



# The LEGION LINK

**LEGION PRIDE: We Fight for Veterans**



**Web Site: [www.floridalegion.org](http://www.floridalegion.org)**

**E-mail: [mail@floridalegion.org](mailto:mail@floridalegion.org)**

*In this issue....*

Page 1

Dept. Commander

Page 2

Dept. 1st Vice Commander  
Dept. 2nd Vice Commander  
Dept. 3rd Vice Commander  
NEC

Page 3

NEC  
Dept. Sgt-At-Arms  
Dept. Chaplain

Page 4

Dept. Historian  
Central Area Commander  
Western Area Commander  
Law & Order Chair

Page 5

Public Relations Chair  
ROTC/JROTC/Shooting Sports  
Women Veterans Chair  
State Legislative Chair  
Donna Artola  
Blood Donor Chair

Page 6

National Cemetery Chair  
SAL Advisory Committee  
American Legion Riders

Page 7

2016 Florida Legislation Report

Page 9

Project: VetRelief

Page 10

2015 - 2016 Champions

**Jim Ramos**  
*Department Commander*  
[commander@floridalegion.org](mailto:commander@floridalegion.org)  
407.247.5232



My Florida Legionnaires, now is time to say Thank You for letting me serve you as your Department Commander for 2015-2016 with "Legion PRIDE".

**Advocacy:** As your voice, we went to Washington D.C. (Capitol Hill) to represent the state of Florida Legionnaires and then to Tallahassee, FL (our Capitol) to represent you and all Veterans issue. Our mission was to ask for support from our House of Representatives and Senators on issue like:

- Fully funding a superior national defense as the global war on terrorism continues
- Ensure real accountability within the VA
- Institute a 21st century health-care system
- Provide opportunities through the Post 9/11 GI Bill
- End Veterans' homelessness
- Reject any attempts to diminish benefits earned by veterans
- Protect the American Flag

All of the VA hospitals and clinics in the state of Florida were visited to see how they were treating our veterans. Remember the American Legion wrote the original GI Bill (Readjustment Act of 1944).

**Our Charity of choice for the Department this year is Fisher House "Helping Military**

Families". We have six Fisher Houses in Florida with one more coming in the near future to the Orlando area. We continue to help Veterans families with our donations. We will also continue to help by supporting our local Fisher Houses by Volunteering, helping with food supplies or cooking, and helping the families of our Veterans that are in the VA hospital.

**Leadership:** Together we used the roundtable discussions to help some of our Posts and Districts with issues that may possibly occur in a post and to get ideas that may help a Post succeed. We further used our skills to help ensure a strong national defense by talking about issues to our Legionnaires, mentoring our youth by doing Children and Youth programs and being a patriot by doing Americanism programs. Since 1919 the American Legion has been a Leader for our Veterans and our Country.

**Vision:** As we go forward and speak out for our Veterans and their Families we help our community and the Nation and by example. We let our Legislators know who we are The American Legion, Department of Florida. We can and will make a difference with "Legion PRIDE".

**Special Thanks to the following:** All Department Staff, all Department Officers, all Department Chairperson, PNC Clarence Hill, PDC Larry White, PDC Gene Smith, PDC George Wehri, PDC Jay

Conti Sr., My Post CDR Vickie Van Buren, Past Northern Area CDR Bob Schmidt and all the 4th District Posts. And if I miss someone thank you all my Florida Legionnaires.

I hope I served you well being your PR guy! (NO, not the Puerto Rican), the Public Relations Guy for the Department of Florida as your Department Commander Jim.





**Joe Magee**

**Department 1st Vice Commander**  
1stVice@LegionMail.org

The last couple of months were extremely busy, beginning with the Northern Area Ball in Jacksonville. Next up was the Department Oratorical contest, followed by the 13th District Picnic, which was absolutely fantastic. Kudos to Post 303 Bonita Springs. From there I went on to the 1st Annual Salute to Heroes in the Seminole. I must say, for a first, Raymond and his crew did an excellent job. The end of March had Pat and I participate in the National Commander's Walk in Dunedin and we visited many Posts with him.

April came rousing in with the Children and Youth Picnic at Post 117, Palm Bay. Congratulations to Rick Johnson, not only for the Picnic, but his overall effort throughout the year as our C&Y Dept. Chairman. April also saw the Department Auxiliary President's Homecoming, the Department Commander's Homecoming, a couple of meetings at Dept. Headquarters, finishing off the month with the 1st District DCC in Ft. Walton Beach.

At the conclusion of the 1st DCC, it was back on the road heading home, as I had to fly to Indianapolis the next day to attend the Spring Meetings as a member of the National Americanism Council. The information received, I disseminated at the DCC's I have attended, which were 16th District, 6th District, 12th District, 13th & 8th District, 7th District and the 9th District. Coming up we have the 4th, 3rd, 5th and 17th District DCC, which I will attend. I also attended the Finance Committee meeting and, on a sad note, I lost my 95 year young Aunt.

Coming up to Memorial Day, I will attend, by invitation, the National POW/MIA ceremony in Clearwater. Following that, I will attend the Deerfield Beach Memorial Day ceremony as a guest of Post 162.

I am looking forward to seeing you all at the upcoming Department Convention.

For God and Country

**Steve Shuga**

**Department 2nd Vice Commander**  
2ndVice@LegionMail.org

It has been a unique year that included the impulse of requesting Posts and Districts to educate their Legionnaires on Who we are, What we do, and Why it is important to belong to The American Legion.

*Steve Shuga (Continued)*

Training Cards and Certificates were created upon request and made available to Florida Posts as well as being handed out during visitations around the state. This concept was slow to catch on at first, but Legionnaires have come to really like the idea and are looking for them in the near future.

Artwork for the outside of the card is being developed and the same card concept will be used during the next Department Commander's term. You can still use the current training cards, just follow the instructions that come with them to acquire the certificates.

A wrap up of education and training will be given at the Department Convention. Thank you to all those who have embraced the Training Card concept. Other Departments around the US have seen what Florida has conceived and have requested samples to use in their states.

We will continue to lead our American Legion in a variety of unique and innovative ways that will showcase what we have learned when we meet new veterans and encourage them to join The American Legion, a Veteran Organization Worth Fighting For.

