



THE LEGION LINK

Full Speed Ahead for Veterans



www.floridalegion.org | 407-295-2631 | mail@floridalegion.org

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JAY CONTI, SR.
Department Commander
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(407) 247-5232

WOW! The Department of Florida is doing good in Membership. As I am writing this article we have moved from 40th place to 14th Place in the Nation; thanks for sending in the cards right away. We have **RACE-TO-THE-TOP** Competition going on with the following Districts: 13, 6, 12, 7, 16, 8, 17, 4 & 5th Districts. Plus a few others is just behind a little and could catch up at any given point! For **RACE-TO-THE-TOP** your District needs to be **100% by March 31st**, so keep pushing, Renew, Reinstate, Recruit and Lets hold Open Houses and tell your Community know who we are.

Programs are also going great, it looks like at this year's Boys State we will have a full complement of Boys to attend with over 530. Social Media is picking up and we are really getting in touch with our younger Veterans through it, Project VetRelief and other avenues.

We are into 2015, which means we have to close the books on the 2014 Tax year with our City, County, State and Federal Governments as a Post. So please ensure that your Post Form 990 (income tax return for the Post), Incorporation papers (reregister as an corporation with the State) and any W-2 or Form 1099's your Post does for paid employees. Also, look at any other tax or certificates if they are due like your Lounge License, Food Handlers Certificates, Heath Certificate, and machine certificates, BINGO (City or County Certificate), etc.

Please hold or attend a 4-Chaplains Ceremony Services on or near 4-Chaplains Day; February 1, 2015. Don't forget the Department Oratorical Contest on March 14, 2014 (9am) at Department Headquarters. As a Post, District or Area Commander you should be attending the Oratorical Contest; or if you never seen one before you



BRAVO ZULU
 "A Job Well Done"



Ball/Homecoming Schedule

Southern Area Ball
February 7, 2015
Post 142

Eastern Area Ball
April 4, 2015
Post 11

Central Area Ball
February 28, 2015
Post 8

Northern Area Ball
March 7, 2015
Post 129

Legion Family Homecoming
April 25, 2015
Post 103



Patriotic Coloring Books Now Available!

Department has Halloween and Patriotic coloring books available for purchase and distribution to the elementary classrooms in your area. An order form is located on page 11 of the Post Administrative Manual. Supplies are limited - get them while they last! The cost is \$20 per 100 books. Send your orders to:

American Legion, Dept of FL
ATTN: Elizabeth Inherst
P.O. Box 547859
Orlando, FL 32854-7859

or by email:

Linherst@floridalegion.org

need to attend this one as its **Top Of The Line!**

What an awesome visit I had to the 16th District, The Legion Family did a great job and the entire District is working well together. We held a Veterans Benefit "**Town Hall Meeting**" at Madeira Beach Post 273; hats off to the Post for making this happen. The 16th District donated over \$7,000 towards my **Breast Cancer Awareness Fundraiser** with puts us just about 1/2 way to the \$50,000 goal we set. I am writing this as I am getting ready to start my 13th District Visit and attend the SW Area Ball.

I also attended the Rededication of the French Borne at Tallahassee Post 13, where a Boy Scout Jake Moudy took on the project to preserve this Borne and Part of WWII History in Europe. It was a great Ceremony as the Post had many City and State Leaders as well as the Mayor of the Town in France (VIA SKYPE) where the Borne originated from. Jake, congratulations on attaining **Eagle Scout!**

This Month I also attended Veterans Memorial Post #347 Lady Lake as they achieved **National Honor Post** again by attaining 100% before January 1, 2015. They not only did this but are the **LARGEST** Veterans Post in the World with now well over 5,000 members and on their way to 7,000 members as they accepted the challenge of being the Largest Post ever. They were awarded the American Legion Department of Florida "**TOP GUN**" Trophy during the meeting.

We are set to have our National Vice Commander Richard "Dick" Neville from North Carolina from 4-8 February and our National Commander Mike Helm March 29-April 2nd. A schedule will be on the Department Website, please come out and meet and greet them.

BRAVO-ZULU"

"FOR GOD AND COUNTRY"

Jay Conti Sr.

Department Commander

"FULL SPEED AHEAD FOR VETERANS"

JIM RAMOS
Department 1st Vice Commander
1stViceCommander@legionmail.org
(352) 226-4370

Florida Legionnaires now is the time to get back to Membership (Retain, Reinstate, Recruit and Renew) lets get our members



to renew today and not tomorrow. We need to get some new members "female and younger" one too. The Department of Florida Legionnaires understand, we can do it be number 1 in the Nation. We have some Districts that have a chance to win the "Race to the Top" we can make a difference all together. The Post who have made 100% already thank you and the Post who have not made 100% just ask for help. We are here to support you and your Post and lets make a Difference. Some Suggestion follows:
How can we do this?

1. Working as a family (Legion, Auxiliary, Sons and Rider) to help and get the word out to their members.
2. How about an OPEN HOUSE using the Post for:
 - a) All programs that you do have a table for each one
 - b) Plus a membership table for your Legion family
 - c) Us the community (Blood Mobile, Local Fire truck and County Emergency Agency)
 - d) Have a Veterans Lunch in at the Post (open to their families to)
3. Call members who have not renew (sometimes a letter will not do)

How good is your Post? (Can you and your Post answer the following questions?)

