



THE LEGION LINK

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Department Convention tentative agenda now online at www.floridalegion.org.

Submit Articles at

floridalegion.org/submit or legionlink@floridalegion.org

Questions? legionlink@floridalegion.org

A Message from the Department Commander

Eunice Butts, Commander

commander@floridalegion.org



Greetings, Comrades; March was an educational and exciting month.

Attended the Washington Conference, where the Department of Florida received an award from the Legislative Department, First Time presented.

Visted 1st, 3rd, 4th, 6th and 17th Districts. I enjoyed visiting posts that I had never visited before. Thank you all for your wonderful hospitality. It would be very nice for each District, Area, and Department Vice Commander to visit their post individually in your prospective positions during a Post meeting.

Represented The American Legion Department of Florida at the "Heavendrops, Angels of the Sky Gala." This organization employs individuals with disabilities,

including U.S. Military Veterans, that create various super-amazing products from decommissioned U.S. Military parachutes dating back to WWII. Hence the name "Angels of the Sky" refers to the paramilitary troops. This organization provides a purpose for veterans.

Congratulations to Post 7 for participating in the "Military Makeover" with Montel Williams. Congratulations, American Legion Post 378, on being selected as the beneficiary of the 203 "Fairways to Freedom Golf Tournament." Thank you, Commander Melissa Barnes and Post 378 members, for your outstanding work for the veterans, youth, and community.

I attended the March on Tallahassee, Northern Area Ball and 15th District Commanders and Auxiliary Dinner and Auction for Boys and Girls State.

Now is the time to prepare for the CPRs and Addendum. Have a great month.

COMMANDER'S CHARITIES

PROJECT: VetRelief and Jackson InAction 83



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Buddy Checks

Michael Raymond, 1st Vice Commander
1stvice@legionmail.org



Sometimes it's so sad to think that some of the most important people in your life become not so important as time goes by. People that helped shape the person you are today have disappeared from view

and are soon forgotten. Years go by, and you hear this person is not doing well or, worse, no longer with us. By then, of course, it may be just a little too late. These people could be your parents, siblings, or people you worked or served with. Buddy checks are not just limited to people who are delinquent on their dues. Sometimes you have no idea just how important that phone call or visit is.

Recently I was notified that a long-time Post member and good friend had passed. The first thing that came to mind was our interaction at the Post. I would greet him, and his words to me were the same every day. "Gambler, you always bring a smile!" I'm just wondering, did I make as big a difference in his life as he made to mine? Would a phone call have made a difference?

It is so important that we never forget where we came from and the people who helped us get there. The same person who planted this silly idea in my head that I could lead a Legion Post of 1300 members is now spending his time at a Veterans nursing home. The last time I visited him, he gave me the impression that he's given up. But I will not give up on him. I will continually check on my buddy! Please do the same. You could save a life!

APRIL 2023	
1-30	Children & Youth Month
1-30	Month of the Military Child
1-30	Military Saves Month
1	Battle of Okinawa (1945)
1	JSSP 2nd Round Targets Due to CMP
1	April Fools Day
1-30	ALR Florida Round Robin
1	District 15: Meeting
1	District 3: ALR Meeting & Picnic
1	ALR Central Area Ride-In
1	♥ Pres & Det Commander's Homecoming
2	Palm Sunday
2	Post 186: Easter Egg Hunt
2	District 5: Meeting
5	Passover
5	Gold Star Spouses Day
6	US Entry WWI (1917)
6	Post 186: Visitation
7	Good Friday
7	🍌 Dept Headquarters Closed
8	Eastern Area Ball
9	Easter
9	Chapter 8: ALR Meeting
12	🍌 Dept Membership 95% Goal
12	Chapter 10: ALR Meeting
13	Baseball Recruiting Maps Due
14	Scholarship Winners Announced
14	US Air Force Reserve Birthday
15	♥ Children & Youth Picnic
16	Post 69: Children Friendship Day
16	ALR: Meet & Greet
17-21	ALR: In-State Unity Ride
22	ALR: State Rally
18	Tax Day
19	End of the Year Deadlines
21	★ 84th High School Oratorical Contest
21	Dept Revitalization & Membership Promo
22	Earth Day
22	♥ Commander's Homecoming
23	US Army Reserve Birthday
26	Administrative Professional's Day
28	Arbor Day
28	District 15: Membership Push
30	Military Brats Day
30	District 4: DCC

- ♥ Commander Eunice Butts' Attendance Tentative.
- 🍌 Department Event
- ★ National Event

Events are subject to change. Additional details can be found at www.floridalegion.org. We share the information we are provided.

Legion Birthday and Remembering

Jessica Moore, 3rd Vice Commander
3rdvice@legionmail.org



As I write this on March 15, the official American Legion Birthday, I think about the many excellent programs the American Legion supports and sponsors. This month of April is devoted to

the Military Child and Children and Youth. There is a Department Children and Youth Picnic on April 15 in Lehigh Acres, my hometown. We are going to have a Child's military table there as well on display.

To me, on this particular birthday, I can't help but think of the effects that Hurricane Ian had and still has on every Legion. No one expected this kind of widespread destruction and devastation. Many American Legions in District 13, where I live, were completely destroyed. As the southwestern posts tried to figure out where to start, Department and Legions

statewide had already stepped into action. They began massive collections of supplies. It was overwhelming at first because many of these posts had nowhere to store supplies that their communities desperately needed. So many people worked endlessly, sacrificing their own personal hardships for the mission, including myself. None of this could have been accomplished without the help of the American Legion Department of Florida.

The Legion's disaster preparedness team went into immediate action and worked nonstop to help all its members and affected communities. Six months have almost passed. We still have an enormous amount of work to do, but on this birthday, I would like to wish the American Legion a great year ahead.

Together we all made an impact, and what a birthday present that is for our state of Florida. Keep it up, Florida

#oneteamonedream



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Legionnaires visit Florida Legislative in the Capitol

Jim Ramos, NEC
nec@legionmail.org



The March on Tallahassee was held on March 14, 2023. Some topics are below:

1. Protect the American Flag
3. Military Quality of life
4. Pay the Coast Guard
5. Concurrent Receipt
6. Florida issues for our Veterans

You can check out all this information online

at Legion.org and go to (Resources) or Brochures and Publication to get updated Information.

Please be up to date with what is going on at National by going to legion.org for information and at the Department level by going to floridalegion.org for information. Stay informed and keep your members up to date. Please have your members sign up for a mylegion.org account, as there is a lot of valuable information about their account.

Try to get all your members to do the Basic Training online as it is free and, yes, it takes

some time to do it, but they will learn a lot and become better members. Also, that will help your Post out, support Post programs, and they will come to Post meetings, which is great.

As your NEC, I'm here to assist you with information, planning, and whatever you need to improve your Post to be the best in the Department of Florida.

If you have any questions, please contact me by phone at 352-226-4370 or email at NEC@legionmail.org

Washington Conference

Jerry Brandt, ANEC
anec@legionmail.org



Comrades, March has been a good month for the Department of Florida, in National and within our state.

I previously indicated that February was a busy month, with the visitation of the National Vice Commander to the Western Area. From February 26th to March 1st was the Washington Conference, in which American Legion Members spoke with our representatives in Washington. Pushing for the programs which will assist our fellow veterans. This accumulated on

March 1st, with the National Commander giving the American Legion report to the Joint Session of Congress.

We start with the Washington D.C. Meetings at the end of February, in which a large number of Florida Legionnaires turned out. These Legionnaires attended several training classes and visited with the lawmakers on Capitol Hill.

On Tuesday, February 28th, the Department of Florida received the FIRST-EVER National Legislation Awards from the National Commander, Jim Troiola. In receiving this award, it was an honor to stand on stage with the Department Commander, Eunice Butts. You may wonder why the award was presented in February versus the Normal National Convention. This award time

frame matches the Legislation year for Congress. The main reason we received the award is our large turnout of calling our representatives in Congress for the PACT Act. Again, thank you for making those calls.

After the presentation, it was our turn to go to the Hill and speak with our Representatives. I talked to Representatives Luna (13th District) and Lee (15th District) and staff from the Tampa and Hillsboro areas. I am happy to indicate that both of these Representatives have a strong military background and are strong supporters of the Legion.

As always, if you need something, please let me know so I can assist.

A Clarification

Phillip Crouthamel, Historian
historian@legionmail.org



I received a letter from a post concerning a comment I made in March's Legion Link. The concern was that the Department of Florida was awarded third place for Narratives for **Department Narratives**

from *National judging*. For some reason, this post assumed that I had made an error in confusing them with Department's award and theirs in my article. I was reminding the membership that **YOUR** Department was given this award submitted by your Historian. Three (3) books were submitted to National for judging: Post History (scrapbook), Post Narrative, and Department Narrative. Any National award will be presented at the Annual Department

Convention in June. It has been my mission as Historian to offer training so that each post has the opportunity to submit their histories. Remember, each post-historian is the keeper of your organization's archives. Take pride in what you do.

The cutoff for your histories should be incoming officers to incoming officers. If this is too close to the submittal date, then use

Historian continued on page 4 >>



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<< *Historian continued from page 3*

Memorial Day.

