



The Legion Link

Full Speed Ahead for Veterans

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Jay Conti Sr.
Department Commander
Commander@floridalegion.org
BRAVO-ZULU
407.247.5232

I would like to congratulate all of your recently elected officers! Your post should be supporting the Legion Family concept! At your post The American Legion, The American Legion Auxiliary and The Sons of The American Legion should be unified as one.

Detachment Commander Kirk Miller of The Sons of The American Legions theme is "Building Bridges" so our Veterans can cross. Department President Erna Schwabe of The American Legion Auxiliary's theme is "Lighting the way for Veterans" with the "Light House" concept so our Veterans can safely navigate. The Legionnaires of The American Legion Department of Florida; cannot ask for any better than that so we can go "FULL SPEED AHEAD" for Veterans Rights, for Veterans Dependents, for Veterans Health Care, for Better Equipment for the American Fighting Men & Woman!

FULL SPEED AHEAD in Fixing this Dysfunctional VA Health System!

FULL SPEED AHEAD for Veterans, Patriotism, Children & Youth & our National Security!

Boy, have we been "BUSY" since the Department Convention! Installations, Boys State, Planning, Community Events and AREA Training. So far, as of this writing, we have conducted training in 3 areas and have trained over 375 Legion Family members. With 3 more Areas to go we are looking at training a total of 800-1,000 Legion Family members. Something we are doing differently this year is try to include a Community

event either before or after the training session. This way the local Posts can show the Communities what we are all about.

We just had a very successful 71st session of Florida's Boys State with 530 young men from all across Florida attending. The future leaders of our country didn't disappoint you! The Delegates that you hand-picked at the Post level did an AWESOME job! I had the pleasure in addressing them their first day and challenged them to be the man that the Legionnaires saw in them! In the end they did just that! With Simeon Daferede from Winter Haven (Post #8 Delegate) being selected as the Governor of Boys State. I would like to thank ALL the Volunteers' who took the time out of their busy schedule to make the 71st session of Boys State a successes; especially Carol Polk!

On July 4th, I attended the Safety Harbor 4th of July Parade and what a great time it was. The entire community was on hand for this event, but it would not have been possible without The American Legion Family of Post 238 Safety Harbor and Ruth Burgess the Parade Coordinator. **BRAVO ZULU** to Post 238 Safety Harbor Family and Ruth Burgess for her Coordination efforts in reminding the Community what being an American is ALL about. **"FOR GOD AND COUNTRY"**

UPDATE!

Throw out all old materials.

Communication is the key to keeping our programs active.

Make sure your program chairmen have all the material they need.

Send in the Packet Request forms;

Administrative Manual
pages 12-14.

Jim Ramos
1st Vice Commander
1stvicecommander@legionmail.org

Thank you Florida Legionnaires for letting me service you again. I will be there to assist you, your Post and the Department with all that's needed to get the job done right. All Area Training is going very well. We have done Southwestern Area, Eastern Area and this weekend to the Southern Area. Over 300 Legionnaires are happy with the training. There will be more training and membership. We have an excellent team to move Florida up with all the programs and membership. All the information you and your Post will need to become a 105% Post and help the Department come up to number one again.

Our Department Commander, Jay Conti Sr., is looking for good Legionnaires to assist their Post to become better as we move forward this year. I know we can do it together.

If you or your Post need's assist PLEASE just ask. My cell is (352) 226-4370 and email is above. Always with "Legion Pride"



Joe Magee
2nd Vice Commander
2ndvicecommander@legionmail.org

Well, here we are, the beginning of a new year and what a start, especially for this Legionnaire. I start out the first day of the Convention and my wife falls and breaks her hip. I would like to thank all you for your telephone calls, cards and prayers. She is doing well and on the road to recovery.

Next we had an election for a first ever position of Department of Florida 2nd Vice Commander and WOW what an election it turned out to be; making history along the way. Why not considering it was the FIRST. It seems like it was the only way it should have been.

The hoopla of the convention and elections is over. I returned home for a couple of days and then down to work. Off to Ft. Myers for a ball game and set up for Membership on Friday night. However, we got washed out. Oh my, what a thunder storm endured before I called it a night. Next morning off to Post 103 Punta Gorda for the Area Training Program which was well attended.

The following week off to the Eastern Area. I set up membership at the Ball Game in Port St. Lucie and training on Saturday at Post 117 Palm Bay. Following that it was off to Sanford for Sunday at Post 53 to complete the Eastern Area Training.

Southern Area training was held at Post 142 on Saturday followed by a District 9 Meeting on Sunday.

Northern Area Training consisted of District 3 and 4 at Post 16 on the 26th and on the 27th Districts 5 and 17 at Post 129. During some of the spare time between the training sessions, there were various installations so off time was minimum.

As you can see, we as a Team have been busy. However, you disregard how busy you are when you look over the audience and see expressions of gratification on their faces and know that you have reached them.

