

Legion commander putting the pieces back together

NORTHWOOD

BELMONT — Bob Stevens, commander of American Legion Post 58 in Belmont, is trying to come up with creative ways to drum up support for his crumbling post, and he's starting with a 300-piece puzzle.

"My main concern is the same that's going on in every post in New Hampshire and probably across the country," Stevens said. "The older (members) are dying off, and the younger ones aren't interested."

Stevens said he's not about to sit by idly and watch Belmont's post, which started in 1919, fall apart. Right now, the post has 59 members, but only about four to eight attend the weekly Monday meetings. Most are members by name only and are not active, Stevens said.

"We can't seem to get the older members that are in the Legion involved," Stevens said. "My main objective is to get more people who do belong to come in and help."

New members would help too, he said. His research has shown that Belmont has 417 residents who are eligible for the veterans' tax exemption, and he estimates that although about half of them are probably wives of veterans and can't join the American Legion, the rest can.

Without help, Stevens worries that the Legion won't be able to continue



PHOTO BY MEGHAN SIEGLER

The American Legion is selling this puzzle of historical Belmont.

supporting the Town of Belmont and its children. Traditionally, the post gives annual scholarships to Belmont students, helps youth organizations like the Girl and Boy Scouts, hands out sportsmanship awards, and pro-

vides flags throughout the town, including at the library and the fire department.

"The town in the long run is going to lose out," Stevens said.

His most recent effort to

bring attention and funds to the American Legion is a puzzle. After driving by Piece Time Puzzles in ~~Northwood~~ Northwood, which custom-makes puzzles from pictures, Stevens asked a friend of his for some old pictures of Belmont. He came up with several pictures ranging from the mid 1800s to the early 1900s, arranged them on a piece of paper, and brought it to Piece Time. The puzzle-makers blew up the photo arrangement and turned it into a 300-piece color puzzle.

Stevens brought the first order to Town Hall.

"We ordered a dozen, and they're all gone," he said. "They're going like crazy. Anybody that sees them, buys them."

Stevens has already ordered 50 more puzzles based on the initial response and hopes to sell them all, for \$20 each. The money raised from the sales will go directly back to the community in the form of scholarships and support of various youth or town or-

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ganizations, Stevens said.

The American Legion is allocated \$1,000 each year from the town, and it earns approximately \$3,000 a year in interest from the sale of its old American Legion building (meetings are now held at the Belmont Senior Center). That money doesn't go very far, Stevens said, and any extra money they raise will help the town.

For example, after the annual Memorial Day parade this year, the Legion is giving children under 12 tickets for a free ice cream cone. The Legion has teamed up with Jordan's, the fire department and the police department in an effort to get much of the community involved. Any child under 12 who visits the fire department after the parade will get a ticket for a free kiddie cone; they'll also get the chance to see the department's new fire truck.

"The fire department would love to have them come," Stevens said.

The Legion had a similar

program last year, but after Jordan's reported giving out hundreds of free ice cream cones that were meant for children to parents and grandparents, the rules have changed. The police department, which printed the tickets, included the age limit of 12, and the tickets are numbered, so only 125 will be given out. Stevens said he's sure that will be enough to get all eligible kids a free cone.

The parade is scheduled for May 26 at 1 p.m.

For more information about the post or to buy a puzzle, call Stevens at 267-6050 or Beebab-AF57-Qmsn