Bring your books to Department Convention, Hilton Orlando Lake Buena Vista, 1751 Hotel Plaza Blvd, Lake Buena Vista FL, 32830 by 3:30 pm, June 15th.

There will be a table set up in **registration** to place your book. At the end of judging, please pick up your book starting Friday.

If you cannot make Department Convention, you can mail your submission to **Department Headquarters, 1912A**

Lee Road, Orlando, FL 32810. Your submission must be submitted no later than June 6, 2023

Thank you all.
This We Defend!

Senator Tester: You Live Up To Promises You Make to Veterans

Dennis Boland, PDC

pdcboland@legionmail.org

Looking ahead to this session of Congress, Sen. Jon Tester had strong words regarding cutting the federal budget when it comes to caring for the nation's veterans.

Addressing The American Legion during the organization's Washington Conference on Feb. 28. the chairman of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs said the U.S. government cannot renege on a pact it made with those who've worn the nation's uniform.

"Some folks who serve in Congress ... want to roll back the budget. But they roll back the budget; they roll back funding for our veterans," he said. "Don't let them tell you anything different. That's a bad idea. I know about fiscal discipline. But when you make promises to people who served this country, you live up to those promises. We will get that done."

Tester also spoke about a piece of pending legislation fully supported by The American Legion: the Major Richard Star Act. The legislation would allow veterans who are medically retired due to injuries sustained in combat to receive their retirement pay without forfeiting their disability compensation.

"We're going to be working on that, and with your support ... we'll see that baby across the finish line, too," Tester said. "Democracy works when people speak up and make sure their opinions are heard, and The American Legion is right there when making sure that democracy works."

Ensuring the Department of Veterans Affairs has the capacity to treat all veterans also is a priority for Tester. "The VA needs to step up and make sure they have the doctors and the nurses and the facilities, but we need to give them the ability to make sure that happens and that old facilities go away. We've got

several bills to do that that I'm pushing on, bipartisan in nature in the United States Senate that we're going to be working on to get done."

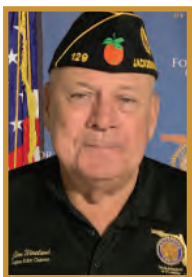
Tester said those inside the Beltway, and many others, don't understand the challenges faced by rural veterans. That is why American Legion support was so critical for one specific piece of legislation.

"That's why I am particularly proud that last year we had the largest expansion of VA healthcare ever in this country in a bill known as the PACT Act," he said. "It is a bill that every veteran service organization in this country was their No. 1 priority. Yet it is a bill that never would have passed if not for you. I am here to say to you thank you. Your voice was heard, and we ended up passing a critical piece of legislation that probably impacts the majority of your members."

Final ALR Activities

Jim Wineland, American Legion Riders

alr@legionmail.org



Wow, April 2023 will have the last ALR activities for this Legion year, but what a month! It's a "Round Robin" month, the Children and Youth picnic on April 15th at Lehigh Acres, In-State Unity Ride, the In-State Rally at OCC, and our first-time Bike Raffle! I sure hope I didn't forget anything; we don't have any room for more.

Our Road Captains have done a tremendous job dealing with the hotel issues and were still able to complete all three routes. Looking at our registration this year, we have broken the record. With the month not over, we have over 175 signed up for the rides, which is fantastic.

We do have a change. The OCC Rally point has moved from Home Depot to the Walmart lot. Thanks to Denny Luke's efforts, the Pinellas Park police department will escort us from the Walmart Lot to OCC.

Raffle Tickets

Reminder, this is right around the corner,

- All ticket stubs and checks are to be sent to Bekki Tibbs at the Department. Please mail your checks and ticket stubs to ALR Bike Raffle, Attn: Bekki Tibbs, 1912 A Lee Road Orlando, FL 32810
- Do not send cash. The dollars you collect, please deposit the funds into your Chapter or Post's bank account and write a check.
- Make the check payable to ALR Department of FL.

American Legion Riders continued on page 5 >>



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<< American Legion Riders continued from page 4

- On the Memo line, write your Chapter Number/Bike Raffle. We want to be able to track sales back to the Chapter and District. Do not forget that tickets sold and dollars raised are credited to your District trophy points for the "Round Robin" competition.
- The cutoff date to mail checks and ticket stubs to the Department is April 7, 2023. Any sales after the cut-off date can be turned in at the Rally.

Individual Raffle Ticket Competition

We have approximately 15 days to sell tickets before the April 7th mail-in date. Ticket sales will continue until 5:00 PM on April 22. Don't forget, all tickets sold will count toward the Trophy competition and will add "one point" for every ticket sold in your District.

Now that takes care of the district

competition, let's start an individual challenge. The individuals selling the most tickets from March 21st until midnight April 21st will receive the following.

1st Place, one free night at the Department Convention, and 15 complimentary tickets for their own entry in the Bike Raffle.

2nd Place, one free night at the Fall Conference, and ten (10) complimentary tickets for their own entry in the Bike Raffle.

3rd Place, five (5) complimentary tickets for their own entry in the Bike Raffle.

Please send your daily or weekly results by chapter and the number of tickets sold to Teresa Wineland and me at jwineland840@gmail.com and tlw4199@gmail.com. The competition winners or their representatives will receive their free tickets at the Rally. If you need tickets, let us know ASAP, and we will get them to you as quickly as possible.

Thanks to all that participate; Ride Safe, looking forward to seeing you soon.

Your 2022 – 2023 Schedule

"Round Robin"

Month of April 2023

Children & Youth Picnic

April 15, Post 323 Lehigh Acres

In-State Unity Ride

Meet & Greet, April 16, 2023

Ride, April 17-21, 2023

Rally, April 22, 2023, Orange County Chopper Museum

If you have any ideas, please share!

Thank You for what you do, and we are proud to be part of your Leadership Team of such an excellent group! *"For the Cause, not the applause"*

Recognizing Today's Youth

Doug Hockenberry, Americanism
americanism@legionmail.org

April is here, and that means Spring is upon us. It also means that we have started our 105th year of service in support of the Four Pillars that we hold so close to in The American Legion. Those same Four Pillars have remained steadfast, and as you know, AMERICANISM is the third pillar. I ask that you continue to promote Americanism throughout your communities by ensuring that you and your Posts "Recognize Today's Youth" get them involved in your programs – you won't be sorry.

As we enter the last two months of the school year, let's make sure that we are all set up to recognize deserving students as we finalize our lists of candidates and prepare to present School Medals and ROTC Medals. Recognizing the accomplishments of our youth is especially important.

Through our programs, we have a profound impact on the youth of today, which in turn

creates a solid foundation for them to grow into responsible young people and future leaders. Recognizing today's youth should be high on your TO-DO list. Those little things we do to recognize our youth and promote Americanism will not go unnoticed.

To all the Post Commanders out there, I am looking forward to reading your reports about the Americanism Programs you have conducted, promoted, or participated in this Legion Year. Remember to start preparing your one-two page narrative write-up for the Post's End of Year Awards – Best Post Americanism, Best Post Shooting Sports, Best Post JROTC, Best Post School Medals, and Best Post Scouting. These narrative reports can be written in a paragraph or bullet format.

Key items on the calendar during April are as follows:

- 1 April – 2nd Round of Shooting Sports competition ends.

- 13 April - Baseball recruiting zone map due.
- 19 April – Teacher of the Year nominations are due.
- 21-23 April – National Oratorical Contest.

In closing, I want to thank you all for what you do for The American Legion and our Veterans. As always, if I can assist, please get in touch with me by email at Americanism@legionmail.org.

"BE THE ONE"

Hang Tough!



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legionlink@floridalegion.org

Spring is in the Air

Terry Phillips, Baseball
baseball@legionmail.org



Greetings To All, Team registration is open; you can go to floridaamericanlegion.com and get information about the fast approaching 2023 season. On the page, you can find area contacts,

area breakdowns, the 2023 Florida Baseball Manual/Handbook, and important dates/deadlines. The Baseball program continues to expand; existing teams, new teams, and potential new teams and players are amazing. This will be a challenging year financially for the program as costs and expenses have drastically increased, as has everything else in today's world. The State Tournament costs are up 30% over the last three seasons. We will need everyone's help

as our program serves many players and families every summer and fall.

We need a Western Area Commissioner, Southwestern Area Commissioner, and Vice Commissioners to join our Executive Baseball Committee and help with the growth we are experiencing in the program. If you would be interested in serving, please get in touch with me ASAP; we need you.

Children & Youth Festivities

Dianne Boland, Children & Youth
cy@legionmail.org



Greetings: This month is Children & Youth month and The Military Child month. There are several activities planned by Department. I hope to see you at them, if possible. I also hope you have several planned for your post, district, or area.

The Department C&Y Golf Tournament

for April 1st was cancelled due to a lack of interest. Refunds will be issued to those who signed up.