The position of 2nd Vice Commander is new, as you know, and the job description is that of Training. I would like to put it in a simpler term, I am here to help you. For God and Country

Bob Brewster
Department 3rd Vice Commander
3rdvicecommander@legionmail.org

First, I want to thank all of you for supporting me and voting me into this new position as 3rd Vice Commander Department of Florida. I promised you at the Convention to do my very best and prove to you that your vote was not wasted. I also stated that I would work very hard in order to encourage others to vote for me next time.

My main job is to promote Legion programs throughout all the Areas, Districts, and every Post in the state. As you know, membership is a program. We have others who will be talking and working with you on membership all year long, so I will leave that alone. In August, a lot of us will be attending the National Convention in Charlotte, NC. Also most schools in the state of Florida will be starting the school year. This is the time to get into the schools and make contacts with administration, teachers, coaches, ROTC instructors, and so on. Let them know we have programs like Oratorical, Boy's State, Girl's State, and other programs where the students can earn scholarship money. If one person turns you off, try some of the others. Don't forget the ROTC programs.

At the kindergarten, 1st & 2nd grades, talk about our American Legion coloring books. I also believe we still have a stock of the old Halloween Safety coloring books. The sooner we get started on our programs, the more successful we will be. I will be wherever you are to help you with your programs. I work for you. You can reach me at my home phone which is 904-272-1619 or my cell which is 904-635-4492. Let's all go full speed ahead and make this year the best year ever!

Dennis R. Boland
National Executive Committeeman
NEC@legionmail.org

TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY (TBI) AND POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)

The American Legion has continued to be concerned with the unprecedented numbers of veterans returning from the Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation New Dawn (OND) with Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which have been called the "signature wounds" of these conflicts.

The American Legion convened a TBI and PTSD Committee in 2010 "to investigate existing science and procedures and alternative methods for treating TBI and PTSD.

During the three year study, the committee held six meetings and met with leading authorities in the DoD, VA and personally interviewed veterans.

The TBI and PTSD Committee found:

Most of the existing research for the last several years has only validated the current evidence-based treatments

Those treatments are defined by DoD/VA's Joint Clinical Practice Guidelines as – cognitive processing therapy, prolonged exposure therapy and antidepressants.

There seems to be no fast track mechanism within DoD/VA for employing innovative or novel therapies in a standardized way.

While a number of VA Medical Centers offer some sort of Complementary and Alternative Medicine, it is not offered in any uniform or consistent manner within DoD or VA's 152 VA Medical Centers across the country.

The TBI and PTSD Committee recommended:

Congress provide oversight and funding to DoD/VA for innovative TBI and PTSD research currently being used in the private sector, such as hyperbaric oxygen therapy, virtual reality exposure therapy and other non-pharmacological treatments.

Congress increase the budgets for DoD/VA to improve the research, screening, diagnosis and treatment and direct DoD/VA to develop joint offices for collaboration between DoD/VA researches.

DoD/VA accelerate research efforts to properly diagnose and develop evidence-based treatments for TBI and PTSD.

The American Legion believe that all possibilities should be considered in the attempt to find treatments and cures for these conditions affecting significant numbers of veterans, including alternative medicine. And, if shown to be effective, these treatments and cures should be made available to all veterans. The American Legion has created a permanent TBI and PTSD committee to continue to build upon our knowledge and understanding of TBI and PTSD and to provide Congress, DOD and VA with the data and recommendations they need to effectively treat veterans.

BRAVO ZULU PIN AWARDS CORNER

The "BRAVO ZULU" award is the Department Commanders Version of the "Billy Award" and is awarded to a Legion Family member for Outstanding Service of Excellence!



In the United States Navy, it is a common practice for the Commodore or Fleet Admiral to signal ships that have performed exceptionally well with the "BRAVO and ZULU" flags. These two flags displayed together mean "Well Done"!

BRAVO ZULU AWARDS to Date:

Larry Sheets, Jim Ramos, Steve Newman, Mike Seidel, Ruth Burgess, Mike McDaniel, Richard Izzy, & Tom Gora.

Shelli Romeu
Department Historian
historian@legionmail.org

For those who may not yet know, the Department website has a link to download a new manual for Historians (both Legion and ALR) as well as a Centennial History manual (found in the last part of the Historian Manual), which are under the "Resources" tab, "Guides and Manual", "Post Manuals". Please look these over – for those seasoned Historians, your feedback would be greatly appreciated on what perhaps should be changed or addressed more in depth. My goals are to assist you in getting the best Post or ALR Chapter History prepared, and getting each Post History completed on the Centennial Website. I am looking forward to the History Narrative and Yearbook contest next year – I am sure that there will be some very good entries! Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Steven Newman
Department Chaplain
Chaplain@legionmail.org

Greetings my fellow Legionnaires. I want to thank each and every one of you for giving me the opportunity to once again serve as your Department Chaplain for the upcoming year 2014-2015. I have been blessed to meet such wonderful and caring veterans and Legionnaires throughout our state that again I feel honored and privileged to serve you. As throughout the previous year, I want to continue my Chaplain Training initiative to those districts that did not get the chance from last year. The response to last years' training was just great. I would like to get the same kind of response this year. The chaplain book that was published will also be updated and sent out. There will be a chaplain Training class at the November Conference in Orlando. Have a wonderful and blessed year. For God and Country

Jerry Brandt
Children & Youth Program Chairman
CY@floridalegion.org

Nancy L. Thomas
Post Development/Revitalization Chairperson
863-618-6738

Legionnaires, I have really big shoes to fill, so I need everyone to assist with Children & Youth this year and to report it, not only to the Department, but also to your Post and Community. Please, do not be **THE BEST KEPT SECRET IN YOUR COMMUNITY**. Let everyone know what you are doing for our Children & Youth, especially the local community and YOUR POST. You will be surprised at how many will volunteer to help, once the word gets out.