I thank you for giving me the opportunity to serve you as your Department 2nd Vice Commander this past term. I seek your support and vote as your next Department 1st Vice Commander during the June Convention. Together we can overcome all obstacles before us.

For God & Country

**Dianne M Boland**

**Department 3rd Vice Commander**  
3rdVice@LegionMail.org

Greetings – The year is slowly winding down to an end. Hopefully your membership is up and your paperwork is done. It is vital that National receives your Consolidated Post Report (CPR) and Department receives your Consolidated Post Report (CPR) plus the Addendum. Combined with the other Departments, these are the numbers that the National Commander takes to Congress to fight for our Veteran's needs. If you do not have these into Department by our Convention, bring them with you to the Convention. You will not be allowed to vote without the paperwork. Wouldn't you like to see our Commander, Jim Ramos, get on the stage at the National Convention to accept an award for 100% participation with CPR's? I do!

It's been an exciting year for me attending some amazing programs and I have to tell you, our youth are outstanding. Our programs are

*Dianne Boland(Continued)*

outstanding; Oratorical, Boy's State, Baseball, JROTC, Shooting Sports and School Medals just to name a few. And our Posts have some very creative ways to raise money to support all these programs. Thanks to everyone for the wonderful job you have done this year in support of our four pillars; Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation (VA & R), National Security, Americanism and Children & Youth.

Always remember, we are a family. Without the Auxiliary, the Sons of the American Legion and the Riders; we could not support our programs as well as we do. Their monetary support as well as their time and ideas are a big help. Thank you all!

Need help? Give a call. Is your post having a function that supports one of our programs? Ask. I'd love to attend (if possible). Have you already had a big function? Write. I'd love to hear about it.

**Dennis R. Boland**

**National Executive Committeeman**  
NEC@LegionMail.org

English as the Official Language

The American Legion strongly urges Congress and State Legislatures to designate English as the official language of government in the United States. As of 2015, thirty-one states have adopted English as their official language of government.

The American Legion believes naturalized citizens should have the ability to speak and understand the English language. It also believes bilingual programs and ballots printed in another language are counterproductive, costly and tend to discourage immigrants from entering the mainstream of American life.

The American Legion urges Congress to encourage and fund alternative bilingual education programs to serve, as was originally intended, as a short intermediate step to achieve a proficiency in the English language. Bilingual education programs that provide instruction in the student's native language relegates English to a secondary status.

The American Legion believes that the promotion of another language over English in the United States contributes to separatism rather than unification of purpose. It believes that legislation designating English as the official language of this country would help unify the different cultures and facilitate the learning of English by immigrants.

The American Legion adopted its first formal resolution calling for English as the official





Dennis Boland (Continued)

language at a national convention in 1983. A follow-up resolution, adopted in 1994, made reference to the belief that “the English language is undergoing gradual displacement in this era of high immigration”.

The American Legion recognizes the desire of immigrants to maintain a cultural link with their native country by speaking their native language. This is understandable and appropriate when the individual also possesses a proficiency in the English language at a level conducive to normal conversation. The American Legion encourages immigrants to achieve a proficiency in multiple languages.

Ninety-four percent of the world’s countries (189 of 202) have at least one official language. English is an official language in 53 nations (26 percent). The United States is one of the only 13 nations that does not have an official language policy.

“Airborne All the Way”

**Art Schwabe**

**National Executive Committeeman Alternate  
NECA@LegionMail.org**

24 Families have been helped since December 2015 for a total of \$33,000  
Here is the list of Kids receiving COTA Donations Jan. To May, 2016.

**YOU DO MAKE A DIFFERENCE! THANK YOU!**



| PATIENT     | AMOUNT  | LOCATION          |
|-------------|---------|-------------------|
| Allison S.  | \$1,000 | St. Augustine     |
| Casey T.    | \$1,500 | Northport         |
| Zach S.     | \$1,000 | Ponte Vedra       |
| Evan R.     | \$500   | Riverview         |
| AnnaRose V. | \$500   | Gainesville       |
| Ethan H.    | \$1,000 | Vero Beach        |
| Casey T.    | \$1,000 | Orlando           |
| Jovani S.   | \$3,500 | Altamonte Springs |
| Ashley Q.   | \$500   | West Palm Beach   |
| ★★★★ TOTAL  |         | \$10,500          |

You truly make a Difference for Florida Kids.



**Tom Gora**  
**Department Sergeant at Arms**  
**Sgt-at-arms@legionmail.org**

**“You will guard especially against the loss of one of The American Legion’s greater possessions, our deep and abiding spirit of comradeship.”**

This year I had the opportunity, when requested, to provide training sessions to two districts, and to several individual Posts and their Sgt.-at- Arms. The most frequent questions I have been asked this year have dealt with color guard procedures such as forming mixed color guards at posts, uniforms, etc. A new chapter for the Sgt.-at- Arms Manual has been written that addresses color guard procedures and I hope to have a revised manual available at the convention. The Department has proofed and approved the new chapter. Four basic color guard training videos produced by the U.S. Army have also been identified and the Department will be place them on their web site. Working together with the 11th District, a pre-convention trip was made to Post 398, Indiantown, to judge color guard performance at this correctional institution post. The Department has agreed to establish a special award category for correctional institution post color guard units who for obvious reasons cannot compete at the annual department convention.

If you are a delegate to the National Convention and wish to volunteer as a Special Assistant National Sgt.-at-Arms working the convention floor, please let me know; names must be cleared by the Department. This is a rewarding experience and your service will bring additional admiration and pride to the Department of Florida whom you will proudly represent.

The Annual Department Convention is coming soon, and keeping order on the convention floor is a responsibility of the Sgt.-at-Arms. Here are some simple suggestions to make this an orderly, well run, and successful convention experience. Please remember, those working the convention floor as a Sgt.-at-Arms volunteer for this duty to serve all of us.

- All program chair persons should personally greet their awardees, guests, and speakers outside the main hall and personally escort them to the seating section reserved for them. Inform the Sgt.-at-Arms stationed at the reserved seating section who they are, and what award they are receiving, so that they can be seated in an organized fashion to keep the presentations moving along.

- All delegates and alternates please make

sure your ribbon is viewable at a glance when you enter the hall. Don’t forget to mute your phone!