April 15th is our C&Y picnic at post 323 in Lehigh Acres. We have a lot of fun planned for both adults and kids. Some days I worry nobody will show up, and other days I worry, there will be too many. You have to show up to find out what happens. The flyer for this will again be at the end of the link. Remember, Sunday, April 23rd; Post 69 will be hosting a Children's Friendship Party. I plan on attending. I also plan on attending the Children's Carnival at Post 250 on April 8,

2023. It will be open to the public with an emphasis on military families.

This is also the month you should visit local schools to present School Medal Awards and ROTC medals. I hope you have been keeping track of your hours and miles because it's getting close to the End of Year Reporting and Awards. The teacher of the Year application is due April 19th, and the C&Y Fund Grant applications are due May 1st. The best C&Y Program application, as well as Best C&Y Chair, are both due May 3rd. Apply..... Your post can't win if you don't do the paperwork.

Florida American Legion College 2023-2024

Jim Ramos, Florida Legion College
falc@legionmail.org



Now is the time to get ready:

The new Department Commander will decide on the dates for Florida American Legion College (FALC) after Department Convention, which is

June 15-18, 2023. Once the dates have been selected, the application will be available on the Department Website.

If you have not done so or need to renew basic training, now is a suitable time to accomplish it; add a copy of your certificate to your application for the next FALC.

All course materials will be supplied to each student. As a student, please have your laptop for assignments and other work for the group and class assignments.

Be ready to work hard and long hours. Follow the dress code (for men, Legion Polo type shirts and slacks), and (for women, Legion appropriate parallel dress) is business casual.

Stay informed. Check out the Officer's Guide and Manual of Ceremonies, Resolutions, Reports, and Dept Constitution and By-laws, to name a few references.

If you have any questions, please contact me by Phone at 352-226-4370 or email at FALC@legionmail.org.

WWII Veteran Remains Finally Coming Home

Lt. Pharis E. Weekley served in the US Army as a navigator on a B-24 Liberator aircraft during WWII. Although it was confirmed his aircraft was hit by enemy fire, it wasn't until July 12, 2022 his remains were identified.

On May 12th, Lt. Weekley's family will finally be able to welcome him home and lay him to rest on May 20th. The American Legion, Department of Florida will be providing escorts and assisting in his Celebration of Life and burial. Avon Park Post 69 and Labelle Post 130 are coordinating efforts with the family and will provide more details once they are finalized. Please mark your calendars and hope you will help us honor the sacrifice and bravery of Lt. Weekley.



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Vanguard NJROTC Shoulder to Shoulder Marksmanship Competition and Coral Glades AJROTC Flag Retirement Ceremony

Loretta Young, JRTOC / JSSP
jrotc@legionmail.org



Vanguard NJROTC hosted an Annual Shoulder to Shoulder Marksmanship Competition last month for the Central Florida area. The meet was conducted by the Senior Instructor, CMDR Steven Davis, Ret. and was attended by 93 Army, Navy, and Air Force JROTC Cadets from 12 schools within the Central Florida area. The results of the Meet were:

First place Oviedo, with a score of 1025.5; Second place Wharton, with a score of 1023.1; Third place Vanguard with a score of 1006.6.

We thank all who helped make this a successful meet and support the

Marksmanship Programs within Florida. This is a program that teaches discipline, focus, and gun safety for our youth and is a much-valued program.

The Coral Glades AJROTC Unit had a Flag Retirement Ceremony held last week in honor of the students and staff who lost their lives in the Marjorie Stoneman Douglas (MSD) mass shooting on Feb. 14th, 2015. The Ceremony was conducted in the Coral Glades Courtyard at dusk and was well attended by the students, staff, guests, and invitees from MSD. The program was conducted by the Senior Instructor, CSM Diedre K. Nevels, Ret., and performed by the JROTC Cadets. This was a very solemn ceremony and showed the respectful disposal of the Flag of our Country, and each Cadet honored those to whom they chose to dedicate their Flag. This is just one of the many events that are done by the JROTC Units, and I encourage all Legionnaires to take time to participate with

the schools that are supported by your posts and show how much we value their work and studies.

We are coming up to the end of the school semester, and the JROTC Units are already having Military Balls and Year End Award Ceremonies. I encourage every post to support the JROTC Units in your area with the Military and Scholastic Award Medals and Certificates. They must be ordered through Legion National Emblem Sales. Please do this as soon as possible, as orders are already backlogged.

Thanks to all who support this program and make every attempt to make the presentations in person. No school should be left unsupported. Please reach out to me if you have any questions or concerns. Have a very successful Year End.



Coral Glades Flag Retirement



Vanguard NJROTC Area Meet

Membership, Revitalization and Buddy Checks

Bruce Thurber, Membership
membership@legionmail.org



We are a short time away from the Convention so it's time to ensure you have all your Membership Award information together and send it to the Department as soon as possible so that those who deserve it

get the proper recognition. The following National Awards applications are on the Department website: Gold Brigade Recruiter, Silver Brigade Recruiter, Department Recruiter of the Year, National Recruiter of the Year, Pioneer Award, and 100% District Commander Pin. The Post and District Awards Applications are also available. It's also time for one last revitalization effort in every District. The lists can be downloaded from myLegion.org with phone numbers and emails to contact the members. Although

National Buddy Check week has come and gone, it's not too late to do your own. Do it as a Post, District, or Area. We are holding a department wide Revitalization with National Vice Commander Patricia Harris on the 21st of April at Post 72 from 10 am-4 pm all are invited to attend.

- 1. Gather up a team, if possible, to call or personally visit members and former members of The American Legion.

Membership continued on page 8 >>



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<< Membership continued from page 7

If each member in a team of ten calls just ten Legionnaires or former Legionnaires, 100 veterans can be reached in one sitting.

2. If you don't have a list of current and former members at your fingertips, visit myLegion.org and download the names of members who have let their memberships expire.
3. Save the file of members and those whose memberships have expired onto a spreadsheet or copy and paste into a Word file to distribute among your team members. Print several copies of the lists.

4. Divide up the call list among your team members. Some may have personal connections with the member or former member and should make that buddy check.
5. Start calling – either from a quiet place inside the Post or from your home – to see how the members and former members are doing, ask if they need anything and invite them to an event or activity.
6. Use the spreadsheet to record your calls and info on the member
7. If you are making it a group effort where many members of your team are calling on a particular night or time, invite the

8. local media to show The American Legion the personal way we check in on our buddies in the community.
8. Make sure you thank the member or former member at the beginning and at the end of your call.
9. If the member or former member wishes to renew, be sure to have your Post's payment procedure at your fingertips, the address to send a check or offer to stop by in person to pick it up (another opportunity to connect).
10. Leave contact information in case the member or former member can't take the call or needs anything in the future.

Longing for Days of Old

Raymond Olson, National Security
security@legionmail.org



Greetings from your National Security Chair. I watch the news nightly and try to keep up with what is going on. I have been around for a long time, and many things have changed during that time. It seems like not too long ago;

Congress worked together to get the job done. Some votes were on party lines, but generally, when America mattered, both sides of the aisle worked together. Now, and basically, for the last 20 years, Republicans blame Democrats, Democrats blame Republicans, the President blames Congress, and Congress blames the President. So much time is spent pointing fingers, and not enough time is spent working together to

resolve problems so that America benefits.

I have been a District and Area Officer in one form or another since 2012. I have done numerous post visits, and I am always amazed that although the membership is composed of Veterans from differing backgrounds, like the two parties of American Politics, we come together to make decisions to help all Veterans, help all members of the community, support all our children and youth. Very few votes or actions are one-vote victories, split decisions, or decisions where the Commander resolves the issue with his or her vote. We work together for the better good. America can take a lesson from the American Legion, and we should let them know. The Legion offers many programs to allow you to let your pollical leaders know how you feel, and we should do that all the time. We do a March on the Capital in DC and Tallahassee

every year. I know that I am not happy with Immigration issues as they currently stand, I was not happy with how the last troop withdrawal went, and I am not happy that banks are failing and inflation is so high. We must remind these guys that they represent us and let them know what "US" really thinks.

Enough of my soapbox. Work your blood drives. Work your Disaster Prep programs. Support your ROTC and Scouting, and do what you can to show that America is the greatest place to be and that the outside influences will not succeed in destroying what we have fought so hard to have and leave for our children. As always, contact me at my Security@legionmail.org address with your Security Programs, events, or ideas, and I will get them spread throughout the state.

ENTER TO WIN A NEW 2023 HARLEY DAVIDSON® STREET GLIDE®!

BERT'S RIDING TO END VETERAN SUICIDE

BENEFITING: Net proceeds to **PROJECT: VetRelief - Suicide Prevention Initiative**

DRAWING: April 22, 2023, 5:30 PM, OCC Road House & Museum in Clearwater, FL

TICKETS: Available with ALR District and Area Chairs, also at the Summit

Tickets are \$20 each or six (6) tickets for \$100. Purchase is not necessary to enter. Details at floridalegion.org/riders

2023 Department of Florida Oratorical

Meri West, Oratorical

oratorical@legionmail.org

"Pics or it didn't happen."

... So says the internet.

Luckily, we have pics. Pics of the Department Oratorical contest on Feb. 25th, 2023. If you were there in person, thank you, and what a program, right? A video of the event will be released in April after the National Finals in Indianapolis.