In order to be recognized for your monthly Children & Youth Post participation, you will also need to track it for a year-end report. PLEASE do a monthly report. These reports should be sent to your District Children & Youth Chairman as well to your Post Commander. The Semi-Annual Report is due December 16, 2014 and the Annual Report is due May 16, 2015. These forms will be available through your District Commander.

District and Post Chairpersons, you should work with your Auxiliary, SAL and Chapter's Children and Youth representatives to plan a better Children and Youth Program with your American Legion Post's, Unit's, Squadron's and Chapter's, and work together. The more volunteers you have, you will find how easy it is to make the programs work.

Plan your C&Y activities at least two months ahead and order your resources early. If products are in short supply, go to National's website under "Media" then "Programs" and download the materials you need and print them at your leisure. Currently you should be planning for September and October. Do you already have your Legion Coloring Books?

Important C&Y Program Dates

Posts are encouraged to seek out Florida's Senior High School candidates to apply for the American Legion General Scholarship. See your Post Administrative Manual for the application. Candidate applications are due at Department no later than March 1, 2015.

Florida's Children & Youth Fund Grant applications are due to Department no later than May 1, 2015. Grant requirements are located under Department of Florida Programs Link, Children and Youth Fund, on Department's website.

Please let me know if you have any Ideas or suggestions to make this year a great year for our program.

A new year is upon us and it will be a wonderful year!

After going to Post 29 in Miami in May and seeing how well this event went for the Post, it made me excited to be able to assist your Post to do a "revitalization". Part of revitalization is membership, however, there is more to helping your Post grow and develop into a place where Veterans and their families want to go and do things.

Do you advise your members that their membership expires on December 31st and help them to renew prior to that time? It is important to make sure that all of your members are aware of this. Do you have time set aside to make phone calls to each of your members who may not have paid at the time and date? Do you use Mylegion.org to see if there are members of the American Legion in your area who do not have a permanent Post? It is a good place to find members.

When your community has an event do you have a table with brochures, applications, and information regarding the American Legion available and someone willing to talk to the Veterans in your area?

Have you had a couple (man and woman) come into your lounge and only ask if the male is a Veteran and not ask the female? Please ask both! Then you may end up with two members rather than losing both because you did not ask both of them. Please do not forget that Women are Veterans too.

It is strongly recommended that when you sign a new member up and/or have a member transfer from Post 400 that you ask for proof of their service to our Country. In recent events within the American Legion there are circumstances where a DD 214 may have been altered. Also, when you have an individual who stops into your Post and decides to transfer to your Post, please request a copy of their documents. You do not have to maintain the copy, however, you really should see it and review all of its information.

Examples of the above are: a member of another Post moved from one city to yours, they decide they wish to transfer and when asked for their DD 214 it was discovered that the Veteran missed the eligibility dates by 17 days. He should immediately be advised that he/she does not qualify. However, this person was asked if he might have a father or grandfather who may have served and if he did, he was offered an opportunity to become a member of the Sons of the American Legion. This also goes for our female veterans, as well. A male and his wife comes into your Post and starts talking about his service. You discover that the individual is not old enough to have served in the Era that he claims to have been in, ask for that DD 214 or discharge information. If they do not qualify, they should be offered an opportunity to become members of the American Legion Auxiliary.

Should you have the desire to have assistance in revitalizing your Post, please contact Department or, should you have a question, please call me. If the phone isn't answered right away, please leave a message.

Let's make 2014-2015 the best year for the Department of Florida and your Post in membership.

We're Going Back To School



60% Goal

September 18, 2014

Membership Report as of July 30, 2014

Steve Shuga
 Department Membership Chairman
membership@legionmail.org

Rise-n-Shine with Membership! This is the slogan for the current membership year. We have a daunting task ahead of us and with the total effort of our American Legion family we will overcome any shortfalls and triumph together. The first Bravo Zulu (BZ) standard is rapidly approaching us on **September 3, 2014** at **60%** and the first Special Incentive on **September 18, 2014** for those at **63%**. Will your Post be among those that are leading the state?

We are already working hard to ensure that the membership references and resources are available so your success tools are in place to meet and exceed this year's goals. It takes total effort at the Post level and at times increased motivation, suggestions, leadership, and guidance to exceed all expectations for the coming year. Remember, your Department Membership Chairman works for every Florida American Legionnaire!