- Please show up on time for general sessions, classes, etc., and if you do attend a session or class please plan to stay for the entire presentation.
- If designated to cast post votes during elections please seat yourself in a location close to a microphone to give the vote, this helps those recording votes and moves the process along.
- After daily sessions please do have fun but remember to be respectful of other guests in the hotel, especially when moving between hospitality suites. Many young families visiting Orlando with children stay at the hotel. Give other hotel guests a good impression of The American Legion Family. We are easily identifiable to others by the shirts and hats we proudly wear. Let’s do the best we can to make others in the hotel proud of The American Legion by the manner in which we conduct ourselves.

**Steven Newman**  
**Department Chaplain**  
**chaplain@legionmail.org**

Greetings and a big hello to my fellow Legionnaire Family. It’s that time of year already for District Constitutional Conferences and the Department Convention. You wonder where the time goes. A year has already past us by. Hopefully, everything has been well and successful for all throughout the 2015-2016 season. It’s also a time for change in leadership, administrative duties, and such.

However, we must never forget that with God everything is possible and with Him we will succeed, adapt, and overcome any challenges that come our way. God is the answer for many of our questions. We just have to realize and believe that He will be with us always through both the good times and difficult ones. Having faith gives us the strength and courage to face any adversity that may come our way. Believing in God gives us a sense of security, a sense of grace, and a sense of belonging. Remember God is our strength in everything we set out to do and accomplish.

Always remember: “Be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go”. Joshua 1-9.

“For God and Country”





**Shelli Romeu**

*Department Historian / Centennial Chair*  
[historian@legionmail.org](mailto:historian@legionmail.org)

To my Florida American Legion Family:

As a number of you may already know, I have recently accepted a Government Cyber-Security position with the Department of Energy in South Dakota. This was a tough decision to make, but after a great deal of contemplation I decided to accept the offer with DOE and will be moving out of Florida early May. I want you all to know that I am truly leaving here with mixed feelings; happy about my new career opportunity and moving back to a location that is within a short drive to my mom, siblings, and numerous other relatives in Minnesota – but also sad to be leaving the great state of Florida and an organization where I have so many wonderful friends, fellow veterans, and Legion Family members.

Serving within the American Legion has been part of the best period of my life after serving in the Army. I will always value and cherish the memories I have gained and made here in Florida. It has been my Honor and Privilege to serve with and for you all, and to contribute to this great organization. I hope to continue to do so in the future, perhaps even one day back in Florida again (yes, I will return- or as Arnold Schwarzenegger said: "I'll be back"! ). On the bright side, my retirement is definitely closer now with this new position.

I sincerely want to thank the Department of Florida leadership, staff, and colleagues for all the support and mentorship I have received over the years to enable me to succeed in supporting our Legion's Four Pillars. I also want to thank my own 15th District and Posts for the ever present support and opportunities they have given me throughout my time here. I couldn't have been successful without all of you, and I've learned a great deal and worked with many exceptional people throughout this great state with whom I am sure I will remain friends for years to come. I can only wish that my new job will give me such rewarding experiences and supportive friends as well.

To my fellow Historians (and any others who also love the histories of your Legion Posts) – please continue on with your yearly history updates and work to update your Centennial information on the website. This will allow Florida to remain a front-runner in getting the 100th Anniversary kicked off to a good start. I will always be available to answer your questions, so please do not hesitate to contact me if you do need assistance. I am sure the folks that follow me as your elected Department Historian and Centennial Chair will

*Shelli Romeu (Continued)*

provide you with ample guidance as well.

Thank you all so much for making my time within the Florida American Legion Family a truly enjoyable one and I look forward to keeping in touch with all of you, and making new memories to share with you.

*"Goodbyes are not forever. Goodbyes are not the end. They simply mean I'll miss you, until we meet again!" - ~Author Unknown*

**Eunice Butts**

*Central Area Commander*  
[centralarea@legionmail.org](mailto:centralarea@legionmail.org)

The 2015-2016 year is coming to an end and I want to thank all of you for the opportunity to serve. It has been with upmost honor and privilege to serve one of the greatest areas in the state of Florida. You have truly proven that The Legion Family can stick together to accomplish the goals of the Post, District and Area in membership and wonderful "thinking outside of the box" programs.

Special thanks to the 16th District for placing 3rd or 4th for the year.

Special thanks to the following Posts for making 100% or more for the year so far:

| DISTRICT 7 |        | DISTRICT 15 |        | DISTRICT 16 |        |
|------------|--------|-------------|--------|-------------|--------|
| POST       | %      | POST        | %      | POST        | %      |
| 95         | 118.75 | 26          | 106.25 | 275         | 103.95 |
| 71         | 113.08 | 248         | 105.56 | 79          | 101.14 |
| 396        | 104.72 | 246         | 101.91 | 273         | 100.73 |
| 23         | 101.72 | 147         | 101.14 | 335         | 100.18 |
| 201        | 100    | 389         | 100    |             |        |

The Central Area was blessed to host the National Commander Dale Barnett's visitation and Walk in Florida. Congratulations to Post 275 for sponsoring the Walk and breakfast. To the Post who prepared and served meals, you did an awesome job! To all Posts that were visited and to the Commanders who visited the Posts closest to them; thank you for coming together as one body during the National Commander visitation, we were able to raise \$19,000: \$5,000 for Children and Youth and \$14,000 for the National Emergency Fund.

We, the family of the Central Area would like to take this time to personally thank NEC Dennis Boland for giving us the privilege of hosting the National Commander. Many of the Posts are still relishing their memory of having a National

*Eunice Butts (Continued)*

Commander visit their Posts. My term as the Central Area Commander for the 2015-2016 year is coming to an end and I want to thank all of you. I am so proud of what you have accomplished individually and as a family. Thank you for the memories I will cherish forever.

God bless you and you families, our POW/MIAs and our troops that continue to fight for us every day.

