



BE THE ONE



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Submit Articles at
floridalegion.org/submit or legionlink@floridalegion.org
 Questions? legionlink@floridalegion.org

Keep it Real

A Message from the Department Commander

Chris Hamrick, Commander

commander@floridalegion.org



Fellow Legionnaires, Happy New Year to all of you! I hope the holiday season treated you well. We're halfway through our year, and I can honestly say, **"What an interesting first half it has been!"**

Hurricanes... one after another... after another. But we're **Florida Strong!** It seems like we're becoming more and more resilient with these challenges. **Kudos** to all of you for your recovery efforts and for supporting one another.

Now, we're at "Halftime." Just like halftime in a game, this is when we go to the locker room, reflect on the first half, make our tweaks and adjustments, and modify our strategy before going out in the

second half to kick some butt and win the game. We all need to do our own "Halftime" adjustments at the Post and District levels by identifying potential weak spots, particularly in our Programs and Membership.

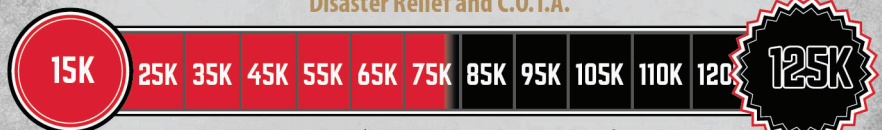
Currently, I am in the process of making changes to certain Program Committee Chairs and personnel. At the beginning of the year, I appointed many new faces compared to previous years, hoping fresh ideas and new motivations could improve and revitalize our programs. For the most part, this has worked well. However, halfway through the year, there has been zero activity in certain areas. We can't get new programs off the ground if we don't work them. As a result, specific personnel changes are being made.

Our membership numbers are running behind last year. There could be several reasons for this. I'm aware of the effect that the storms had on our West

Commander continued on page 2 >>

COMMANDER'S CHARITIES

Disaster Relief and C.O.T.A.



Commander's New Goal: \$125,000 (Current funds raised **\$78,972.24**)



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Coast, but that doesn't fully explain why the rest of our Department is falling behind. While recruiting new members is always great to see—and we need to continue this—retention, in my opinion, is even more critical. The retention and renewal aspect needs to be addressed at the individual Post level. We need to ask ourselves: **What is our Post doing—or NOT doing—to encourage our members to renew?**

Let's remember that retention and renewals are the key to our core strength at the Post level and the source of future leadership at all levels. **Buddy checks** are crucial and need to be done.

Food for thought: If you're uncomfortable making phone calls, you can always TEXT members.

You're more likely to get a response or a return call because, nowadays, people are far more apt to read a text than answer a phone call due to the rise in spam calls. This also applies to working our DMS 400AD lists. This approach has proven successful recently. Sometimes, it's just a matter of thinking outside the box.

We've got some very busy times ahead. January will be filled with activity, and things will begin to happen non-stop, carrying us through until year-end. Let's focus on where we need to improve, fine-tune what we're already doing well, and keep our ship on course.

**We're Florida Strong!
Keep It Real!**

Renew, Recommit, and Be Proud to Be a Legionnaire!

Jessica Moore, 1st Vice Commander
1stvice@legionmail.org



A very Happy New Year to all my Fellow Legionnaires!

In case you forgot, your membership card expired on December 31. **It's time**

to RENEW. We are a membership-driven organization, and your dues help support your Post and all the programs we sponsor.

If you have not yet renewed your dues, there are several ways to do so:

1. The easiest way is to visit your local Post and get your 2025 card.
2. To renew your American Legion membership online, visit www.legion.org/renew. When your membership becomes eligible for

renewal, a "Renew NOW" button will appear at the top right-hand corner of your MyLegion.org account. Click "Renew Now" and pay your dues annually or set up automatic payments using a credit card.

3. You can also download an application to send in with your dues payment.
4. Additionally, there is an option to renew with a three-year membership for added convenience.

Membership reports for The American Legion are available on legion.org and MyLegion.org if you would like to update your Post's records and monitor its standings.

Try to encourage everyone in your Post to renew their membership. Personally, I am always proud to show my card at any Legion event and even prouder to say, "**I am a Legionnaire!**"

UPCOMING EVENTS

JANUARY 2025

| | |
|----|--|
| 1 | Be The One Day |
| 1 | New Year's Day (Dept Closed) * |
| 1 | Baseball Registration Opens ★ |
| 3 | Boys State Registration Fee Deadline * |
| 3 | 10th Annual Veterans Expo ☼ |
| 4 | Membership Renewal Date ★ |
| 4 | Chapter 316: ALR Meeting |
| 4 | District 9: Meeting |
| 8 | Department Membership Goal 80% * |
| 8 | Boys State Online Del/Alt Registration * |
| 8 | Chapter 10: ALR Meeting |
| 12 | Chapter 8: ALR Meeting |
| 12 | District 5: Meeting |
| 15 | Legion Link Articles Due for February * |
| 17 | Oratorical District/Area Contest Dates Due * |
| 18 | Auxiliary President's Homecoming ☼ |
| 19 | Oratorical Post Competitions Completed * |
| 20 | Martin Luther King, Jr. Day (Dept Closed) * |
| 20 | Inauguration Day |
| 25 | Southwestern Area Riders Rally |
| 25 | Vice Commanders' Tailgate Party ☼ |

**For more events and updates visit our website at www.floridalegion.org **

- ☼ Commander attendance anticipated.
 - * Department of Florida event.
 - ★ National event.
- Events are subject to change. More details at floridalegion.org.

LEARN MORE >>

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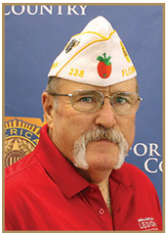
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New Year, New Focus: Programs, Training, and Leadership Preparation

Bob Matheson, 2nd Vice Commander

2ndvice@legionmail.org



Well, it's 2025! With the New Year upon us, it's time to concentrate on programs and training! Your Boys State and Oratorical programs should be in full swing, with interviews and candidates ready. Just down the road is the time for school medals. You need to get out and visit the local schools to ensure you can be part of their programs.

If you attended the Fall Conference, I hope you participated in the Program Session. It was a room set aside for various programs to set up, discuss with members, and answer questions. I am quite sure you will see this again at the Convention!

In just a few months, all Posts will be getting ready to nominate officers for the 2025-2026 calendar year. If you are considering running for office, now is the time to make sure you are ready. You can start by completing Legion Basic Training. Go to Legion.org, click the **Information** tab, scroll down

to **Training**, and the **Basic Training** program will appear. This is a great starting point.

Then, review your **Constitution and Bylaws** to understand what the job position involves. You can also ask your Post Commander to contact the District Commander and request a training class at your Post. The more information you have before you take on a position, the easier your job will be.

Integrity, Honesty, and Loyalty: Strengthening Our Legion Family

Jim Ramos, NEC

nec@legionmail.org



To preserve the integrity of the Post, District, Area, and Department levels, we must remember to support our new members. We must demonstrate integrity by helping them understand

how the American Legion works, guided by our Four Pillars. What are the Four Pillars? They are

Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation, National Security, Americanism, and Children & Youth programs.

Encourage our new members to seek information and try to get them to attend Post, District, and Department meetings. Involve them by encouraging them to volunteer at the Post and take part in programs. Always offer monthly activities related to these programs to help them get involved. We have too many programs for our Legion Family not to participate.

Honesty is vital. Show new members how a

program is set up at the Post or District level, but start by letting them observe someone else running it. This makes it easier for them to get involved with programs at the Post. Volunteers are the backbone of the American Legion, and especially at the Post level, we need them far more than they need us. The way to encourage volunteers is to lead by example and always be honest with them. If you expect honesty from others, you must be honest with them in return.

What is Loyalty in the American Legion?

Loyalty is what binds us together. Loyalty to our country, which we fought for in service. Loyalty to ourselves, to our families, our friends, and our Legion Family keeps us strong and united. Loyalty is the foundation of everything we stand for in the American Legion because we believe in **God and Country**.