1. In Membership is it growing?
2. Youth activities do you have some?
3. Working with the Community?
4. Servicing our Troops, Veterans and their Family ?

Some more Suggestion:

1. Get a good Public Relation Office to work all levels
2. Start NOW, Be Creative, Be Different, Be Flexible
3. Reward your works
4. Keep your members info (newsletter, what your Post is planning and what is your Post doing?)

If you or your Post needs help just call (352-226-4370) or email me at 1stvicecommander@legionmail.org

Jim Ramos
1st Vice Commander

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, Post 238 Family, Bill Hamblin, Rene Stachelrodt Jr., John Dollinger, Dusty Douglas, Shirley Douglas, Jim "Radar" Henry, Karen Henry, Sherry Hayes-Luzader, SAL PNC Jim Roberts, Doug Deierlein, Larry Roberts, Sandy White, Eunice Butts, MaryLou Hamblin, Andy Anderson and the entire Department of Florida American Legion College Class of 2014, Larry White, Jimmy Roberts, Kirk Miller, Squadron 72 CDR & JJ Jennings, Roy Havekost, Post 54 Family,, Tim Teirney, Bob Johnson, Terry Briggs, Dennis Storey and Johnny Gibbons.



BOB BREWSTER
Department 3rd Vice Commander
3rdViceCommander@legionmail.org
(904) 635-4492

First off, we have some Boy's State openings. The deadline has been extended to February 11, 2015. If you have a delegate, get your information into Department asap. Four Chaplain ceremonies are all over the state. If you have never attended, you should do so. I have been to many, and all of them have been very moving. It makes us realize how important history is to us.

Oratorical contests should be completed at both Post and District by the time you read this. The area contests should be completed by February 22, 2015. The state contest will be held in Orlando at the Department on March 14, 2015. All Oratorical chairmen, District Commanders, and Area Commanders should attend the state contest. Let's fill the house this year.

The Boy Scouts Cracker Trail is also scheduled this month at Tanah Keeta Boy Scout Camp, Tequesta, FL. I will also be attending this on Friday, January 27, 2015. If you have an interest in Boy Scouts, this where you should be. The kids really appreciate seeing the American Legion caps.

I won't mention all the balls throughout the state, because I don't believe that these fall into Programs.

It is never too early to make contact with the schools regarding school medals, ROTC medals, and getting the schools thinking about flag etiquette.

I also will be attending District meetings and the initial baseball meeting at Department.

Please, if I can be of any help to any Post, District, or Area on anything dealing with programs, etc., give me a call. Home: 904-272-1619 Cell: 904-635-4492.

For God and Country,
Bob Brewster
Department 3rd Vice Commander



DENNIS R. BOLAND
National Executive Committeeman
NEC@Legionmail.org
239-963-8383

UNsung HERO

So many times when we hear the word Unsung Heroes, we automatically think of Service Officers within our Department who have dedicated themselves to the service of our veterans. With that being said, I would like to give you some insight on the quiet Unsung Heroes. Hopefully as Legionnaires we all strive for the same reasons to serve God, Country and our Community. There is another breed of Legionnaires who sometimes don't receive the credit they deserve. Many of us, including some Past National

Commanders, have been advocates of our women veterans and regard them as Unsung Heroes. Helen Gaekle, was one of those Unsung Heroes for the Department of Florida. Helen served in the United States Air Force (WAF) during the Korean War. Helen was a charter member of Fort Lauderdale Post 222 as well as a lifetime member of The American Legion. As many of us do in our

own Districts, Helen was very active in the 9th District, serving as District Asst. Sgt-at-Arms, and District Commander. She was a JROTC drill team sponsor, participated in Boys and Girls States programs, School Medal Program and 20&4 Honor Society. One of her greatest achievements was bringing home the National School Medal Award trophy for the Department of Florida when she was our Department School Medal Chairman.

We all strive for the best within the Department of Florida and it's a shame when we lose another dedicated Legionnaire. Hopefully their memory will carry on and their achievements will always be recognized.

I, thank all the Legionnaires of Florida, for what they do to make our Department of Florida, American Legion Family as great as we are.

Dennis R. Boland
National Executive Committeeman



SHELLI ROMEU
Department Historian
Historian@legionmail.org

Department of Florida is making history... have you checked out the Department of Florida Posts on the Centennial Website lately?

<http://centennial.legion.org/histories/florida>

We are starting to "fill out". But I need your help. If you see your Post with the icon of a Red State of Florida with the Legion emblem, then I need a picture of your Post! Does your Post have a web page or facebook page? Send the links to me. This will be a good starting point. Any additional information that could contribute to your Post's history or pictures would also be very welcomed! I also can add your Post's Historian or other point of contact to your Post's Centennial Site, please contact me so I can set this up for you.

Is your Post a 1919 Chartered Post? You will be celebrating your 96th Anniversary this year – Congratulations!! Any celebration that you have would be a great addition to your Centennial site information!

History Book Contest for both American Legion Riders (ALR) and American Legion Posts: Please make note that your 1 Year Narrative or Yearbooks are due to Department Headquarters (Orlando) NLT the deadline of June 1, 2015. This is important so that we have an accurate assessment of how many will be entered into the contest and then for the Department staff to have adequate time to pack these for transport to Convention. It would be unfair to allow any submissions after this date, so please get them to Dept. HQ by the deadline of 1st of June to avoid your book not being in the contest. On the off-chance that there are District or Area History Books, these can be entered and judged, however they will not be sent on to the National Contest (only Post Narratives and Yearbooks are allowed currently in the National Contest).

