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Questions? legionlink@floridalegion.org



A Message from the Department Commander

Michael "Gambler" Raymond, Commander

commander@floridalegion.org



Even as renewals start to slow, we are seeing a continuous climb in our number. This is a good sign of "stopping the slide"! We're seeing numbers we haven't seen in nearly eight years. Our membership team continues working hard

to assist Posts struggling to renew members and exchanging ideas on generating new members. As I write this, all Districts are over 80%, and our Department is at 85%, a full month ahead of our goal! Traveling around the state, I can feel the excitement radiating from our Posts and Districts. As our numbers increase, so does morale. It goes hand in hand! Remember, if you need help with membership and/or training, please reach out to

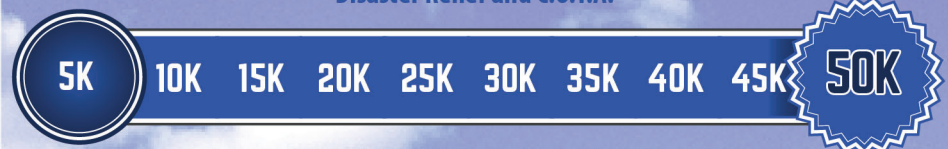
your District Commander.

We have a busy month ahead with visits to Districts 12, 16, and 4. At the release of this article, we will have also concluded a visit from National Commander Dan Seehafer. Commander Seehafer will arrive in the Southern Area, visiting numerous Posts and attending a Four Chaplains' Ceremony. I'm personally looking forward to this visit and hope that it is memorable for our Commander. Following Commander Seehafer, our National Vice Commander Charlie Aucoin, will have concluded his visit at the end of January. Vice Commander Aucoin will visit the Southern Area, conducting several revitalizations at our hurricane-stricken Posts.

Please be safe. Continue the great work you're doing! We're on track to have a great year, Let's do this!

COMMANDER'S CHARITIES

Disaster Relief and C.O.T.A.



Commander's Goal: \$50,000 (Current funds raised **\$45,004.05**)



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Looking Ahead

Chris Hamrick, 1st Vice Commander

1stvice@legionmail.org



Happy February, fellow Legionnaires. We're coming into the busiest time of the year and we're doing fantastic. We had an eventful January and looks like February is shaping up to be just as busy. We'll start with our Department American Legion Riders Summit, continue with Post revitalizations, District meetings, Area balls, picnics, and conclude with our National Legislative meetings in Washington D.C.. Let's remember our goals and what we stand for. We've had a very productive membership year so far, and we're ahead of schedule, pertaining to National membership goals. There is no time to slow down, we have to keep up our momentum.

Over the coming months, our programs will be coming to completion. We'll be busy from the Post level to the Department level. In another month or

so, Post nominations for officers will start, signaling the winding down of the 2023-2024 membership year and Department Convention. Have you been mentoring someone to learn how to be an officer at your Post or to lead your Post? Continuity is an important aspect to consider. Do the individuals interested in running for a position within your Post understand the roles, responsibilities, and duties of the position they're seeking? If not, there is training available. We have a training team available and willing to train and give guidance. There is also the "go to" guide that, unfortunately, goes unused, the **Officer's Guide and Manual of Ceremonies**. Do you have a copy at your Post? I highly recommend you read it. My point is how important it is to know what your duties are and what they're not.

MENTORSHIP, TRAINING, CONTINUITY. Those are the three things to keep in mind as we continue to ROCK the rest of the year in membership. I look forward to seeing you all at the upcoming events during my travels.

UPCOMING EVENTS

FEBRUARY 2024

- 22-10 District Oratorical Contests
- 31-2 ALR Summit & Expo 🌟🌟
- 1 Freedom Day
- 1 Youth Law Cadet Registration Opens 🌟
- 1 JR Shooting Sports 1st Targets due to CMP ★
- 1-29 Americanism Month
- 1-29 Black History Month
- 2 Groundhog Day
- 3 Four Chaplains Day
- 3 District 12/ALR: Special Olympics Ride
- 3 ALR: Chapter 316 Monthly Meeting
- 4 USO Birthday
- 4 District 3: Meeting - Four Chaplains
- 7 Department Membership 85% Goal 🌟
- ~~8-19 Walk 4 America - POSTPONED~~
- 10 Southwestern Area Ball
- 11-17 Salute to Veteran Patients
- 11 Area Oratorical Contests
- 11 ALR: Chapter 8 Meeting
- 12 Lincoln's Birthday
- 13 Mardi Gras
- 14 Valentine's Day
- 14 Ash Wednesday
- 14 ALR: Chapter 10 Meeting
- 15 Legion Link Articles Due for March 🌟
- 15 Baseball Insurance Available ★
- 15 JR Shooting Sports 2nd Targets Mailed ★
- 17 District 12: Meeting
- 17 District 15: Picnic
- 17 Chapter 316: Mardi Gras Party
- 19 Presidents Day
- 19 Dept Headquarters Closed 🌟
- 19 Washingtons Birthday
- 19 U.S. Coast Guard Reserve Birthday
- 24 District 13: Suicide Prevention Event
- 24-28 DSO / Washington Conference ★
- 24 Chapter 10: ALR Kissimmee Bike Night
- 26 District 15: District Commander Visit Post 108

🌟 Commander attendance tentative.
 🌟 Department of Florida event.
 ★ National event.
 Events are subject to change. More details at floridalegion.org.

Remembering Four Chaplains

Jessica Moore, 2nd Vice Commander

2ndvice@legionmail.org



It's already February, and I'm trying to get used to writing 2024! First and foremost, I'd like to thank you for all the support at the Vice Commanders' Hoedown. It was a wonderful day and a great opportunity to see so many of you. The season is kicking off quickly. I'm already attending area balls and training throughout the state. The ALR Summit & Expo is also happening

January 31 – February 3, and I hope that I see a lot of you in the many classes offered.

February 3, 2024 is designated as Four Chaplains Day. This day is set aside to remember the four U.S. Army chaplains who made the ultimate sacrifice when the USAT Dorchester sank during World War II. Personally, every time I attend one of these ceremonies, it touches my heart. It reminds me why I remain so dedicated to this American Legion Family and organization.

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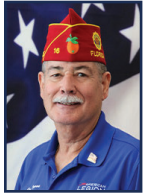
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Be Informed

Jim Ramos, NEC

nec@legionmail.org



Now is the time for action on legislative issues, make sure you're informed.

H.R. 234 – Gerald's Law Act

Suppose a Veteran dies of a non-service-related cause. In that case, their survivors are entitled to a VA burial benefit, which provides \$300 toward burial and funeral expenses and a \$796 plot-interment allowance. This benefit eases the financial burden of grieving families and ensures the Veteran receives a proper burial. One of the requirements to receive this benefit is for the death to occur in either a VA hospital or nursing home, thereby excluding the increasing number of Veterans who choose to pass away at home.

As technology advances, aging at home is becoming a more appealing option for Veterans, especially those living in rural areas whose families must travel long distances. The American Legion supports a Veteran's choice of where to age so long as they receive quality care and are supported by an approved and accredited agency. Furthermore, Veterans who choose to die at home shouldn't have to sacrifice their burial benefits. This legislation would expand VA burial benefits by allowing the survivors of Veterans who died at home or in other settings to receive a VA burial benefit. The American Legion Resolution No. 20: Home and Community-Based Services and

Veteran Choice to Age in Place supports legislation to allow Veterans to choose where to age in place.

H.R. 854 – Captain James C. Edge Gold Star Spouse Equity Act

America's obligation to Gold Star families is embodied by the Department of Veteran Affairs

'mission statement, "To fulfill President Lincoln's promise to care for those who have served in our nation's military and for their families, caregivers, and survivors." To honor this sacred obligation, Gold Star spouses who have lost their loved ones in the line of duty currently receive specialized benefits in the areas of compensation, health insurance, and education.

Current statutes hold that this benefit is terminated should a Gold Star spouse remarry before the age of 55, or in some cases, remarriage at any point:

- The Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) is a Department of Defense program servicemembers and their families pay into to provide financial support to military spouses and family should the servicemember die while on duty or after retirement. If a spouse remarries before the age of 55, their annuity payments are stopped.
- Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) is a tax-free benefit designed to support the surviving spouses and families of servicemembers who died as a result of military service or service-connected disability. If the spouse remarries before the age of 55, their compensation is terminated.
- The Marine Gunnery Sergeant John David Fry Scholarship is an education benefit that allows surviving spouses to access the Post-9/11 GI Bill and attend school while receiving a basic housing allowance. Surviving spouse eligibility expires either on the 15th anniversary of the servicemember's death or if they remarry.

The American Legion Resolution No. 20 (2021): Home and Community-Based Services and Veteran Choice to Age in Place. <https://archive.legion.org/node/3579>.

TRICARE Survivor Benefits provide health insurance at retiree pay rates for surviving spouses and their children. Should a spouse remarry, they will be disenrolled from the program and have their access to their children's accounts restricted.