Preserving integrity is straightforward. Encourage new members to attend Post meetings, volunteer, and support one another. It is as simple as understanding that we all want to uphold integrity when making good decisions. Running a Post or

a program is an obligation we accept to ensure things happen and improve for all participants. By preserving our integrity, we demonstrate our care for the Legion Family and make ourselves stronger.

We must always be honest with everyone we meet—new members, family, and friends. Care about them and check in regularly (e.g., "Buddy check: Can I help you? Do you need anything? Are you coming to the Post meeting tonight?"). Simple gestures like these show we care. Be prepared to act quickly for your Legion Family, and they will know your honesty is genuine. Sometimes we forget that we have family members outside the Legion, too. Do what you can for them and hope for the best outcome. If you know you've acted honestly and correctly to make things happen the right way, you can rest assured your purpose is fulfilled.

We have loyalty to ourselves, our families, our organization, our Post, and the American Legion Department of Florida. Each day, we must work to preserve the memories of those we have lost

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(we are losing too many of our Legion Family members). Life is not easy, but we must keep going to Post meetings to find out how our friends are doing.

This time of year, as the holidays come and go and the New Year begins, let us all look forward to a **Happy New Year 2025.**

We will see you soon!

Thank you. If you have any questions, please contact Jim Ramos by email at NEC@legionmail.org.

A New Year of Resilience, Membership, and Preserving Our Legacy

Elbert Ziegler, Historian

historian@legionmail.org



By the time this reaches you, the holiday cheer will have quieted down, and we'll already be looking ahead—before you know it, Convention season will be knocking at our doors in June. So, let me ask you this:

What New Year's resolutions did you make? And more importantly, how's it going?

Remember, keeping promises to yourself is half the battle—good luck!

As we enter this new year, I pray for health and blessings for those still with us and peace for the souls we've lost—may they rest in the arms of their Heavenly Father. I also send heartfelt hopes for recovery to all impacted by the devastation caused by the hurricanes of 2024. Resilience is our strength,

and I know we'll rebuild, as we always do.

Now, speaking of building up—**membership, membership, membership!** If you've spoken to Bruce Carl lately, you'll know that's the magic word (he's probably said it three times, too). Membership is the lifeblood of our organization, and it's time to roll up our sleeves and make it happen.

For all the post historians out there, this is your time to shine. Our mission is ongoing—**collecting, preserving, and documenting American Legion history** at the local level. At the Fall Convention, we saw excellent training sessions for historians led by Edward Lewis and social media classes by Dana Jackson. As I mentioned last month, I took the opportunity to videotape those valuable sessions, along with the Judge Advocate training and mock trial presented by Assistant Judge Advocate Curtis McNeil. If you missed them—or need a

refresher—you can find the recordings here:

<https://www.eztouse.org/training-classes>

Now that the holidays are behind us, it's time to refocus and dive into our work. **Historians, this is your call to action!** Gather those materials, organize those images, and start shaping your history books, narratives, and digital entries. I've been doing just that—cataloging events by month, organizing photos, and preparing for what's next.

The June Convention will be here before we know it, and I can't wait to see your hard work displayed in your history books and digital projects. I also look forward to connecting with all of you along the way. Let's keep pushing forward together: **"Be The One!"** And, as always—**keep it real.**

Answering the Call: Volunteers Needed for Sgt-At-Arms Duties

Troy Horsley, Sgt-at-Arms

sgtatarms@legionmail.org



Comrades,

I hope this finds you and your family well after the holidays.

During the Fall Conference and Convention, there are several occasions where we need assistance in performing all the duties of Sgt-At-Arms (SAA). During the

general session, you will observe assistants posted at the entry and exit doors to help maintain decorum during the meeting. These duties include:

- Assisting speakers and guests to the stage.
- Ensuring only those allowed to speak or vote are doing so (e.g., delegates, DEC members).
- Counting votes or hands when required for motions.
- Ensuring members allowed to be in the meeting are correctly seated.

With that being said, I am still looking for volunteers to serve as assistant SAAs during our upcoming convention.

I want to extend my gratitude to the following Legionnaires for their help with SAA duties at the Fall Conference:

- Jack Bennet, Post 284
- Ed Manak, Post 47

Sgt-at-Arms continued on page 5 >>



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<< Sgt-at-Arms continued from page 4

- Ruben Martin, Post 331
- Robert Vance, Post 331
- Grady Marshall, Post 331
- Melvin Anthony, Post 331

Without their assistance—posting colors, helping members enter and exit the conference room, or

guiding speakers to the stage—it would not have been possible.

We had an excellent turnout for the SAA/Color Guard class. I aimed to provide a thorough overview of the position’s requirements. If there are additional topics you would like added or feel certain areas were unnecessary during the course, please let me know

so we can improve the class for the Convention.

For all inquiries, volunteering, questions, or suggestions, feel free to email me at sgtatarms@legionmail.org.

Thank you, and I look forward to working with you.

Strength Through Unity: Supporting Our Legion Family and Communities

Rick Orzechowski, Central Area Commander
central@legionmail.org



Good morning, my brothers and sisters,

As you all know, Hurricane Milton destroyed several posts in District 16, and Post 158 was one of those severely impacted.

I had the privilege of attending a Christmas party at Post 125, which was hosted jointly by Post 158 and Post 125. Post 125 stepped up and has been sharing

their facilities with Post 158, allowing them to hold their meetings and events in comfort. **This is what The American Legion is all about—helping veterans and supporting local communities.**

The Christmas party was jam-packed with people, and everyone had a wonderful time. I would like to thank Commanders Len Fromel and Mike Harley for demonstrating what it truly means to support one another and keep The American Legion the strongest veterans’ service organization in the world.

I also heard many inspiring stories about how our members reached out to local communities and veterans’ organizations during the Thanksgiving holidays—donating food and inviting hundreds of people to join them for Thanksgiving dinners at their respective posts. I want to express my gratitude and let the entire State of Florida know just how great we are and how much we do for our communities and fellow members.

Thank you all for your dedication and service!

A New Year of Renewal, Growth, and Service

Bruce Thurber, Eastern Area Commander
eastern@legionmail.org



The New Year has arrived!

Thank you to those who have already renewed their membership, and I ask for your help in reaching out to those who haven’t yet renewed.

Remind them of the benefits of membership and how it strengthens our fight for veterans’ benefits.

We are currently a little over **66,000** members. Let’s shoot for **45,000 additional renewals by Groundhog Day**. Thank you, everyone, for working so hard on membership over the past six

months. Hopefully, you’ve had people watching and learning from you, and during the remainder of the membership year, we’ll have even more contributors. Put them to work!

We also need to elevate our efforts in **Buddy Checks and Revitalization**. Remember, when recruiting, if your Post doesn’t offer what a member needs, another Post may be able to sign them up. Approximately **900 people a day** are moving to Florida, and about **63 of these new Floridians are veterans**. Use creative tools to engage these new residents:

- Look for signs of their veteran status.
- Utilize door hangers.

- Contribute to welcome baskets distributed by local chambers of commerce.

Our Commander and Vice Commanders are working hard to elevate us to a new level by providing training, guiding us into a mentorship mindset, and being there for us. Show our appreciation by achieving an **All-Time High** in every Post, District, and Area.

As part of **The American Legion’s “Be the One” mission** to end veteran suicide, we have joined forces with **Columbia University** to develop training for those who want to learn more about interacting with and responding to veterans

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who may be in crisis.

After completing the training, participants will be able to:

1. Use the **Columbia Suicide Severity Rating Scale** to identify at-risk individuals.
2. Identify **risk factors** and **warning signs**.
3. Outline the types of suicidal ideation and the **four behaviors** that indicate imminent risk.
4. Communicate effectively with an individual who may be at risk of self-harm.

Members are encouraged to take part in this training and share it with their communities.

A New Year: A Time to Forgive, Reflect, and Move Forward

Jim Bowers, Northern Area Commander

northern@legionmail.org



Now is the time to correct past errors and move forward. It is a good time to forgive and try to forget. Throughout our lives, we have seen the New Year represented as an infant—symbolizing a

new beginning. I am asking all who read this to make the effort to **renew, forgive, and start**

over. This is your once-a-year opportunity to do so.