Five students participated, and two (Ishaque and Kanistras) were returning students from 2022.

Here is a list of the winners and their awards:

- 1st Place – **Nurfat Ishaque** – a Junior at Florida Atlantic University High School in Boca Raton, FL, 9th District, Southern Area, \$2500.00
- 2nd Place – **Talmadge Kanistras** – a Junior at Oviedo High School in Oviedo, FL, 6th District, Eastern Area \$1500.00
- 3rd Place – **Emily Peake**, a Sophomore at Cambridge Christian School in Tampa, FL, 13th District, Southwestern Area. \$1000.00
- 4th Place – **Zoya Baty** – a Senior at Belleview High School in Belleville, FL, 4th District, Northern Area, \$500.00.
- 5th Place – **Celina Sanchez**, a Junior at Destin High School in Destin, FL, 1st District, Western Area. \$500.00

Air Force Junior ROTC students from Rutherford High School in Panama City, FL, presented the colors. Retired Navy Master Chief Mack Ellis performed his moving narration of Old Glory. The five students presented inspiring and well-written speeches.

Before the judges left for the tabulation room, the Rutherford JROTC drill team performed an official flag folding ceremony and presented the flag to Retired Master Chief Ellis. Following that, the drill team

moved outside to the parking lot and performed the 30-Step Drill Sequence, once with voice commands and then a second time with stomped commands.

Florida sets a high bar for the judging panel, but this year's contest had the most distinguished and esteemed judges ever. Below are the names and a brief history.

Anna Eskamani – State House Representative in the Florida Legislature. Has a Ph.D. in Public Affairs. She's the first Iranian American to be elected to any public office in all of Florida.

Amy Johns – Chief Justice of the Seminole Tribal Court in Hollywood, FL. She is also a ten-year member of Team Florida for the North American Indigenous Games, where she has won 3 Gold Medals, 2 Silver Medals, and one Bronze for Rifle Shooting. She is a Journeyman Gunsmith and does lapidary, metal engraving, and wildlife photography.

Andrew Steinberg – the 2017 National Oratorical Champion from Boston, where he is an organizer for the Jewish Alliance for Law and Social Action. The topic of his recent thesis was US Veterans who had been deported. Today, he is on the board of an organization called Deported Veterans Support House, and he volunteers his time to serve US Veterans deported to Northern Mexico.

Alexander Weeden, Esquire - When he isn't practicing law at his criminal defense firm in Orlando, he works as a Field Director for congressional campaigns in Florida.

Reverend Co'Relous Bryant – Co'Relous was the 2007 National Oratorical winner and was the first winner from FL since 1948! He was also elected Governor of Boys State in 2007. In 2010 while at NYU, Co'Relous competed at the National College Mock Trial Tournament when NYU finally beat Harvard. While on the Mock Trial Team, he won 25 Outstanding Attorney Awards. He earned his Bachelor's Degree in Political Science from

NYU and a Master of Divinity from Emory University, GA.

Elizabeth Barahona – The Florida Department Oratorical winner in 2014. Elizabeth got her Bachelor's degree from Duke and is getting her Ph.D. in history at Northwestern University in Chicago, IL. She works with an immigrant human rights organization in Tuscon, AZ, and she also organizes year-round workshops to help low-income, first-generation students apply for college and scholarships. Elizabeth is a fine example of what the Oratorical Contest was designed to do for students— using her speaking skills and promoting civic duty and education.

Gilbert King – Gilbert King, from Brooklyn, NY, is the writer, producer, and host of the Bone Valley podcast, a 9-part narrative about murder and injustice in the 1980s in Central Florida. His book Devil in the Grove was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for general nonfiction in 2013. King has written about race, civil rights, and the death penalty for the New York Times, Washington Post, and The Atlantic.

USAF Major Patrick Bass – Major Bass is the Senior Aerospace Science Instructor at Rutherford High School, where he and two other retired Air Force veterans teach with him. They have 100 JROTC students and a very active and competitive drill team. Major Bass served 27 years in the Air Force in GA, TX, the Pentagon, and one tour to Iraq.

USAF Chief Master Sergeant Dillon Johnson – Chief Dillon is the Chief Enlisted Manager of the 912th Air Refueling Squadron at March Air Reserve Base in CA. He supervises 169 people representing 34 diverse Air Force Specialty Codes. In 2022 he earned his Master's in Business Administration from Liberty University in Lynchburg, VA.

US Navy Command Master Chief Mack Ellis – Master Chief Ellis, from Savannah, GA,

Oratorical continued on page 10 >>



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<< Oratorical continued from page 9

served 32 years in the Navy. He was awarded 4 Meritorious Service Medals, the Legion of Merit, 2 Navy Commendation Medals, 3 Navy Achievement Medals, 10 Good Conduct Medals, and an Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal. In 2018 he was a finalist to

be inducted into the Florida Veterans Hall of Fame.

Nurfat Ishaque will represent Florida at the National Oratorical Contest in Indianapolis in April.

Thanks to all the Oratorical Chairman who worked hard to find such great students to participate. Thanks to the Department staff for all the administrative support. And thanks to all the Legion Family who keep this program alive and well in Florida.



2023 Florida Department Oratorical Winner Nurfat Ishaque and Commander Eunice Butts.



Left to right: Back row 2nd Vice Chris Hamrick, 3rd Vice Jessica Moore, Commander Eunice Butts, 1st Vice Michael Raymond. Front Row: Emily, Peak, Talmadge Kanistras, Celina Sanchez, Zoya Baty, Nurfat Ishaque.

Revitalization

Judith Richards, Post Revitalization
revitalization@legionmail.org



There are several Revitalizations being planned throughout the Department. You may have received emails and flyers about some of them that have set dates. If you are in one of the Districts, I encourage all Posts to be supportive and attend the events.

Have you held your Buddy Checks? There are many resources to assist! <https://www.legion.org/membership/258317/buddy-check-wristbands-create-public-awareness>

Are you advertising in your local community media pages? Working with your Chambers of Commerce? Schools?

Places of Worship? Do you have a National Guard Armory or Reserve Unit in your area? Active Duty? These are all entities to engage with and support within your community.

Have you considered starting a new post in your area? PDC Dennis Boland sent out an excellent email regarding the steps and links to several resources. Below is the link:

<https://www.legion.org/membership/startapost>

As always, please contact me or our Department Membership Chair Bruce Thurber for assistance.

Thank you for your continued support in serving veterans and keeping The American Legion membership your primary priority.



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Best Post Public Relations Program Award

Kathryn Hockenberry, Public Relations
pr@legionmail.org



One last reminder: **Best Post Public Relations Program Award** deadline for nominations is no later than May 3, 2023. The reporting period is from May 1, 2022, through

April 30, 2023. Also, to have your nominees considered, a copy of your Consolidated Post Report and Addendum must be on file with Department Headquarters. Please be sure to follow all the instructions provided. If you have any questions or need clarification, contact me at pr@legionmail.org.



American Legion Scouters

Chris Ragusa, Scouting
scouting@legionmail.org



American Legion Scouters:

Legion Color Guard at Boy Scouts of America Golf Event:

On February 27, 2023, the Greater Tampa Bay Area Council of the Boy

Scouts of America held their 50th Annual Golf Classic at the Carrollwood Country Club in Tampa, FL. And who did they ask to present the colors to open this event? The American Legion...one of their oldest and most loyal Chartering Organizations! American Legion "USS Tampa" Post 5 Color Guard presented the National Colors and POW/MIA flags to kick off this annual fundraising event for the council. The Greater Tampa Bay Area Council serves over 10,000 Scouts, and funds from Golf Classic participation support council operations.



Citation of Appreciation Awarded to Scouting Leader:

American Legion Post 138 Commander Drew Davis presented the American Legion Citation of Appreciation to Cub Scout Pack 1381 Cubmaster Scott Burkett at the pack's annual Blue and Gold banquet on February 26, 2023. These citations are awarded in recognition of and in sincere appreciation for outstanding service and assistance which contribute to the advancement of The Scouting Program. The citations...Flag and Emblem catalog #733.121...are an excellent way to recognize those individuals and organizations that support our Scouting units...BSA unit leadership, program facilitators, and those organizations that host Scouting meetings and events. Cub Scout Pack 1381 has been chartered by American Legion Post 138 (Port Tampa City, District 15) since 2016. As a youth, Commander Davis earned the rank of Eagle Scout in the BSA program.



Outstanding Post Scouting Program Nominations:

Up to three Department of Florida posts will receive the Outstanding Post Scouting Program recognition at the Department of Florida Convention this year. This award recognizes the post most involved in the Scouting Program – those posts chartering BSA units, sponsoring BSA units, and otherwise supporting BSA units in their communities.

Nominations are due not later than May 3, 2023, and a copy of your National Consolidated Post report and Department Addendum must be on file with Department Headquarters to be eligible for this award.

The reporting period is from May 1, 2022 – April 30, 2023. The award nomination form is posted on the Resource page of the Scouting Program portal - <https://www.floridalegion.org/programs-services/scouting/resources/>

Please help me highlight the many positive relationships between the American Legion and the Boy Scouts of America by submitting article and pictures.

