



## A Message from the Department Commander

### Jessica Moore, Commander

[commander@floridalegion.org](mailto:commander@floridalegion.org)



I hope everyone had a Merry Christmas and enjoyed time with family, friends, and loved ones. As we step into January, we welcome not only

a new month but also a new year filled with promise. For The American Legion, this moment is more than just turning the calendar. It is a reminder that our Legion year is already halfway through.

January is a time to reset, recharge, and recommit ourselves to the mission of service. Six months have passed, and now is the perfect moment to reflect on what we've accomplished and what still lies ahead.

Membership matters: Every new member strengthens our voice and

our ability to serve veterans, families, and communities. Let's make this month a turning point in reaching our membership goal.

Our fellow veterans need us year-round. January is a reminder to check in, offer assistance, and ensure no one feels forgotten.

The second half of our Legion year is where determination makes the difference. By staying focused and united, we can finish strong, ready to celebrate our achievements and set the stage for even greater impact.

January is more than the first month of the year. It is a call to action. Let's embrace this fresh start with renewed energy, honor our commitments, and continue to serve with the dedication that defines The American Legion.

**#OneTeamOneDream**

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# 2026

HAPPY NEW YEAR

### Submit Articles at

[floridalegion.org/submit](http://floridalegion.org/submit) or [legionlink@floridalegion.org](mailto:legionlink@floridalegion.org)

Questions? [legionlink@floridalegion.org](mailto:legionlink@floridalegion.org)

**#oneteamonedream**

**\$23,589.51 RAISED**

**COMMANDER'S CHARITY: Special Olympics**

10K 30K 40K 50K 60K 70K 80K 90K 100K 110K 120K 130K 140K 150K

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**\$150,000 GOAL**



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## UPCOMING EVENTS

### JANUARY 2026

- 24-1 Headquarters Closed
- 1 BE THE ONE Day
- 1 New Year's Day
- 1 Baseball Registration Opens ★★
- 1 District 13: ALR Winter Passport Tour
- 2 Boy State Registration Fee Closes ★
- 3 Post 252: Polar Plunge for Special Olympics ★
- 3 Chapter 316: ALR Monthly Meeting
- 7 Membership 80% Department Goal ★
- 7 Boy State Online Del/Alt Registration Open ★
- 7-11 District 8: Commander's Tour ★
- 7 Chapter 136: ALR Monthly Meeting
- 8 Membership Department Zoom Meeting ★
- 9 Post 69: Vietnam Wall Escort
- 10 Post 69: Veterans Expo
- 10 District 14: Training
- 11 Chapter 8: ALR Meeting
- 11 District 5: Meeting
- 14 Membership 80% National Goal ★
- 14 Chapter 10: ALR Meeting
- 15 Legion Link Articles Due ★
- 16 Oratorical Area/District Contests Dates Due ★
- 17 Vice's Event (Legion/Auxiliary) ★
- 18 Oratorical Post Competitions Completed ★
- 18 Post 103: 100th Year
- 19 Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
- 19 Headquarters Closed ★
- 24 Department President Homecoming (Aux)
- 24 District 9: Training
- 26-1 Eastern Area: National Commander Visit ★
- 31 Southern Area Ball

★ Commander attendance tentative.

★ Department of Florida event.

★ National event.

Events are subject to change. More details at [floridalegion.org](http://floridalegion.org).



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## Should Leadership hold Themselves to Higher Standards?

**Bob Matheson, 1st Vice Commander**

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Leadership within the American Legion Department of Florida, whether at the Post, Area, or Department level, carries a deep responsibility to both the organization's mission and the veterans it serves. As representatives of an institution built on honor, service, and sacrifice, leaders must hold themselves to the highest standards of integrity, professionalism, and accountability. Their actions set the tone for the entire organization and directly influence how the Legion is perceived by its members, partners, and the wider community.

Leaders in the American Legion are entrusted with upholding the proud legacy of those who have served before them. The Legion stands as a symbol of patriotism and selfless service, and those in leadership positions must embody those values in every aspect of their conduct. A leader's decisions and behavior must reflect the Legion's core principles, veteran advocacy, community service, and national

pride. When leaders hold themselves to higher standards, they reinforce trust, respect, and unity among the membership, creating an environment where all members feel valued and inspired to participate.