We have had Thanksgiving, a time to meet with and appreciate our families. We have had Christmas or Hanukkah, a time to build connections and strengthen friendships. Now, it is a New Year. Be kind, move forward, keep your friends, and forgive everyone. And don't forget to ask for forgiveness as well.

We are now in the last half of the year. There are

CPRs (Consolidated Post Reports) that will be due, officer training for all, balls and parties to attend, and, of course, the ongoing focus on membership. Members are who we are and what we need to succeed.

I am looking forward to this part of the year. This is the time when we can reflect on what has been accomplished and see how close we are to achieving our goals.

New Beginnings: Supporting and Empowering Our Women Veterans

Joan Suelter, Women Veterans Chair

womenvets@legionmail.org



Happy New Year!

As we welcome the New Year, I would be remiss if I didn't take a quick look back at November 2024.

Dianne and I want to thank all of you who participated in or attended the **Women Veterans' Forum** during the Fall Conference. Because of your input and discussions, we will be able to compile this information to help us move the **Women's Task Force** forward. One of our goals is to provide a resource directory for all our Women Veteran Chairpersons to use. More information will follow on its rollout.

This time of year brings a sense of **new beginnings, hope, and renewed energy.** Let's engage our sister veterans. For some of them, the holiday season might have brought additional stress due to the balance of work and caregiving responsibilities. Let them know we are here for them. Till we meet again...

Refocusing on the Mission: A Year of Purpose and Progress

Jim Wineland, American Legion Riders Chair

legionriders@legionmail.org



I hope everyone had a wonderful holiday season and was able to enjoy special moments with family and loved ones. For those still navigating the challenges of insurance claims and regulatory hurdles,

please know that you are in our thoughts, and we hope for swift resolutions soon.

As we move into the New Year, I'm excited to announce that the **Summit** is ready to go, and all ride planning has been finalized. This milestone reminds us of the tremendous work we've accomplished together. However, it also highlights something we need to refocus on: the "Cause" that

brought us here in the first place.

Lately, I've heard comments and complaints about matters that don't move us closer to our goal of supporting veterans' programs. It's essential that we don't lose sight of what truly matters. Take **Project Vet Relief** as an example. Over the past ten years, this program has provided short-term

American Legion Riders continued on page 7 >>



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<< American Legion Riders continued from page 6

financial assistance to nearly **2,000 veterans**, distributing **\$2 million** in loan-free donations to those in need. That's real impact.

The same can be said for our **Suicide Prevention Initiative**. While the success of this program may be harder to measure in numbers, the stories we know personally speak volumes. Lives have been saved through our **Strategic Partners** programs, and countless individuals are here with us today because of our efforts.

This is what we do. This is why we are here. Let's continue to focus on what truly matters: making a difference for our veterans and their families.

Thank you all for your dedication and commitment. Let's make this a year of **purpose and progress**.

"For the Cause, Not the Applause."

Your 2024–2025 Schedule

- Summit
 - Meet & Greet
February 5, 2025
 - Classes
February 6-8, 2025
- "Round Robin"
Month of April 2025
- Children and Youth Picnic
April 5, 2025

(Note, Holy Week April 13-19th; Easter April 20, 2025)

- In-State Unity Ride
 - Meet & Greet
April 6, 2025
 - Ride
April 7-11, 2025
- Rally
April 12, 2025
OCC Clearwater, FL

If you have any ideas or suggestions, please share them! Thank you for all that you do. We are proud to be part of such an outstanding leadership team!

"For the Cause, Not the Applause."

Back to Work: Building Momentum for a Successful Year

Wayne Mulligan, Americanism Chair

americanism@legionmail.org



I hope everyone had a great Christmas and New Year, but now it's time to roll up our sleeves and continue providing **American Legion programs** for our Posts and communities.

Take a close look at the programs you offer, gather your team (the more hands, the lighter

the work), and document your achievements. Share your successes on social media platforms to keep the community informed and engaged. This not only highlights your hard work but also builds awareness and support.

Be sure to keep track of your accomplishments so that when you complete your **Consolidated Post Report (CPR)** at the end of the year, you'll have everything ready. Use this time to reflect on what went well and identify areas for improvement, laying the groundwork for even greater success next year.

Whatever program you are tackling, remember **we are here to help**. Reach out to the Program Chairs to let them know what you're working on. Don't hesitate to call or email them for flyers, resources, questions, or even to request a presentation at your Post.

The main thing to remember is to **know your deadlines**. We are a family, and each of us brings unique experiences to the table. **When we work together, we can't fail.**

Be the Lifeline: Supporting the Blood Donor Program

Jamie Grinis, Blood Donor Chair

blooddonor@legionmail.org



I hope everyone had a wonderful holiday season. Now that the holidays are over, it's time to return to business as usual. **The Blood Donor Program is one of the most**

important programs that the Legion Family can support. Together, we can make a difference in someone's life.

Now more than ever, we need to establish a regular schedule for your local Blood Mobile to visit your Post or location of choice to keep the Blood Drive going strong. We are currently behind last year's

donation levels due to Mother Nature's impact, which hit our state harder than usual. However, that does not mean we can't get back on schedule.

Please contact your local Blood Center to re-establish donation collections so that we may save lives as we support this vital program.

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Our **Blood Donor Program is part of Emergency Preparedness** and will be vital to our success this year. Several Posts already support this program, and it has been a great success. Let's continue to support it as we enter the hustle and bustle of the new year. Your kindness and preparation have meant so much to those who depend on this vital elixir to sustain life.

Florida has always had a greater demand for blood due to the **influx of over 400,000 new**

residents each year. Many of these individuals may not realize when they might need our help. If your Post is looking for a program to adopt, the Blood Donor Program is one of the easiest and least expensive to establish. In some cases, Posts may be at risk of losing their charter because they have not adopted a program. Now is your chance to save your charter and support your community.

After each Blood Drive, kindly visit the Department's website:

- Go to **Programs**
- Click on **Blood Donor**
- Then click on the **fill-in form** and submit the details.

It's just that simple! Many Posts last year reported their Blood Donor Donations on their yearly CPRs. Don't forget to complete the Blood Donor Form after the Blood Mobile leaves your Post.

May we remain ever diligent in **continuing this vital program.**

No Boy Left Behind: Ensuring Every Delegate Has a Seat

Sonny Decker, Boys State Chair
boysstate@legionmail.org



During our military service, one of the mantras we carried down range was knowing that **no one was left behind.**

Last year, when the buses rolled out of the district, 46 boys were left behind. There was no paid room on the buses because no spots had been secured for them. **We left 46 boys behind.** We need to work harder and longer, finding new ways to pay the fees for those delegates so that no one is left behind.

If there are Posts in your District that were unable to send delegates last year and could not check the box on the **CPR (Consolidated Post Report)**, get together with other Posts in your District. Collectively, donate whatever you

can afford—**\$125, \$250, or \$495**—to your District. Let the District use those funds to sponsor a delegate.

SAVE THIS DATE:

On **May 10, 2025**, at Department Headquarters, the **Boys State Alumni Foundation will hold its 2nd Annual Fundraiser Dinner** to help pay for additional delegates to attend this year's Boys State. Come out and meet this year's Boys State Governor, get briefed on the foundation's mission, and learn how it will operate in the future.

Now, this is a **fundraiser**. There will be:

- Gift baskets you can bid on.
- A sign-up table for anyone wanting to join the Alumni Foundation.
- Guest speakers to help raise funds for Boys State.

This will be an evening of fun, giving, and learning about Boys State. More information will be provided as we finalize the details.

Just like the Marine Corps, **Boys State** is looking for a few good floor counselors. Your past military experience and your patriotism are exactly what we need to teach the younger generation. If you have a week to donate to Boys State, please complete the online application and submit it.

This is an American Legion program, and it needs to be supported not just with money but with bodies to fill the positions. We have all seen what happens when we let non-patriots teach our children. I'm asking you to **step up one more time and give the children of Florida a real chance.**



BOYS STATE: Delegate & Alternate Online Registration Begins: January 7, 2025 Closes: March 19, 2025



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A Voice for All Veterans: Addressing the Plight of Foreign-Born U.S. Veterans

Gene Smith, Immigration Chair

legionriders@legionmail.org



Thank you for dropping by the Department's Immigration column for January. I hope you had an enjoyable and rewarding Christmas (if you celebrate) and New Year's Day. Now, it is time to get back to the business for

which we serve.