Shelli Romeu, Department of Florida Historian

Legionnaires Insurance Trust

Good news! Online enrollment is now available. Any Legion member can go to the LIT website to enroll. To sign up online, go to: <http://www.thelit.com> and follow the the links.



Jerry Brandt
Children & Youth Program Chairman
CY@Floridalegion.org
(904) 910-5201

Commanders, there will be a Department of Florida Children & Youth Golf Tournament on April 18th, 2015. This will be hosted by American Legion Post 129, in Jacksonville Beach, FL. All proceeds will go to the Department of Florida Children & Youth Fund

This month is a busy month, Oratorical Contests and Boys State candidates selections, School Medals, ROTC Certificates need to be order for schools in your area. However Spring is around the corner, Easter, School Graduations, have you look into the American Legion Scholarship Programs? Scholarship applications must be submitted no later than 1 March 2015.

Important Dates in January

- 1st - Happy New Year
- 18th- Post Oratorical Contests are completed
- 19th - Martin Luther King JR Day
- 30th - State Wide Blood Drive

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

Important Dates in February

- 12th - Lincoln's Birthday
- 14th - Valentine's Day
- 17th - President's Birthday
- 20th - Washington's Birthday

Yours in Service
 Jerry Brandt
 Department of Florida
 Children & Youth Chairman 2014 - 2015



JOHN DOLLINGER
Department Blood Donor Chairman
BloodDonor@legionmail.org
(941) 661-8086 Blood Donor Committee

The time has come, January 30 & 31 is The American Legion Statewide Blood Drive. We have sent radio spots and newspaper articles in numerous directions, 2 letters to all Posts, emails to Units and Squadrons. It is all up to you, we have communicated the need, the plan and I hope Legion, Auxiliary and SAL members will go out and meet the challenge. Want to find your nearest location, go on the Department Website and look for the Blood Donor box. We continually say we are here for our veterans, we want to help.

Donating blood costs you nothing, the benefits of the medical review are worthwhile, it, is a win/win for everyone. Thank you for your support.

John Dollinger, Department Blood Donor Chairman
Jesse Figuero, Department Assistant Blood Donor Chair



STANLEY GOLD
National Legislative Chairman
NatLegislative@legionmail.org
(786) 423-2458

While in Israel, in October, I saw on CNN, the burning of the American flags in St. Louis riots. Now is the time to call your member of congress and tell them to co-sponsor House joint resolution 9. This legislation is a proposed constitutional amendment to protect the American flag from physical desecration of the flag of the United States. All members and family should call your member of congress and ask them to support H.J.9 and maybe this will be the year it will be passed.

UPDATE ON FLAG AMENDMENT BILLS: On January 7, House Joint Resolution (H.J. Res.) 9 was introduced by Representative Steve Womack, (AR). This legislation is a proposed constitutional amendment to protect the American flag from desecration. Its text states simply: "The congress shall have power to prohibit the physical desecration of the flag of the United States."

As noted above, staff from legislation division met this week with the office of the flag protection amendment for the 114th congress. Senator Hatch has long been a champion of the amendment and it seems to be in his intention to reintroduce it around Flag Day this year, which is June 14.

Congress has tried repeatedly to pass similar restrictions on destroying the flag in the 26 years since the U.S. Supreme court ruled that the flag burning is political expression protected by the first amendment. The most recent vote on the matter, in 2006, fell one senate vote shy of the 67 votes necessary to send the measure to the states for ratification. The house passed its version in 2005.

On February 22-26, a delegation from Florida will attend the Washington Legislative Conference. On the 24th our Department will hold its 9th annual luncheon for all our Florida members of congress. Last year 13 members did show up and those that could not were visited later at their offices. On February 25, our National Commander Helm will speak to the Joint Senate and House Veterans Affairs Committee. We will all be at that meeting.

Stanley Gold
National Legislative Chairman

JOHN "METRIC" VINCENT
American Legion Riders Vice Chairman
Jpvincentiii@hotmail.com
863-214-1129

Wheelchair Derby

No one know the meaning of **"FREEDOM"** and enjoying the great outdoors more then those of us who ride motorcycles. Well, with the cooperation of the **Florida Park Service** (FPS), the **Fiends of Highlands Hammock** (CSO) and just about every motorcycle organization in Highlands County, called the **Gathering of the Clubs** (GOC), we have come together to host the **Highlands County Inaugural Wheelchair Derby**. The Wheelchair Derby will be a great day of fun, food entertainment and the proceeds go to upgrade park facilities and purchase specially designed **Nomad** wheelchairs to accommodate persons with disabilities. The event will consist of wheelchair races, tram rides in the park, a wheelchair obstacle course and a 5k Stride and Stroll run. The wheelchair obstacle

course is for both those with and without disabilities to see how to maneuver in a wheelchair. There will be "FREE" admissions to the park for all wheel derby participants (persons with disabilities). We all know being in a wheelchair can severely restrict the "**FREEDOM**" we have to enjoy the great outdoors and venture off the beaten path. The event will be held **Saturday February 21, 2015** at the Highlands Hammock State Park (**Sebring**) starting a 9AM (0900). What better way to enjoy riding to **GOD'S** country and helping others less fortunate than us to enjoy the great outdoors. Come spend the day or spend the whole weekend and ride some of the greatest back roads in Florida. All Roads lead to Highlands County, we are the center of the state. For more information or Vendor inquiries contact: Brain Pinson, Park Manager at 863-386-6099 or Russ "Rooster" Danser at 863-273-4050 rdanser@embarqmail.com. Please make a donation to this worthy cause!!!! Make Payment to: **Friends of Highlands Hammock Wheelchair Derby**, 5931 Hammock Rd. Sebring, Florida 33872. Ride safe and we'll see you there!!!
by Phoenix and Metric