For God and Country

**Michael Kirchoff**  
*Western Area Commander*  
[westernarea@legionmail.org](mailto:westernarea@legionmail.org)

As I write my last Legion Link Article, I'm amazed how quickly this year has zoomed by. It's been an honor to serve as Western Area Commander. District 1 had 5 Posts reach 100% and District 2 did outstanding by having 7 out of 14 Posts reach 100%. I want to thank District 1 Commander Charlie Johann and District 2 Commander Willie Jackson for all their support this past year. Also, congratulations to the new District 1 Commander Chuck Olsen from Post 378 in Gulf Breeze and District 2 Commander Jim Brennan from Post 84 in Havana. This past year I traveled over 20,000 miles visited 29 of the 35 Posts in the Western Area attending 19 General Membership meetings, 6 District meetings and 2 Constitutional Conferences along with attending National Convention and Department of Florida Fall Conference. I rode in both of the National and Florida In State Legacy Rides as well.

I am looking forward to attending Department of Florida Convention in June.

**Brian Gehling**  
*Law & Order Chair*  
[LawOrder@legionmail.org](mailto:LawOrder@legionmail.org)

First, I would like to thank Commander Ramos for the allowing me to serve this past year as your Department Law & Order Chairman. I have enjoyed this opportunity and hope to serve you once again in some capacity in the future.

Secondly, I would like to announce the winners of this year's Law & Order program. The Law Enforcement Officer of the Year winner is Detective Matthew Briglia from St. Lucie County Sheriff's Deputy. He was sponsored by Port St. Lucie Post 355. The Firefighter of the Year is Lieutenant Paul Smith from St. Lucie County Fire District. He was sponsored by Port St. Lucie Post 318. I look forward to seeing these gentlemen at the Convention.



*Brian Gehling (Continued)*

Lastly, I would just like to thank all the Posts that sent in their candidates. I would like to remind Posts that when you submit the applications for judging to ensure that all the required information is submitted with it. I hope more post will participate in this wonderful program.

**Diane Schmidt**  
**Public Relations Chair**  
**PublicRelations@legionmail.org**

I challenged each Post this past year to use media such as the local newspaper to promote all Post activities. One Post stands out for their commitment to Public Relations, for their commitment to their local Veterans and for their commitment to their Community. I wish to commend **Post #136, Saint James City**, for outstanding achievement in Public Relations. Under the leadership of **Tom Lewis, Committee Chair** (and Post Adjutant) and **Commander Larry Nixon**, this Post has shown Florida what can be done with planning and enthusiasm. They filled a notebook with newspaper articles about Post activities that included "Safe Boating," "Medicare 101," "Free Cleaning and Testing Hearing Aid Program," for the Community and provided the American Flag for a flag raising at the local community center. They encouraged participation of local WWII veterans to attend a special luncheon at Post #323. This "We are Family" Post is an excellent example of what a Post can be for all veterans and their community.

**Loretta Young**  
**Department ROTC/JROTC/Shooting Sports Chair**  
**JROTC@legionmail.org**

The semester is just about over for the High Schools. There have been numerous Year End Award Ceremonies, Military Balls and Final Events in the last two months. I have attended as many events as time would allow. Some schools have been well represented by the Legion however, reports from the District Chairmen have not been forwarded to me for the most part. I would like to know the Posts in all the Districts and the schools that they support.

I attended the Army State Marksmanship Meet at Island Coast H.S. Cape Coral. The event was very well attended by schools throughout the State. Kudos to the 13th District Chairman, Don Teasley, who initiated the sponsorship for the event and has been a driving force for the Marksmanship Program in the area. The Department of Florida made a contribution to the event which assisted in the cost of trophies and other items necessary to carry out the Meet.

*Loretta Young (Continued)*

There are plans for a future partnership between the Legion and the Army 6th Brigade to conduct this event which is held annually. There were several Legionnaires who were able to attend the Award Ceremony and present the trophies including our Dept. Vice Commander of Programs, Dianne Boland. The State of Florida had one finalist, Luis Vazquez attending Summerlin Academy, who qualified for the National Marksmanship Meet that will be held in Colorado Springs in August. He will also be awarded a \$500 scholarship which will be presented at the Department Convention.

There was a moderate turnout for the Cadet of the Year Application but not as many as the last 2 years. This application shows just how much some of our youth are able to accomplish in their High School Cadet Leadership Programs. We had some outstanding returns. I would hope this program continues to increase as there are scholarship awards which are presented at our Convention to assist the cadet for their future education.

Thanks so much to all who give their time and effort in support of our Youth Programs.

For God and Country

**Deborah Wheeler**  
**Women Veterans Chair**  
**womenveterans@legionmail.org**

As this year of the American Legion closes, another begins, just like New Year's Day each year. This is an opportunity to rededicate ourselves to the men and women veterans we were founded to serve. Take this opportunity to utilize our female veterans on the District and Post level. Encourage, not discourage them from accepting additional responsibilities and help our American Legion; Committee Chairs, Post and District Office just to name a few. You can rely on them for their dedication and willingness, but you have to ask and want their help. You will be impressed by the results. Women Veterans will rise to the occasion and far exceed your expectations. We need to appreciate all Veterans regardless of gender.

**Paul Martel**  
**State Legislative Chair**  
**StateLegislative@legionmail.org**

May I start off by saying THANK YOU for all that you do for our veterans. I know that all of you are busy with life, but when we ask you to contact your state representative's or Washington, you call, e-mail or write to let them know we are not

*Paul Martel (Continued)*

pleased with a situation and something needs to be done. Please believe me that when you react, they DO listen. We are a block of 200,000 thousand plus here in Florida, the one thing that the politicians will pay attention to is numbers, not all, we are fortunate in Florida to have quality representative's both state and Washington who are doing the best they can for the right reason, not just to enhance their future.

I need to ask all of you that have been receiving information from me or if you want to be added to my list, so you can receive such, please send me your e-mail address once again. Last month I lost all that I had in my computer, that is why you have not seen anything from me, now, some will say, THANK GOD, but if you would like the information, please do as I ask.

This will be short because next month at Convention I will have a Legislative training class on June, 17th from 3:15 - 4:30, if you do attend please bring information from your representative that you can share with us.

I want to say THANK YOU to Commander Ramos for allowing me to serve this year, it has been my honor.

May God bless and take care of you till we meet.

**Donna Artola**  
**Blood Donor Chair**  
**BloodDonor@legionmail.org**

This has been an active quarter. April, we had Children and Youth picnic, which I had attended and a blood mobile scheduled however, I am sorry to say that they showed up at the end of the event. There was also for the first time a blood mobile at American Legion Post 398 Martin County Correctional. The staff donated blood on behalf of the members. There was a total of 7 pints donated for the first time. I attended this drive and I was told that I am a three gallon donor.