Forcing widows to forego remarriage to maintain survivor benefits is indefensible. The American Legion believes that it is essential to support Gold Star spouses throughout their lifetime, not just while they are unmarried. H.R. 854, the "Captain James C. Edge Gold Star Spouse Equity Act," would begin to correct this by providing continued eligibility for SBP and DIC for surviving spouses of servicemembers who died in the line of duty.

The American Legion appreciates Congressman Waltz's focus on equity for Gold Star spouses but requests the consideration of five amendments to this legislation to address the totality of remarriage incongruities:

- 1) Eliminate "...of members of the Armed Forces who die in the line of duty" from the bill preamble. Intended or otherwise, this preamble creates a distinct and uncalled-for division between retirees and those killed in the line of duty. The spouses of all servicemembers who have paid into SDP have the right to annuities after remarriage.
- 2) Amend Paragraph (3) of section 101 of title 38, United States Code, to remove "a person of the opposite sex" in defining the term "surviving spouse."
- 3) Amend Section 1062 of title 10, United States Code, to provide access to military exchanges and commissaries.

NEC continued on page 4 >>



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<< NEC continued from page 3

4) Strike section 311(f)(2)(B) of title 38, United States Code, to remove expiration on entitlement to Marine Gunnery Sergeant John David Fry Scholarships for surviving spouses

5) Amend Section 1072(2) of title 10, United States

Code, to provide TRICARE eligibility to remarried spouses in the TRICARE program.

These benefits are granted to help families honor the sacrifice made by their beloved by building a brighter future, and to do so, love must live on. Through Resolution No. 36: Prevent Gold Star Spouses Loss

of Benefits, The American Legion believes Gold Star spouses should not lose benefits when remarrying.

Reference National Commander's Testimony

If you have any questions, please contact us at 352-226-4370 or email nec@legionmail.org.

Evaluate Your Post's Membership Dues

Jerry Brandt, ANEC

anec@legionmail.org



Comrades,

Thank you to National Commander, Daniel J. Seehafer, for his visit to our Southern Area.

A special thank you to all those who were involved in making this a great visit, including:

- Johnny Castro, Southern Area Commander

- Rico Thomas, District 9 Commander
- Toni Sutherland, District 11 Commander
- Thomas Frank, District 14 Commander

All our Post Commanders and their staff throughout the Southern Area made the visit personal for our National Commander. National Vice Commander, Charles D. Aucoin, will also be visiting District 13 from February 5th – 9th.

Don't forget about the new 3-year membership

program! If you have not yet renewed for 2024, you can go online to Legion.org and renew for the next three years at the same yearly rate you currently have. This offer is only good for those who have not renewed their 2024 dues. So, lock in your rate for the next three years!

A National rate increase of \$5 will take effect on July 1, 2024, Department could also increase as well. Posts, please check your current dues amounts, and update any rate changes with Department.

What Officers Need to Know

Les Martin, Sergeant-at-Arms

sgatatarms@legionmail.org



Now that we are into the second half of our American Legion year, it's time for us to push to our yearly finish line. What does that mean? It means we need to push for our membership and work with

the Department membership chair and his committee to meet our Department and National goals. It also means that our current Post officers should be making sure that they are training and mentoring other members to take over their positions, if they have decided not to run for office again. If you're wondering what this has to do with the Department Sergeant-at-Arms, not much, but it is the job of all of us to help further our organization, not only on the Post level but also at the District and

Department levels. I encourage all members to go to the Department website, www.floridalegion.org, and download the **Officers Guide and Ceremonial Manual**. See what your duties are and how you can help your Post and department.

I am going to highlight a few quotes from the Officers Guide and Ceremonial Manual.

Should all Posts operate alike? We have large Posts and small Posts; should they be operating the same? Here is the first quote.

"Posts do not have to operate alike, regardless of the tendency to think they do. Membership troubles can arise in a community when a group with a narrow perception of The American

Legion becomes dominant and suppresses any group with a different perception. This can prevent the development of activities that produce new leaders and new members. They also help or hinder the establishment of new Posts that attract and serve new groups of Veterans."

I know from being a District Officer for many years that some Posts use the short form for Post Installations, and others use the long form. I believe that using the short form diminishes the ceremony. See the following quote.

"The installation of a new group of officers is the first occasion of the new Legion year for an impressive ceremony and one of the top

Sgt-at-Arms continued on page 5 >>



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<< Sgt-at-Arms continued from page 4

social events on the Post's calendar. If new officers are casually installed, their attitude toward their obligation will be casual. Suppose the installation is accompanied by a banquet, visits from department and district officers, and entertainment that draws a crowd. In that case, the event instills among all attending the importance of the roles being assumed by the new officers."

Here is another one.

"Each department may prescribe the constitution

of its Posts, and the department has supervision of the Posts within its boundaries."

This means that even though each Post is autonomous, they still have to follow the Constitution and By-Laws of the Department and National organizations, and if needed, the department can place the Post under department supervision.

I know all of us know and can recite our Preamble to the Constitution, but how many of us know the Veterans Creed? Various Veterans' groups and Georgetown University developed the Veteran's Creed in 2017. With Resolution 10, this was approved

by The American Legion National Organization on October 17-18, 2018,

1. I am an American Veteran
2. I proudly served my country
3. I live the values I learned in the military
4. I continue to serve my community, my country, and my fellow Veterans
5. I maintain my physical and mental discipline
6. I continue to lead and improve
7. I make a difference
8. I honor and remember my fallen comrades

Americanization

Joe Marcheggiani, Eastern Area Commander
eastern@legionmail.org



February is Americanism Month. According to Webster writes that Americanism, a noun, is first, a language function, and secondly, an "attachment or allegiance to the traditions, interests, or ideals of the U.S." How does this attachment to U.S. traditions materialize? It materializes through the process of Americanization, a verb. I reside in an area with a heavy immigrant population. Americanization is a constant and sometimes an invisible process for our Post, as it is for a lot of Legionnaires. It is more than being a patriot; it is developing new patriots. We practice it within all our programs. Americanization is not about

politics. It is about continuing and developing "traditions, interests, or ideals of the U.S." Popular Americanization programs within the American Legion include Boys State, Oratorical, Baseball, Scouting, and Sea Cadets. Those and more can be seen and read about at <https://bit.ly/falprograms>.

February is also the time we recognize the sacrifice of The Four Chaplains: Father John P. Washington, Rabbi Alexander D. Good, Reverend George L. Fox, and Reverend Clark V. Poling, who on February 3, 1943, gave up their life jackets on a sinking Army transport in the North Atlantic so that others might live. This selfless act of bravery and valor by four Army chaplains is recognized not only by American Veterans but also by Veterans and mariners worldwide. Learn more at <https://bit.ly/3SOV91E>.

All Posts and Districts should be at 85% membership by February 7th. For those at 85% and above, congratulations and Thank You. Years ago, as a Post Commander, it was my mission to change the mindset of the "December expiration date". We all need to get on board with helping to instill a culture of renewing at the beginning of The American Legion New Year in July. It begins with all your Posts officers, program chairs, and committee chairs. If they renew in July, many will follow. Too many Posts have let their "early bird" activity fall to the wayside because of expenses. Does your membership see this lack of recognition? It's not an expense, it's an investment in our future.



Vietnam War Memorial Dedication in Freedom Memorial Plaza at Florida National Cemetery Bushnell January 10th, 2024



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Eastern Area and Training

Lena Heredia-Perez, Northern Area Commander

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Northern Area,

As we enter the last quarter of the Legion year, I strongly encourage each of you to dig down deep and let's finish this year off stronger than when we started. Remember, "It is not how you start the race or where you are during the race — it is how you cross the finish line that will matter." Throughout the year the Northern Area has been in either 2nd or 3rd when it comes to Department Membership with very little margin between us and the Area that is ahead and/or tailing us.

Please continue to reach out to your members who have yet to renew their 2024 Legion Membership Dues and start working on the DMS Lists if you have not done so already. I know without a shadow of a doubt that we can finish #1 in the Department this year because we did last year!

I want to THANK everyone who came and supported the 2024 Northern Area Ball, "There's No Place Like Home." For those of you that were not able to make it for whatever reason, you were missed but we all know our health and family must come first! I do not have a final tally because donations are still trickling in, however, I am proud to announce to date we have raised over \$4,500.00 for Boys & Girls State Scholarships. A special shout out to Lake City Office Depot, Atlantic Security, Late for Class Band, Sharron Davis, and Jim J Gilleo American Legion Post 283 for your generous donations.

Post Officers,

If you haven't already started, now is the time for you and your team to start gathering the required documents and information to get a head start on your 2024 Consolidated Post Reports. The Department Commander's goal every year is 100% CPR reporting however this year our Department Commander is emphasizing this goal.

Consolidated Post Reports (CPR) was established nearly 50 years ago to assist Departments in the documentation of activities that a specific Post completed during a 12-month reporting period. The information gathered from these reports shows the many ways Legionnaires make a difference in their communities and beyond. These numbers also provide numerical data of what the collective American Legion is contributing when The American Legion National Commander testifies before Congress. Unfortunately, the data collected are conservative because only about 65% of Posts submit reports.

The CPR forms can be electronically filled out on mylegion.org. You can even keep a running total and save the data until you are ready to submit. If you have any questions about completing this form, please contact your District Commander for additional assistance.