HIGHLANDS COUNTY

Inaugural Wheelchair Derby

Hosted by
 Florida Park Service (FPS)
 Friends of Highlands Hammock (CSO)
 Gathering of Clubs (GOC)
"Motorcycle riders and enthusiasts"

Saturday February 21, 2015
 Event starts at 9am

Highlands Hammock State Park

The event will consist of wheelchair races, tram rides, a wheelchair obstacle course, and a 5k Stride and Stroll run

Proceeds go to upgrade park facilities and purchase specially designed Nomad Wheelchairs to accommodate persons with disabilities.

FOOD & FUN FOR Everyone!!

Museum Tours

Make Donations Payable To: *Friends of Highlands Hammock Wheelchair Derby*
Free admissions for all wheelchair derby participants

For more information or Vendor inquiries contact:
 Brian Pinson, Park Manager @ (863)386-6099,
 or Russ "Rooster" Danser @ (863)273-4050
 rdanser@embarqmail.com

LIVE MUSIC!

AUCTION



POST EXCELLENCE AWARD

To qualify for the Post Excellence Award, a post is required to achieve excellence in four areas: membership, youth activities, community service and support to currently serving troops or veterans.

The purposes of this award are membership growth, exposure of American Legion values to the youth of the community, and increased visibility of the American Legion Family through service projects. A

post achieving this qualification will have had numerous post members involved in planning and achieving these goals.

Many posts are most likely already active in these areas and will qualify without extra effort. Others, however, will need to increase their efforts in one or more areas to qualify for the award.

The standard to be achieved in each area:

- **Membership.** Must be at least one member greater than the previous year. At least one post officer attends district meetings.

- **Youth activities.** Must sponsor and actively participate in at least one primary youth program: Boys State, American Legion Baseball, Oratorical, Boy Scouts or Junior Shooting Sports.
- **Community service.** Must accomplish a community service project with members of the Legion Family actively working in the community outside the post home. A wide range of potential projects exists, such as a project centered on one of Children & Youth's emphasis areas to fulfilling a strictly local need. A monetary donation may be part of the project but may not constitute the entire project.
- **Service to troops/veterans.** Must accomplish a project supporting troops or veterans in the community with Legion Family members outside the post home. Potential projects include the Family Support Network, Heroes to Hometowns, or simply helping a local veteran with necessary updates to his or her home. Again, a monetary donation may be part of the project but may not constitute the entire project.

Florida American Legion Specialty License Plate

Don't forget to purchase your Florida American Legion specialty license plate. We need your support to reach our goal of 1,000 pre-sales by July 1st.

Visit <http://members.floridalegion.org/> for more information



The district commander responsible for the post will certify a post as having achieved the four specified criteria. The district commander will submit a list of posts meeting the criteria to the department headquarters. That list should include the post name, post number, post address and post commander's name. Ideally, the last two criteria are accompanied by copies of press releases submitted to the local media about the projects. That method ensures the projects were not only accomplished but that an attempt was made to enhance the image of The American Legion through local media. The copy submitted should include a date and time stamp showing receipt by the media outlet.

All Posts that Submit for this award will also receive a Department Commanders **"BRAVO-ZULU"** Streamer.

The department adjutant will transmit information as posts qualify to:

The American Legion National Headquarters

ATTN: Membership

P.O. Box 1055

Indianapolis, IN 46206-1055



NANCY L. THOMAS

Department Post Development and Revitalization Chairman

PostDevelopment@legionmail.org

(863) 618-6738

February, brings our Area Oratorical Contest, Four Chaplains Programs, Memorials, Americanism Month and of course, Valentines Day and President's Day.

It is my hope that all sixteen (16) Districts contestants do well and wish each and every one the best. We hope to be able to travel to Department for the Department contest in March.

Let us remember the Four Chaplains who gave their lives when the U. S. A.

T. Dorchester was torpedoed on February 3, 1943 and went down with the ship. Chaplain Alexander D. Goode (Jewish Rabbi), John P. Washington (Roman Catholic Priest), Clark V. Poling (First Reformed Church Minister) and George L. Fox (Methodist Minister). As an ordained Clergy, this is an event that I believe in, as these men gave their life jackets to young soldiers in order for them to continue to serve our Country.

My Husband and I would like to thank all of those who sent thoughts and prayers for our Son, Robert (Shawn) while he was hospitalized in December. A second surgery on his stomach, an infection, and needing to be heavier than 89 lbs. We are glad to report that he is doing better, he is not eating all yet, he gets tired easily. Thank you!

Happy Valentines Day to everyone!