I recently read an article published on **May 28, 2024**, by The American Legion titled **"The Legion's Role in Immigration Reform."** The article focused on issues at the southwest border and possible resolutions. For most American citizens, when you mention immigration problems, they immediately think of images showing immigrants navigating the Rio Grande River in Texas or crossing the barren deserts of Arizona and New Mexico. I view these as **law enforcement issues**. Immigration requirements and laws are already in place. The border chaos is a severe violation of these laws and must be resolved by securing border crossings, as the article states—and I concur.

What I didn't find addressed in the article was a resolution for **foreign-born U.S. veterans** who, for whatever reason, are not naturalized U.S. citizens. The numbers are estimated to be several thousand. Remember, The American Legion proudly claims to be a **"voice for all veterans, advocating for legislation and providing VA benefits assistance."**

Many of these foreign-born individuals came here legally and enlisted in the U.S. Armed Forces. Many believed that by simply serving in the Army, Navy, Air Force, or Marines and receiving an **Honorable Discharge** upon completing their service, they were

automatically granted U.S. citizenship. Somewhere in the process, the **out-processing system failed**. It is estimated that thousands are now either in the U.S. illegally or waiting in border towns, such as Baja California, in hopes of legislation that will allow them to resurface in the United States or re-enter legally. For those still residing in the U.S., avoiding deportation is challenging, with the added possibility of a **permanent ban** from returning to the United States. My point is that we have many more immigration issues beyond the southwest border.

I want to thank the **Commander-in-Chief of the National Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW)** for his stand on **Resolution Number 416**, submitted to the Committee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, titled **"Deported Veterans."** Over the years, The American Legion has generated supporting documents for foreign-born veterans who served honorably but did not naturalize. However, I am not aware of any **current action** by The American Legion to assist these veterans with the naturalization process. **Should we not be actively advocating for a positive resolution? Did they not serve in our country's Armed Forces and receive an Honorable Discharge?**

In June 2019, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) submitted Report GAO-19-416 to Congress, titled **"Immigration Enforcement—Actions Needed to Better Handle, Identify, and Track Cases Involving Veterans."** The report highlights foreign-born individuals who served in the U.S. military. Historically, an Honorable Discharge often resulted in citizenship. Unfortunately, today, the process is far more complex, and it is up to appropriate government agencies to ensure these veterans receive the information and assistance needed to naturalize upon their separation from service.

This brings me to the case of a **foreign-born U.S. Marine veteran** I have been assisting for the past five years. This Marine served four years of active duty and three years in the Marine Reserves—a **total of seven years of honorable service**. Because of delayed entry, he missed the conflict period declared by President Bush, which would have provided special consideration for citizenship.

Based on his recollection, his recruiter told him that if he completed his Marine Corps commitment, he would **become a U.S. citizen**. Remembering this, he left the Marine Corps believing he was now a naturalized citizen. Unfortunately, no one informed him otherwise during **out-processing**.

Here is what happened:

- He married an American citizen, started a family, paid taxes, and actively engaged in his community.
- He even went to the Elections Office, where he was issued a **Voter Registration Card**, and he voted in elections, unaware of the legal consequences.

By this time, his **student visa** had long expired, but he thought it no longer mattered since he believed he was a U.S. citizen. The situation came to a head when Florida implemented new driver's license requirements, which required more than a DD-214 to prove citizenship. This was the moment he discovered he was not a naturalized citizen.

The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) reviewed his case and charged him with moral character violations for voting in a federal election. According to USCIS, an applicant for

Immigration continued on page 10 >>



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citizenship must demonstrate good moral character, proficiency in English, and knowledge of U.S. government and history. Although this Marine passed two of the three requirements, the voting violation disqualified him.

Today, this Marine is waiting on the disposition of legal action filed on his behalf by our partnering immigration attorney. The last five years have

taken a tremendous toll on him and his family. My question to the USCIS is this: **What liability is shared with the Elections Office clerk who issued the Voter Registration Card?** Had he not received the card, the moral character issue might never have surfaced, and he could have been a naturalized U.S. citizen by now.

Will The American Legion step up to advocate for a resolution to the thousands

of pending cases like this? These veterans took the **same oath of commitment** that you and I swore when we served in the U.S. Armed Forces.

If we truly want to **make America great**, let us help those who came here legally, served our nation with commitment and pride, and received an Honorable Discharge but, for various reasons, were not naturalized. The American Legion is a **voice for ALL veterans**.

JROTC and JSSP: Year-End Highlights and Exciting Opportunities Ahead

Loretta Young, JROTC/JSSP Chair
jrotc@legionmail.org



This article is a follow-up on both the **JROTC** and **JSSP** programs as we approach year-end. Both programs were represented at the **Fall Conference Program Fair** with a table set up and

chairmen available to answer questions. It was a great opportunity for Legionnaires to engage in one-on-one discussions, ask questions, and receive detailed answers.



Fall Conference Programs Fair

I had the chance to meet both new members to the programs and seasoned members who have long been involved with JROTC and JSSP. The turnout was strong, and I was able to follow up with several attendees after the event to answer

additional questions and thank them for taking the time to stop and chat. I hope this opportunity continues in the future and is well publicized to encourage even greater participation.

We are striving for a strong presence at the upcoming **National Convention in August in Tampa**, with **JROTC Color Guard Units** participating in the **Annual Competition**. Currently, JROTC units are competing at local levels, with state competitions scheduled for the spring. If your Post is hosting a team already competing at the state level or preparing for a spring competition, please let me know. Successful participation requires **significant planning and preparation**, so getting a head start is key.

The JSSP Postal 3x20 Course Fire Competition Round #1 registration ended on December 10th. As of the Fall Conference, I was advised by the National JSSP Chair that there were five teams registered but not yet completed, and one team was in the process of registering. The deadline for any changes was December 14th.

At the time of writing, the teams are as follows:

- Team Hornets / Haines City
- Astronaut HS Team / Titusville
- Summerlin Academy / Bartow
- East Lee County HS JROTC / Lehigh Acres
- Mariner HS JROTC / Cape Coral
- Sarasota Military Academy / Sarasota

You can **track results online by visiting <https://thecmp.org>**. Go to the *Competition Tracker* for up-to-date standings and scores.

I have received numerous requests for information on involving youth in the marksmanship program and clubs offering training. This website is also an excellent resource for anyone interested in participating in civilian youth marksmanship programs. Additionally, several Posts have expressed interest in starting their own shooting programs. This website, along with our Department website, is a valuable resource for getting started.

A special thank you to the Posts that sponsored the Marksmanship Postal Event this year. Good luck to all our participants, and may everyone achieve a successful year-end program result.



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Florida's Roadways: A Call to Action on Fatal Traffic Accidents

Daryl Bass, Law & Order Chair

laworder@legionmail.org



As a **First Responder**—whether serving as a **police officer, firefighter, paramedic, or emergency room personnel**—the most challenging part of the job is responding to a call involving

a fatal wreck. The parties involved can be young or old, male or female, adults or children, representing all races and statuses. Some bodies are mangled, extremities amputated, and, many times, the **“Jaws of Life”** are required to extract victims from the wreckage. While the job can be rewarding, the sights and **mental anguish** can weigh heavily on one's psyche, leaving a lasting impact from the horrors of the experience.

Most, if not all, of these **fatal accidents** are caused by **poor driving habits and driver distraction**. In 2023, Florida experienced **394,219 traffic accidents**, resulting in **3,409 fatalities** and **251,832 injuries**. Among the road users killed were:

- 779 pedestrians
- 604 motorcyclists
- 224 cyclists

From 2023 through July 2024, the numbers have continued to rise, reaching **394,910 accidents** and **3,377 fatalities**. Of all the accidents reported, **80,300 drivers were teens**. Tragically, 111 teen drivers were killed, along with 66 teen passengers.