Let's Make History

Bruce Thurber, District 12 Commander

District12@legionmail.org



Now that the holiday season is behind us, it's time to get back to work. Our District meeting will be on February 17th, 10:00 AM, at Post 22. The District 12 Picnic will be held on March 23rd at Post 81 in Melbourne. In conjunction with the picnic, we will have a ride to assist in raising the funds needed for Boys and Girls State transportation. There will be a Special Olympics Run on February 3rd. District 12 Oratorical contest will be held at Post 191 on February 10th.

I'd like to thank all of my officers and chairs for a

great first half of the year! Working with the District 12 Auxiliary and SAL have all been great, and they have really embraced the "family" attitude. From the joining of these organizations, the Riders emerged.

Let's make history in February 2024, with the Department of Florida hitting 100% in membership. When you joined the military, you learned that nothing was impossible if you put your mind to it. As a Veteran of the United States Armed Forces, you earned your right to join The American Legion. I ask for your help as you continue to serve our country with honor as a member fighting for Veterans' rights. The American Legion National Commander addresses the United States Congress each year to fight for Veterans' rights. This is not a statement about which

party is responsible, but rather the ability of all parties to work together and improve the quality of life for the men and women who have defended our nation through military service. They listen to us because of our numbers. When he speaks about Florida Veterans, they listen because he speaks on behalf of 100,607 members and their families (VOTERS); just think what would happen if we went back to 2008 when Florida had 144,066 members. You, the members of the Department of Florida, are the best of the best, and I ask you to bring us to an all-time high of 144,067 or more.

Our Vice Commanders are highly experienced recruiters, pick their brains, they've been there.

District 12 continued on page 7 >>



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<< District 12 continued from page 6

You also have your Department Revitalization Chair, Past Department Commanders, and Area and District Commanders to assist. The American Legion Department of Florida Auxiliary, Detachment of Florida Sons of the American Legion, and the American Legion Riders are also great resources.

Here is a bit of February’s history: One of the first to fight for soldier’s rights, Emperor Claudius II banned marriage because he thought married men were bad soldiers. Valentine felt this was unfair, so he broke the rules and arranged marriages in secret. When Claudius found out, Valentine was thrown in jail and sentenced to death. There, he fell in love

with the jailer’s daughter, and when he was taken for execution on February 14th, he sent her a love letter signed “from your Valentine”.

Again, thank you, everyone, as the MIGHTY 12th District moves forward.

Help Us Rebuild

Eric Loyd, District 13 Commander

District13@legionmail.org



District 13 was hit hard after Hurricane Ian, and we still need help rebuilding our Posts. Posts 303, 123, 274, and 110 could all greatly benefit from your generosity. We need your help

to continue serving our fellow Veterans. American Legion Post 303 and Post 123 have acquired their permits and are moving forward. The officers and members of these Post did an awesome job!

Post 110 was once the largest Post in District 13, and with your help, it will be again. Please consider donating at <https://give.floridalegion.org/>

[RebuildPost110](#) as well as share with your Posts, friends, and family.

Don’t forget to join us on February 25th for our PROJECT: VetRelief / Suicide Prevention Picnic to be held at Post 192 in Fort Meyers. Complete details on included flyer. Please, come out and show us your support!

Off to a Great Start

Randy Holeyfield, District 15 Commander

District15@legionmail.org



The year is already off to a great start, and great things are ahead of us. On Sunday, January 14th, we gathered at Post 108 (Land O’Lakes), where several members of Squadron 273 arrived by bus,

to a kick-off dinner for a new Legion baseball team. Post 108 has been working for four years to bring this team into fruition and accomplished that today with the Baseball Commissioner’s attendance. Idlewild Baptist Church’s Athletic Director will not only be the team manager but has dedicated field #10 as the team’s home field at no cost. Idlewild Baptist Church has a massive athletic complex

that will accommodate the team. Startup costs are around \$16,000 with complete uniforms (not t-shirts), of which Post 108 is acquiring sponsors to offset these expenses. Let’s support Post 108’s team when they have home games with our attendance, we are family.

Membership is moving forward, with our next goal of 85% due February 7th. Some Posts are doing very well, and District 15 and I are working directly with Posts needing assistance. Remember: The “Be the One” program is a tool to not only check on our members but also to show your care and concern for them, which could indirectly encourage some of them to pay their dues if needed. However, these **Buddy Checks** are not about “calling for dues”,

but rather about the individual and how they are doing and identifying any potential indicators of distress. In turn showing we are there for them and their families could promote being up-to-date on their membership dues, but please do not ask them about dues during the conversation, only about their wellness. Membership dues can be seen as donations to The American Legion, wherewith those funds, we support our programs and scholarships, as well as expenses that support TAL.

Several Area balls and other outdoor events are coming up. Consider attending some or all, whether in your local area or across the state. Thank you for letting me serve you, and I look forward to the rest of the year.



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Walk 4 America Celebration Postponed

Kurt Gies, Americanism Chair

americanism@legionmail.org



The Walk 4 America Celebration events, tentatively scheduled for February, have been postponed. Unfortunately, due to shoulder surgery in December and ongoing physical therapy, I have not had the time to dedicate to the event. The process has been very

difficult. I had hoped to use the downtime to continue planning the details of the Americanism Celebration month, but God had another plan for me.

After discussions with our Department Commander, we would still like to attempt to move forward, but it will have to be once I am cleared by doctors. We are looking to plan the event in either April or May. We realize these are

busy months, but maybe we can still find a way to pull this off.

If you are interested in helping, please contact me at American Legion Post 63. You can also email to americanlegion63@cfl.rr.com or americanism@legionmail.org.

God Bless all, and God Bless America.

What Were Your Thoughts on the ALR Summit & Expo?

Jim Wineland, Legion Riders Chair

alr@legionmail.org



As you read this, the ALR Summit & Expo is in session. Bev and I would like to thank the instructors and volunteers who have worked to make this event possible. We hope that you will take a moment to complete our survey. Let us know your thoughts on the Summit and any other topics you would like to see covered in the future. Bev and I rely on the information you provide to implement changes, ensuring the best ALR Summit & Expo possible.

We have made a couple of changes: Ted Wieder, Wayne Parrot, and Bobby Greer have a two-day safety course, on two-wheeled motorcycles and another on trikes. Beverly has two-hour classes

scheduled to go over all the reporting and answer any questions you may have. I will personally, cover the Motorcycle Safety Program in our General Session.

The new Motorcycle Safety Program requires additional reporting. It is simple: four or five questions, name of the event, number of participants, and safety materials handed out. It will cover all events, meetings, wing nights, etc. You can email the questionnaire to me or the new Assistant Program Manager, Connie Koonce. We will cover more of the program and its requirements during the Summit.

That's all for now, we've got things to get wrapped up for the Summit, we hope you're here with us!

Additional committees are coming on board to assist. As we have grown into a professional riding organization, we need to delegate more responsibilities to other individuals. This should allow us to make a smooth leadership transition in the future.

All scheduled activities are coming together, and we're still on schedule. Ride Safe, looking forward to seeing you soon!

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"

Your 2023 – 2024 Schedule

- Summit
 - Meet & Greet, January 31, 2024
 - Classes, February 1-3, 2024
- Round Robin, Month of April 2024
- Children and Youth Picnic, April 6, 2024
- In-State Unity Ride
 - Meet & Greet, April 21, 2024
 - Ride, April 22-26, 2024
- Rally, OCC in Clearwater, April 27, 2024



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Easy to Implement, Life-Saving

Jamie Grinis, Blood Donor Chair

blooddonor@legionmail.org



January was an active month for blood donations. The Central and Northern Areas are “knocking it out of the park” with their Blood Donor programs. Unfortunately, that accounts for less than 10% of the

Posts in our state. After tornadoes hit the panhandle, blood is in even greater demand than before.

Many Posts and Legionnaires do not wish to participate in the program, for one reason or another. Just to remind you, a Post must sponsor at least one program to maintain its charter. We understand you get busy, or have other reasons, but please don’t forget the importance of a life-saving donation. Maybe you can’t donate, but we’re you know others who can.

Our Posts are made up of a family, and we

challenge each of them to pass the torch of life-saving needs. Commanders start using the Auxiliary or the Sons to pick up the slack and adopt the program at your Post. Schedule the big Red Bus to visit your Post, involving the entire Legion Family to promote the program. The power of this life-saving endeavor costs the Post nothing and in return saves not only a Veteran’s life but also helps the community.

Prepare for Recognitions

Loretta Young, JROTC/JSSP Chair

jrotc@legionmail.org



Welcome to the New Year for all Districts and Posts in supporting the JROTC Program and JSSP Marksmanship.

We’re halfway through the school semester, and there is still a lot on the horizon for our youth programs. Please remember to order the year-end JROTC Scholastic and Military Excellence Medals and Certificates as soon as possible to ensure you have them in hand. There are also the Marksmanship Gold, Silver, and Bronze Medals and Certificates that can be awarded to the top expert, mid-level sharpshooter, or qualifier at the minimum level marksman level of shooting. Order these medals and certificates NOW and avoid backorders, delays, and other issues. Some presentation ceremonies will be as early as April.