I have also visited a number of Posts the last few months. There will be a blood mobile at the Department Convention on Friday June 16th, so let's get out there and donate.

My question for you is, does your Post have a "blood chair"? This is not a hard chair to work. When you have an event call your local blood mobile, they do all the work. Please keep me updated with your drives that you have. If your post is in need of help, or if you are having an event let me know, I am here to support your drives. The time to save the life of 3 is 20 minutes.



**Jack Stanley**  
*National Cemetery Chair*  
 FloridaNationalCemetery@legionmail.org

With the opening of the Cape Canaveral National Cemetery in Scottsmoor for burials in January 2016, the state of Florida now has nine National Cemeteries.

The Saint Augustine National Cemetery is closed except for spouses of those already interred there and Bay Pines National Cemetery in St. Petersburg is accepting cremations only.

The other National Cemeteries are located in Pensacola, Tallahassee, Jacksonville, Bushnell, Sarasota and Lake Worth. These seven cemeteries should provide burial space for at least the next 50 years.

I have visited each one of them at least once each year and the directors and their staff do a fantastic job. I'm sure most of you have visited at least one of them but if you have not, make it a point to visit one, you will be impressed.

Legion volunteers are helping at all these cemeteries, making our presence known. Remember, all of you who have served have earned the right, along with your spouse, to be interred with Military Honors at one of these cemeteries at no cost to you.

Take advantage of it. I have a lot of information on what you are entitled to and would be happy to share it with you. I can be reached at email yelnats33@msn.com or phone 386-274-2299.

*Meeting with Rep. Ros-Lehtinen*



**James K Roberts III (FL)**  
*SAL Advisory Committee Chairman*  
 sal@legionmail.org



My Fellow Legion Family Members,

As this year comes to a close, I want to thank Commander Ramos for allowing me the opportunity to serve as the Department of Florida SAL Liaison. This year has been great and your Sons have been working hard. While the numbers reflecting their work will not be out until the Convention, I can tell you that the Sons of the American Legion, Detachment of Florida did make their 100% this year, have chartered 2 new Squadrons and are on their way to another All-Time-High in membership.

We have had some firsts this year – this year was the first year that a SAL Member has held this position. In previous years it has either a Legionnaire or a dual member. This year I was privileged to serve as an instructor for the Florida American Legion College, another first for the Sons, and finally, we delivered an SAL Advisors Course of instruction at the Fall Conference. This course provided our Sons Advisors and Liaisons with some additional knowledge on the Sons of the American Legion Program.

As we look forward to the new year, I will be moving on to a new position within the Detachment as the Detachment Adjutant. In this position I hope to carry on our continued growth and work with our leadership to keep the Florida Sons of the American Legion moving in the right direction towards a brighter future.

Thank you all for everything you have done for the Sons of the American Legion and the Florida American Legion Family.



**Jim Day**  
*American Legion Riders Chairman*  
 Dept of Florida

**THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU!**  
 I can't believe it's already been a year since I



*Jim Day (Continued)*

had the honor of being appointed Legion Riders Chairman by Commander Ramos. I am so proud of how well we all worked together this year to build the communication and support each other and the programs of The American Legion. There is no way that all the successes would have happened without the continued work and support of every Legion Rider.



I want to take a moment and THANK all my Area Chairman, District Chairman and Chapter Directors. Together you all worked to get

information submitted to build communication and get those numbers reported.

Sadly, recently we lost a great asset in the Eastern Area with the loss of Tony Mirabella the Eastern Area ALR Chairman. Services will be held to honor Tony on July 23rd @ 11:00am at Post 1 in Titusville. I would like to ask all Chapters/Districts to refrain from planning events on this day and make every attempt to attend the services. If an event is already in the works and planned, please take have a moment of silence on Tony's behalf.

Not only was Tony a dedicated rider, leader, husband and father, he was truly an inspiration for all to look up to. He worked tirelessly to build the Eastern Area and fulfill the goals he set for himself. His absence will be missed by all.



The Merry-Go-Round was held this spring for the Children & Youth Programs and the contributions will stay in the state of Florida. The winning District and trophy will be awarded at Convention in June 2016.....

The 2016 Florida Legacy Run was once again a great success. With record numbers for "Hardcore" riders, funds raised and American Legion Post visited. With that growth will come



*Jim Day (Continued)*

changes for the years to come. The Legacy Run Committee is growing from Mike Kirchoff and Jennifer Day to a team of 5 additional members and 5 alternate members. Welcome Mike Amig, Dale and Janie Fish, Rodney Hollingsworth, Manny Ayala, Diane Tucker to the new team. The 2017 Florida Legacy Run planning is already in full swing.



This year we rode over 1,400 miles, visited 50 Posts and raised over \$35,000 (with a private donation from a member of Post 392 to bump us up to \$35,000). We had great support from all the Legion Family Department Staff

and Officer as well as Area and District support. President Pearl paid us visit and we even go Mike McDaniel to dust the cobwebs off and ride a stunt with us. We had the opportunity to get Central Area Commander Eunice Butts on a trike and she



had a blast riding for 2 days with us. Commander Ramos spent the week with us and joined us for "LOOP" every evening. We are looking forward to exposing more of the leadership team to the comradery and kinship that comes with the Legacy Run.

The 2016 ALR Rally was hosted by Punta Gorda Legion Family. What a great job and turnout. The food was outstanding, entertainment great and what a fun time watching the bike games. Thank you Stanley and your whole crew for an outstanding job.

**CONVENTION:** is just around the corner. ALR Chairman meeting is on Thursday and the ALR General Session is on Friday. We will have the room available to us all day on Friday for some ALR SOP questions/answers and help. Please bring your works in progress and let's get them finished and submitted. Also, during this time a few computers will be available to submit officers reports and or quarterly reports if they have not been submitted yet.

**THE FUTURE:** Going forward for the next year I would like to focus on THE FOUR PILLARS and the foundation of The American Legion. Let's

*Jim Day (Continued)*

work on using all the communication networks we have built this year and get our Riders trained and educated on the core principles of The Legion Family.