The causes of these accidents vary. However, it is now widely recognized that **driver distraction**—particularly due to cell phones, texting, and other devices—**plays a significant role** in most crashes. Driver fatigue is another factor, especially among over-the-road truck drivers. Drugs and alcohol consumption remain major contributors to fatalities, though much of this data is often tied up in litigation and cannot always be included in standard reporting. I will continue to research these statistics and provide further updates in a future Legion Link article.

We, as the **American Legion Family**, should personally **commit to driving defensively** at all times. **Obey all speed limits and traffic laws, and always drive sober**. As the Florida Highway Patrol reminds us:

“Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over.”

Finishing Strong: A Roadmap for Membership Success in 2025

Bruce Carl, Membership Chair

membership@legionmail.org



Happy New Year, Team Florida! Goodbye, 2024, and hello, 2025! It's hard to believe, but we are already halfway through our 2024-2025 membership year. Our

Department Convention will be

here before we know it. As of the writing of this article, we are sitting in **43rd place** nationally, having moved up 3 spots. However, we still have work to do to catch up to last year's numbers. Currently, we are **8,481 members behind last year at 67.49%**, and we **need 33,366 more members to hit 100%**.

Keep working on renewals and don't forget to push the **three-year renewals!** Reach out to the

DMS members (Direct Membership Solicitation) and focus on bringing in new members. We have plenty of time to regain the momentum we lost during the first six months. We can do this! Each District and Area has a Membership Chair, so please reach out to them for assistance. **Working as a team** will accomplish far more than trying to do everything individually.

At the Post level, make phone calls to your unrenewed members and DMS lists. You can also contact them via email, text, or, if necessary, by mail.

Membership Card Checks

As of now, 2024 cards have expired. Members who have not renewed should no longer have access to meetings, events, games, and the canteen. Your Post and District Sgt-at-Arms should be checking

membership cards before allowing anyone into a meeting. Only members with valid 2025 cards or invited guests should be in attendance.

If your Post has a canteen, please ensure your canteen staff checks membership cards before serving anyone. Florida Statutes specify that **only members may be served alcohol or allowed to play the games** (except for bingo). Guests must be signed in by a member and are not permitted to purchase alcohol or participate in games.

If an ABT agent (Alcoholic Beverages and Tobacco) visits your Post and observes any activity that violates these statutes, it will be considered a violation. Depending on the agent and the severity of the issue, your Post could face a license

Membership continued on page 12 >>





<< Membership continued from page 11

suspension. **Do not take that chance—follow the rules!**

On the Road to 100%

I have been traveling to District meetings and will continue to visit those I haven't reached yet. Keep working toward that 100% goal so that when I attend, I can present the 100% coins and pins.

We are entering a busy time of year with Area Balls and other Department events, but this will not deter me from assisting your Posts or Districts if needed. I can always visit during the week—just let me know!

If you need help with revitalization, please contact Judith Richards to get it set up. Let's continue moving forward and hitting our goals. The **District Commanders' Race to the Top** is fast

approaching, and I would love to see several of our District Commanders qualify. The deadline to hit 100% is **March 31st**.

Let's Finish Strong!

Thank you for all you do—your hard work and dedication are greatly appreciated! Let's finish these next six months with a bang! I look forward to handing out a bunch of awards at the Convention.

Crossing the Finish Line: Supporting Students on the Path to Oratorical Success

Doug Hockenberry, Oratorical Chair

oratorical@legionmail.org



Hello, Department of Florida.

Let me start by wishing everyone a **Happy New Year!**

I want to thank those of you who attended the **Oratorical Training** at the Fall Conference. This year, I took a different approach to the training, focusing on the students, the contestants, and how to best prepare them for the competition. We also discussed the marketing of the Oratorical Program at your local high schools. This resulted in a **great exchange of ideas and techniques** to better assist Posts and chairpersons as they work on the Oratorical Program in the future. Again, thank you to everyone who attended and contributed to this year's training.

In last month's article, I said we were "**Coming around the corner, heading to the finish line.**" Well, Team, we are about to "**Cross the Finish Line.**" That's right—your hard work and the hard work of the students will be tested this month as they compete in Post-level competitions, with some Districts also holding their contests.

With just a few weeks left before the competitions

begin, we need to reassure our students that we are here for them. Continue working with them and, most importantly, encourage them to rehearse consistently. Not only should they focus on their prepared oration, but they should also practice all their speeches for the assigned topics. Remember, you never know which assigned topic will be chosen on competition day, so ensure they are prepared with a speech for each one. Your **continued support** can make the difference for your student and their **future success**.

Important Dates to Remember:

- Post-level contests run through January 19, 2025.
- These are followed by District and Area contests.
- The Department-level contest will be held on March 15, 2025.

In closing, I once again extend my best wishes for a Happy New Year. Keep up the splendid work, and best of luck with your upcoming contests. As always, if you have **any questions**, please do not hesitate to:

- Call me at **727-514-3742**,
- Text me, or
- Send an email to oratorical@legionmail.org.

One Final Question:

Will your Post candidate be representing the Department of Florida at the National Oratorical Competition?

Hang Tough!

"For God and Country"

ORATORICAL CONTEST DATES

I. Post Level

December 1 - January 19

II. District Level

January 20 - February 9

III. Area Level

February 10 - 23

IV. State Level

March 15, 2025

V. National Level

May 2025



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Honoring the Mission: Commitment to Our POW/MIA Heroes

Denny Luke, POW/MIA Chair

povmia@legionmail.org



I have been asked what has given me the passion to serve as your Department's POW/MIA Chairman. I must be completely honest—I had never considered the position until Past Department Commander Michael

"Gambler" Raymond approached me and asked if I would take on the role. During our conversation, he expressed his full confidence that I would not be just another **CINO**.

How many of you know what a CINO is? A **CINO** is a **Commander or Chairman in Name Only**. Don't be a CINO! If you are asked and agree to step up, do everything in your power to honor that commitment.

As I have undertaken the duties of your POW/MIA Chairman, I have learned so much about the program, the **Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA)**, the **National POW/MIA Memorial and Museum**, and the deep connections I now share with families of past POWs and MIAs. Little did I realize that several of my friends and acquaintances were children of current MIAs.

Growing up, I knew of a couple of World War II POWs from my small hometown of Milan, IN. They rarely talked about their war experiences. One of these men was our town veterinarian, Dr. William Glover, the father of one of my classmates. Dr. Glover was a member of the Caterpillar Club, and he proudly wore a pin featuring a silkworm with red eyes—the red eyes symbolized that his plane was on fire when he parachuted out. After the war, he always wore this pin on his suit jacket. I noticed

the immediate respect and attention he received, especially from pilots and crew members who recognized its meaning. I had no idea what the pin represented until I began researching for an article I was writing. This is just one example of how serving as a Chairman who is not a CINO has enriched my life.

Stay Connected

The Department of Florida has a **POW/MIA Facebook Page**. Search: FL Legion POW-MIA or visit the link:

<https://www.facebook.com/falpowmia/>. I

encourage everyone to Like and Follow the page.

For a one-stop source of **POW/MIA resources**, visit this site:

The **Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA)**: <https://www.dpaa.mil/>

As of November 29, 2024, the DPAA has identified the following MIA personnel for FY 2025:

- World War II: 4
- Korean War: 4
- Cold War: 0
- Vietnam War: 0

November 2024 Recoveries

During November 2024, the following 19 personnel have been accounted for.

- Nov. 26, 2024 — Soldier Accounted For From Korean War (Slaten, W.)
- Nov. 26, 2024 — Airman Accounted For From World War II (Roy, S.)
- Nov. 25, 2024 — Soldier Accounted For From

Korean War (Troup, H.)