Please contact your sponsored units in advance, be proactive, and don’t wait for them to call you. The state competitions have already been completed, except for the State Marksmanship Meet, to be held on Saturday, January 20, 2024, at Island Coast High School in Cape Coral.

There have been many requests for local Posts or private clubs that have shooting sports programs for youth. I’d like to hear from any Post that has a program already in place or is planning to implement a program and needs guidance. If you’ve already reached out to me, thank you for your interest, and please don’t hesitate to contact me with any further questions.

The results for the JSSP first-round competition have not yet been determined. I will provide an update in my next Legion Link article, or you may visit the

National website, legion.org, to view the results when posted.

The Cadet of the Year application deadline is March 1, 2024. Make sure your schools are getting the application delivered to the students of their choice who will represent the top cadet in their program. The application is available on the Department of Florida website, floridalegion.org, and can be emailed directly to the JROTC senior instructor for completion. This is a scholarship award to the first-place winner for \$2,500, second-place winner for \$1,500, third-place winner for \$1,000, and fourth-place winner for \$500. Don’t overlook all the work that goes into this program throughout the year and recognize a deserving cadet. Thank you so much for all that you do for all our youth programs! Best of luck to all!



LEGISLATIVE UPDATES

www.floridalegion.org/legislative

March on Tallahassee
February 21, 2024

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The Forgotten First Responders

Daryl Bass, Law & Order Chair

laworder@legionmail.org



Law enforcement, firefighters, paramedics, nurses, and doctors are all first responders. Often overlooked and taken for granted, are our four-legged friends, THE CANINE FIRST RESPONDERS. We

mostly know about law enforcement attack dogs and blood hounds used for tracking, but let's not forget our search and rescue, drug and bomb sniffing, and cadaver dogs. These highly trained animals perform

a more than worthy service to our communities. In my research, I discovered a story about CRISIS RESPONSE CANINES.

Crisis response dogs are trained to handle stressful, crowded situations so that they can help people remain calm in disasters. These dogs assist people struggling with the aftermath of natural disasters, hurricanes, fires, floods, epidemics, and tornadoes.

Top ten breeds of dog for crisis response canines: Labrador Retriever, German Shepherd, Golden Retriever, Jack Russell Terrier, Border Collie, Bernese

Mountain dog, Greyhound, French Bulldog, Beagle, and the Cavalier King Charles Spaniel.

Veteran service dogs can come in different Breeds and sizes with specific training designed to assist each Veteran. Remember to be considerate when you meet Veterans with different breeds and sizes of service dogs. They are performing their service.

Law & Order chairs, remember, if you know of a law enforcement officer or fire rescue person who is a canine handler, reward them and their furry friend.

2024 Legislative Session in Progress

Stuart Scott, Legislative Chair

legislative@legionmail.org



As we begin the 2024 session, we're already seeing several bills get traction, others absorbed by other bills, and some won't see the light of day. There have been over 1,700 bills filed along with many appropriation requests, such as our request for Boys/Girls State and the upcoming 2025 National Convention in Tampa.

When the need arises, we will ask for your

assistance. Please be vigilant for legislative communications from us. We may ask that you reach out to legislative members and/or have your Post-membership reach out. This is our ability to be the grassroots of our endeavors.

Please visit our website, floridalegion.org/legislative, to view the bills that we are tracking via the Legislative Update. Some we support (Yes), and some we are simply watching to see how the language in the bills moves and/or changes. If the language doesn't move in the right direction, we will then indicate that we are not in support of the bill (No).

If you would like additional information about the bills that we are tracking, please review the bill language through the Florida House of Representatives or the Florida Senate websites.

- <https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/Bills/bills.aspx>
- <https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bills/2024>

In closing, please read up on legislation you are passionate about. A well-educated citizen should be the goal of everyone!

Membership is Growing

Bruce Carl, Membership Chair

membership@legionmail.org



Hello, Team Florida!

We continue to impress with membership numbers. According to the National membership report on January 16, 2024, we are currently 12th in the nation at 85.10%. Our numbers are higher than last year as we keep moving forward. Our Areas and Districts, with the exception of one, met our Department's 80% goal. Our next goal of 85% is February 7, 2024, for Department and

February 14, 2024, for National, many of you are already there!

Only two months remain before the conclusion of the District Commanders' Race to the Top. I want to see most of our Districts over 100% by then. Many of our Posts that are close to 100% (10 or less) have no one left on the roster to renew. Therefore, you must seek out new members, call those DMS400AD members, and encourage them to join your Post. Remember, DMS400AD members count towards your goal, even if they've already paid. Don't hesitate to contact your district membership and department

teams for assistance, especially if you're unsure how to access the list. We are here to help you in any way we can.

I have a bunch of 100% coins and pins already given out and more to distribute. Continue to work on your renewals, along with other sources.

If you're Post is struggling, don't be embarrassed to ask for help, it's why we are here. We want you ALL to succeed at every Post and District!

Thank you for the fantastic job you have all done

Membership continued on page 11 >>



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<< Membership continued from page 10

this year, and let's keep this train rolling! I look forward to writing next month's article and hope

we have some 100% Districts by then! I have been working behind the scenes to assist you and will continue to do so. Get in touch with me for any

issues or other assistance you might need. We've got this, Team!

Raise Your Voice

Raymond Olsen, National Security Chair

security@legionmail.org



My apologies for not writing last month, due to illness. The Iowa Caucuses have American's attention. My concern is Congress.

Congress has the purse strings and controls what gets completed, the success, how things are passed, and how well they're administered. However, the caucuses within Congress are so busy with name-calling, holding one another hostage, and trying to impeach someone, or disgraced that nothing is being done. It seems that everything is on hold for the upcoming elections. Can we continue to be ineffective for that much longer, with no guarantee that the outcome of the elections will resolve anything?

In my opinion, our most significant problem is illegal immigration and drugs coming over our

borders. This isn't just happening in the South, but in other large parts of call as well. There should be no opposition to this; cities are going broke, criminals and terrorists are entering the country, drugs are entering the country, and children and citizens are being killed.

What can we do to strengthen the national defense at your Post? The first step is membership. Build your membership and increase your voice. Strength is within the numbers, so do your best to be over your quota. Now is the time to pick up stragglers and recruit new members. Use programs to aid in recruiting: blood drives, VA volunteering, disaster relief, Americanism, community activities, and Veteran support. Show the public why we would be missed if we closed our doors. School awards, ROTC, Boys and Girls State programs, and Oratorical are all programs that raise awareness among many of our voters. You can use these opportunities to draw attention to the work the Legion does, especially

when it concerns our troops and security. Remain neutral in your speech, and direct the public to legion.org, floridalegion.org, or your Post website.

Get out and VOTE! Encourage your membership to vote. Set up voter registration events with the help of your county government. Remind everyone about election days and primary days and provide rides to those in need. Ensure you follow the National Legion rules about remaining non-partisan in your political events.

Have a good February, and don't forget your spouse or children this Valentine's Day. Youth Law Cadet registration is open. February is also Americanism Month and Black History Month. The Four Chaplains remembrance is on February 3, 2024. Area Oratorical competitions are in February and lots of events to recruit new members while learning more about Legion programs.

Defining Revitalization

Judith Richards, Post Revitalization

revitalization@legionmail.org



"To revitalize is to restore something to life or give it new life. Revitalizing adds newness and strength. Since vital things are alive, strong, and flourishing, it is returned to health or life when something gets revitalized. A good night's sleep will revitalize you - as will eating a healthy meal". ~

Merriam-Webster Dictionary

What are we doing to restore our Post's health and

life? Are we using the Buddy-Check calls? Are we encouraging and engaging our members at the Post and at home?

I'm available by phone or in-person to work with your Posts, Districts, and Areas. I am scheduled to work with our Department Membership Chair in District 13 this month. When will I be working in your District?

District 8 had revitalization training at one of their District meetings. (See photos on the right)





Remembering our POW/MIA's

Denny Luke, POW/MIA Chair

powmia@legionmail.org



This February, remember this solemn day: February 3, 1943, four chaplains sacrificed their own lives to save others as the military transport ship USAT Dorchester was torpedoed by a German submarine.

To my knowledge, their remains have never been recovered, making them MIAs who will likely never be recovered and repatriated.

The good news for today is the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) has identified sixteen WWII, two Korean War, and one soul from the Vietnam War so far, this fiscal year. If you know of any descendants of a MIA member, please encourage them to contact the DPAA Casualty Assistance Office and submit a DNA sample for their library.

The DPAA released December 7, 2023: <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/3610893/marine-accounted-for-from-vietnam-forrester-r/>. The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) announced today that **U.S. Marine Corps Capt. Ronald W. Forrester** lost during the Vietnam War, was accounted for on Dec. 4, 2023.

In the winter of 1972, Forrester was assigned to Marine All-Weather Attack Squadron 533, Marine Attack Group 12, 1st Marine Air Wing. On Dec. 27, Forrester was the navigator of an A-6A Intruder, along with his pilot, during a nighttime combat mission over the northern part of the Democratic Republic of (North) Vietnam. After entering the target area, Forrester's aircraft ceased radio communications and never returned to base. Search and rescue teams could not locate any trace of the aircraft or the crew in the Le Thuy District, Quang Binh Province. In September 1978, the Marine Corps changed Capt. Forrester's initial Missing In Action

status to Killed in Action.