VISIT OUR WEBSITE

floridalegion.org

**NEWS, FORMS, VETERAN RESOURCES
 UPCOMING EVENTS, AND MORE**

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FLORIDA LEGION RIDERS... LOOKING TO SURPASS LAST YEAR'S TOTAL OF \$139,182 TO END VETERAN SUICIDE!

The Florida Legion Riders kick off their month-long efforts to raise funds and awareness for PROJECT: VetRelief's Suicide Prevention Initiative. Chapters host rides, dinners, and other activities to earn points for the coveted District Trophy. The In-State Unity Ride and State Rally also take place: all of which the proceeds benefit PVR/SPI.

Each year, they set the bar higher and higher. However, the Legion Riders know their veteran community is counting on them and are always up for the challenge. They want to raise even more this year!

HOW YOU CAN SUPPORT THE FLORIDA LEGION RIDERS:

► **Join the Ride** - The Ride will be split into three routes: Pensacola, Jacksonville, and Kissimmee. All routes will include a Meet & Greet on Sunday, April 16th. The ride will officially begin the next day (April 17th). Riders will stop at American Legion Posts along the way to collect donations and pay their respects at Veteran Memorial sites to honor our fallen.

We encourage you to register and create your fundraising page. The more funds you raise to end veteran suicide the more COOL PRIZES you'll earn.

► **Ride Virtually** - If you can't go on the actual ride, sign up as a Virtual Rider (\$5). Then, ride at least 22 miles and show your efforts by posting a photo on your social media using #iRideforthe22. Virtual Riders are eligible for the COOL PRIZES, too.

► **Make a Donation** - Make your donation in a variety of ways: on an individual's page, an ALR Chapter's Team page, or donate directly to the entire event efforts. However you choose to support, your generosity will be applied towards the joint cause of ending veteran suicide!

► **Visit a Post Stop** - Our riders would love to see your smiling faces as they make it to their next pit-stop along their journey. Check out the route agendas and plan to welcome them in from the road!

► **Attend the State Rally** - Upon completion of the In-State Unity Ride, April 22nd, a Rally will be held in celebration at the OCC Road House & Museum in Clearwater. There will be live music, vendors, and raffles. The Rally is open to the public at no cost!

JOIN, DONATE, & DETAILS:
<https://bit.ly/ALRUnityRide23>

**Link is case-sensitive!*

COOL PRIZES

- BOTTLE KOOZIE** — RAISE \$50
- T-SHIRT** — RAISE \$100
*PLUS KOOZIE
- COOLER TOTE** — RAISE \$250
*PLUS KOOZIE & T-SHIRT
- WIND BREAKER** — RAISE \$500
*PLUS KOOZIE, T-SHIRT, & COOLER
- STANDARD ROOM NIGHT AT 2024 SUMMIT** — RAISE \$1,000
*PLUS KOOZIE, T-SHIRT, COOLER, & WIND BREAKER

EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE STATS: YEAR 9 JULY '22-FEB '23

254 VETERANS ASSISTED

\$271,731 FINANCIAL AID AWARDED

Expo Results

Larry Roberts, VA Entitlements

benefits@legionmail.org



I want to start by apologizing for not doing a Legion Link article last month. I would like to thank all the sponsors and volunteers of the Veterans Expo. I'm proud to say that each year the results of the Veterans

Expo have doubled in donations and assistance to the veterans and their families. Here are just some of the results.

2023 Veterans Expo Results

- Polk County and Highlands County Sheriff's Department: Provided three (3) patrol cars each for the escort
- Procession was over: 3 ½ miles long.
- Motley Jeep Crew: Had approximately 30 Jeeps in the Escort.
- Skyway Corvette Club: Had 9 Corvettes in the escort.
- Several hundred people were on the side of the road waving flags as the wall passed by.
- We had the honor of having four (4) queens in the procession, our own Queen State Commander Eunice Butts, Ms. Veteran of America, Ms. Ann Farrel, American Legion Post 69 Queen Bee, who is a Koran War Veteran, and my 13-year old Grand-Daughter Brooklyn a Junior and a Rider.
- When the Wall arrived at Post 69, Thunder the Bald Eagle opened her wings to honor the 58,300 names on the Vietnam Wall and the 300 names on the Global War on Terror.
- Blood One: 8 procedures-10 donors participated = Each procedure can save up to three lives.
- Highlands County Fire Department: Had a fire truck on display.
- Thunder (Bald Eagle Was on site): Overall aesthetic of patriotism.

- Avon Park & Sebring JROTC: Opened the Ceremony by presenting the Colors.
- Cape Coral VA Suicide Prevention Coordinator: Passed out Suicide Awareness cards to everyone who participated in the event, with the signs and symptoms and the hotline number. (988)
- Spirt Training: Had a horse on site; the trainer was on the horse walking around with Old Glory.
- Quilts of Valor: Awarded 8 Veterans with a Quilt.
- Florida Department of Veterans Affairs (FDVA): Was able to submit 37 fully developed disability claims and started 25 more.
- Highlands County Service Officer: Started 35 disability claims.
- Ms. Veteran of America: Was part of the Escort of the Mobile Vietnam Veterans and Global War on Terror to American Legion Post 69. She also sang the National Anthem during the opening ceremony and Lee Green Woods's song Proud to be an American, and was able to talk to hundreds of veterans.
- Amy Green: Received the Project VetRelief VA Employee of the year award.
- Avon Park Rotary Club: Was able to talk to 100 Vietnam Veterans about the Freedom Flight.
- Dr. J Royster Semper Motis, LLC: Talked to 75 Veterans and set up appointments for ten (10) veterans to get counseling for PTSD.
- Kari Russo First Orlando Counseling: Talked to 100 veterans and set up appointments for ten (10) veterans to get counseling.
- Paint 22: Talked to 70 veterans about therapy through art.
- I Got Your 6: Talked to 100 veterans and scheduled 8 to go on a retreat.
- Mission 22: Connected with approximately 200 veterans within two days.
- Blue Guardian Network: Connected with 15 active or retired law enforcement officers to get counseling.
- Hands for Homeless: Got two homeless veterans off the streets.
- K9 Lines: Because of the Veterans Expo they have now teamed up with 5 more Organizations and started the process for five (5) veterans to get a service dog.
- Wolfhound Legacy: Because of the Veterans Expo, now has teamed up with 5 more Organizations and started the process for four (4) veterans to get a service dog.
- South Florida College: Started the paperwork for ten (10) veterans to enroll in college under the GI Bill.
- National Veterans Resource: We had a mother who just lost her son 2 weeks before the Veterans Expo to suicide. The National Veterans Resource was able to team up that mother with another mother who lost her son a year ago.
- Both mothers are going to a retreat in May.
- Reed Transport Services: Interviewed eight (8) Veterans for truck driving jobs.
- Good Shepherd Hospice: Was able to connect with approximately 200 people, around a dozen people interested in volunteering.
- The Juniors Raised: \$1,300 for Project VetRelief by placing people in jail.
- Donations for Project VetRelief: 14,000
- Riders Poker Run: \$1,500
- We are already starting the planning for the 2024 Veterans Expo which will be Friday, Jan 5th , Sat Jan 6th, and Sun, Jan 7th, 2024.

After the Veterans Expo

I had the Honor to give four classes at the Riders Summit on Veterans Benefits.

VA Entitlements continued on page 14 >>



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<<VA Entitlements continued from page 13

After each class, there was a test, Guys against Girls; well, I can say the Girls definitely pay more attention than the Guys. In three out of the four classes, the Girls won. This is what the Girls got to hang up at their post.

GIRLS RULE GUYS DROOL



After the Riders Summit, I got to go to the Washington Conference to talk to Senators and Congressmen about our benefits.

Here are just some of the things we talked about.

- Pay the Coast Guard
- Protect the American Flag
- Military Quality of Life
- Mental Health & Suicide Prevention
- VA Healthcare Modernization
- Pact Act: Implementation & Oversight
- Protect Veterans from Predatory Actors
- Concurrent Receipt
- Guard & Reserve GI Bill Parity

When I got back from Washington, I had the honor to work at the St Pete Indy Race with the BE THE ONE TEAM.

What an honor to pin a suicide ribbon on Alex Palou, The No. 10 American Legion Indy Car driver.



Women are Veterans Too

Deanna Hall, Women Veterans

womenvets@legionmail.org



"I was a soldier, a fighter tried and true. You do not remember me, but I went there for you."—Author Unknown

I would like to thank the American Legion Auxiliary Unit 117, Palm Bay, for hosting the Women Veteran and Goldstar Mothers Luncheon on Sunday, March 12th. It was an honor to represent the American Legion, Women Veterans, and our Heroes during this event. I know every female veteran felt honored and respected; thank you again, President Kim Oaks, and your amazing Unit from 117!

I also had the privilege to attend the American Legion Auxiliary Unit 347, Lady Lake's Women Veteran's Luncheon, on Monday, March 13th. The President, Maureen Caswell, along with her amazing staff, ensured all the female Veterans were

welcomed and acknowledged for their service. Thank you so much.