At the Post, Area, and Department levels, ethical leadership ensures effective governance and mission fulfillment. Leaders often manage funds, organize community programs, and represent the organization at public events. As leaders, we carry the banner of Being Guardians of Tradition and Values. Maintaining transparency, fairness, and humility in these roles safeguards the Legion's reputation and ensures that resources are used responsibly for the good of veterans and their families.

Ultimately, leadership within the American Legion is not about authority but about service. Holding oneself to a higher standard means leading by example, demonstrating respect, compassion, and a steadfast commitment to the ideals of the Legion. In doing so, leaders preserve the honor of the organization and ensure its continued strength for generations to come.

## Americanism, Our Third Pillar

**Bruce Carl, 2nd Vice Commander**

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Happy New Year everyone! I hope everyone had a wonderful holiday season. Our 2025

membership cards have now expired, so make sure your canteen staff are checking the cards of everyone coming in. You want to make sure your Post is in compliance with the ABT rules and regulations.

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<< 2nd Vice Commander continued from page 2

I attended a couple of Districts this past month to speak about membership, programs, and training. The training this month will focus on the American Legion's third pillar, Americanism.

Americanism is an unfailing love of country, loyalty to its institutions and ideals, eagerness to defend it against all enemies, individual allegiance to the U.S. flag, and a desire to secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity. Our preamble has as one of its purposes to "foster and perpetuate a 100% Americanism."

Since its inception nearly 100 years ago, the Legion has been a stalwart champion of patriotic values, morals, culture, and citizenship.

The Legion's pillar of Americanism embodies its devotion to law and order, the raising of wholesome youth, an educated and law-abiding citizenship, and respectful observance of patriotic holidays and remembrances. February has been designated as Americanism Month by the American Legion.

Key components of this pillar include Flag protection, voter registration, and illegal immigration.

**There are numerous programs that provide and foster healthy, wholesome, and educational opportunities for young people, including:**

American Legion Baseball, Boys Nation and Boys State, The National High School Oratorical

Competition, Junior Law Cadet, American Legion Junior Shooting Sports, The American Legion Legacy Scholarship Fund (for children of servicemembers who have died on active duty since Sept. 11, 2001), Eagle Scout of the Year Scholarship, The Samsung American Legion Scholarship, the "Need a Lift?" college financial aid guide, Flag education, Operation Comfort Warriors, Veterans in the Classroom, Child Well-Being Foundation, and School Medal Awards.

I would encourage you to work these programs, as many of them deal with our children and youth. They provide a great gateway to increasing our membership in the Legion family, as parents see what we are doing for their children.

## Understanding the Role of the National Executive Committee Member

**Jim Ramos, NEC**

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As we welcome the New Year 2026, it is time to move forward with all programs and continue strengthening our Posts and Districts.

There is always one more thing that can be done to support the mission. One simple step is to share Legion information with fellow members and new members by using Legion Link. Visit the Department of Florida website at [floridalegion.org](http://floridalegion.org), search for Legion Link, and pass the information along.

### Leadership of The American Legion

The leadership of The American Legion begins with the National Commander, five National Vice Commanders, one National Executive Committeeman, and one alternate elected by each department. Together, they comprise the National Executive Committee. Past National Commanders are considered life members and may participate in debate on issues but do not have voting rights.

The NEC holds the Legion's administrative authority and is responsible for drafting the annual

budget, approving contracts, and authorizing Legion expenditures. NEC members serve as delegates with full voting power during the Legion's Fall and Spring Meetings in Indianapolis and during the National Convention. In short, the NEC functions as the organization's board of directors.

### NEC Duties

1. Assist and support the Department of Florida Commander.
2. Coordinate and assist with National guests visiting the Department of Florida.

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3. During the National Commander's visit to the Department of Florida, Dan K. Wiley will be present from Jan. 26 to Feb. 1, 2026, visiting the 6th and 12th Districts in the Eastern Area.
4. Photos and updates will be shared in the next Legion Link and on the Department of Florida website during travel with National Commander Dan K. Wiley.