- Nov. 22, 2024 — Pilot Accounted For From World War II (Wilson, G.)
- Nov. 20, 2024 — Airman Accounted For From World War II (Farnham, L.)
- Nov. 20, 2024 — Soldier Accounted For From Korean War (Miller, J.)
- Nov. 20, 2024 — Soldier Accounted For From Korean War (Hoots, P.)
- Nov. 18, 2024 — Airman Accounted For From World War II (Scott, W.)
- Nov. 18, 2024 — Soldier Accounted For From World War II (Gutterman, J.)
- Nov. 18, 2024 — Soldier Accounted For From World War II (Mitchell, J.)
- Nov. 15, 2024 — Airman Accounted For From World War II (Hop, Y.)
- Nov. 15, 2024 — Soldier Accounted For From World War II (Larson, G.)
- Nov. 15, 2024 — Soldier Accounted For From World War II (Worley, H.)
- Nov. 15, 2024 — Airman Accounted For From World War II (Kelly, T.)
- Nov. 15, 2024 — Soldier Accounted For From World War II (Clark, W.)
- Nov. 14, 2024 — Airman Accounted For From World War II (Mourer, R.)
- Nov. 13, 2024 — Soldier Accounted For From World War II (Swartz, J.)
- Nov. 13, 2024 — Airman Accounted For From World War II (Calvi, B.)
- Nov. 8, 2024 — Soldier Accounted For From Korean War (Simmons, W.)

Thank you for your continued support of this program and for honoring the memory of our POWs and MIAs. Together, we ensure they are **never forgotten**.



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January 2025 | Happy New Year!

PROJECT: VETRELIEF

REACHING MILESTONES THROUGH YOUR GENEROSITY

As we shared last month, PROJECT: VetRelief is in higher demand than ever, allowing us to help more of Florida's veterans each year.

This year alone, we've responded to urgent needs in real time. For example, when Hurricanes Helene and Milton struck, PROJECT: VetRelief sprang into action, ensuring veterans had food on the table while they rebuilt their lives and livelihoods. **Despite operating without a full-time caseworker, we've upheld our promise to stand by Florida's veterans during their most challenging times.**

The need for support continues to grow. To date, we are on track to assist **2,000 veterans** and provide **\$2 million in financial aid** over the last 10 years—an incredible milestone made possible only through the generosity of donors like you.

But we can't do it alone. To meet this rising demand and continue offering the same level of critical support, we need your help.

- » Donate today at:
www.projectvetrelief.org/donate
- » Mail donations to PROJECT: VetRelief Headquarters
- » Give directly to Commander Chris Hamrick during his visits
- » Contribute at the Department Convention in June

Together, we can continue to make a lasting difference in the lives of Florida's veterans. Thank you for your continued generosity and commitment!



Upcoming Event

Veterans Expo Hosted by American Legion Post 69

American Legion Post 69 in Avon Park will host their annual Veterans Expo this January!

- » The **Traveling Vietnam Memorial Wall** will be escorted in on January 3rd.
- » Join us for a full day of activities starting at 10 AM on January 4th, including:
Live Music | Delicious Food | Vendors | Veteran Resources

This incredible event not only raises funds for our **Suicide Prevention Program** but also brings the community together. It's a valuable opportunity for veterans to explore local resources and connect with those who support them.

We are especially grateful to **Board Member Larry Roberts** and the entire **Post 69** team for their dedication to growing this event year after year. Their efforts continue to provide critical support and information to our veteran community.

Is your Post hosting an event to benefit PVR? Let us know—we'd love to attend and support your efforts!

ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT July '24 - June '25

87
Veterans Received
Financial Support

\$93,086
Provided as
Emergency Assistance

14
Suicide Prevention
Strategic Partners

\$92,500
Given towards
Veteran Suicide Prevention



Crafting Resolutions: A Comprehensive Checklist

Clarence Hill, Resolutions Chair

resolutions@legionmail.org



The following is a **resolution writing checklist**. It should be used as a guide when composing your resolution and again to check the final product.

- Use Times New Roman or Arial font
- Font size should be 12 or greater
- Check the spelling—don't just rely on spellchecker
- Check the grammar
- Have a non-expert read it to see if they have issues understanding it
- Make no reference to specific congressional bill support
- Put the date of the meeting in the header
- Ensure the wording in the resolved clause(s) is/are correct
- The entire resolution is only one sentence with a period (.) at the end of the resolution
- Ensure the resolution is relevant to The American Legion
- Check the archives to ensure a resolution doesn't already cover the issue
- One subject per resolution
- Signature(s) on each page of the resolution
- Resolved clause(s) in bold

- Authority noted before the text of resolution begins
- Concisely title the resolution
- Documentation attached when appropriate
- Do not use 'partnership' in reference to other organizations; use 'relationship'

When you have completed your resolution to your satisfaction, please forward it to me for further review at cehill316@aol.com. **All resolutions** should be reviewed before the **department's deadline** to mail them to all Posts.

Honoring Excellence: Scouting Square Knot Award Presented to Sea Scout Skipper

Chris Ragusa, Scouting Chair

scouting@legionmail.org



I had the distinct pleasure of awarding the **American Legion's Scouting Square Knot Award** on behalf of Immediate Past National Commander Daniel Seehafer and Department of Florida

Commander Chris Hamrick to **Sea Scout Ship 412 Skipper Rafael Jovet-Ramos Jr.** during their **December 16, 2024**, Bridge of Honor ceremony in Orlando, FL. This award is designed to recognize the significant contributions and commitment of American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary, or Sons of the American Legion members to the Scouting program.

I have not seen a more deserving individual or better example of dedication and impactful service to the Scouting program by a Legionnaire than "RJ". In addition to fulfilling the myriad

requirements for this prestigious award, RJ led a team of dedicated Scouters to establish one of the **first Sea Scout Ship units in Central Florida**.

To support resources for Sea Scout advancement criteria, RJ affiliated with the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, where he earned their highest membership status of Operational Auxiliarist. In this role, he is now developing a recruitment platform at Innovation High School in Orlando, introducing their first Coast Guard JROTC program.

The vision RJ—a retired U.S. Army officer—inspired among a cadre of leaders culminated in the chartering of Sea Scout Ship 412 to American Veterans Memorial Post 412 (Lake Nona, District 6), under the stewardship of their Commander, William Musto.

Pictured with the Department Scouting Chair are:

- U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary Flotilla 17-11

Commander Ron Olgin

- Ship 412 Committee Chair Michael Hockman
- Award recipient Rafael Jovet-Ramos Jr.



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Reflections and Resilience: A New Year with the American Legion Family

Alan Cohen, VAR Chair

var@legionmail.org



Greetings, Fellow Legionnaires,

I'd like to begin this month's article by wishing everyone in our American Legion family a Happy and Healthy New Year.

Looking back at 2024, not a

week went by without the strength of our bond being on full display. We faced tragedies of many kinds, ranging from the passing of beloved, long-time members to hurricanes that wreaked havoc on lives and livelihoods. Yet, **we rallied through these challenges** and continue to do so as only the **Legion Family** can.

Our successes, too, have been shared by all—many of which have gone unspoken and others that resulted in awards at the national level. The

Department of Florida continues to make tremendous strides with the ongoing **Be The One** campaign, quite literally **saving and improving the lives of our brother and sister veterans**.

I'm proud to share that at the Fall Conference, we graduated a class of over **60 Post Service Officers (PSOs)** who joined the ranks of existing PSOs. These dedicated individuals continue to team up with **County and FDVA Service Officers** to assist fellow veterans and their families with claims, benefits information, and a host of other critical services. Legion Post Service Officers have been instrumental in **helping veterans secure awards totaling more than \$20 billion**. Additionally, let's remember that Post Service Officers' responsibilities extend far beyond claims—they are a valuable resource for many other community-wide services.

Since its inception, our **Women Veterans Taskforce** has successfully reached hundreds more of our sister veterans than ever before. The task force has raised awareness, helping more women veterans learn about the healthcare services available to them through the VA healthcare system. To learn more, veterans can access the participant handbook through the following link: womenvet/docs/whttt/VAwhtttParticipantHandbook.pdf.

In closing, I would like to end this article much the same way I began it—by wishing all of you a Happy and Healthy New Year. It continues to be a great personal honor to work with and for our community.

And, of course, I'll share one more valuable life lesson: The Beatles told us, *"All you need is love,"* but a little chocolate and ice cream sure don't hurt.