March was Women's History Month, and I was so fortunate to be surrounded by so many strong, intelligent, talented, and simply wonderful women of this world! I want them to know that they are loved and appreciated, and they have filled my days with happiness and my world with love. It's crazy that women still have to fight for their rights!

WOMEN ARE VETERANS TOO



"We weren't just tokens or pretty faces to decorate your offices and platoon; we weren't dumb, too plain, or too stupid to make it in the real world. We've marched your muddy roads, carried and shot your heavy guns. We've been shot at, wounded, and died, and been prisoners of war. We've been active in all services and

risen to high ranks. We've tended your bleeding wounds and held you when you were dying. We've flown your mighty airplanes and navigated your giant ships. We've fixed your broken engines and driven heavy equipment. We've mailed letters for you and brought you news from home. We've stood alongside you without flinching or running away and continue to stand by you today. We are not asking for special treatment or that you should go out of your way. We only ask that you recognize that women are veterans, too." ---Lynda K. Dokken, USMC 1966-1967

Thank you for supporting Women Veterans!



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Legislative Commission Washington Conference

William D Kelly, SAL NEC

nec@floridasons.org



The American Legion gathers at the Washington Hilton for Veterans' lobbying. The Legislative Commission and other TAL Commissions meetings, including National Security, Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation, and Finance, meet for their mid-winter meetings every year at the end of February.

The Sons of The American Legion National Legislative Commission organizes a bus trip each year to memorialize our veteran's monuments in Washington DC on Sunday, the 1st day of the conference. We gather early Sunday morning, just inside the lower level of the Hilton, with over 30 wreaths. Three (3) wreaths for our National Commander to present. (see photos) One at Arlington National Cemetery's Tomb of the Unknown, one at the Vietnam Memorial Wall, and one at the World War II Memorial. There are very few things in life more stirring than standing at the highest point in Arlington National Cemetery, the Tomb of the Unknown, overlooking our Nation's Capitol witnessing this solemn ceremony. The Sons of The American Legion National Commander Chris Carlton, his wife, and two (2) young members from the New York delegation presented our wreath at the Tomb. This year we had three (3) busloads of over 160 American Legion Family members attend. This year two (2) of our FL Legionnaires attended with us, Jim Bowers and Larry Roberts, who are also dual members. We are always looking for more of our Department of Florida Family to accompany us. Start making plans to attend next year's trip. Yes, it is an expensive weekend, but it is important to show support and unity for a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

Our Detachment of Florida wreath was placed at the Vietnam Memorial Wall for all of our Florida Veterans who were called to

duty and those who paid the ultimate price for our country. We returned to the Hilton after a 6-hour trip around Washington.

The next day Monday begins with TAL Legislative Commission Chairman LaCoursiere's call to order, which I attend for almost 4 hours. TAL is still pushing Voters Voice, and Florida was the top Department in Legislative Contacts, and that was because you loaded the QR code, registered, and contacted our Legislators. The Sons of The American Legion National Liaison Mook put on a luncheon for the SAL attendees, which was quite unexpected. Later in the afternoon, the entire Florida Delegation attended TAL "Know Before You Go" this highlights the Legislative Agenda to be discussed the next day with our Legislators.

Tuesday starts very early with the Commander's Call, where CDR Troiola introduced speakers from both the Senate and the House of Representatives from both sides of the aisle. At this meeting, The Department of Florida CDR Butts & PDC Brandt received The National Legislative Commission Advocacy Award for the most Congressional Contacts in 2022. While the contacts are un-categorized, I believe you, the SAL Detachment of Florida, were responsible for a large percentage because we used the QR code at the Conference and in the Source.

Thank you, and please continue to register and contact our National Legislators regarding the Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxins Act (PACT Act) wouldn't have passed without your contacts.

Later that afternoon, PNC Clarence Hill and I visited Florida Sr. Senator Marco Rubio's Office and spoke with his Veteran's Legislative Aide Ryan Rasin. The Senator was at the Senate Intelligence Committee meeting. Ryan was quite well-versed as we reviewed The American Legion Legislative Agenda with him. When we finished, we asked Senator Rubio's aide to make sure to thank the Senator for addressing the

Department of Florida Convention and for his support of the PACT Act. and The American Legion Legislative Agenda.

Our next appointment was with Florida's 4th Congressional District newly elected Representative Aaron Bean. PNC Hill knew Representative Bean from his son at TAL Dept. of FL. Boys State and I met Representative Bean in Tallahassee as an FL. State Legislator several years ago. PNC Hill took the lead, and we went point by point through the TAL Agenda, including Mental Health & Suicide Prevention, VA Modernization, PACT Implementation and Oversight, Protection of Veterans from Predators, specifically the Camp Lejeune lawsuits, Parity for the Guard & Reserves, Pay for the Coast Guard and Protecting the American Flag. We thanked Representative Bean, and he volunteered to speak at any of our TAL Posts in the future.

Wednesday is the day that The American Legion National Commander Vincent J Troiola's Testimony before the joint session of the House and Senate Committees on Veteran Affairs. This is where all your hard work as a Son of The American Legion, which you contributed to the \$98 Million dollar total of goods, time, and cash from last year, was reported to Congress.

Please remember that in the next few months why you should be filling out your Detachment of Florida Consolidated Squadron Report (CSI), which will be reported next year. Don't let all your and your Squadron's hard work go unreported. We respectfully request that all Department and Post Officers assist your Squadrons with and include the SAL Squadron Time, Goods, and Money Donated into your Post Consolidated Reports. Think of the Increase in your PCR.

I hope this gives everyone a better understanding of our American Legion, Washington Conference, and our Programs,

SAL NEC continued on page 16 >>



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<<SAL NEC continued from page 15

The Sons of The American Legion. I would like to thank The Department of Florida, Commander Eunice Butts, Department Adjutant Bruce E. Comer, PNC Clarence Hill, and all the rest of the Florida delegation for their inclusion of The Sons of The American Legion at the Washington Conference.



Veterans bring life back into historic Florida Post 33

The American Legion

Legion.org



The historic home of Frank R. Marston American Legion Post 33 in Pensacola, Fla., had been a vital part of the community with its swing dances for all ages, financial assistance to those in need, a safe place for youth to do homework and more. After years of neglect, and the loss of its charter for a year due to an unfortunate circumstance, the post fell into disrepair. But that is all changing thanks to a group of enthusiastic veterans who saw the history and potential of the post home and the need to reinvigorate it back into the community – both inside and out.

“We love that building but not just the building ... we love Post 33 and the potential of Post 33 as an American Legion post,” said Nicole Dickson, second vice commander of Post 33.

Thanks to a \$140,000 grant from Pensacola Community Redevelopment (PCR), the exterior of Post 33 will be rehabilitated, while volunteer work and fundraising efforts are helping with the cleaning and repairing of the inside to create a safe, welcoming space for veterans, youth and

the community.

Dickson said Hilary Halford with PCR helped make the grant possible. “She came to us and said, ‘I care about veterans, I care about this building and I want to save this building.’ So she did.”

Post 33 is named in memory of U.S. Army Capt. Frank R. Marston Jr., who was Pensacola’s first casualty of World War I. At the age of 25, Marston died in the second battle of the Marne on July 15, 1918. Before losing its charter more than 100 years later in 2019, the lack of upkeep and care for many years took its toll on the post. In 2020, a group of veterans not affiliated with Post 33 became concerned with its deterioration and began restoring it by hand. This included Dickson.

“I toured the post and fell in love with the building. It’s beautiful and it has a stage; I’m an actor by trade. I saw the stage, the dance hall and some of the other veterans and I said, ‘this is somewhere I really want to be.’ And I really want to help establish the building as a space for community, as a space for veterans and a space for the arts. It doesn’t look like any other Legion I’ve been in; it’s so special.”

Thanks to the efforts of those rehabbing the post and showing pride in making it an active American Legion post again, Post 33 has its charter back. And construction on the exterior of the post home gets underway in April with a completion time of October.

The grant covers a new roof, paint, rehabbing of doors and windows, and landscaping. And

an iron rail, designed by a post member, will be installed outside the post commander’s office with the post number in Roman numerals.

“Watch us grow, watch us change. It’s going to go from the ugly duckling to the beautiful swan,” said Post 33 Commander Rick Cusimano, who rejoined the post to restore the post and to help invigorate it back into the community. “The post is so important because of its age and history, but also because it’s a part of the community. We have to become a part of the community again because if we don’t get into the community, people are not going to know we’re here.”

Right now, the community is seeing Post 33’s presence and wants to help them succeed.

Community support

The Pensacola News Journal recently featured a story about the revitalization efforts of Post 33; as a result, Dickson received an email from an Army veteran who is with an electric contracting firm and said they would like to come help the post with its electrical work. “Now that we are getting the word out people are coming together and saying, ‘Let’s help them,’” Cusimano said.

For the past two years, Post 33 has been the beneficiary of Old Hickory Whiskey Bar’s charity event around St. Patrick’s Day, where cocktails are auctioned off. Last year the event raised \$1,800 for the post; this year

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they almost doubled that at over \$3,500.