The DPAA released December 12, 2023: <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/3614667/soldier-accounted-for-from-wwii-cole-h/>. The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) announced today that **U.S. Army Pfc. Hood E. Cole**, 26, of Atlanta, Georgia, killed during World War II, was accounted for Feb. 22, 2023.

In January 1945, Cole was assigned to L Company, 3rd Battalion, 276th Infantry Regiment, 70th Infantry Division. On Jan. 14, Cole was killed in action when his unit was attacked by German forces near Baerenthal, France. At some point during the fighting, Cole was killed, but historical records do not indicate exactly where. Due to the fighting, his body was unable to be immediately recovered.

The DPAA released December 18, 2023: <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/3621076/soldier-accounted-for-from-wwii-mitchell-h/>. The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) announced today that **U.S. Army Pvt. Homer J. Mitchell**, 20, of Portales, New Mexico, killed during World War II, was accounted for on July 24, 2023.

In November 1944, Mitchell was assigned to Company F, 2nd Battalion, 359th Infantry Regiment, 90th Infantry Division. His battalion had been tasked with holding defensive positions in the Pachten Forest near Dillingen, Germany, when he was reported killed in action on Dec. 10 by enemy artillery fire. His body could not be evacuated due to intense fighting against heavily reinforced German forces. American commanders eventually ordered the regiment to withdraw, but many casualties were nonrecoverable due to the intensity of the mortar and artillery strikes.

The DPAA released December 21, 2023: <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/3624466/soldier-accounted-for-from-wwii-hurst-r/>. The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) announced today that **U.S. Army Pvt. Robert L. A. Hurst**, 21, of Wabasso, Florida, who was captured and died as a prisoner of war during World War II, was accounted for July 10, 2023.

In late 1942, Hurst was a member of the 429th Signal Maintenance Company when Japanese forces invaded the Philippine Islands in December. Intense fighting continued until the surrender of the Bataan peninsula on April 9, 1942, and of Corregidor Island on May 6, 1942.

Pvt. Hurst will be buried in Vero Beach, Florida, on a date to be determined.

I encourage all to visit The American Legion Department of Florida website, <https://www.floridalegion.org/programs-services/powmia-remembrance/about/> to learn more about the POW-MIA program. Under the resources tab, you will find a link to the Defense POW-MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) <https://www.dpaa.mil/>, Library of Congress Vietnam Era POW-MIA Database, National League of POW-MIA Families, National Alliance of Families for the Return of America's Missing Servicemen, and the POW-MIA Chairmans Manual. The National American Legion website link is under the Media tab: <https://www.legion.org/honor/powmia>.

I also encourage you to visit the National POW-MIA Memorial and Museum website, <https://powmiamemorial.org/>, to follow the progress being made to complete this wonderful and only National POW-MIA Memorial being built here in the state of Florida.



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Members of District 5, Winner of last year's ALR Round Robin Trophy - District 5

PVR/SPI Events... Ending Veteran Suicide

One of PROJECT: VetRelief's goals is to help End Veteran Suicides. The Suicide Prevention Initiative focuses on working with our verified Strategic Partners by training or mentoring veterans through their existing mental health treatments, programs or processes to avoid suicide. Whether it's a ruck walk, educational seminar or speaking engagement, there's no shortage of opportunities to alert our communities through our PVR/SPI events on this serious issue our veterans are facing.

These events are designed to encompass fundraising, creating awareness and educating our communities on the importance of mental health within our veteran communities and understanding the severity of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

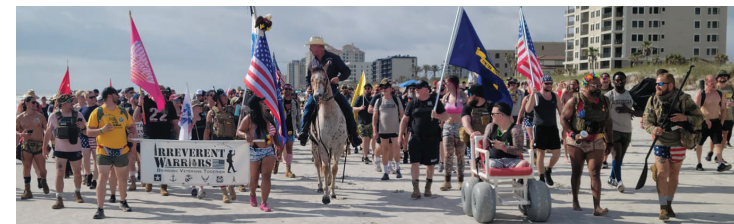
>>RECENT EVENTS

American Legion Post 69 in Avon Park hosted their Veterans Expo in early January. Not only were they able to raise funds for our SPI program, but they engaged their local community to give veterans the opportunity to see all resources within their area. Check out our Board Member, Larry Roberts article on page 15 for all the details.

>>UPCOMING EVENTS

Saturday, March 23rd - Jacksonville Beach

Ocean Beaches Post 129 is hosting a PVR Challenge 22 Walk & Event in Jacksonville Beach on Saturday, March 23rd. Registration is open for attendees to join for \$22/walker, or add-on the official event shirt for \$35/walker. For more details, visit: <https://give.floridalegion.org/ch22jax>



April - Entire State

The Florida American Legion Riders are gearing up to Ride for the 22 during their Round Robin, In-State Unity Ride, and State Rally events. Chapters are encouraged to put together a ride during April for the cause. Then, from April 22-26, they will join forces traveling three routes to raise funds and awareness to End Veteran Suicide. Additionally, they are raffling off a BRAND-NEW Harley Davidson motorcycle, too! Details on all their activities can be found using the following link: <https://bit.ly/ALRUnityRide>

Current Year: July 2023 - October 2023

188
Veterans Received Financial Support

\$250,647
Provided as Emergency Assistance

16
Suicide Prevention Strategic Partners

\$102,000
Given towards Veteran Suicide Prevention



Relevant Information for Resolutions

Clarence Hill, Resolutions Chair

resolutions@legionmail.org



If you are considering transmitting a proposed resolution beyond your Post, you should ensure that the subject matter is relevant to our organization's principles. The Preamble to the Constitution can

be used as a general guide to the boundary within which subject matter should be kept. Posts should also be wary of becoming a channel through which non-Legion organizations seek to achieve their own goals.

- **Is it relevant?** A resolution that calls for saving the environment of the spotted woodpecker might make some people happy, but what does it have to do with the mission of The American Legion? The American Legion might support legislation that would open up the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge Coastal Plain for oil exploration since it impacts our national security and economic well-being as a nation.
- **Does The American Legion already have a position on the subject?** If so, the proposed resolution will be "received and recorded."

- **Can the subject matter be taken care of administratively without the need for a resolution?** If so, there is no need for the proposed resolution.
- **Does the resolution involve a local issue?** If so, again, there is no need for the proposed resolution.
- **What legislation is involved?** Avoid quoting references to the numbers or titles used in the proposed legislation, whether the bills proposed are at the local, county, state, or national level. The text of these bills may change to such an extent that you end up appearing to support legislation that is not good for Veterans or your particular cause. Always write directly about the subject, not a title or bill number.
- **Is it reasonable that the intent of the resolution can be realistically attained?** Calling for the elimination of terrorism sounds great, but why draft such a resolution if it cannot be realistically accomplished unless there are sound ideas and suggestions in the resolution as to how this can be done?
- **Does the resolution deal with a politically sensitive issue?** Article II, Section 2 of the Constitution states: "The American Legion shall

be absolutely nonpolitical and shall not be used for the dissemination of partisan principles nor for promotion of the candidacy of any person seeking public office or preferment." The Corporate Charter, 36 USC Section 21706 states: "The corporation shall be nonpolitical and may not promote the candidacy of an individual seeking public office."

- **Should The American Legion be involved in the issue?** Because we do not have research physicians on staff, we should not recommend and advocate for a specific medication. But you can certainly call upon the VA to use the most appropriate medication to treat the patients under their care, regardless of cost.
- **Is it simple or complex?** Remember to keep the resolution to one subject. Submit two separate resolutions in the case of two different objectives.

We are approaching four months from the Convention, and thus far, no resolutions have been submitted for review. Please don't wait until the last minute to submit proposed resolutions for review. Keep in mind that proposed resolutions need to be received by each Post by the end of April.

Promote The School Medals Program

Deveron Reaves, School Medals Chair

schoolmedals@legionmail.org



Hello, to all The American Legion Family!

Moving into February we are closing in on the end of our Legion year. There are still so many opportunities to reach out to your local area schools and share information about the School Medals Program. District Commanders and chairs let's get involved with the Posts to spread the word

on awarding our students a positive contribution to the future because the current students ARE our future!

Please submit names of any volunteers who want to take on the position of School Medals Chair for their respective Posts. You can reach me at schoolmedals@legionmail.org if you have any questions.

BOOK NOW \$140
plus tax | per night

The **105TH American Legion, Department of Florida Convention** will be held June 13-16, 2024 at the Hilton Orlando Lake Buena Vista in the Disney Springs area.

800-782-4414
RESERVATIONS



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Successful Veterans' Expo

Larry Roberts, VA Entitlements Chair
benefits@legionmail.org



Nothing unites The American Legion Family members in purpose like **Be the One**.