Nancy Thomas
Dept Post Development and Revitalization Chairman



STEVEN NEWMAN
Department Chaplain
chaplain@legionmail.org
954-865-1026

Greetings my fellow legionnaires. I hope all is well with you and your love ones. Before I start I would like you all to keep your thoughts and prayers with the families of Frank Reese and Helen gaele. These two legionnaires will truly be missed as they were a vital part of our organization. They gave so much throughout their lives to their families, friends, and love ones. I would like to wish you all a Happy Valentine's day on February 14th. A small prayer for you. To everything there is a season, and a purpose under the heaven. February 14th is about love. Love thy god, love your neighbor, and love everyone no matter what. Love is abundant. The more you give the more you have. The minute you spread love around it will give you plenty of reason for joy in your life. With this we pray almighty father give us the strength and power of love. Bless us all as we share one of your most special feelings and emotions. Heavenly father, creator of us all, thank you for this day and for many more to come. Remember us today as light surrounds us, your love enfolds us, your power protects us, and your presence watches over us. For yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Everyone have a safe and joyous February and love everyone and allow them to love you back.

"For god and country"
Chaplain Steven Newman

National Commander Michael Helm's 4x4 Program

American Legion National Commander Mike Helm's fundraising goal during his year-long tenure as national commander is to raise \$4 million in Legion Family charity program donations. Donations will support The American Legion's six charities: Operation Comfort Warriors, Legacy Scholarship Fund, National Emergency Fund, Child Welfare Foundation, Endowment Fund and Soldier's Wish. Several Auxiliary charities are also a part of Helm's \$4 million fundraising goal, including the Emergency Fund, Spirit of Youth Scholarship Fund, Children of Warriors National President's Workshop and American Legion Auxiliary Foundation.



District/ Area	Commander	Goal	Rcvd	% of Goal
6	T. Biddle	11,734	10,645	90.72
13	A. Burkett	9,372	8,464	90.31
12	R. Saxby	8,938	8,002	89.53
17	M. Wolohan	4,111	3,573	86.91
7	I. Anderson	3,848	3,338	86.75
16	R. McNabb	12,099	10,480	86.62
8	D. Deierlein	8,266	7,159	86.61
4	C. Ferguson	3,924	3,387	86.32
5	T. Gora	8,127	6,984	85.94
15	J. Romeu	5,509	4,636	84.15
9	J. Tewes	4,111	3,436	83.58
11	A. Bruce	4,011	3,332	83.07
3	H. Perry	1,797	1,447	80.52
2	W. Jackson	1,416	1,139	80.44
1	L. Carpenter	6,417	5,140	80.10
14	G. Decker	3,139	2,385	75.98
Eastern	A. Diaz	20,672	18,647	90.20
SW	J. Dollinger	17,638	15,623	88.58
Central	E. Butts	21,456	18,454	86.01
Northern	J. Brandt	17,959	15,391	85.70
Southern	W. Johnson	11,261	9,153	81.28
Western	V. Joyce	7,833	6,279	80.16

Helm is rewarding those who make a donation to American Legion Charities with his "Stay On Course" fundraising pin.

Any individual who donates \$100 or more to the funds will receive a pin. Three pins will be awarded to any Legion post, Auxiliary unit, Sons of The American Legion squadron or Legion Riders chapter that donates \$500 or more. Below is a image of the pin that will awarded.

To support Helm's 4x4 program, the Legion recently launched the web page www.legion.org/4x4

Rise-n-Shine with Membership!



Race-to-the-Top is a target for those Districts who are or will be 100% plus before or by March 31st. Check out this National link <http://www.legion.org/recruiting/racetothetop>

The competition is keen and it's a battle to the end. You are against all the American Legion Posts in the world who are in your individual categories (1 thru 5). In case you were wondering,

Florida has several Districts who have won honors of 1st, 2nd, or 3rd place over the years and that's impressive.

We currently have the only Category 5 District (6th) who has taken 1st place in the past three years and although they claim "1 more for 4", we have heard of others that have a familiar ring to them as well "the great 8" or "8 isn't late – we'll beat them to the gate", "the 12th will set the fierce pace, for this year's membership race", "13th will sport the crown, as we watch the 6th and 8th frown". The 13th District placed a close second within Category 5 nationwide last year so let's **Race-to-the Top Florida!**

The State of Florida has had several Districts that have accomplished the notable recognition over the years within the top three placed finishes. It would be a rare occasion and a very welcome sight to see Florida sweeping the prized positions the same year or see

many of them claiming them.

Rise-n-Shine with Membership! Membership renewals across the state have been steady but we still have delinquent members out there who have or are about to become suspended for their lack of membership renewal.

We can prevent this! The notices, phone calls, email, letters, post cards, newsletter reminders, have alerted most of our members to renew, but it hasn't reached all and it is time to start knocking on doors with teams of Legionnaires from the Posts.

We need every Legionnaire to remain amongst us as members of the elite veteran service organization, The American Legion.

February – Americanism month (*the 3rd Pillar*) hosts a sleuth of activities and events that give each of us a golden opportunity to reach out to our communities, gaining new members and renewing/reinstating those that have not yet done so. The American Legion family will be engaged this month supporting a variety of programs that support one another.

Remember, a healthy Post promotes program activity that draws in veterans and their families. If they like what they see.... **Just Ask!** or **Ask Again!** Invite them to the Post, show them around, tell them what programs the Post does well and how it plays an important part in your community. It actually begins with you!