Posts are encouraged to participate in 250USA activities to recognize the history of their Post and their community.

The term of office for National Executive Committee members and alternates is two years, with elections held every two years. Within the Department of Florida, many Past Department Commanders seek to serve as NEC or ANEC members. However, service in these positions should not exceed six years.

### **American Legion Library and Archive in Indianapolis**

The American Legion Library and Archive was established in 1923 to house the corporate records of the national organization. The

Department of Florida has made significant progress in this area, particularly in earning National Awards within the Media category, thanks to the efforts of Edward Lewis, Department Historian. Questions regarding American Legion marketing tools should be directed to [marketing@legion.org](mailto:marketing@legion.org). Regular reference to the *2025 Officer's Guide and Manual of Ceremonies* is also a tremendous resource.

Thank you for your continued service. Questions should be directed through the appropriate Chain of Command.

### **Legal Assistance Resources for Veterans**

**Michael Raymond, ANEC**

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Way back when I was a Post Commander, I was often asked where a veteran could find civil legal advice at a reasonable price.

All of us, at some time in our lives, need legal advice for one reason or another. Luckily, we had several

attorneys in our local area who were willing to work with veterans at reduced rates. What I did not know was that the VA can actually help you find this assistance right in your local VA medical clinic. The Medical-Legal Partnership can be found right in our backyard at the Cape Coral VA Clinic. It is an interactive care collaboration between clinicians and legal service providers. The MLP is

designed to assist high-risk, low-income veterans who may need civil legal assistance. They can be found in Room 1A-211 (check in with the Veteran Resource Center). Their hours are the 1st Monday, 2nd Wednesday, and 4th Wednesday of each month from 0900 to 1100. If you need more information, check with an available VA social worker at your local clinic.

### **Protecting Our Senior Veterans from Financial Exploitation**

**Shirley Douglas, Finance Officer**

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As we continue our mission of service throughout the year, it is important to stay aware of challenges that sometimes take

place quietly among our veterans and senior community members. One issue that is becoming increasingly common is elder

financial exploitation, and many families do not know where to turn when it happens. As Legionnaires and caregivers, understanding the signs and knowing what steps can be taken can make a meaningful difference.

### **Financial exploitation comes in many forms:**

1. Phone scams, lottery scams, and

fake government impersonators prey on seniors.

2. Unauthorized access to bank accounts, credit cards, and retirement funds.
3. A trusted individual misuses legal authority (POAs) to steal money or assets.
4. Manipulating a vulnerable senior into changing their will or trust.

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<< Finance Officer continued from page 4

5. Home title fraud where criminals forge documents to transfer property ownership.
6. Excessive fees or charges for home services, repairs, or medical care

### **There are warning signs to watch for:**

1. Unexplained withdrawals or transfers from bank accounts.
2. Sudden changes to wills, trusts, or beneficiary designations.
3. New "friends" or caregivers exerting control over finances.
4. Missing financial statements, checks, or personal belongings.
5. Confusion or lack of awareness about financial transactions.
6. Bills going unpaid despite having adequate financial resources
7. Uncharacteristic ATM withdrawals or wire transfers.

When something does not seem right, help is available. Adult Protective Services investigates concerns involving vulnerable adults, and in Florida, the Florida Abuse Hotline can be contacted at any time. Veterans have additional protections through the VA, which can step in when someone mishandling a veteran's VA benefits is suspected. Law enforcement is also an important resource, especially in cases of theft or fraud. Legal support is available as well. Several of these Florida programs assist seniors and veterans without income restrictions.

Keeping good records can strengthen any report of financial abuse. Noting dates, missing funds, restricted access, or unusual conversations can help protect the individual and support a faster investigation. Financial exploitation can happen quietly, but no veteran or senior should face it alone.

### **QUICK RESOURCES:**

- **Elder Financial Safety Florida Abuse Hotline (APS)**  
1-800-962-2873  
Report suspected elder or vulnerable adult exploitation.
- **VA Benefits Hotline**  
1-800-827-1000  
For concerns involving misuse of VA disability or pension funds.
- **Florida Veterans Legal Helpline**  
866-486-6161  
Free legal assistance for veterans, including POA issues.
- **Florida Senior Legal Helpline**  
(Age 60+)  
888-895-7873  
Civil legal help for seniors statewide
- **VA Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO)**  
Support available through all VA Medical Centers.