Area trainings are underway and the responses from the Legionnaires have been overwhelming. There is a mind and gut wrenching hunger for information and we are delivering it! Your responses from the critiques have enable your Department Training Team to re-evaluate this year's training package ensuring that it is a very effective resource tool. District meetings have begun and the membership plan of action is being reinforced, communication is expressed both ways and the incentives, challenges, and goals are being targeted by every single Legionnaire.

Remember to always plan, review at least two (2) months in advance. Remember to be flexible as situations and events do change on short notice. Be prepared at all times to include a Membership Platform (booth, table, or tent) at every event. Be prepared to be inside or outside.

Seeking ideas that will draw members to our American Legion Posts? How about a parade float that is simple, an attention grabber, and effective? Or how about carrying signs on a stick or banner that encourages wartime veterans to join The American Legion? The ideas are endless and we must do what it takes to gain new members. Promote the \$25 Gift Membership application! Everyone gains with this option!

Being successful is a common thread between us. Every Post, District, and Area events that are being planned, should include a membership booth/table. Your Department Membership Chairman can make a difference at your event with a lasting first impression to the public and mutual American Legionnaire family support. Got Membership? I have the resources to prevent defeat! Your Department Mobile Membership Package awaits support requests from all over the state of Florida.

Let's be successful, maintain growth in our Posts, encourage others to support our goals, do our very best to fulfill the four pillars of The American Legion. **Rise-n-Shine with Membership!**

District/ Area	Commander	Goal	Rec'd	% Goal
6	Thomas Biddle	11,734	3,886	33.12
8	Douglas Deierlein	8,266	2,640	31.94
15	Jose Romeu	5,509	1,671	30.33
13	Andrew Burkett	9,421	2,823	29.96
17	Michael Wolohan	4,113	1,221	29.69
4	Sherry Hayes-Luzader	3,924	1,128	28.75
12	Ronald Saxby	8,938	2,522	28.22
9	James Tewes	4,111	1,084	26.37
5	Thomas Gora	8,127	2,079	25.58
7	Charles Giffin	3,848	971	25.23
16	Thomas Zbikowski	12,099	2,709	22.39
1	Lawrence Carpenter	6,417	1,429	22.27
11	Arie Bruce	4,028	848	21.05
3	Randall White	1,797	345	19.20
2	Willie Jackson	1,416	254	17.94
14	Gary Decker	3,139	471	15.01
Eastern	Albert Diaz	20,672	6,408	31.00
SW	John Dollinger	17,687	5,463	30.89
Northern	Gerald Montgomery	17,961	4,773	26.57
Central	Eunice Butts	21,456	5,351	24.94
Western	Verna Joyce	7,833	1,683	21.49
Southern	William Johnson	11,278	2,403	21.31
Department			26,081	
Post 400		12,067	5,627	46.63
Post 208		3,181	1,227	38.57
Totals		111,525	32,935	29.53

Stanley Gold
Dept. National Legislative Chairman
786.423.2458

On June 17th, President Obama signed into law HR1726 which gave the Congressional gold Medal to Veterans of the 65th Infantry Regiment (known as the Borinqueneers) for their distinguished service during the Korean War. The National Chairman, Frank Madina, of that group presented Michael McDaniel and I with certificate awards for the work our Department did to help encourage all 29 members of Congress to co-sponsor this bill. Florida was the first state to have 100% backing of this bill.

It is so important that all Department and Post Officers read the Department and National web sites regarding legislation and relay that information to their members. We must all remember the one thing all benefits given to us is by action of Congress. They can give us or even take away what was given if we do not have the proper support in the field to contact them with our wishes.

On September 26th I will be in Normandy, France and anyone who has someone at the cemetery there call me. I will try to take a picture for you.

There is always so much going on in the legislation on the National level. The following article by Senator Bernie Sanders, Chairman Senate Veterans Affairs Committee. I believe you should support him.

Sen. Sanders Seeks New VA Funding Compromise

By Leo Shane III

A push by Veterans Affairs Department officials for billions in new funding to hire more doctors may upend congressional efforts for a wide-reaching VA reform package that appeared all but finished just a few weeks ago.

On Wednesday, Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., said he wants to include portions of VA's new \$17.6 billion funding request in a larger veterans omnibus bill that is already being finalized by a House-Senate conference committee.

That measure already comes with a \$35 billion price tag that senators have questioned and that House members have insisted must be paid for with budget offsets.

Sanders would not put a cost estimate on his idea for a new bill, but said he expected all of the items would cost far less than \$35 billion – a figure he noted both chambers have already initially approved.

"Nobody gets everything they want," he said, promising cuts to what VA has asked for. "But I think we can get that number down, and believe we can still put together a strong bill."

But House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Rep. Jeff Miller, R-Fla., has already publicly balked at the new funding request, saying Congress has received few details on how the money will be spent.

"I am committed to giving VA the resources it needs to provide our veterans with the care and benefits they have earned," he said in a statement last week. "But if there's one thing we've learned over the last few months, it's that we can't trust VA's numbers."