We are talking about hosting the 1st Annual Florida ALR Convention in January 2017. This will be an opportunity for us to focus on ALR training and building Legion Family foundations.

Jennifer is working on an ALR Directory. This directory will be separated by Area – District – Post and will contain information on each Chapter/Post for meeting nights, meals and events. It will also have each Area/District Commander and Chairman listed. Please get your Chapter information submitted if you haven't already done so.

Finally, I would like to take a moment to thank all of the ladies at the Department offices in Orlando. Without all of them there is no way we could get everything accomplished. Rachel, Jennifer (both), Bobbie, Elizabeth and Allyson, you are under appreciated and a tremendous asset to The American Legion Family in Florida.

Thanks for a great year.

### 2016 Florida Legislation Report

The 2016 regular session of the Florida legislature was a success in that it ended on time and that it was a successful session for Florida's veterans and Veteran Service Organizations.

Below is a list of Veteran Related Bills and where they are in the process.

#### Legislation:

**HB 7099 Gaetz** – The Tax package passed this year includes a variety of tax breaks and tax holidays. For veterans the significant change is an exemption for sales of food and drink by military veterans service organizations to their members. This exemption will save Congressionally Chartered Veterans Service Organizations approximately \$1.6 million a year. Additionally, Posts will no longer get in trouble if a new or inexperienced canteen officer or treasurer accidentally fails to submit. This bill goes into effect July 1.

**SB 184 HB 429** – Was the 2016 omnibus Veterans bill that picked up many veteran issues at the end it:

#### 1. **Housing Rental Applications for Military Service members**

The bill provides that a landlord is required

*2016 Florida Legislation Report (Continued)*

to process a rental application from a military service member within seven days of submission, if the landlord requires an application before residing in a rental unit. Within that seven-day period, the landlord must provide to the service member a response in writing of the approval or denial of their application and, if denied, the reason for denial. Should the landlord not provide a timely denial of the rental application, the landlord must lease the rental unit to the service member if all other terms of the application and lease are met. These provisions also apply in situations in which a service member seeks to rent a unit or parcel within the control of a condominium association, cooperative association, or homeowners' association.

#### 2. **Voluntary Check-off to Request Information on Veterans' Benefits and Services**

The bill creates a voluntary check-off on the application form for an original, renewal, or replacement driver license or identification card to allow military veterans to request written or electronic information on federal, state, and local benefits and services available to veterans. The veteran may elect to receive the information through the U.S. mail or by e-mail. The Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs (FDVA) will select a non-profit third party provider that has sufficient ability to communicate with veterans throughout the state to distribute the requested information directly to veterans. The Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles (DHSMV) and the FDVA will collaborate to administer this voluntary check-off program.

#### 3. **Florida Veterans' Hall of Fame**

The bill provides authority for the Florida Veterans' Hall of Fame Council to accept nominations for and consider former members of the Florida National Guard for inclusion in the Florida Veterans' Hall of Fame.

#### **Credit for Military Experience for Professional Licensure through the Department of Business and Professional Regulation**

The bill requires the Department of Business and Professional Regulation (DBPR) to extend credit to honorably discharged veterans for relevant military training and education towards the requirements for construction and electrical contracting licensure and certification. For construction





*2016 Florida Legislation Report (Continued)*

contracting licenses, the bill allows up to 3 years of relevant active duty service to meet the four-year experience requirement for licensure. An additional year of active duty experience as a foreman in the trade may also be applied toward the experience requirements for licensure. For electrical or alarm system contracting licenses, the bill allows 4 years of experience as a supervisor in electrical or alarm system work with the military to meet the four-year experience requirement for licensure. The DBPR must provide by October 1, 2017 and each year thereafter a report to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives on the method used to license and certify honorably discharged veterans in construction and electrical contracting.

**4. Credit for Military Experience for Professional Licensure through the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services**

The bill requires the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (DACS) to extend credit for relevant military training and education towards the requirement for private security, private investigative, and recovery services licensure. The DACS must provide by October 1, 2017 and each year thereafter a report to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives on the methods used to license honorably discharged military veterans in the aforementioned professions.

**5. Florida National Guard Commercial Driver License Testing Pilot Program**

The bill directs the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles (DHSMV) and the Department of Military Affairs (DMA) to conduct a commercial driver license testing pilot program for members of the Florida National Guard. By June 30, 2017, the DHSMV and the DMA must jointly submit a report on the results of the pilot program to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

**Military and Overseas Voting Assistance Task Force**

Finally, the bill establishes the Military and Overseas Voting Assistance Task Force (task force) within the Department of State to study issues involving the development and implementation of an online voting system that allows absent members of the uniformed services to electronically submit voted ballots. The task force consists of the

*2016 Florida Legislation Report (Continued)*

following 11 members:

- The Secretary of State or his or her designee;
  - The Adjutant General or his or her designee;
  - The executive director of the Agency for State Technology or his or her designee;
  - One member of the Senate appointed by the President of the Senate;
  - One member of the House of Representatives appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives;
  - Three supervisors of elections appointed by the Florida State Association of Supervisors of Elections; and
  - Three individuals appointed by the Secretary of State with relevant expertise in computers, the Internet, or other associated technologies.

The Secretary of State must submit a report by the task force to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives by July 1, 2017, that recommends whether or not the state should pursue the development and implementation of an online voting system for absent uniformed services voters. If the task force recommends pursuit of an online voting system, the report must include steps for developing and implementing such a system. The task force expires upon submission of the report.

Was approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2016.

SB 222 HB 235 – The bill requires the governing body of each publicly owned or publicly operated airport to grant free parking to any vehicle displaying specified license plates for disabled veterans; clarifying that such license plates, rather than “DV” license plates, are exempt from certain parking fees charged by a county, municipality, or an agency thereof, etc.

Was approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2016.

**HB 439 SB 604** – Was the omnibus mental health package. For veterans it expands eligibility criteria for defendants to participate in diversionary programs to include veterans who were released from military service under a general discharge

Was approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2016.

**SB 772 HB 641** – This was the omnibus

*2016 Florida Legislation Report (Continued)*

Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services bill. We have worked for several years to get some exemptions from fees for veterans and this year finally got it passed.