In an emergency, call law enforcement to report theft, fraud, or misuse of authority.

The best way to protect seniors from financial abuse is through proactive estate planning and legal

safeguards. Florida law provides several legal instruments to shield elderly individuals from financial exploitation. A properly drafted Durable Power of Attorney (DPOA) allows a trusted individual (agent) to manage the elderly person's financial and legal affairs while protecting against fraud. A DPOA limits financial control to only necessary tasks, such as paying bills, and reduces the risk of court-appointed guardianship in case of incapacity. A Revocable Living Trust allows seniors to maintain control over their assets while ensuring that trusted family members or professionals step in to manage finances if needed. The trust protects assets from fraudsters, dishonest caregivers, or family members. It also avoids probate requirements and ensures smooth asset transfer to beneficiaries. If an elderly loved one is already being exploited, legal intervention may be necessary. Florida courts allow guardianship or conservatorship proceedings to protect seniors who cannot manage their own affairs. Guardianship should be a last resort if a power of attorney or trust is unavailable.

By staying attentive and offering support when something seems off, we help ensure that our seniors are treated with dignity and respect.

Special thanks to Department Assistant Adjutant Jamie Hanselman for bringing this issue to my attention. Your assistance with this article made it easy to write.



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## U.S. Flag Display Guidelines and the Meaning of Half-Staff Observance

**Troy Horsley, Sgt-at-Arms**

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In early 2025, the Pentagon revised its internal guidance regarding the display of the U.S. flag by uniformed service members, particularly concerning horizontal presentations at public events. This update followed a review of existing Defense Department policies related to flag protocol.

Previously, a February 2023 Defense Department memo restricted uniformed service members from participating in the unfurling, holding, or carrying of large horizontal U.S. flags at events such as sporting ceremonies. The rationale was to ensure the flag was always displayed in a manner consistent with traditional protocols, which typically emphasize the flag's upright position.

Under the updated guidance, Defense Department personnel may now participate in flag displays at eligible public sporting and community events, provided such displays are conducted respectfully and in accordance with established protocol. This change allows for the inclusion of large horizontal flag presentations, which are a common feature during major event ceremonies.

It is important to note that traditional protocols for vertical displays remain unchanged. When the flag

is displayed vertically against a wall, the union, the blue field with stars, should be uppermost and to the flag's own right, meaning to the observer's left. This ensures the flag is presented in a manner that honors its design and symbolism. Additionally, during parachute demonstrations, flags attached to jumpers must not touch the ground, maintaining the flag's dignity during such displays. These revisions reflect the Pentagon's effort to balance respect for long-standing flag traditions with modern ceremonial practices.

### Observing Flags at Half-Staff: When, How, and Why

The practice of flying flags at half-staff is a solemn tradition that serves to honor those who have passed, acknowledge national tragedies, or commemorate significant moments in history. Understanding when and why we observe this custom, as well as the proper procedures for displaying the flag in this manner, is important for maintaining its dignity and symbolism.

### When Do We Observe Flags at Half-Staff?

Flags are flown at half-staff during specific occasions that warrant national or local mourning, respect, or remembrance. These occasions include:

#### 1. National Days of Mourning:

The President of the United States may declare a national day of mourning following the death

of a prominent figure, such as a U.S. president, vice president, or other national leader. A notable example is the death of President John F. Kennedy in 1963.

- 2. Tragic Events:** Flags are lowered in response to tragic events, such as mass casualties, natural disasters, or acts of terrorism. For instance, the flag was flown at half-staff following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and after other large-scale national tragedies.
- 3. Honoring the Military and First Responders:** Flags are flown at half-staff to honor members of the armed forces, police, firefighters, and other first responders who have lost their lives in the line of duty.
- 4. Commemorating National Heroes:** Flags may also be flown at half-staff to honor historic figures, cultural icons, and individuals who made significant contributions to society.
- 5. State and Local Observances:** Governors or local authorities may issue proclamations for flags to be flown at half-staff in their respective states or communities in response to local events or the death of a notable local figure.

