlotte Hall veterans and a survivor such as Mr. Wagner."

"Just to talk to them, and for them to see other faces and talk to other veterans, is something quite memorable," said Schaaf. "They are just amazing people, and they served before half of us were born. They are remarkable."

Post 66 also saw its anniversary as an opportunity to present Schaaf with a \$1,000 check for the Heroes to Hometowns program, established to assist service members and their families who are recuperating from wounds received as a result of their participation in the Global War on Terrorism.

"Funding like this helps, because it doesn't look like this war is going to stop. It's a different war, and different generation, but we're all brothers and sisters together. We're all veterans. Once you're a veteran, you're always a veteran. And you always help each other out. I am proud of the people, these dedicated people, and proud of the posts like Disney-Bell for what they've done."

A brief history of post

According to the Disney-Bell Web site, in the late '20s and early '30s the World War I veterans were having very hard times. In Bowie many had been gassed and wounded. There were no VA hospitals, no bonus, no compensation, plus the Depression. Some were unable to do manual work. Things were hard for them.

It was soon learned by our Bowie vets, the way to get their voices heard was through proper channels - congressmen, senators and the president.

The American Legion was founded March 15, 1919 in Paris,

France and was having some success, but it did not have the membership to be heard loud and clear, so the national organization was out recruiting. It took 15 wartime veterans to form a local post, so the Bowie veterans recruited the necessary 15 locally, and a temporary charter was granted Feb. 20, 1932 to Bowie Post No, 66, as it was the 66th post formed in Maryland.

The first meetings were held in members' homes, then the IOOF Hall, Aaron's Lunch Room and then the Bowie School (which is now Huntington Community Center). In 1948, they were granted 7.6 acres from the Department of Interior by an act of Congress. Day rooms from Ft. Belvoir were dismantled and moved to the site on Bowie-Laurel Road and reassembled. Over the years these buildings were replaced by what is now being used.

The name of the post was changed after World War II, naming it after the first man killed from the Bowie area in World War I, James Disney, and the first killed from the Bowie area in World War II, Sylvester Bell.

In December 1941 a meeting was held at the home of Ora Overholser for the formation of an Auxiliary Unit to Post 66. Due to the wartime rationing, this was put on hold. The ladies continued to assist the post in all its activities however, and Disney-Bell Unit No. 66, American Legion Auxiliary, was finally chartered in June 1944.

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