In testimony before the Senate, Acting VA Secretary Sloan Gibson said the \$17.6 billion would be used to hire about 10,000 clinicians over the next three years and secure more space for medical appointments through leases, VA facility improvements and new construction.

He insisted the moves would help cut down on veterans' medical appointment wait times not just in the short-term but also for years to come.

Gibson is scheduled to brief House lawmakers on the funding request Thursday morning.

Congress has only a few legislative days left before an extended summer break begins Aug. 2. Any work left undone would not be finalized until mid-September at the earliest, and more likely would sit until after the November mid-term elections.

That gives the veterans' legislation conference committee about a week to not only finalize the new funding plans but also find a compromise on offsets to pay for the measure – issues that have remained unresolved since June.

Sanders said not getting the work done before the August break would be "a disgrace."

"We should be able to come together on this," he said. "If there's a will, we can do it. If there's not, we will fail."

Success can't make you happy, but happiness
makes you a success!

~ unknown ~

**Roy Havekost,
Social Media Chairman
socialmedia@legionmail.org**

Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Roy Havekost and I am a veteran of the Vietnam Era, having served in the U.S. Navy. I have only been a member of the American Legion for eight (8) years, having joined Post 233 in the 5th District, Department of Florida. During that time, I have served as an elected officer for the past seven (7) years from Executive Committee member to Commander, and I am currently in my third term as Commander. My career background was in Law Enforcement in New Jersey, where, after over 26 years I retired as a Detective Captain. During my law enforcement career, I was fortunate to be involved in the development of an in-house computer system in my department, as well as a mobile data computer system in all of the police vehicles in my county. This involvement began in the early 1980's and the technology has kept my interest ever since. I do not consider myself an expert in the field, however I do recognize the need to promote technology within our organization.

In the early part of this year, I was approached by then Vice Commander Jay Conti Sr. who spoke with me regarding the website and Facebook group, which I had created for the 5th District. Vice Commander Conti asked if I would consider putting together a Power Point presentation for the upcoming June Department Convention, addressing social media, to which I agreed. If you attended the class, you could probably see that I was a novice as a teacher. The feedback received did indicate that the course was informative and many stated that it should have been longer. We will work on this for any future presentations.

Now what we need to do in the Department of Florida is for every Area, District and individual Post, to create their own Facebook tm page or group. At the District and Post levels, commanders need to appoint a Social Media Chairman or Manager to maintain the Facebook tm presence. Once your page or group is set up you need to send the page (or group) to me at socialmedia@legionmail.org. Once I receive the address (*http: url*) information I will visit your page (or group) to acknowledge receipt.

In the 2014-2015 term of office, it will be my goal to connect the American Legion Department of Florida 100% on Social Media. Let's be The First State to do this, after all we are The First Coast!



**John Dollinger
POW/MIA Chairman
powmia@legionmail.org**

Recently Accounted for:

The two servicemen from WWII - Army Air Force Staff Sgts. Robert E. Howard, 21, of Moravia, Iowa, and David R. Kittredge, 22, of Oneida, Wis. Accounted for July 9.

Army Cpl. Cletus R. Lies, 26, of Bremen, N.D., assigned to the Medical Company, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 31st Regimental Combat Team missing from the Korean War, was accounted for on July 3rd.

Army Cpl. William N. Bonner, 23, of Sault Sainte Marie, Mich., assigned to Medical Company, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division missing from the Korean War, was accounted for on June 23rd.

Pfc. Randolph Allen, Marine Corps, Company F, 2nd Battalion, 2nd Marine Division, was lost on Nov. 20, 1943, in Tarawa. He was accounted for June 17, 2014

Staff Sgt. Gerald V. Atkinson, U.S. Army Air Forces, 358th Bomb Squadron, 303rd Bomb Group, Eighth Air Force in Korea. He was accounted for on June 20th. He will be buried with full military honors Aug. 16, 2014, in Chattahoochee, Fla.

Master Sgt. Lawrence O. Jock, Battery A, 955th Field Artillery, 8th U.S. Army in Korea. He was accounted for June 25th.

During the month of August a POW/MIA Remembrance Day Poster and Prayer Service will be sent to every Post in the Department. POW/MIA Remembrance Day is September 19, 2014. The POW/MIA issue is extremely important to the American Legion and we open every official meeting with their recognition so it would follow this Remembrance Day is also very important. I would strongly suggest every Post take time to recognize our missing comrades.

**NOW AVAILABLE
HALLOWEEN and PATRIOTIC
COLORING BOOKS**

Department has Halloween and Patriotic Coloring Books available for purchase and distribution to the Elementary classrooms in your area. The order form is on page 11 of the Post Administrative Manual. Supplies are limited—get them while they last! The cost remains \$20.00 per 100 books. Send orders to Department Headquarters with attention to Elizabeth Inherst by mail or by email:

Linherst@floridalegion.org.