### How Do We Observe Flags at Half-Staff?

The U.S. Flag Code provides clear instructions on the proper method for lowering and raising the flag when

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2025-2026 COMMANDER JESSICA MOORE

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<< Sgt-at-Arms continued from page 6

observing half-staff:

- 1. Raising the Flag:** When the flag is raised to half-staff, it should first be hoisted briskly to the peak of the flagpole, then lowered slowly to the half-staff position.
- 2. Position of the Flag:** The flag should be lowered to a position halfway down the flagpole. It should be flown at half-staff only for the duration of the prescribed mourning period
- 3. Duration of Half-Staff:** The duration may vary and is determined by the president, governor, or other appropriate authority. Traditionally, the U.S. flag is flown at half-staff for 30 days following the death of a sitting or former president. For other figures or events, the observance may be shorter.
- 4. Raising the Flag Again:** At the end of the mourning period, the flag should be raised back to the

peak of the flagpole before being lowered for the day.

- 5. Flags at Half-Staff and the Union:** When flown at half-staff, the union should always remain at the highest point of the flag, reinforcing the symbolism of respect and honor.

## Why Do We Observe Flags at Half-Staff?

Flying the flag at half-staff is a powerful symbol of respect, mourning, and unity.

- 1. Paying Respect:** The primary purpose is to honor those who have passed, particularly individuals who served the nation or made significant contributions to public life.
- 2. Honoring Sacrifice:** Lowering the flag recognizes the sacrifices of military members, first responders, and others who gave their lives in service to the nation.

- 3. Unifying the Nation:** In times of loss, the half-staff flag serves as a visible symbol of national unity and shared remembrance.

- 4. Symbol of Continuity:** While acknowledging loss, the eventual return of the flag to full staff represents resilience, continuity, and the enduring strength of the nation

## Conclusion

The tradition of flying the flag at half-staff is deeply rooted in respect, remembrance, and unity. Whether honoring the passing of a national leader, marking a tragedy, or recognizing the sacrifice of fallen service members and first responders, this practice carries profound meaning. By observing proper flag etiquette, we help ensure that this enduring symbol continues to reflect the values and ideals of the United States.

## Understanding Leadership and the Causes of Team Failure

**Rick Orzechowski, Central Area**

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First, let us define leadership, and then we can examine the causes of team failure.

Leadership is the act of guiding, inspiring, and influencing a group of people toward achieving a common goal. Effective leaders set a vision, motivate team members, foster collaboration, and make strategic decisions that drive

progress. Leadership is not just about authority or position; it involves building trust, communicating clearly, and empowering others to perform at their best. Great leaders demonstrate qualities such as integrity, empathy, adaptability, and resilience.

### Key Elements of Leadership

- **Vision:** Leaders set clear directions and goals for the team.
- **Communication:** They share information openly and listen actively to team members.

- **Inspiration:** Leaders motivate others by being role models for positive behavior and enthusiasm.
- **Decision-Making:** They assess situations and make informed choices for the benefit of the team.
- **Empowerment:** Effective leaders delegate responsibilities and encourage autonomy while still maintaining sight of the goals.

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- Make the purposes and goals of the team fun, and your team will have fun.
- T.E.A.M. – “Together Everyone Accomplishes More”

### What Causes a Team to Fail?

Team failure can occur for a variety of reasons, sometimes from poor leadership, lack of communication, or unclear goals. Understanding these causes can help prevent common pitfalls and build stronger, more resilient teams.

### Common Causes of Team Failure

1. Poor Communication: In order to succeed, we must all be on the same page and be clear in our messages to one another.
2. When team members do not share information or misunderstand each other, collaboration suffers and mistakes increase. If you are unclear about information, do not be afraid to ask questions.
3. Lack of Clear Goals: If the goals are clear and precise, then they are easier to attain.
4. Leaders who fail to motivate, support, or guide their teams can create confusion and disengagement. Lead by example.
5. Conflict and Lack of Trust: Keep your egos in check and keep conflicts to a minimum. Unresolved conflicts or distrust among team members can erode morale and hinder cooperation.
6. Poor Collaboration: If team members do not work together or share responsibilities, productivity and innovation decline.
7. Lack of Accountability: When individuals do not take responsibility for their actions or outcomes, the team's performance suffers.
8. Insufficient Resources: Teams without the tools, time, or support they need may struggle to complete tasks effectively.
9. Resistance to Change: Teams that are unwilling or unable to adapt to new challenges or ideas may fall behind.