Convention Planning: Chairpersons, Teamwork, and Success Ahead

Clarence Hill, 2025 National Con Corp President

pnchill@legionmail.org



The Chairpersons of the various committees are as follows:

- **Badges and Packets:**
Keith Berres
- **Distinguished Guests:**
Dennis Boland

- **Information/Registration:**

James Burk

- **Memorial Service/Special Events:**

Karen Warren

- **Liaison:**

Don Hinst

contact information for each Chairperson, who can now begin assembling their teams. I have forwarded to them the volunteer forms submitted thus far and will continue to share additional forms as I receive them. Since most of you volunteered for multiple committees, you may hear from more than one Chairperson.

State Legislative Efforts

Please remember the importance of **contacting your state representatives to lobby for transportation funding** in next year's budget for this convention. The Legislature will be going into session soon, and we need to push hard to secure this funding. The one-page information sheet developed for last year's session will be posted on the website for your use.

For context, the transportation cost for the New Orleans convention this year was **\$200,000**, so we truly need your help in persuading the Florida Legislature to approve this critical funding.

Memorial Service Committee

The Memorial Service Committee coordinates with the National Chaplain to:

- Organize the memorial service
- Arrange rooming accommodations as needed
- Provide volunteers to assist with seating attendees

So far, we have not received recommendations for well-known groups in the Tampa area willing

We have provided National with the names and

National Convention continued on page 17 >>



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<< National Convention continued from page 16

to perform during the **Memorial Service** on Sunday. We need to provide National with several options by January, and they will pursue booking a group. If you have any suggestions, please submit them to Bruce, Karen, or me as soon as possible.

This is an immense project that Florida has taken

on, and your support and volunteering are critical to its success. We will likely need between **50 and 100 volunteers** to ensure everything runs smoothly. As we move into 2025, deadlines will come faster, and timely action will be essential.

Hosting a National Convention is no easy task—it requires **significant funding**, and we know

that every member of the other Departments will have their eyes on us as critics. This is a fantastic opportunity to **showcase Florida** and demonstrate what makes our state exceptional.

If you can help in any way or have ideas to share, please let us know. Most importantly, if you are able to volunteer, we truly need you.

Child Well-Being Foundation: Updates, Achievements, and Goals for 2025

Dennis Boland, Child Well Being Fdn. President
pdcboland@legionmail.org



At the **CFW Board of Directors meeting** on **October 6, 2024**, a motion was made to change the name from the American Legion Child Welfare Foundation to **The Child Well-Being**

Foundation (CFW). The motion was seconded and passed. The change was prompted by the negative connotation associated with the word “welfare.”

On October 31, 2024, a special CFW meeting was held to elect the officers of the Board of Directors. I am proud to announce that I was elected President of the Child Well-Being Foundation.

Donations: June 1, 2023 – May 31, 2024

The Department of Florida Family raised the following donations:

| Category | Amount |
|--------------|--------------------|
| Individuals | \$200.00 |
| 8 & 40 | \$208.00 |
| SAL (Sons) | \$23,066.00 |
| Auxiliary | \$12,804.00 |
| Legion | \$15,751.72 |
| Total | \$52,029.72 |

- **\$15,751.72 represents 14.21%** of the Legion’s total contribution to National.
- **\$52,029.72 represents 7.19%** of the total donations the Florida Family contributed to National.

Considering there are **55 Departments** in The American Legion, I think Florida does very well!

Grants for 2025

For 2025, the Board of Directors awarded a total of **\$852,543.00** in grants to **13 non-profit children’s organizations**.

I want to congratulate the **Sons of The American Legion** for reaching the **\$10 million** mark in donations since they began contributing to the Foundation in 1988.

Additionally, congratulations to the Department of Florida American Legion Auxiliary for achieving 18 consecutive years as the recipient of the **Garland Murphy Award**—the highest award in the Child Well-Being Foundation for the most donations in the National Auxiliary category.

Award Qualifications

Post-Level Award: “Children First” Gift Club
Awarded to American Legion Posts, Sons of The

American Legion Squadrons, Auxiliary Units, American Legion Riders Chapters, and Eight & Forty Salons for cumulative donations made during the contribution year.

- **Guardian (Gold):** \$1,500
- **Advocate (Silver):** \$1,000
- **Caretaker (Bronze):** \$750

Individual Award: “Cornerstone” Gift Club

Awarded to individuals for cumulative donations made during the current contribution year.

- **Foundation Ambassadors:** \$1,500 – Dated gold logo pin with five diamonds
- **President’s Circle:** \$1,000 – Dated gold logo pin with one diamond
- **Foundation Partners:** \$500 – Dated gold logo pin with one blue sapphire
- **Century Club:** \$250 – Dated gold logo pin with one amethyst



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TRAINING ★ MENTORSHIP ★ CONTINUITY

www.floridalegion.org
legionlink@floridalegion.org



Detachment of Florida: Fall Conference Report

William D. Kelly, SAL NEC

nec@floridasons.org



The Sons of The American Legion Detachment of Florida celebrated its **2024 Fall Conference** at the Caribe Royale Resort in Orlando, Florida, on November 22-23, 2024. If you were not there, you missed an important

and valuable experience.

Our **Member Training & Development**

Committee, chaired by Pete Puzzo and his team of instructors, conducted an excellent training session on The American Legion and Sons of The American

Legion Programs Overview. Great job!

Commander Rocky, Adjutant Christian, and the Staff organized an **outstanding** Conference. Officers, Commission members, and Committee Chairmen provided thorough Officer and Committee reports to keep attendees updated on the ongoing activities and achievements of the Detachment of Florida.

Commander Rocky, PDC Gerard, and The American Legion Child Well-Being Foundation's new President, Dennis Boland, presented awards accepted on behalf of the Detachment of Florida and Florida Squadrons at the National Convention. They also presented the **2024 Membership Awards** to all the deserving

Squadrons.

The highlight of the Conference was the National Visitation and guest speaker, Sons of The American Legion National Commander **Joseph Navarrete from New Mexico**. He praised the Detachment of Florida for their hard work and numerous accomplishments. I would like to personally thank our membership for providing a fantastic welcome to our National Commander. Well done!

We hope everyone had a Happy Thanksgiving, and on behalf of Commander Rocky and all the Sons, we wish you all a **Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays, and a Happy New Year**. We look forward to seeing you in the upcoming year!

A New Year's Message to Our Veterans

Happy New Year from The American Legion, Department of Florida!

As we welcome 2025, we take this moment to honor your service, sacrifice, and unwavering dedication to our great nation. Your courage and commitment inspire us all to stand strong, united by the values and freedoms you fought to protect.

This New Year, we remain steadfast in our mission to support and uplift our veterans, their families, and our communities. Together, we will continue to make a difference, ensuring that no veteran is left behind and that your contributions are never forgotten.

May 2025 bring you peace, health, and prosperity. Thank you for your service and for reminding us all what it means to be truly patriotic.



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MEMBERSHIP TARGET REPORT

December 19, 2024 (80%)

| | | |
|--------------|------------------|--------|
| District 4 | Doug Hockenberry | 80.82% |
| District 17 | Bryant Thorpe | 75.41% |
| District 2 | Doyle Combs Jr. | 75.02% |
| District 5 | Miguel Garcia | 74.49% |
| District 6 | Joan Suelter | 73.19% |
| District 7 | Kalvin Thompson | 72.91% |
| District 9 | Jim Tewes | 71.90% |
| District 1 | Jason Skobel | 71.56% |
| District 14 | Faustino Benitez | 71.42% |
| District 3 | Stuart Scott | 70.98% |
| District 13 | Keith Berres | 70.86% |
| District 12 | Daniel Martin | 70.69% |
| District 8 | Charlie Magnus | 70.28% |
| District 11 | Toni Sutherland | 67.47% |
| District 16 | Michael Harley | 68.24% |
| District 15 | Andrew Davis | 67.87% |
| Northern | Jim Bowers | 75.60% |
| Eastern | Bruce Thurber | 72.07% |
| Western | Shelby Windham | 72.06% |
| Southwestern | John Rauh | 70.60% |
| Southern | Teddy Pomerantz | 70.29% |
| Central | Rick Orzechowski | 68.80% |
| Post 400 | | 71.75% |
| Post 208 | | 55.68% |



TRAVEL WITH CONFIDENCE

Learn How the Legionnaire Emergency Assistance Plus (EA+[®]) Helps You Handle Travel Emergencies.