Stephen Shuga
Department Membership Chairman



JOHN DOLLINGER
POW/MIA Chairman
SouthwesternArea@legionmail.org
(941) 661-8086

POW/MIA February 2015

The following is an excerpt from a January 8 2015 Stars and Stripes article which is the most recent information available to explain the delays in implementation of the changes to the POW/MIA Program

The Defense Department announced an overhaul of the agencies in February 2014 that would have JPAC and the Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office combined into a more accountable entity, but a DoD inspector general report in

October said that poor leadership and a hostile work environment could continue to plague the mission even after the new agency's planned debut this month.

Family groups that represent the missing from America's modern military conflicts have complained in recent months about being left in the dark about the reorganization, despite assurances of transparency, which fueled speculation that the reorganization was destined to fail.

Top leadership at the agencies has not been sanctioned for the accounting failures. W. Montague Winfield, deputy assistant secretary of defense for POW/Missing Personnel Affairs and DPMO director, has resigned to take a job with the Department of Homeland Security.

"It has always been our vision to ensure that the new organization serves you and the families you represent in the manner you all deserve," Bardorf wrote.

"In order to do so, we needed to identify and specifically address the numerous steps to take that will make certain we meet these important commitments to you. We recognize that this process has taken longer than we'd hoped and promised; but it was important that we got it right."

John Dollinger Department POW/MIA Chairman

PROJECT: VetRelief Recognition Program

January 1, 2015 – May 31, 2015

You will be awarded with the Meritorious Service Award and a corresponding level of achievement medal at the 2015 Department Convention, in addition to other benefits, in recognition of your support of PROJECT: VetRelief.

GOLD LEVEL

- \$30,000 Cumulative Contribution
- Receives Plaque & Gold Dog Tag Emblem

SILVER LEVEL

- \$20,000 Cumulative Contribution
- Receives Plaque & Silver Dog Tag Emblem

BRONZE LEVEL

- \$10,000 Cumulative Contribution
- Receives Plaque & Bronze Dog Tag Emblem

PARTNER LEVEL

- \$5,000 Cumulative Contribution
- Receives Plaque & Partner Dog Tag Emblem



(Note: levels of support are cumulative based on all individual donations from your Post, Squadron, Chapter, or Unit.)

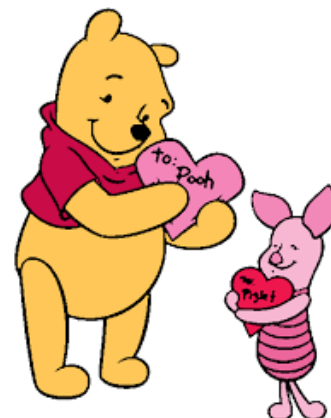
SUPPORT BENEFITS

- Present awards during Department Convention
- Announce your support in *The PROJECT: VetRelief Bulletin*
- Publicize your support through social media
- Acknowledge your Post, Squadron, Chapter, or Unit on PROJECT: VetRelief's website (www.ProjectVetRelief.org)
- Provide recognition in the *PROJECT: VetRelief Annual Report*
- Extend advance invitations to PROJECT: VetRelief events

Join us as we fight the good fight!

For more information contact PROJECT: VetRelief
407-295-2631
www.ProjectVetRelief.org

Happy Valentine's Day



JESSE FIGUERO
12th District Adjutant
adjutant@fal12thdistrict.org

The month of January has already gone by. I will start off with the Department Shooting Sports Challenge that took place on Saturday, 10 January 2015 at Titusville High School. Excellent turnout with Legion Dignitaries present. Also, the Space Coast Harley-Davidson in Palm Bay had its flagpole dedication ceremony sponsored by the Honor Guard of Post 117 that same day with Legion dignitaries present. Finally, the 12th District has brought back its Oratorical Contest. That event took place at 4PM on Sunday 25 January 2015 at Post 81 in Melbourne. Congratulations to the contestants who stepped up, especially to 12th District Oratorical Chairman Barry Roberts of Post 117 and his staff of volunteers for setting up the meeting hall, timekeeping, tabulating and judging. The Eastern Area Oratorical Contest will take place at Post 191 in Melbourne at 4PM on Saturday, 21 February 2015. The 12th District membership has been at 3rd place for Race to the Top since the New Year. It is still up for grabs so never give up!

For God and Country Jesse Figueroa
 12th District Adjutant

Southwestern Area

8th District - The "Great 8" is charging ahead on membership and programs. As of the 1/15/2015 report we stand at 85.13% or we need 1229 more renewals, paying transfers or new members to make 100%. Sounds like a big number but we turned in over 800 in 4 weeks in December, so it is possible, we just need to get it done! You have all those cards for members that have not renewed, write them, call them and go see them, whatever it takes to get them to renew their membership. Programs should be well underway. Oratorical needs to be finished at the District level by February 7. - *Doug Deierlein, 8th District Commander*

13th District – Membership is doing very well, and I thank all the Posts for the support. We still have a ways to go, so please keep going after renewals and new members. Oratorical at the Area Level will be February 14. Posts should be talking to High Schools about Boys State. If you need any help please let me know. - *Andy Burkett, 13th District Commander*

Southwestern Area – *MEMBERSHIP* remains the focus in the Southwestern Area. Both Districts with a lot of time, energy and effort could make "**Race to the Top**". I know what that takes; it is everyone working together pushing that will make it happen. It is all up to the that individual Post, if each Post does their best it will happen. *PROGRAMS* I must turn in the name of my Oratorical Champion from the Southwestern Area no later than February 22. The Area contest will be February 14 and once I know what Posts the contestants are from we will pick a central location for the Area contest. Please start working with your High Schools on finding exceptionally qualified students for Boys State. I would encourage every Post Commander and Officer to step back at some point during the week or at a Post meeting and ask a very simple question "what have we, as a Post, done for our veterans this week?"