The bill waives first time licensing application fees for specific veterans of the United States Armed Forces, his or her spouse, or a business entity in which he or she has a majority ownership stake on the following classes of licenses:

| LICENSE                                 | CURRENT INITIAL LICENSING FEE |
|---|-------------------------------|
| Land Surveyor & Mapper                  | \$180 - \$255                 |
| Health Studio                           | \$300                         |
| Commercial Telephone Seller             | \$1,500                       |
| Telemarketing Salesperson               | \$50                          |
| Movers & Moving Broker                  | \$300                         |
| Liquefied Petroleum Gas Related License | \$100 - \$525                 |
| Pawnbroker                              | \$300                         |
| Motor Vehicle Repair Shop               | \$50-\$300                    |
| Sellers of Travel                       | \$300 - \$2,500               |

In addition, to qualify for the fee waiver, the veteran, his or her spouse, or his or her business must submit an application for licensure within 60 months after the date of the veteran’s discharge from the United States Armed Forces and provide a copy of his or her discharge paperwork; a valid marriage license where applicable; and proof of ownership interest, where applicable.

The next section of the bill waives application or licensing fees for veterans only who apply for specific licensure within 24 months, rather than 60 months, of their honorable discharge from the armed forces:

| LICENSE   | CURRENT INITIAL LICENSING FEE / Application Fees |
|---|--|
| Private Investigator                            | \$75 / \$50                                      |
| Private Investigator Intern                     | \$60 / \$50                                      |
| Private Investigative / Security Agency Manager | \$75 / \$50                                      |
| Security Officer Instructor                     | \$60 / \$50                                      |
| Security Manager                                | \$75 / \$50                                      |
| Recovery Agent                                  | \$75 / \$50                                      |
| Recovery Agent Intern                           | \$60 / \$50                                      |
| Recovery Agent Manager                          | \$75 / \$50                                      |
| Recovery Agent Instructor                       | \$60 / \$50                                      |
| Firearms Instructor                             | \$100 / \$50                                     |





*2016 Florida Legislation Report (Continued)*

Was approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect at different times.

**HB 1157 SB 1538** – The bill expands the mechanism through which eligible members of the United States Armed Forces can earn college credit for military experience. Specifically, the bill:

- Requires the Department of Education (department) to annually, identify and publish minimum scores, maximum credit, and course or courses for which college credit must be awarded for the specified tests:
  - Excelsior College subject examination.
  - Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support (DANTES) subject standardized test.
  - Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT).
- Modifies the residency requirements for recipients of a Purple Heart or other combat decoration superior in precedence to qualify for a waiver from tuition for undergraduate college credit programs and career certificate programs if such recipients are currently or were at the time of the military action that resulted in the awarding of the combat

decoration, residents of this state.

- Adds new methods for demonstrating mastery of subject area knowledge for educator certification purposes by allowing individuals to demonstrate subject area competency through documentation of:
  - Successful completion of a United States Defense Language Institute Foreign
  - Language Center program, or A passing score on the DLPT

*Was approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2016.*

**SB 1202 HB 1321** – The bill requires county and municipal departments of parks and recreation to provide a full or partial discount on park entrance fees to the following individuals:

- Current military service members;
- Honorably discharged veterans;
- Honorably discharged veterans with a service-connected disability;
- The surviving spouse or parents of a military service member who died in combat; and
- The surviving spouse or parent of a law enforcement officer, firefighter, emergency medical technician, or paramedic who died in the line of duty.

*Was approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2016.*

**HB 1219 SB 1538** – The bill requires each state agency and authorizes each political subdivision of the state to develop and implement a written veterans' recruitment plan that establishes annual goals for ensuring the full use of veterans in the agency's or political subdivision's workforce.

Each veterans' recruitment plan must apply to veterans and their family members who are entitled to veterans' preference in appointment and retention in public employment pursuant to s. 295.07(1), F.S.

The Department of Management Services must annually collect and publish on its website and include in its annual workforce report statistical data for each state agency on the following:

- The number of persons who claim veterans' preference;
- The number of persons who are hired through the veterans' preference; and
- The number of persons who are hired as a result of the veterans' recruitment plan.

*Was approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect October 1, 2016.*

Budget – The Florida legislature included \$100,000 for Boys and Girls State in the 2016 budget.

# PROJECT: VETRELIEF

A PROGRAM OF THE AMERICAN LEGION, DEPARTMENT OF FLORIDA



## MOST GENEROUS BRANCH OF SERVICE CAMPAIGN

*Contribute to the generosity of your favorite branch through this campaign to support our service members and their families!*

Do you think your branch of service can be considered the "Most Generous"? **Join our campaign** by creating a fundraising page for the branch of service you'd like to win the title, or make a donation. Then, invite your friends and family to join in on the fun! To learn more about the campaign, visit the campaign link listed below. The winner will be announced at the 2016 Department Convention.

**So, who will it be?** Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force, or Coast Guard? It's up to you!

**FOR MORE INFORMATION - <http://bit.ly/MostGenerousBranch>**

### Department Convention is coming up!

During the 2016 Department Convention, there will be several opportunities you can learn more PROJECT: VetRelief. We encourage you to sign up for a class, or attend our presentation.

**Introductory VetRelief Advocate Training (Fantail):**

- Thursday, June 16th - 3:00 - 4:00 PM
- Saturday, June 18th - 8:00 - 9:00 AM

**Fundraising Class (Fantail):**

- Thursday, June 16th - 12:30 - 1:30 PM
- Friday, June 17th - 9:00 - 10:00 AM

**Presentation and Q&A Session (Odyssey):**

- Thursday, June 16th - 5:00 - 6:00 PM

**Vendor Table (Main Lobby Area):**

- Friday, June 17th - 8:00 AM - 5:00 PM
- Saturday, June 18th - 8:00 AM - 5:00 PM



For more information visit our website: [www.ProjectVetRelief.org](http://www.ProjectVetRelief.org)