Dennis R. Bruland
(941) 276-1842 drbruland@comcast.net
Dept. Veteran Benefits Chairman

Selecting a Service Officer

Before selecting a service officer, you, the veteran, must have an idea what a service office is and isn't. First things first, a County Service Officer or a Post Service Officer is not a representative of the VA. Service Officers are a veterans' advocate and it doesn't matter between County Service Officers or Organizational Service Officers (DAV, VFW, American Legion, VVA etc.). At the end of the day every veterans service advocate desires to help each veteran receive all the individual benefits and opportunities earned by honorable military service to this country. In its most basic form, a veteran's advocate is someone who cares about veterans and supports their causes.

With respect to the claims process through the Department of Veterans Affairs, the veterans advocate takes a greater role and responsibility; it's the advocate's obligation to present the veteran and his or her claim in the most concise, accurate and complete manner to give the VA rating officer a complete package on which to base a decision.

The service officer must work directly with the veteran or family to identify all the possible benefits the claimant may be entitled. This often involves hours of interviewing and analysis of medical and military records to ascertain the status of the veteran's health or financial situation.

However the role of the Service Officer doesn't start with the veteran walking through the door. It begins long before, in our attempts to educate the public and veterans on services we offer and the benefits they have earned. Although the veteran may realize how military service ultimately affected their health, talking about wounds or injuries has never been something people hide. For example, when a veteran received compensation for Agent Orange exposure and resulting conditions caused by that exposure, every veteran he runs across is quickly informed of conditions that may be caused by exposure or service, and urged to follow the appropriate claim. In contrast, financial status or well-being is not often discussed outside the family. This coupled with an overwhelming pride not to take advantage of programs such as welfare brings about relative obscurity of the VA pension benefits.

Once a veteran or his family member comes to a Service Officer for assistance, it is the service officer's responsibility to determine eligibility for compensation, pension or other benefits through the VA. Like our entire counterparts throughout the nation, we must develop the case, review the pertinent information, and prepare a claim for the veteran to submit. We are often able to facilitate the compilation of additional information when it is necessary, thereby limiting the longer waiting times. In addition, we receive our complimentary copy of the notice of decision for our records, so we can be proactive in reviewing the decision and determining a course of action before the veteran has received the same letter.

Problems for Service Officers:

Claims jumping: Service Officers inherit many claims that he/she did not initially develop and did not submit to the VA. This is often more time consuming than the establishment and development of the case from the beginning. Jumping from Service Office to Service Officer usually gets you into more trouble, causes more delays and confusion because the Service officer does not have a clear picture of the case from the beginning.

Worthless Claims:

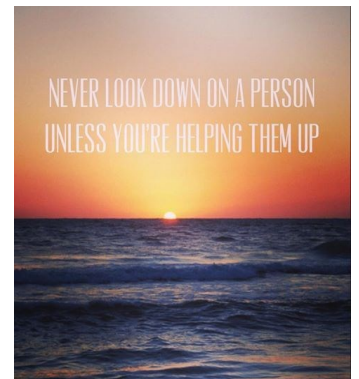
There are approximately 800,000 claims in the back log across the United States. Many of these claims are what we Service Officers call Worthless Claims. Worthless Claims are those that have NO MERIT, no evidence of a service connection and in most cases is wishful thinking on the part of the veteran. These claims are much of the problem, creating major back log issues.

The American Legion, Department of Florida proudly announces the backing of PROJECT: VetRelief.

PROJECT: VetRelief, formally known as PROJECT: Homefront, ensures that our service men and women have the backing necessary to live successful and thriving civilian lives. While the original ideals that guided the creation of PROJECT: Homefront remain intact, a concerted rebranding effort has now placed a high level of attention on three specific areas of service: assisting during times of immediate need, working to secure benefits earned with service, and providing encouragement through mentorship.

Overall, it is our vision to one day live in a nation where no service member stands alone. We invite you to join us as we fight the good fight! They fought for us. We fight for them.

Look for the launch of www.ProjectVetRelief.org in early November 2014 with a full rollout to our Members at Fall Conference!

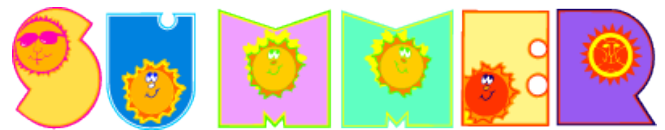


John Dollinger
Southwestern Area Commander
SOUTHWESTERN AREA

8th District – Commander Douglas Deierlein- It's great to be in the GREAT EIGHT, as that is what we are now going to call us. We have already installed the officers of 9 Posts and by the time this Link is published we will have another 3 under our belt. Everyone in the GREAT EIGHT is very excited and motivated to win the "RACE to THE TOP". Which we will! I am very proud to be the 8th District Commander and look forward to working closely with the Southwestern Area Commander and the whole Department Staff. I will have more next month to report as membership progresses and I do more Post visits and talk to the Veterans in the GREAT EIGHT! Before I close I want to announce that the 8th District has a Service Officer and he is willing to assist any veteran with issues you may have with the VA. Thanks again, until Next Month!