JERRY BRANDT
Department of Florida
Northern Area Commander
(904) 910-5201

Fellow Legionnaires,
 I would like to let everyone know that the Northern Area Homecoming will be on March 7th, at American Legion Post 129, in Jacksonville Beach Fl.

Upcoming Events:

January 7th, Post Membership Goal is 90% for the BZ Award

January 11th, 5th District Meeting at Post 250

January 18th, Post Oratorical Contests must be completed

January 18th, 17th District Picnic at Post 6

January 24th, 5th District Oratorical Contest

January 24th, 4th District Oratorical Contest

Team; Congratulations to the following for achieving the 85% Goal

3rd District

Post 83, MacClenny 115.789%

Post 234, Monticello 104.348%

Post 68, Madison 96.774%

Post 96, Perry, 85%

4th District

Post 210, Ocala, 95.238%

Post 230, Hawthorne 94.872%

Post 58, Dunnellon 88.779%

5th District

Post 174, Fernandina Beach 91.667%

Post 373, Orange Park 90.286

Post 194, St Augustine 87.671%

17th District

Post 255, Deltona 100%

Post 293, Interlachen 90.566

Post 259, Debary/Orange City 88.496%

District Commanders should now be visiting your Posts. Commanders, please open up and let them know if there is any problems within your Posts that you need assistance with. Too often, as commanders, we feel we can handle any problem. However, we often find out, we can. The District Commanders are there to assist, if they do not have the answer, they will reach out to someone who does. Commanders, you do not need to feel alone, we are there to help. 3rd District now has a Face Book Page; please reach out to them at <https://www.facebook.com/floridadistrict3>

Jerry Brandt

Department of Florida Northern Area Commander

MIKE (GOAT) KIRCHOFF

Florida In State Legacy Ride Chairman

goat392@gmail.com

Hard to believe the 3rd Florida In State Legacy Ride is less that two months away. We have the route planned (from past experience I know there will be last minute changes) and all the hotels have been identified. Registration forms and the hotel lists are on both the Department of Florida web site and on the In State Legacy Ride Facebook page. Emails have been sent to all Area and District Chairman as well. Riders from other Areas are already planning on meeting at Post 155 in Crystal River when we finish the ride on 28 March. For Riders arriving on Friday 27 March I would invite all the Riders from other Areas to participate in Chapter 155's Annual Mystery Ride. We plan on arriving at Post 155 around 3 PM on the 28th to partake in the end of the Mystery Ride and to celebrate the

ride and have some fun with fellow Riders from around the State. If anyone has any questions please contact me at goat392@gmail.com or call 850-624-2503.

Looking forward to another successful ride.

Mike (Goat) Kirchoff
Florida In State Legacy Ride Chairman



TAPS

Past Department School Medals Chairman Helen Gaekle

It is with deep regret that we report the passing of Past Department School Medals Chairman, Helen A. Gaekle, on Monday, November 24, 2014 at the age of 85. Helen Gaekle was a Korean Air Force Veteran and a the last surviving member of Ft. Lauderdale American Legion Post 222, with 57 continuous years of membership. Condolences may be sent to the Gaekle Family, at 1656 Mitchell Rd., Maysville, GA 30558.

Past Southwestern Area Commander John Ebling

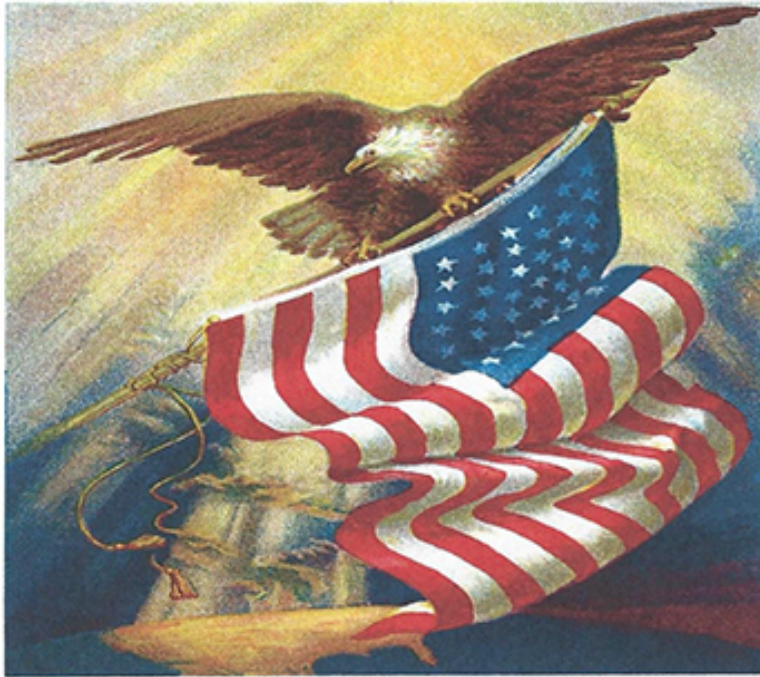
It is with deep regret that we report the passing of Past Southwestern Area Commander, John Ebling, of Ft. Myers, FL on Tuesday, December 30, 2014 at the age of 61. John Ebling was a Retired Army Veteran and a member of Hodges University Post 397, with 26 continuous years of membership. He served as Post 351 Commander 2007-2010, 13th District Vice Commander 2007-2008, Southwestern Area Commander 2010-2011, Department Veterans Benefits Chairman 2011-2014, 13th District Law and Order Chairman 2014, Post 397 Adjutant 2013-2014 and Department Campus Chairman 2014. John will be remembered by many as a dedicated and genuine individual.