"Two cocktails went for \$1,000. This shows you that the community is supporting this organization. And they should. We are a veteran organization in a military community," Dickson said. "It just makes sense. But half the work is getting the word out."

Dickson said it's thanks to her friend and Old Hickory Whiskey Bar manager Darren Campbell that Post 33 has been the charity of choice for two years in a row.

"Darren has been instrumental in helping Post 33 garner community attention. It's so important to me to have that community support because they are a very well-known bar in Pensacola, so they have been able to extend our reach beyond veterans, beyond other places in the community."

Old Hickory Whiskey Bar also supported Post 33 through its involvement with Campari liqueur's National Day of Service in September. While Campari donated rollers and brushes, volunteers from the bar and Cusimano's work at Navy Federal Credit Union donated time to paint the inside of Post 33. The painting was completed by students from the JROTC at Pensacola High School.

"It was then that you could really start feeling that you know people do love the building," Cusimano said. "Every time I'm here people stop in and say, 'You've got to save the building' because it's so important."

Legion mentorship

As mentioned, most of the veterans helping in the restoration are new to The American Legion, including Dickson, and younger – in their 40s and 50s. Cusimano said, "It makes me happy that these younger veterans are coming in and they want to do something with the building, they want to do more Legion things. That's important because

we're helping veterans, we're becoming part of the community, and we're telling people what the Legion is all about."

Mentorship also has been vital to helping the new members thrive. To help them gain institutional knowledge and understand their leadership roles, Cusimano and Dickson said the support at the post, district and department levels has been outstanding.

"(Western Area Commander) Sonny Decker has been involved with Post 33 from Day 1," said Dickson. "He's counseled us, he's taught us a lot about the organization and how to function as an American Legion. He's just been such an incredible support." Dickson added that other support has come in the form of posts providing volunteers or monetary donations. Their generosity "gives us something to look up to and to look forward to doing of our own one day," Cusimano said.

Even national leadership has visited the post to extend support; National Vice Commander Patricia Harris visited the post with Department of Florida Commander Eunice Butts.

Future of Post 33

The vision of what Post 33 members want to see happen inside the post walls is endless because they have the space. Besides the stage, there's a kitchen with an original stone fireplace, ballroom, and several large meeting rooms both upstairs and in the basement. "The potential for the building is enormous," Dickson said. It even can be rented out for events, which is how David Henderson and his wife joined. They were looking to rent the hall and after speaking with Dickson, they joined Post 33 "and jumped in with both feet."

"I'm excited to be a part of something that is moving forward," said Henderson, Post 33's judge advocate and public affairs officer.

Henderson is looking into establishing

programs at the post such helping feed homeless veterans, hosting craft fairs and re-establishing the school program where kids come to the post to do their homework with the help of veterans.

"In rebuilding the history of Post 33, we want to rebuild the school program part and let people know that we are here and that we can help," he said. "We are focusing on the four pillars of The American Legion and trying to get back to being an American Legion post and service to community through that first and then as a venue second.

"I want to see the American Legion post be that service back to the community. To bring back that reminder that veterans are still helping in the community long after our service ended; we're still serving where our hearts have been. I would like Post 33 to become that shining example of a place where service happens."

Overall, creating a supportive, safe place for veterans, youth and the community is a passion for the veterans of Post 33.

"My husband is a 20-year retired veteran," said Dickson, an Army veteran. "We have seen the difficulty that veterans can have firsthand. For example, navigating the VA or knowing where to go to get VA benefits, to really have a point of contact for something they might need. A lot of us at (Post) 33 feel very strongly about (Post) 33 becoming a place where veterans can go; younger veterans sometimes don't feel they have a place to go and Post 33 wants to be that place. It's really hard when you get out to find the people to build a community with and Post 33 wants to be there for those veterans who are just getting out, who don't really have a community of their own and we want to be able to support them.

"That's really why we all stuck around ... we are that younger generation. When we found each other, we really found a little

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family and we just sort of got together and was like, 'OK, we're going to do this together.'"

The post currently has around 50 members and is actively getting a Sons of The American Legion squadron and Auxiliary unit underway. Cusimano believes ones the exterior of Post 33 is complete it will drive people to join.

"As soon as the outside of the building starts looking nice again, that's where the draw is going to come in," he said. "It's going to start attracting more members, but it's also going to start attracting the community we belong to and that's where

we're going to start really accelerating in the things we want to get done."

What drives Cusimano to continue the path forward with Post 33 is "the memories the building has with people" and the possibility of once again helping the community through financial assistance. A visitor stopped by the post and reminisced with Cusimano when their grandparents did ballroom dancing there 40 years ago. Then a JROTC student helping paint at the post shared that his grandmother told him Post 33 helped her family monetarily in a time of great need.

"I thought that's the things I want to become a part of again ... we can help veterans,

we can help the community, we can be a place for kids to come and be safe," he said. "The biggest thing is just to be a part of everything. Those are the stories that I love hearing and that's what drives me to continue with what we're doing."

If you speak with those helping re-energizing life back into Post 33, you will hear in their voice passion for the post home and a strong drive to be part of the Pensacola community again. This makes it understandable why the community is rallying around them. "Our enthusiasm is kind of infectious," Dickson said. "If you care about that building at all, you're going to join."

New Military Makover Veteran - Staff Sergeant Matthew Mitchell

Military Makeover with Montel
militarymakeover.tv



March 16, 2022 at 4 PM at post seven Montel Williams military makeover gave a disable combat Veteran paid up life membership to the American legion, and a home that will be on television.

National TV show *Military Makeover with Montel* selects Mitchell family from St. Petersburg for its next makeover.

Military Makeover is called on volunteers and local businesses in Pinellas County to participate in the renovation of the home of U.S. Army veteran Matthew Mitchell and his family. The big reveal was held on March 18, 2023.

September 11, 2001 changed the lives of millions, including Matthew Mitchell, who was a junior in high school. Upon graduation he enlisted in the U.S. Army, in 2002.

Staff Sergeant Mitchell's vehicle drove over an improvised explosive device (IED), while on deployment in Iraq. Mitchell suffered a

traumatic brain injury, as well as hand, hip, and back injuries. This led to bouts of depression and PTSD. For his service and sacrifice, he was awarded a Purple Heart. Mitchell served fourteen years on active duty and is currently a member of the U.S. Army Reserve.

Matthew Mitchell is happy to be back home with his wife, Sarah, who is his high school sweetheart, their two-year-old son and two fostered nephews.

Always ready to help a veteran, *BrandStar's Military Makeover with Montel*, hosted by decorated veteran Montel Williams, along with co-hosts Art Edmonds and designer Jennifer Bertrand, as well as show participants, local businesses and numerous volunteers, will be working to provide the Mitchell family with the home they truly deserve.

The *Military Makeover* team partners up with likeminded brands such as, Home Depot, Ready Cap Lending, Midea Appliances, Junk King, and several surprise participants. The process would include renovating the home from top to bottom, including a new curb-side appeal that will welcome the Mitchell's home with comfort and love every time they arrive in their driveway.

"I can think of few greater privileges than helping to provide such a worthy hero and his family the type of forever-home they desire," says Montel Williams. "This home makeover is a small way to show our appreciation for Matthew's service and dedication to our country, as well as support Sarah and the entire Mitchell family."

"As we begin this initial phase," says BrandStar Founder & CEO Mark Alfieri, "our goal is to generate awareness throughout the state of Florida to garner support from local businesses, volunteers, and anyone who wishes to simply be part of this amazing makeover to support the Mitchell family."



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POST EVERLASTING



"If they are remembered, they are not gone truly, they simply change duty assignments and are amongst the best."



PDC Reginald Beverly

It is with deep regret that we report the passing of Past Department Commander Reginald C. Beverly of Bear, Delaware, at the age of 89. Reginald is survived by his wife, Evelyn C. Beverly; son, Reginald C. Beverly, Jr.; and daughter, Larita R. Mason. The service will be held on Saturday, February 4, 2023, 1:00 PM, at Scarlet Note Church in New Castle, DE.

Reginald was a U.S. Air Force Korean War Era Veteran and a member of Port Orange Post 270, with 37 continuous years of membership. He served in every capacity within the Post, most predominately having served as Post Commander for four consecutive years from 1994-98. Under his leadership, the Post increased its membership and achieved an All-Time High. He served as 17th District Commander from 1997-99. During 2000-01, Reginald served as Department Membership Chair. He led the Department to achieve an All-Time High and was awarded the General Henri Gouraud Trophy for being the first Department to reach 100% in its category. Reginald served as Northern Area Commander from 2001-02, Department Vice Commander from 2002-03, and Department Commander from 2003-04. At the National level, he served on the Americanism Council from 1999-01 and the Foreign Relations Council from 2001-09.

If you would like to send your condolences, you may do so through his wife, Evelyn C. Beverly, at 35 Nairn Ln., Bear, DE 19701-4757.

Tony King

It is with great sadness that we inform you of the death of our comrade, Tony King. Tony passed away Sunday, January 22, 2023 after a long battle with cancer.