13th District – Commander Andrew Burkett – We are off and running completing numerous installations and getting everyone focused on membership, membership and membership. On March 31st 2014 in "RACE TO THE TOP" we were number 2 in the nation, the 13th can do better and will show you on March 31 2015. I would like to thank the 13th District Posts that participated in the Department Training. The feedback has been impressive. August is the beginning of the school year so let's get our youth programs in place and ready to go. Thank you for your support and assistance.

Southwestern Area Commander – We have hit the ground charging ahead with Installations and MEMBERSHIP. I would like to thank the approximately 90 Area members that participated in the Department Training program. I think everyone felt they learned more about all the programs for this year. I would like to thank the 8th and 13th District Commanders for their attention to membership. The Southwestern Ball will be held on January 24th at Post 103 in Punta Gorda. More information will follow. Full Steam Ahead!



Rededication of American Legion Post 6 Home

On October 5, 2014 Post 6 of the American Legion will be renaming our post home. The post name will be dedicated in the name of Adam Quinn, a local young man who grew up in our community and gave his life in the Afghanistan conflict nearly seven years ago on October 7, 2007.

Breakfast will be served for a five dollar fee for an all you care to eat complete with fresh made pastries. At 11:30 AM, Chapter 6 riders will escort Mr. & Mrs. Quinn to the cemetery where our chaplain will host a grave side service for our hero. We will proceed back to our post and unveil a new sign dedicating the Post in honor of Adam Quinn.

Our Auxiliary, Sons of the American Legion Riders, Riders of chapter 6 will all take part in this ceremony. In addition we have sent out a invite to the local Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), American Veterans (AMVETS), Gold Star Mother Association, Patriot Guard, and of course our Mayor and Congresswoman Dorothy Hukill.

The parents of Adam Quinn do not at this time have any knowledge of the new sign, which will be draped and covered to prevent them from seeing it until the most appropriate time. They did sign a letter authorizing Post 6 to use his name, which we told them was the Adam Scholarship, which we have supported since his untimely death. This should be a total surprise and hopefully a closure for the family.

We wish your attendance at this event and expect local news coverage.

William 'Rick' Johnson

Southern Area Commander/Public Relations Chairman

Well it's that time of the year where we have new officers in place and new events happening all over the state. We just had our Area Training which was well received by all and that was the biggest turnout we have had in years. The baseball game at Marlins Stadium was a great event and raised \$525.00 for our Commanders charity Susan G. Komin. So that shows me there are legionaries out there that want to learn. Take the information back and pass it on. I challenge every officer to complete the Legion Institute class that is on the National website and learn what the American Legion is about as once you learn more you will not have a problem talking about our great organization. Post and District Commanders, I need for you to give a schedule of events happening in your post and district. Any special nights or days that you have planned.

Now is the time to get the Veteran calendars and get into the schools and teach our children about the history of the United States of America and what our Flag stands for. Have fun with it and enjoy. I want all Officers to have a great year and if there is anything we can do to help, please contact us and we will be there. So let's start this year off great and keep moving forward. Thanks for your dedication to the position that you have taken and mostly, have fun!

Eunice Butts
Central Area Commander

Greetings from the Central Area. We are busy supporting our Veterans and Communities at "full speed"! In the 15th District on 26 June, 2014, the American Legion Riders Chapter 138 hosted the AMBUCS Vet Bike (Therapy Cycle) presentation to Marine Corps Veteran Shawn James. AMBUCS, a non-profit 501.c.3 corporation, donated the bike which was designed and built with specifications of the therapy needs of Shawn James as provided by his medical team at James Haley VAMC. Shawn served in the United States Marine Corps from 2002-2007, with two tours in Iraq. During both deployments he was subject to multiple close range blast exposures that resulted in multiple concussive traumatic brain injuries. Shawn's goal is to use the AMBUCS cycle to increase his physical strength and agility, balance, and overall wellness. Pictured L-R: 15th District Commander Jose Romeu, AMBUCS Vet Program Coordinator Gordon Brigman, Central Area Commander Eunice Butts, Tara James, and Shawn James.

For the Central Area as a whole, the Florida Governor Rick Scott set out on a "tour" of Florida making several stops in cities along the way to have a "Veteran's Service Award Medal" presentation ceremony to honor area Veterans. The first stop was hosted by Post 111 in Tampa, with over 200 Veterans receiving medals. In attendance from the Central Area were the Central Area Commander, 7th and 15th District Commanders, Past Area Commander, State Historian, and multiple Legionnaires from 7th, 15th, and 16th Districts. Pictured L-R: 15th District Cdr. Jose Romeu, Past Central Area Cdr. Jim Burgess, Central Area Cdr. Eunice Butts, Dept Historian Shelli Romeu

From the 16th District, the 6th Annual 4th of July Parade on Main Street in Safety Harbor was a fantastic community event. The parade had over 40 separate group participants plus drum and bugle corps, the Legion State Commander, the Auxiliary State President, Congressman David Jolley, Cub Scouts, car clubs, and so much more. Following the parade was a patriotic ceremony at the town center gazebo which was had presentations from the "Santa's Drill Team" who are a group of veterans who do patriotic presentations in support of Freedom Flight and Wounded Warriors. Pictured L-R: Dept. Cdr. Jay Conti, Central Area Cdr. Eunice Butts, 15th District Cdr. Jose Romeu, 16th District Cdr. Tom Zibowski