Leadership plays a critical role in shaping the success or failure of a team. By understanding what effective leadership looks like and recognizing the common causes of team failure, organizations and individuals can foster stronger, more successful teams. Remember, too, that you may not like all those who have led you or will lead you, but respect the fact that they stepped up to lead you.

## New Beginnings - Kindness & Understanding

**Doug Hockenberry, Northern Area Cmdr**  
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Hello, Department of Florida American Legion Family. I want to start by wishing each of you a Happy New Year. May the New Year be filled with kindness and understanding.

I had an article all prepared and ready to submit (early), but I chose to hold off submitting that article due to a situation that required my attention. I thought this was too important, as

it affects far too many of us in the normal course of our Legion days. So please bear with me as I jump around.

If you recall, last month I wrote about Standards and the importance of adhering to the established standards that are laid out in our Constitution and By-Laws, along with our Policies and Procedures for the conduct of business and/or events. The moment we deviate from those standards, we open ourselves to scrutiny, questions, or even failure. There is no other way

to put it.

Getting back to the situation. I reviewed the information that was presented to me. I asked a few questions, listened to each of the parties involved, then I followed up with in-depth questions. As I began peeling back the onion (so to speak), I realized this was a much deeper issue that involved differences of opinion, standards not being adhered to, and of course, egos were in play to a considerable extent.

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<< Northern Area Cmdr continued from page 8

This experience reminded me once again of the importance of open communication and thorough examination before drawing conclusions. By engaging in respectful dialogue and seeking clarity, we not only resolve issues more effectively but also strengthen the trust within our organization. We can use these opportunities for growth while continually striving to uphold our values and the principles

of our great organization.

So, as we start this New Year, my wish is simple: *"Treat one another with kindness and understanding."* We are not always going to agree, and that is okay. What's important is how we deal with that fact. Taking the time to be an active listener and exchanging one's point of view in a civil tone can make all the difference. I go back and think about this great organization and our Four Pillars. If

we all spent more time to ensure the success of this great organization and carrying out our intended mission while upholding the Four Pillars, we wouldn't have as many problems.

Once again, please accept my best wishes for a Happy New Year. If I can be of assistance, feel free to email me at [northern@legionmail.org](mailto:northern@legionmail.org) or call me at 727-514-3742.

**"Hang Tough."**

## The Importance of Social Media and Guidelines for Social Media Postings

**Geo Bograkos, Southern Area Cmdr**  
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If you are not utilizing social media to promote your American Legion Family organization, you are "missing the boat."

The most successful American Legion Family organizations all have one thing in common: a strong social media presence on the internet.

If you need help establishing such a presence, look to social media accounts of individuals and organizations you know, perhaps even admire, to give you advice. They will be flattered you asked.

In person or online, it is important to conduct ourselves in a positive manner when representing The American Legion, Sons of The American Legion, Legion Riders, or American Legion Auxiliary with our cover, the emblems on our vehicles,

and apparel. We should also conduct ourselves in a similar manner while promoting our organization through online and social media platforms.

Social media is a wonderful tool that we can use to promote and market ourselves and the programs we support. Unfortunately, one inappropriate post may undo all the hard work that you and other members have done to further our goals.

The following are etiquette tips and guidelines to help you determine the difference between appropriate and inappropriate posts.

### Do's and Don'ts Regarding Social Media Postings

#### Do's...

- Create a website, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, X, and/or other social media

platforms for your organization.

- Post frequently and be as consistent as possible.
- Promote The American Legion and the American Legion Family, along with programs and charities supported by the organization.
- Always post pictures when possible.
- Create and post events to let the public know how they may show their support.
- Create posts to let people know how to join your American Legion Family.
- Highlight accomplishments of your American Legion Family at the National, Department, and Post level.
- Share other American Legion Family social media posts when appropriate.
- Promote all patriotic holidays and

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<< Southern Area Cmdr continued from page 6

activities, American Legion Family milestones, and significant dates related to military or American history.