The 9th Annual Veterans Expo was our best yet, even with bad weather. Friday, January 5th began with the escort of the *Global War of Terror Wall*. We were not able to get the *Vietnam Veterans' Wall*, due to the weather. Approximately 100 Riders plus a multitude of cars and trucks led the way. The roads were lined with people waving flags as we passed.

We escorted the wall 22 miles in respect of the 22 Veterans a day who commit suicide. Upon arrival at The American Legion Post 69, the Highlands County commissioners, Boys Scouts, and Girl Scouts were on the side of the road cheering us on and waving U.S. Flags. What truly hit home, was Eric Anderson and his S.E.T. Spirit Training Team welcoming us in with his horses.



Saturday, January 6th marked the second day of our Veterans' Expo. We started at 5:00 AM putting together the state indoors due to bad weather. Bad weather didn't stop our combat missions, and it didn't stop our mission to help our Veterans.



I can't say enough about our opening ceremonies. Eric Anderson, emceed the event,

and with Ms. Veteran of America's first runner-up, J'Nes Thomas on stage it was a lot of fun.



During the opening ceremonies, the Department Sergeant-at-Arms and the Juniors brought in a huge U.S. Flag as Eric Anderson read the *My Name is Old Glory* poem.

Next, the POW/MIA flag was placed on the chair. We honored and awarded some heroes:

- Fire Fighter of the Year: Chief Andrew Marcy
- Law Enforcement of the Year: Benjamin Tony
- VA Employee of the Year: Phillip Hunter

We were also given the honor of presenting fourteen *Quilts of Valor* to fourteen superheroes:



- WWII Veteran: U.S. Army Sgt. Carl Johnson
- WWII Veteran: PVT. Joseph Albert
- Korean War Veteran: U.S. Air Force Airman 2nd Class Ann Farrell
- Korean War Veteran: U.S. Air Force Roger Bradshaw
- Korean War Veteran: U.S.M.C. William Fleming Jr.
- Korean War Veteran: U.S.M.C. Lloyd Burlew
- Korean War Veteran: U.S.M.C. Bradley Wayne Smith
- Korean War Veteran: U.S. Army John Goodman
- Korean War Veteran: 3rd Class Petty Officer Warren Schorr

- Korean War Veteran: U.S. Army Daryl Hovey
- Korean War Veteran: U.S. Air Force Claud Jons, Jr.
- Vietnam War Veteran: U.S. Air Force Bob Kimball
- Vietnam War Veteran: U.S. Army CW02 Rod Love
- Vietnam War Veteran: U.S. Navy Lee Shelton

The most fun had was the opportunity for J'Nes and I to put an U.S. Army shirt on Jessica Moore, who lost the bet on the Army-Navy Game. Jessica had a choice to wear the Army shirt for a 2.2 mile walk, because it was raining, or she could wear it for the remainder of the day. Ultimately the people voted, and she had to wear it all day.



Our Department Commander was thrown in jail by our Juniors, despite Gambler's best efforts. He claimed to have a pardon from the Governor, however Legislative chair discovered it had not been signed.

Throughout both days of the expo, we had important displays. The first with 22 pairs of boots to remember the 22 Veterans a day who commit suicide. The second, 16 teddy bears to remember the 16 kids a day who commit suicide.





Homeless Women Veterans

Joan Suelter, Women Veterans Chair

womenvets@legionmail.org



Homeless Women Veterans are a growing and vulnerable population facing many challenges and barriers to accessing adequate services and support. When returning to civilian life they often face many challenges, especially from events that may have

occurred while in service, such as but not limited to, sexual trauma, divorce, employment, parenting, and housing. An astonishing statistic, according to the VA, is that in 2023, twenty-five-thousand homeless Women Veterans were served by the VHA homeless programs.

Our Posts' service officers and the VA service officers are our front line to assist our Veterans. If you know

a Veteran in need, please call the VA's National Call Center at **877-424-3838**.

Serving as your Women's Veteran Chair, I will continue my efforts to raise awareness, advocate for change, and with your help, propose solutions to this growing situation.

Youth & Law Cadet Program Revisions

Bud Boyer, Youth Law Cadet Chair

youthlawcadet@legionmail.org



Happy New Year, to all! I hope you had a wonderful holiday and Santa was good to you.

In my last article, I mentioned that we would be revising our brochures and flyers for this year and that new information would be available by February 1st. I have received information from our partner, the Florida Highway Patrol, and have passed it on to our wonderful people at Department. They have worked hard to make the necessary changes to our brochures.

The brochure states the start of the program is July

7th, however, please disregard this date. The Florida Highway Patrol has not yet confirmed a date for this year. Once I receive confirmation, we will make the necessary updates and distribute the information. The Lieutenant and I are working together and hope to have a firm date set by April.

Because of our hard work, we were able to distribute the majority of the new information to all the Posts, District, and Area chairs the first week of January. Special thank you to Department.

Please start looking for applicants, send applications, and medical forms, for the young folks interested in this outstanding program. If any Post, chair, or commander has questions, please contact me, even if just for a packet with new information.

We have 16 Districts, and the Florida Highway Patrol is allowing us to send 32 students/cadets this year. I hope the Posts can work together and then the District can choose two students to represent them in this fantastic program. If not all Districts and Posts participate, we can plan to pick other students/cadets to attend.

We also need chaperones; we hope you will consider volunteering. If we can send 32 students/cadets to the academy, we will need a minimum of eight volunteers to chaperone for the week. Of course, if there are fewer students, fewer chaperones will be required.

Proud to be Legion.

2025 Tampa National Convention - Call for Volunteers

Clarence Hill, Past National Commander

pnchill@legionmail.org



February marks the eighteen-month point to the National Convention in Tampa. Next month, Department Adjutant Bruce Comer and I will join the national convention professionals from the national

staff and the national convention committee chair in Tampa to conduct hotel checks and ensure the status

of our contracts hasn't changed.

We need to consider appointments to various convention committees in time to meet during the Department Convention this June. I would like to have a member of the Legion as a chair, and a member of the Auxiliary, Sons, and Riders as vice-chairs to coordinate the volunteers from each organization. Events will begin moving faster after our Department Convention. The committees needed

are: badges and packets, distinguished guests, memorial service, information/registration, and special events. We'd also like to consider volunteer(s) for a Tampa liaison position.

The expected cost of the National Convention is \$400,000 or more, with the largest cost being bus transportation. Legislative chair, Stuart Scott, asks for assistance from everyone to contact the Florida

2025 National Convention continued on page 17 >>



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<< 2025 National Convention continued from page 16

House Chair Andrade and Senate Chair Hooper to lobby for money from our legislature to help offset these transportation costs. I hope that many of you have already made these calls, and if not, please do

so. Fundraisers would also be greatly appreciated.

Hosting a National Convention is no easy feat, and every member of all the other Departments are critics. There are numerous entertainment sites near

and within Tampa, which means the convention attendance could easily exceed the 7,000 National uses as a guide. If you can volunteer or have any ideas, please share them. **We need volunteers, we need you!**

National Committee on Children & Youth

Dennis Boland, Child Welfare Foundation

pdcboland@legionmail.org



In 1954, The American Legion endorsed the separate incorporation of the American Legion Child Welfare Foundation. Since then, the foundation has granted over twenty

million dollars to other non-profit youth-serving organizations. The foundation exists to contribute to the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual welfare of children and youth and to add to progress, including but not limited to all youth activities now or hereafter sponsored by The American Legion.

These goals are accomplished due to the generosity of the 55 American Legion Departments through their donations to the foundation.

The contribution year and awards year run from June 1st to May 31st each year.

TO QUALIFY: Awarded to organizations (Post, unit, salon, and squadron for their cumulative donations made during the contribution year.

- Guardian Gold Plaque donation of \$1,500 or more
- Advocate Silver Plaque donation of \$1,000
- Caretaker Bronze Plaque donation of \$750

Individual Awards:

- Century Club - \$250. Donation receives a dated gold logo pin with one Amethyst.
- Foundation Partner - \$500. Donation receives a dated gold logo pin with one blue sapphire.
- Presidents' Club - \$1,000. Donation receives a dated gold logo pin with one diamond.
- Foundation Ambassador - \$1,500. Donation receives a dated gold logo pin with 5 Diamonds.

Thank you for Supporting our American Legion Children and Youth Programs.

Donations received since June 1, 2023 to May 31, 2024 - \$304,256.48

Department	8/40	Auxiliary	Individuals	Legion	SAL	Total
Arizona	\$400	\$100	\$230	\$1,341	\$52,255	\$54,326
Pennsylvania	\$310	\$963	\$175	\$16,222.25	\$11,756.28	\$29,426.53
Florida	\$108	\$100	\$250	\$11,183.72	\$15,742	\$27,383.72

Post 375, L.E. "Tommy" Thomas: Resurgence Personified

Jim Rensburg, District 1 Historian

A farm boy from upstate New York, Thomas joined the U.S. Marine Corps on his 17th birthday. Serving as a gunner in the Pacific Campaigns of WWII, he was awarded five Air Medals and received the Purple Heart.



Following the war, the New York native moved to Birmingham, Alabama, where he began his long

career in the automobile business. He became a dealer at the age of 26 and when he retired, owned and operated five dealerships in Alabama and Florida.