Tony King was a long-time member and acting commander for the Robert H.L. Dabney American Legion Post 192 in Tice Florida.

Please keep his wife, kids and family in your prayers as they deal with this giant loss in their lives. Please send flowers and cards to: 263 Richmond Ave; South Lehigh Acres, FL 33936



George T. Pinner, Jr.

With deep regret we report the passing of Past 15th District Commander George T. Pinner, Jr. of Tampa, Florida, who passed away on Wednesday, March 1, 2023, at the age of 91. He is survived by his Children; 2 daughters: Debbie Pinner and Sandy Riley; two sons: George T. Pinner, III (Chip) and Michael McHerron.

On May 12, 1956, he married the love of his life Betty Lee. He worked for CXS railroad for 40 years (previously named Atlantic and Seaboard Coastline). After the passing of his beloved wife, George met Jeannie York, with whom he spent the last 21 years. Sadly, Jeannie passed away 16 days before George.

George was a U.S. Army Korean War Veteran. He was a member of Tampa Post 152 with 36 continuous years of membership. George served as Post Commander from 1998-1999 and 2000-2001 and 15th District Commander from 2002-2003. He also served on many committees and was very involved with Boys State.

The Burial Service will be held at 1 pm on Thursday, March 23, 2023, at the National Cemetery in Bushnell. A Celebration of Life will be held at 1 pm on Saturday, March 25, 2023, at Tampa Bay Community Church, 3318 Moran Rd, Tampa, Florida 33618.

In lieu of flowers, his family requests donations to Hospice of Tampa or Tampa Bay Community Church.



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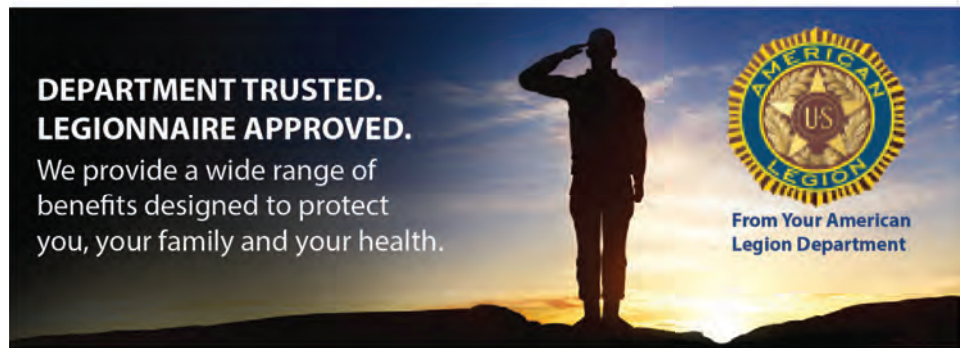
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March 23, 2023 Membership Target Report (87.07%)		
16	Eric Nestler	93.24%
3	Stuart Scott	92.33%
4	John Bennett	92.22%
8	John Rauh	91.02%
1	Ronnie Grover	90.33%
17	Bruce Howe	90.16%
5	Lena Heredia-Perez	89.67%
7	Burl Thomas	88.50%
13	Harold "Bud" Boyer	88.30%
6	Joe Marcheggiani	87.22%
11	Harry Malecki	87.04%
15	Randy Holeyfield	85.55%
2	Roger Hewitt	85.25%
12	Wayne Mulligan	84.60%
14	Angela Glover	83.14%
9	George "Geo" Bograkos	82.82%
Northern	Jim Bowers	90.63%
Central	Bob Matheson	90.42%
Western	Sonny Decker	89.57%
Southwestern	Skip Felicita	89.50%
Eastern	Dennis Mallon	86.06%
Southern	Johnny Castro	84.69%
Post 400		77.19%
Post 208		76.77%



Call Now: 1-800-235-6943
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- We send you money – even if you don't have cancer

Next Membership Goal 2022-2023:
April 12, 2023
95%

www.thelit.com



DEPARTMENT
**Children &
Youth
Picnic
Fund Raiser**

April 15, 2023

11 am - 5 pm

American Legion Post 323

1124 Ashlar Ave, Lehigh Acres FL

(239) 369-3178



**Games, Food, Baskets, 50/50, (Military
Child's Program - by our Juniors)**

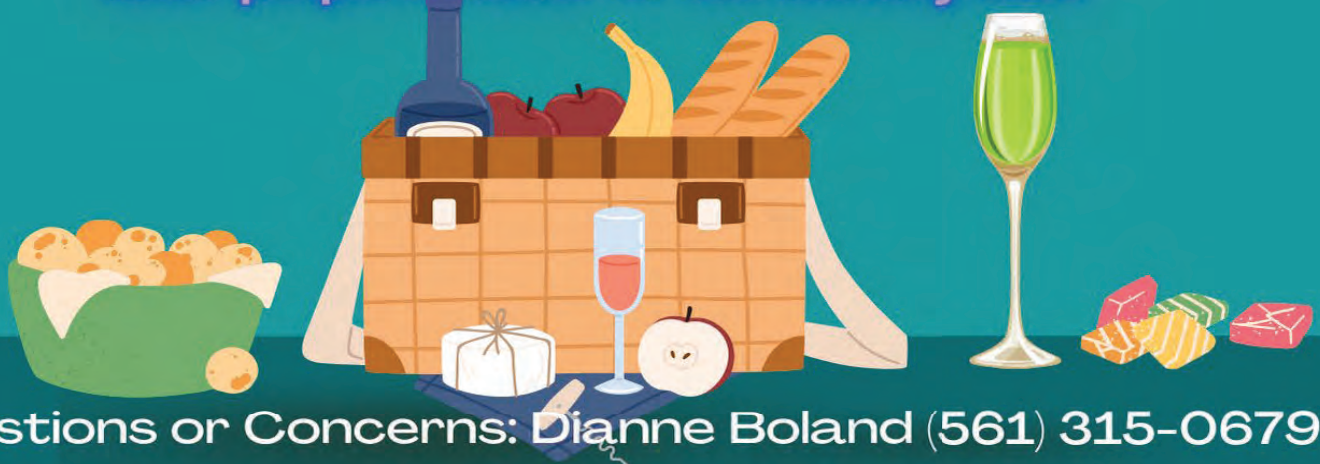
Quality Inn - 1320 Business Way, Lehigh Acres FL

(239) 369-2121

Price - \$127.25. Ask for American Legion -

Dianne Boland

Wear purple in honor of the Military Child



Questions or Concerns: Dianne Boland (561) 315-0679

DEPARTMENT OF FLORIDA

AMERICAN



LEGION RIDERS

STATE RALLY

SATURDAY, APRIL 22ND

**RAFFLE TICKET SUGGESTED PRICE: \$20 DONATION
OR 6 TICKETS FOR \$100 DONATION**

*THE WINNING TICKET WILL BE PULLED ON 4/22/23 AT 5:30PM
AT OCC ROAD HOUSE & MUSEUM IN CLEARWATER, FL.
WINNER NEED NOT BE PRESENT!*

*NET PROCEEDS TO PROJECT VET RELIEF/
SUICIDE PREVENTION INITIATIVE.*

BERT'S

RIDING TO END VETERAN SUICIDE

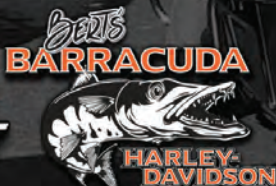
**ENTER TO WIN A
NEW 2023
H-D® STREET GLIDE®!**

LIVE MUSIC BY

RUSTY WRIGHT AT 1PM

BRIGETTE KELLY AT 2:30PM

ALEX LOPEZ XPRESS AT 4PM



POST SERVICE OFFICER TRAINING SCHOOL

Dept. Convention Registration Form 2023

This course is filled based off first come, first served interest. Slots are limited!

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: FL Zip Code: _____

Email (required): _____

Phone number: _____

Post number: _____ Member ID number: _____

By signing this document, you are stating that you have been appointed as the Post Service Officer by the Post Commander to attend this course as stated in the Department Constitution and By-Laws Article X, Section

**** A Post can only send THREE PEOPLE to attend the course
due to the limited seating! ****

Service Officer Signature

Date

Commander Signature

Date

Return this form to:

Florida American Legion, ATTN: Programs, PO BOX 547859, Orlando, FL, 32854-7859

OR

Email: btibbs@floridalegion.org

OR

Fax: 407-299-0901

This form **MUST** be submitted and received by Department to reserve a place in the class.

****Registration by phone will NOT be accepted****



Class Name: FL American Legion Post Service Officer Course, Dept. Convention 2023

Dates (Must Attend Both Days): Thursday, 15 June 2023; 8AM – 4PM
Friday, 16 June 2023; 8AM – 1PM

Note: Training by The American Legion is **valid for one year**

Room Name: Palm 4-5, Hilton Orlando Lake Buena Vista

Hotel Reservations: Hilton Orlando Lake Buena Vista – (407) 827-4000
1751 Hotel Plaza Blvd. Lake Buena Vista FL, 32830

****Be sure to tell them you are with The American Legion to receive our special rate****

SAVE THE DATE!