The 7th District event highlight was Saturday Morning, July 12, 2014, where Post 71 in Lake Wales hosted a "Veteran's Town Hall Meeting". VA Clinic and CBOC representatives and a panel of others on their team provided overviews of VA Benefits, claims, and other veteran programs, National Cemetery information, Homeless Outreach and grants, and Vet Ready centers. There were over 53 Veterans in attendance and following this meeting, 52 Veterans were assisted with 32 VA Benefit Enrollments and 23 Claims! In addition to the speakers, American Legion representatives present were Central Area Commander Eunice Butts, Department VA Assessment Team Chairman Michael J Gallucci (who also addressed the assembly regarding the ongoing review of the VA programs), 7th District Commander Chuck Giffen, 15th District Commander Jose Romeu, 7th District Vice Commander and Post 71 Commander Andy Anderson, several officers/members of Post 71, and Department Historian Shelli Romeu. Pictures are from the General Session. For God and Country, Still Serving

Al "Big Al" Diaz
Eastern Area Commander
12th District Upcoming Events

Oct. 25, 2014 we are having a ride of "Paws for Veterans" The CEO / Head trainer will be along with (Sonic) the dog that Caesar Miller (Dog Whisper) rescued. The run is still being finalized. We will have more info later on where the run will end. I plan on attending.

There is a web page for KSC (Kennedy Space Center) News and resources. It is packed full of links to all kinds of information including different services from News links to Jobs, KSC Vets web site.

We have a Stand Down coming up on September 20th. In Titusville, 9-20-14 at the (DAV). They are always in need of escorts and services. Call Al for additional info. There are fliers out also.

The same date there will be a POW/MIA Ceremony at Post 163. For more info please contact Commander Mark Johnson at 321-259-7239.

I have asked the Commanders for their reports but have not received them yet. I hope to have a more detailed report next month.

For God and Country





PROJECT: VETRELIEF

They Fought for Us. We Fight for Them.

MISSION

To provide a Legion of support focused on transitioning our service men and women into civilian lives.

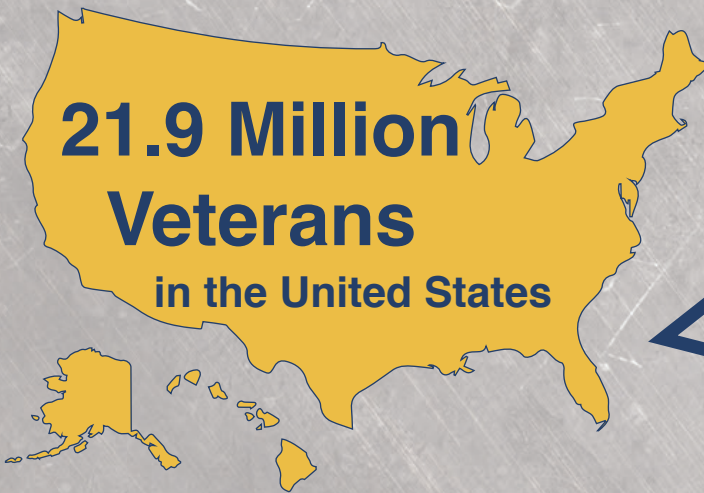
VISION

A nation where no service member stands alone.

HISTORY

A service provision backed by The American Legion, Department of Florida - a veterans' organization with 130,000 members and a history spanning nearly 100 years.

FLORIDA VETERAN STATISTICS



1.6 million statewide

75% served during wartime

231,000 served during recent wars

SERVICES



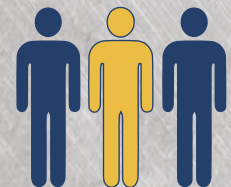
Emergency Assistance

From financial hurdles to health burdens, we are there during an emergency.



Benefits Support

We ensure veterans can access and utilize all benefits earned with service.



Community Engagement

We seek to eliminate isolation by creating a community of veterans helping veterans.

Supported by

The American Legion, Department of Florida



First Annual

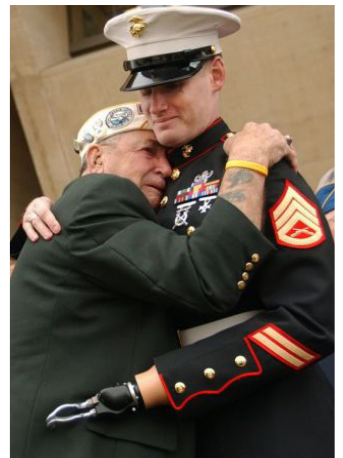
LEGIONNAIRE photo contest

**Free to Enter!
Over \$1,500 in Prizes!**

**Entry Deadline:
October 1, 2014**



**Winners will
be announced
at Fall
Conference**



**For more information contact:
Jennifer Cooper at jcooper@floridalegion.org**