He served on the National Board of Directors for the Salvation Army. Thomas established the "Tommy" Thomas Family Services Center in Panama City. He was a 33rd Degree Mason, a Paul Harris fellow, and a member of numerous civic and community organizations. Thomas is widely known for his work in the Methodist Church and served on many state boards, including the Methodist Children's Home. One

of his last contributions was the Mathison Retirement Center, which was dedicated in September 1996 and continues to serve our community.

After moving to Florida in 1965, he was elected Florida Republican Party Chairman from 1970-1974. He was the only living American to have cast Electoral College votes for four different Presidential candidates.

Thomas died in Panama City, Florida, at the age of 71 and was buried with full military honors and

"Post 375 - L.E. Thomas" continued on page 18 >>



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<< "Post 375 - L.E. Thomas" continued from page 17

Masonic rites. One of his favorite sayings was, "You'd better stand for something ...or you'll fall for anything."

American Legion Post 375 received a temporary charter on December 3, 1995, and obtained a Full Charter on July 7, 1997. It can be said that Post 375 evolved from the need for local representation when American Legion Post 356, which was chartered on August 4, 1990, in Southport, Florida, relocated to Lynn Haven, Florida. This created a need for a local post for Veterans in the Southport, Florida area. AL375 Auxiliary was chartered on January 4, 1999, and the SAL375 on November 25, 2002. American Legion Post 375 has occupied its current location in Southport since the Post went into operation on December 3, 1996.

Then, in October of 2018, Hurricane Michael came to the Florida Panhandle. It was a powerful and destructive tropical cyclone that became the first Category 5 hurricane to make landfall in the contiguous United States since Andrew in 1992.

It was the third-most intense Atlantic hurricane to make landfall in the contiguous United States since Hurricane Camille in 1969. Michael was the first Category 5 hurricane on record to impact the Florida Panhandle, the fourth-strongest landfalling hurricane in the contiguous United States in terms of wind speed, and the most intense hurricane on record to strike the United States in the month of October. Hurricane Michael destroyed Post 375.

On January 8th, 2024, I drove over to Post 375 to be there for their Burger Night and to absorb their vibe as inspiration for this article. On the way, I was reminiscing about my other trips around Florida on Legion business. I recalled how some Posts were grandiose in their facilities, with thousands of members, paid officer positions, and community connections. I realized for a Post to be successful, it's the people that make it happen; the facility, almost ALMOST, doesn't matter. Such is the case here at Post 375; here, they have almost nothing, but the spirit of the American Legion is alive at the Post; the air there almost crackles with the spirit of helpfulness and camaraderie. Their Commander is going to be

absent for months with family health concerns, but the rest of the members have stepped up to cover and make sure the Post runs as "business as usual." I've enclosed their calendar for you, dear reader, to come to the realization that, despite their situation and their hardships, they are carrying on cheerfully without complaint because that's what Legionnaires do: carry on. On January 8th, I arrived at 5:00 pm; it was dark, raining, and 48 degrees Fahrenheit. Under their tent, the crew, Adjutant Rick Davis, 2nd Vice Gordy Tamplin, and a 375 SAL member, George Cox, were manning the outside kitchen. They welcomed me as if we were in sunny Florida, not a night when they could have been at home with their feet up before a crackling fire, while the weather outside was a building gale that spawned tornadoes later; no, they were operating Burger Night, helping each other, and swapping stories about fishing and other anecdotes. Inside the bar, an Auxiliary member, Helen Davis, Rick's wife, was selling tickets for food, and the Post was having drinks while they waited for their to-go orders; there was steady traffic while I was there. So here we have it, Post 375 exemplifying "Be the One": business as usual...

Oliver Kennedy, Jr. - A Servant Hero

The Midtown Press - Dec 23/Jan 24 Edition - Pgs 16-17



According to the Oxford Dictionary, a hero is a person who is admired or idealized for courage, outstanding achievements, or noble qualities. These attributes precisely describe Oliver Kennedy, Jr. I enjoyed spending time with Mr. Kennedy in

his Orlando home, where we discussed his life and legacy.

Mr. Kennedy has been a member of the American Legion, Dorie Miller Memorial Post 331, located at 4325 Fairmont St. in Orlando, for over 30 years. He has held every position at the Post during his time at the Legion. Mr. Kennedy also was responsible for establishing the Honor Guard, which provides ceremonial renderings of the United States Flag throughout Orange County. Under his leadership, his Color Guard Team are 3-Peat National Champions and have placed first first in state and national competitions. Mr. Kennedy's activism also includes his exceptional mentoring capabilities, which are responsible for a Naval Academy Nuclear Submarine Officer, Quinton Cooper, and a Westpoint Military

Academy graduate, Joseph Simmons, who are both Maynard Evans High School alums.



His American Legion resume includes an impressive array of roles that show Mr. Kennedy's dedication and commitment to the Post. From being named Sergeant-at-Arms to his two terms as Commander, Mr. Kennedy's influence on the Post

"Oliver Kennedy" continued on page 19 >>



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<< "Oliver Kennedy" continued from page 16

is incomparable. But his work and influence didn't end there, and due to efforts, Mr. Kennedy led the charge to have the statue of Dorie Miller, which sits in front of the Legion, commissioned. For those unfamiliar with the story of Dorie Miller, he was the first black recipient of the Navy Cross and a nominee for the Medal of Honor. As a mess attendant second class in the United States Navy, Miller helped carry wounded sailors to safety during the attack on Pearl Harbor. Despite no prior training in gunnery, Miller manned an anti-aircraft gun and shot down between four and six enemy planes. In 2032, the USS Dorie Miller will be commissioned. It will be the first aircraft carrier named for both an enlisted sailor and an African American. Mr.



Kennedy initially traveled to Louisville, Kentucky, but due to price, he found a local sculptor based in Lake Mary to do the job.

Mr. Kennedy, who was born in New Orleans, retired in Orlando after a 30-year military career. He enrolled in 1957 as a Chief Petty Officer. When he joined the Navy, he couldn't even type. As a problem solver, he created a keyboard out of paper to teach himself how to type. When I asked Mr. Kennedy about his decision to join the Navy, he mentioned that he heard a song from actor and singer Bing Crosby called "Far Away Places". It would be the lyrics from the song that piqued his curiosity for seeing the

*Far away places
with strange-sounding names
Far away over the sea
Those far away places
With the strange-sounding names
Are callin' (callin'), callin' (callin') me.*

*"Far Away Places"
~ Bing Crosby ~*

world.

Each year, The American Legion awards a member the Legionnaire of the Year Award. For his service and dedication to the Post, the award will now be called the Oliver Kennedy, Jr. Legionnaire of The Year Award. This award is a testament to Mr. Kennedy's body of work.



As we wrapped up our time together, I asked Mr. Kennedy for three words that he thinks best describe him. His response was dedication, dependability, and ambition. I can concur! Congratulations Mr. Kennedy, I salute you on a job well done!

Department Staff Updates

Willie Leonard retires after more than a half-century of service to The American Legion, Department of Florida, and the Florida Boys State program. Leonard worked for a combined total of fifty-four years with Department staff as custodian, and this year would have been his 61st year with the Florida Boys State program.



1, 2007. After deciding retirement was not for him, he returned on July 20, 2014, and worked another nine and a half years, until December 13, 2023. Leonard was still not ready for retirement; however, medical issues left him with little choice.

Leonard suffered a stroke on December 26, 2023 and is still not in good health. His family is requesting no visitors, but continued prayers and thoughts are greatly appreciated. Get well wishes can be sent to: Willie Leonard, c/o The American Legion, Department of Florida, PO Box 547859; Orlando, FL 32854

The Department will truly miss the man affectionately referred to as "Mr. Willie". He has been a constant and reliable source. His dedication and passion for serving our Veterans and our youth, is unmatched. We pray for his recovery and will miss the pleasure of his smiling face within the organization.

Bobbi Halle, Department Finance Director, retired on January 5, 2024, along with her companion "Mo Bear". Halle worked with the Department for fifteen years. We wish her the best in this new chapter of her life.

Leonard began his journey with The American Legion on July 23, 1962, and retired after 45 years on June

Post 296

HIGH SCHOOL ORATORICAL COMPETITION



Front Row (L-R): Jim Wood, Judge Catherine Card, William Kider, Celina Sanchez, Judge Destin Mayor Bobby Wagner, Judge Attorney Michelle Anchors

Back row (L-R): Cole Rewis and Post 296 Commander Corelene Ziegler



1st Place - William Kider



2nd Place - Celina Sanchez



3rd Place - Cole Rewis



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MEMBERSHIP TARGET REPORT

January 25, 2024 (87.06%)

District 17	Jim Bowers	91.39%
District 3	Stuart Scott	89.49%
District 8	John Rauh	89.17%
District 2	Doyle Combs, Jr.	88.96%
District 7	Rick Orzechowski	88.67%
District 1	Shelby Windham	88.18%
District 6	Peter Gregory	88.03%
District 11	Toni Sutherland	87.95%
District 12	Bruce Thurber	86.65%
District 15	Randy Holeyfield	86.43%
District 4	Doug Hockenberry	86.36%
District 9	Rico Thomas	86.32%
District 13	Eric Loyd	85.97%
District 16	Eric Nestler	85.73%
District 5	Miguel Garcia	85.30%
District 14	Thomas Frank	82.16%
Western	Sonny Decker	88.29%
Eastern	Joe Marcheggiani	87.42%
Southwestern	Harold "Bud" Boyer	87.41%
Northern	Lena Heredia-Perez	87.29%
Central	Bob Matheson	86.33%
Southern	Johnny Castro	85.96%
Post 400		86.64%
Post 208		89.09%

NEXT GOAL: February 7, 2024

85%

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★ ★ ★ BI-WEEKLY DRAWINGS ★ ★ ★



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RESERVATIONS

The **105TH American Legion, Department of Florida Convention** will be held June 13-16, 2024 at the Hilton Orlando Lake Buena Vista in the Disney Springs area.