Past Department Commander Frank Reese, Jr.

It is with deep regret that we report the passing of Past Department Commander, Frank Reese, Jr., of West Palm Beach, FL on Saturday, January 24th, 2015 at the age of 81. Viewing will be held at Emmanuel Missionary Baptist Church located at 1220 Pioneer Road, Mangonia Park, FL 33407 on Friday, January 30th, 2015 from 6:00pm – 8:00pm. Funeral Service will be held at Payne Chapel AME Church, 801 9th Street, West Palm Beach, FL 33401 on Saturday, January 31st, 2015 at 1:00pm. A Memorial Service immediately following the Funeral Service will be held at American Legion Post 199, 1020 11th Street, West Palm Beach, FL 33401.

Frank Reese, Jr. is survived by his wife, Juanita Reese, and 6 children; Joyce Smith, Diane Finley, Ramona Smith, Sandra Alexandra, Natalie Smith and Ramon Smith. Frank is a Korean Air Force Veteran and a member of Post 199, with 44 continuous years of membership. Frank served many roles during his impressive career in The American Legion. Frank was former Post Commander of Post 199 (1978-81, 2003-05 & 2009-12); 11th District Commander (1976-77); Southern Area Vice Commander (1983-84); Department Commander (1988-89); and NECA (2014). Frank also served on the Department Finance Committee for 15 years (1998-12 & 2013-14). On a National level, Frank served on the Foreign Relations Council (1978-79); Disguised Guest Committee (1980-82 & 1985-07); Americanism Council (1982-85); Membership Committee (1983-84); Legislative Council (1999-00); and Constitution and ByLaws Committee (2007-2015). If you would like to send your condolences you may do so through his wife, Juanita Reese, at 1431 13th Street, West Palm Beach, FL 33401-2442.

HOME COMING 2015



For God and Country

The American Legion Department of Florida Commander, Jay Conti Sr.
The American Legion Auxiliary Department of Florida President, Erna Schwabe
The American Legion Detachment of Florida Commander, Kirk Miller
Present

Homecoming 2015

April 25, 2015

Post 103 – Punta Gorda

2101 Taylor Road, Punta Gorda, FL 33950

Cocktails: 5:00 pm Dinner: 6:00 pm

Tickets: \$25.00

Theme is Red, White and Blue—Theme casual attire
(Additional Information on back page)

Name: (please print) _____ Phone: _____

Your Meal Choices: (includes salad, meat choice, mashed potatoes, vegetable, roll and dessert)

			How Many
(Tickets \$25.00)	Prime Rib	(# meals)	_____
	Chicken	(# meals)	_____
	Fish(Basa)	(# meals)	_____

Pick up tickets at the door

Please make checks payable and send to:
Mark checks "Dinner"

Mrs. Noel Makovsky
18626 Ashcroft Circle
Port Charlotte, Florida 33948
Phone: (941) 391-4968

Tear off here.....

Accomodations: (for Saturday Night)

Sheraton Four Points, Punta Gorda Harborside P (941) 637-6770
33 Tamiami Trail, Punta Gorda 33950 (cutoff 4/06/2015)

Mention American Legion Rate \$ 99.00 per room

Souvenir Booklet Advertising Rates:(all B/W)

Business Card	\$ 15.00
¼ Page	\$ 25.00
½ Page	\$ 35.00
Full Page	\$ 50.00

All information submittals must be received by April 6, 2015

Please send checks and information made payable to:

Mrs. Noel Makovsky
18626 Ashcroft Circle
Port Charlotte, Florida 33948
Phone: (941) 391-4968

Mark checks for "Booklet"

Send pictures Submittals and comments by email to: jdolly@comcast.net

Cutoff date for Ad is April 6, 2015

Thank you for your support of Homecoming 2015

AMERICAN LEGION DEPARTMENT OF FLORIDA MEMBERSHIP CALL-UP



WHO: CALLING ALL VOLUNTEERS!!!
WHEN: THURSDAY, MARCH 5TH, 2015
WHERE: DEPARTMENT HEADQUARTERS
TIME: 8:30 AM TO 3:30 PM

**ITEMS REQUIRED: YOUR CELL PHONE, CHARGER,
MOTIVATION, DEDICATION, AND CAN DO SPIRIT!**

**BBQ LUNCH WILL BE PROVIDED FOR THOSE IN
ATTENDANCE.**

Let's gain those that have not paid their annual commitment, encourage our Legionnaires to remain, reinstate and seek out new members who meet our qualifications to join the
World's Largest Veteran Service Organization
The American Legion

**Please RSVP to the Department Membership Chairman –
membership@legionmail.org of your participation NLT Monday,
March 2, 2015!**

RISE-N-SHINE WITH MEMBERSHIP! FULL SPEED AHEAD FOR VETERANS!