**2015 - 2016 Champions**

**2015 Boys Nation President**

Aravind "Vinny" Byju  
Sarasota, FL

**2015 Boys State Governor**

Olufemi "Femi" O'niyi  
Margate, FL

**Eagle Scout of the Year**

Jeremiah Lovestrand  
Floral City, FL

**Department Oratorical Winner**

Natalie Morgan  
Sanford, FL

**JROTC Cadet of the Year**

Renato-John Leon  
Hurlburt Field, FL

**General Scholarship**

Madison Zook  
Titusville, FL

**Veteran's Service Officer Association**

**Scholarship Winner**  
Alexander Douglas, III  
Maitland, FL

**Law Officer of the Year (Department)**

Detective Matthew Briglia  
St. Lucie County Sheriff's Office

**Firefighter of the Year (Department)**

Lieutenant Paul Smith  
St. Lucie County Fire District

*2015 - 2016 Champions (Continued)*

**Law Officer of the Year (National, Southern Region)**

Salvatore Anicito  
Ft. Pierce, FL

**Firefighter of the Year (National, Southern Region)**

Matt Brown  
Lakeland, FL

**Teacher of the Year**

Melody Zortea  
Jacksonville, FL

**Junior Shooting Sports (Individual): Sporter**

Cadet Luis Vazquez  
Bartow, FL

**JUNE 2016**

*Upcoming Events*

|                                 |         |
|---------------------------------|---------|
| 4th District DCC Meeting.....   | 6/4     |
| 3rd District DCC Meeting.....   | 6/4     |
| 5th District DCC Meeting.....   | 6/5     |
| 17th District DCC Meeting.....  | 6/5     |
| 11th District DCC Meeting.....  | 6/5     |
| 98th Department Convention..... | 6/16-19 |
| Boys State.....                 | 6/19-25 |

**Attention Officers & Posts:**

*Effective July 1, 2016, all article deadlines will be the 15th of each month. The Legion Link will be available on the 1st of each month beginning in August, there will be no edition for July. **Send us your news and updates, we want to know!***

*Please send submissions to:  
acapecca@floridalegion.org*



Department of Florida

**98<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL DEPARTMENT CONVENTION**

*Renaissance Orlando at Seaworld  
June 16-19*

Visit our website for complete details:  
[www.floridalegion.org](http://www.floridalegion.org)

**Thank you to  
Department Commander**

**Jim Ramos**

**for a Great Year!**



**OOPS!**

*It appears we overlooked a couple of submissions. Thank you for bringing it to our attention! Our sincerest apologies this happened, we will do our best to prevent it from occurring again.*

*Please share this page with those who do not have access to the internet.*

**Roy Havekost**  
Social Media Chairman  
SocialMedia@legionmail.org

Greetings Legionnaires;

This will be the last newsletter article on Social Media for the 2015-16 term of office. I would like to thank all of the Social Media Chairpersons, both local and district, throughout the State of Florida for your efforts in promoting the goals and objectives of the American Legion through your Facebook TM pages and groups. If your Post or District still is not online, you are missing out on a great opportunity to advertize your existence to the thousands of veterans who are living in your area. Facebook TM is a very powerful membership recruitment tool that is at your disposal at no cost, and has no physical boundaries when it comes to its advertizing potential.

This year at the Annual Convention I will again be conducting a training class on Friday, June 17th in the Damselish meeting room. Due to the tight scheduling of meeting room times the class will start promptly at 3:15pm and conclude at 4:30pm. This class will be a repeat of the November 2015 class. The content will again cover how to properly promote your Facebook TM page or group to its fullest capacity so it can better serve your advertizing needs.

On Saturday, June 18th Social Media Awards will be presented during the General Session before noon.

**Jerry Brandt**  
Membership Chairman  
Membership@legionmail.org

At the time I am writing this, May 16, 2016, we have 101 Posts who exceeded the 100% goal for the year. Congratulations! However, there is still time to reach out to those members who have not renewed for 2016 and bring them back into the Legion. There is a number of Posts who need only 1 to 10 members to reach the 100%. Reach out to the members who did not renew, if nothing else, you can find out why they did not renew. Whether the problem is a finance problem, or a problem with someone else in the Post, see if you can resolve the problem.

As for those Posts who have exceeded this year goal: Please have your "Post Excellence" request sent in to your District Commander. You did the hard part already, take home the award! What is needed?

1. Membership 100% plus 1 (from last year)
2. Youth Activities, must sponsor and actively participate in at least One Primary Youth program, (Boys State, American Legion Baseball, Oratorical, Boy Scout, etc.)
3. Community, working with the community outside the Post Home.
4. Service to troops/veterans, (Assist with the VA, Care Packages to Troops overseas, Supporting the USO, etc.)

Please write a letter to your District Commander, highlighting each of the above items.

Commander's walk: many Posts took part in this event, I would like to thank all the Posts involved. I understand the Post 275 in Dunedin took the National Commander, Dale Barnett for a walk. Post 129 had the City of Jacksonville Beach, Mayor Charlie Latham, involved. Another Post had the sheriff in theirs. Thank you for getting the word out about the problems with the VA.

In closing, I would like to thank everybody involved with Membership this year. With the changing of the guard at Posts, Districts, Area and Department levels, please start the planning for Open House and other events. Please do not let the American Legion, be the "Best Kept Secret in YOUR Community".

**William "Rick" Johnson**  
Children and Youth Chair  
CY@legionmail.org

Hello Legion family. Well, it's that time again where we are closing out the year. We did a lot of great things this year and I had a great time being your Chairman. I think that we were able to get the awareness out throughout the state about the Children and Youth programs. I had a lot of help around the state with the help of Michelle and Bill. I can't leave out Elizabeth Douglas as she helped me out a lot.

We put on two major events this year; the golf tournament and the picnic. Both were huge success with the help from the family around the state. Special congrats to the family of 323 and 117. You guys rock and THANK YOU from the bottom of my heart.

All the new District Commanders, please get your Chairman chosen quickly and turn their names in so we can get the new year started off right and begin to work together to get the awareness of the programs out to the community. With that being done you will increase your membership within your Post and most important be a viable asset within your community.

Our new Children and Youth chairman will be Sid Damsgard from Post 275. Please help him out as you did me. He is a great guy and his heart is in it like mine.

Doing events together as a family only gets awareness out there about our programs. The more events that we have the more the community will know about us and begin to stand behind us in our goals.

Let's not remain a secret in your communities and let's get visible. Let's remember what the Children and Youth Pillar stands for. If your Post or District has a function going on, please let us know so we can get the word out and get participation within the State.

Let's continue to give our kids a "Square Deal" and continue working the programs. Let's have a great 2016-2017.