For complete convention details visit our website at www.floridalegion.org



USE GROUP CODE

Be sure to mention
"LEG"



BOOKING DEADLINE

To receive special rate you
must book by **May 31, 2024**



OPTIONAL RESORT FEE

Internet, shuttle, discount
tickets and more

Book soon, room block will fill quickly!



BOOK ONLINE



Hilton Orlando Lake Buena Vista
1751 Hotel Plaza Blvd
Lake Buena Vista, FL 32830



Department
of Florida

**PROGRAM ADVERTISING
LEGION FAMILY**

*** Deadline May 15, 2024 ***

105th Annual Department Convention, June 13-16, 2024

Hilton Orlando Lake Buena Vista – Disney Springs Area, 1751 Hotel Plaza Blvd; Lake Buena Vista, FL 32830

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name of Member, Post, Unit, or Squadron

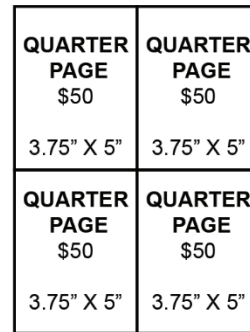
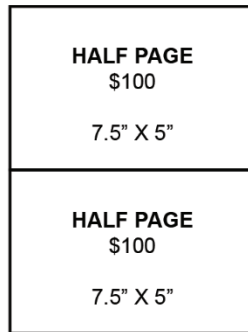
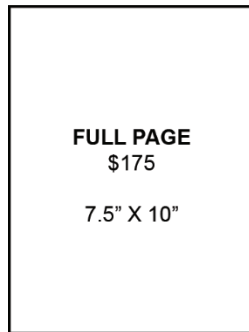
Contact Person

Title

Email

Phone

PROGRAM ADVERTISEMENT OPTIONS FOR LEGION FAMILY MEMBERS, POSTS, UNITS, AND SQUADRONS ONLY



- Full Page (7.5" x 10") \$175 Half Page (7.5" x 5") \$100 Quarter Page (3.75" x 5") \$50 Custom Design Fee \$25

Program advertisements must be submitted no later than May 15, 2024 to be included in the program. Please submit your advertisement artwork via email in one of the following image file types: .ai, .eps, .psd, .pdf, .tif, .jpeg, .jpg, .png. All artwork must be digital: no scanned or printed artwork will be accepted. All advertisements are printed in grayscale. All imagery must be legally licensed. For an additional \$25 Custom Design Fee, we will design your advertisement for you. You'll be contacted for details at the email provided. Please email artwork to: events@floridalegion.org.

PAYMENT METHOD

- Credit Card Check # _____ Make checks payable to *The American Legion, Dept of FL*

CREDIT CARD INFORMATION

- Visa Mastercard American Express Discover Total to Charge: \$ _____

Credit Card #

Cardholder Name

Expiration Date

Security Code

I authorize The American Legion, Department of Florida to charge the amount listed above to the credit card provided herein. I agree to pay for this purchase in accordance with the issuing bank cardholder agreement.

Signature

Date

Submit to: The American Legion, Department of Florida, Attention: Event Coordinator; PO Box 547859, Orlando, FL 32854-7859.

CHILDREN & YOUTH PICNIC

SATURDAY APRIL 6, 2024

12pm - 5pm

**Music by
Doc Holiday**



**Raffle Baskets
50/50
Carnival Games
+ More!**

Location:

**American Legion Post 117
189 Veterans Drive
Palm Bay, FL 32909**

1/3 Pound Burger or, 1/4 Hot Dog \$10

Kids Under 12 1/4 Burger or Hot Dog \$5

PICNIC MEAL = \$7

All Meals Served with Sides

Poker Run

Registration 9:30am KSU 10:30 am

Questions: Contact

**AL Dept C&Y Chaiman Rick Johnson 954-242-4496
MaryAnn Spellman 917-834-5763**

All Proceeds go to COTA



LIVE BAND • DANCING

POST 103

2101 Taylor Rd; Punta Gorda FL 33950
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\$40 EA
MAIL CHECKS
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MAY
18 2024

5:00 PM

COCKTAILS THEN
DINNER AT 6:00 PM

YOUR CHOICE OF

PRIME RIB • FISH • SHRIMP

• Dress in Island Casual •

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Proceeds to benefit Disaster Relief fund and C.O.T.A.



Department
of Florida

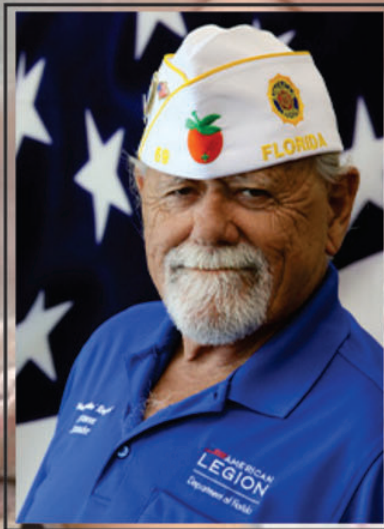
The American Legion
High School Oratorical
Scholarship Program

Support Your Area's Competitor
at State Finals

March 30, 2024
Competition begins at 9:00 am

Dept. of Florida HQ
Orlando, FL

Ponytail cutting to support Commander Raymond's Charity Children's Organ Transplant Association.
\$25,000 raised at the event for the hair cutting to take place
Bring your Donations to the Commander's Homecoming
on May 18, 2024 at American Legion Post 103
Punta Gorda



Commander
Mike "Gambler" Raymond



Look who's getting their hair cut



Sgt-at-Arms
Les Martin



Eastern Area Comm.
Joe Marcheggiani



Blood Doner Chair
Jamie Grinis



AMERICAN
LEGION

Western Area Commander's
BALL

Come have a Nip of Kentucky
Bourbon with Sonny Decker

Smooth as
Kentucky Bourbon

SATURDAY, APRIL 13, 2024

Post 235

105 Hollywood Blvd NW, Fort Walton Beach, FL 32548

Meet & Greet 5pm | Dinner 6pm

Wear your Sonny Decker Shirt, all proceeds go to
Project: Vet Relief/Suicide Prevention!
Don't forget your Jeans and Boots!

*We will have a staff attended buffet, live music
& comedy roast*

TICKETS: \$35 EACH./\$60 COUPLES IN ADVANCE
(Online tickets & shirt slaes coming soon)
CALL JEANIE HENSON AT 850-445-9186 FOR MORE INFO

SAVE THE DATE

District 13 Family Be The One Event & Project: VetRelief Resource Fair

Open to All Veterans, Family Members, Veteran Organizations and the Public.

Join Us:

Date: February 24, 2024
Time: 10:00 AM—4:00 PM
Walk Starts: 10:15 AM

Where:

American Legion Post 192
3130 Dr. MLK Jr. Blvd.
Fort Myers FL 33916

Event POC: Mike Turner, Chair by email at fld13VeteransuicideAevent@yahoo.com

All Funds raised will be for Project: VetRelief and District 13 Be The One efforts.

Project: VetRelief is a program of American Legion Department of Florida; visit



Vendors Needed:

FL Veterans Foundation	FDVA	Cnty Veteran Services	Government Agencies
VA Services	Vet Center	VBA	VA NCA
Veteran Service Organizations	Veteran Organizations	Service Dog Organizations	Homeless Resources
Mental Health Resources	Suicide Prevention	Education Resources	Employment Resources
Long Term & Home Care	Medicaid & Medicare	Caregiver Resources	Children Activities
Blood Mobile	Music		

American Legion K Post 11

Love Our Veterans

Valentine Golf Tournament And Celebration

February 10, 2024 (Saturday)

4 Person Scramble - 8:30 AM Shotgun

Putting Contest Begins 7:30 AM

Arcadia Municipal Golf Course

Lunch and Awards After Golf at K Post 11

\$65 per person

Donation Includes – Golf, Cart, Lunch, Two Drinks at Post (Full Bar),
Raffles, Auctions, Contests, Live Entertainment and MORE!

Prizes For

Low Score TOP 3 teams

Longest Drive (Men/Women)

Closest To the Pins (Par 3)

Putting

Benefit For Our National and Post Emergency Funds

For more information call

Ron Jones – 941-806-7108

Entry Forms Available At

Arcadia Golf Course – and – Radio Shack 707 N Brevard Ave.