LEGIONNAIRE INSURANCE TRUST PROGRAM

Any time you have an accident or sudden illness while traveling away from home, Emergency Assistance Plus provides a crucial safety net that helps coordinate and provide for emergency medical transportation your health or travel insurance generally will NOT cover. EA+ steps in to provide Medical Evacuation, Transportation Home, Medical Assistance, Travel Assistance, and Assistance for Companions.

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Emergency Assistance Plus[®] (EA+[®]) is not insurance, it is a membership plan. This is only an outline of the plan's features. Hospitalization (admitted as an inpatient) is a requirement to be eligible for some services. All services must be arranged and provided by EA+. Please read the EA+ Member Guide carefully to understand all the services available to you, as well as any rules and regulations. Visit www.TheLIT.com/Emergency-Assistance-Plus to view a sample of the EA+ Plan details.

★ ★ ★ FREQUENT WINNERS ★ ★ ★

50/50 VETERANS RAFFLE

WIN BIG & SUPPORT VETS

ENTER ONLINE
florida5050.org

AMERICAN LEGION Department of Florida

FLORIDA SAMPL

SHOW YOUR SUPPORT

The American Legion official license plate.



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National Convention Volunteer Interest Form

August 22-28, 2025 in Tampa Bay, FL

Return to Department or email to resolutions@legionmail.org

Name: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

When is the best time to contact you? Anytime Morning Afternoon Evening

What is the best way to contact you? Email Phone Either Method

VOLUNTEERING

How would you like to volunteer? (Select all that apply)

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Badges and Packets Committee | <input type="checkbox"/> Information/Registration Committee | <input type="checkbox"/> National Commander's Driver |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Distinguished Guests Committee | <input type="checkbox"/> Special Events Committee | <input type="checkbox"/> National Adjutant's Driver |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Memorial Service Committee | <input type="checkbox"/> Tampa Liaison | <input type="checkbox"/> General Tasks |

Are you interested in serving as Chair for any of the committees you selected? Yes No Undecided

Are you a member of any of the following? (Select all that apply)

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> The American Legion | <input type="checkbox"/> American Legion Auxiliary |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sons of The American Legion | <input type="checkbox"/> The American Legion Riders |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Not a member | |

Do you have any special skills or experience that would be beneficial? (Please explain)

Are you able to attend the 2025 National Convention? Yes No Not Sure

**Lodging and travel expenses will be the responsibility of the volunteer. Parking will be provided.*



DEPARTMENT COMMANDER'S



HILLBILLY HOEDOWN

COME DRESSED AS A HILLBILLY!
JEANS - OVERALLS - STRAW HATS

SATURDAY APRIL 26, 2025
STARTING AT 12:00PM



RAFFLES DURING THE DAY
MAIN AUCTION 4PM
DINNER INCLUDED

ENTERTAINMENT BY
DJ DOC HOLIDAY
THE LAST CALL BAND

TICKETS:
\$30/PERSON \$50/COUPLE

CONTACT COMMANDER HAMRICK FOR TICKETS
(321) 313 - 3469
SGTHAMRICK@HOTMAIL.COM

AMERICAN LEGION POST 117
189 VETERANS DRIVE PALM BAY, FL

PROCEEDS BENEFIT
COMMANDER'S CHARITIES



AMERICAN LEGION DEPARTMENT OF FLORIDA
VICE COMMANDERS'



**SATURDAY, JAN 25, 2025
STARTING AT 12PM**

AMERICAN LEGION POST 8

300 AVENUE M NW | WINTER HAVEN, FL 33881

TICKETS: \$20 PER PERSON

MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO AMERICAN LEGION CHAPTER 8

MAIL TO:

JESSICA MOORE
282 ALPINE DRIVE
WINTERHAVEN, FL 33881

PROCEEDS BENEFIT

**COTA | DISASTER RELIEF
PROJECT: VETRELIEF | SPI**

AMERICAN
LEGION
AUXILIARY

AMERICAN
LEGION

SONS OF THE
AMERICAN
LEGION

THE CENTRAL AREA LEADERSHIP

Presents



The Central Area
CASINO
ROYALE

SATURDAY
MARCH 8

AT WINTER
HAVEN POST 8

COCKTAILS/GAMES AT 5:00PM
DINNER SERVICE AT 6:00PM

TICKETS:

\$45

PER PERSON
OR
\$80 PER COUPLE

Tickets include dinner and casino "cash" that can be used to play your favorite casino games.

Dress like 007 or your favorite Bond girl or villain!

Highlights:

CASINO GAMES - LIVE DJ - RAFFLES - DOOR PRIZES

**PROCEEDS BENEFIT: C.O.T.A, OPERATION 300, AND
OPERATION COMFORT WARRIOR**

**MENU: 1905 SALAD - STUFFED MUSHROOMS - BEEF TENDERLOIN
- POTATOES - DESSERT -**

RSVP /Make checks payable to: Michael Sherman
(813) 541-3452 - vccentral@floridasons.org
Mail to: 7519 Winging Way Dr, Tampa, FL 33615

2025 Eastern Area Ball

February 8th, 2025

Post 117 Palm Bay

Cocktails at 3pm

Dinner at 5pm

Schnitzel by Chef Ray

Tickets \$30 Couples \$55

At the door \$40

Proceeds go to Commanders Charity of choice

Chris Hamrick and Rocky Cirigliano

Wear your Red Shirt



ENTERTAINMENT

BY

JIMMY D

NORTHERN AREA BALL

Party

APRIL 19TH

1 TO 4 PM

No Theme

Wear What You Like

But Remember, People Are Watching

Fun, Food, Games, Raffles and Friendship

\$30 Single - \$50 Couple

Post 120
461 Walker St. - Holly Hill FL

PROCEEDS WILL BE DONATED TO BOYS STATE
SCHOLARSHIPS AND VETERANS NEEDS

SUPPORTING FLORIDA DISASTER RELIEF

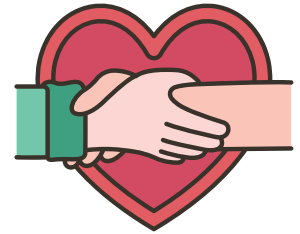


SOUTHWESTERN AREA PICNIC

January 18, 2025

11 am - 5pm

2124 American Legion Drive
Arcadia, FL 34266



Competitive games - entry fee

\$10 per couple -

Trophy's for 1st, 2nd & 3rd
Baskets, 50/50, live music -
donations gladly accepted



Checks written out to
AL K Post 11

Memo - SW Area Picnic



AL K Post 11
C/O Tammie Clifton
PO Box 835
Arcadia, FL 34265





**American Legion
16th District
Children and Youth Picnic
April 12, 2025
12 pm - 5 pm
Post 125
6440 - 5th Ave. S
St. Petersburg**

Proceeds go to

 **Children's Organ
Transplant Association.**



**Food,
Prizes, &
Games
&
The District
Commander
Dunk Tank**

**We're expecting
a surprise visit
from
Dennis Boland
&
Dianne Boland
PDC**

**For More Information Contact:
Eric Nestler, 16th District Vice Commander
16thdistrictvicecommander@gmail.com
727-999-1711**

President Charlotte's Homecoming

January 18, 2025

Social Hour Begins 5pm-6pm with Hors d'Oeuvres
Buffet Dinner 6pm-7pm featuring : Chicken & Beef, Broccoli & Rice
Casserole, Scalloped Potatoes, Salad, and Assorted Desserts
Business Casual Attire

Live 70's Rock with PEGGHEDD @ 7pm



Post 80 St Cloud
1019 Pennsylvania Avenue
Saint Cloud, FL 34769

Ticket info:\$25PP/\$40 Couple
Send Checks Payable ALA Unit 80 to:
Heather Cunningham (address above)



Hotel information: Hunter Arms Hotel (1029 New York Ave) 407-891-9855
Day-Zee Inn (1221 Carolina Ave) 407-957-0668
Polynesian Inn (2900 13th Street) 407-892-2858
Budget Inn (602 13th Street) 407-892-2858