- Inform National and Department Headquarters of your website and social media presence so they can follow you.

### Don't...

- Overpost, which in turn may cause your audience to unfollow you.
- Post, share, or tweet any content that does not meet the mission of The American Legion, Sons of The American Legion, Legion Riders, or American Legion Auxiliary.
- Post or share content that portrays The American Legion or the American Legion Family in a negative light.
- Post or share any political advertisements, statements, jokes, or overtly political photos. Remember, The American Legion is non-partisan.
- Link to any site or page that does not share the same goals or mission as The American Legion or the American Legion Family.
- Smear, besmirch, or otherwise impugn the character or reputation of any individuals, public figures, or other organizations.

Remember to **#BETHEONE**

### Noteworthy Events Coming

### Up in the Southern Area:

Remember our remaining Southern Area Training Sessions for 2025-2026, which are set for District 14 (Florida Keys) at Post 154 on January 10, District 9 at Post 304 on January 24, and District 11 at Post 268 on February 14. All sessions focus on: MyLegion.org, Conflict Resolution, and How to Conduct a Post Meeting.

Department Convention trainers traveling to the Southern Area to deliver this training will include, but are not limited to: Department of Florida 1st Vice Commander Bob Matheson, Department of Florida 2nd Vice Commander Bruce Carl, Department of Florida Southern Area Commander Geo Bograkos, Department of Florida Membership Chair Lena Heredia-Perez, and Department of Florida Membership Vice Chair Isaac White, along with other guest trainers.

See Southern Area Training flyer on page **27**.

- Tickets for the "Fonzie Approved" 2026 Sock Hop Themed Southern Area Ball are selling fast.
- This epic event will be held on Saturday, January 31, 2026, at Post 321, 9081 SW 51st St., Cooper City, FL 33328. Tickets are \$40. A table of 10 is \$360, with one free ticket included. There will be a cash bar cocktail hour with roving hot and cold hors d'oeuvres at 18:00 hours, dinner at 19:00 hours, and a choice of

Chicken Cordon Bleu or Shrimp Scampi with penne pasta. Live music will be provided by Happy Daze, a five-piece rock band. Dress is 1950s and 1960s casual

- Contact Geo for tickets: [southern@legionmail.org](mailto:southern@legionmail.org)
- Tickets are going fast. Do not wait and be left out.
- Proceeds to benefit Special Olympics. See Southern Area Ball flyer on page **26**.

The award-winning District 9 Four Chaplains Commemoration Ceremony will be held the very next day, February 1, 2026, at 14:00 hours at the I.T. Parker Center, 901 NE 3rd St., Dania Beach, FL 33004.

Immediately following the Four Chaplains Ceremony, American Legion Post 304 Commander Kevin "Gunny" Savage cordially invites you to join him at the official Four Chaplains After Party and Dinner, to be held at the host location, American Legion Post 304, 41 NE 1st Ct., Dania Beach, FL 33004.

Speaking of social media, if you have not already done so, please visit and follow the first-ever Southern Area Facebook page, where you may share all your Facebook posts of your events with everyone in Districts 9, 11, 14, and beyond: <https://www.facebook.com/SouthernAreaFL>

**Wishing you and yours a very Happy New Year.**



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## Looking Ahead to The Summit and Upcoming Events

**Jim Wineland, ALR Chair**

[alr@legionmail.org](mailto:alr@legionmail.org)



I hope everyone's holiday went just as planned and that you had the opportunity to spend quality time with family and friends. As

we look ahead to the remainder of 2026, we still have five major events on the calendar, not including our Department Convention. This article will focus on the first of those events: THE Summit, beginning with Opening Ceremonies at 5:30 PM on February 18, immediately followed by our Meet and Greet.

I have received several positive comments about our new Summit location. One remark really captured the feeling:

*"On the beach, in a motorcycle town, just three blocks from Daytona's famous Main Street."*

Of course, I did receive one negative comment:

*"Wow, this is really expensive!"*

And yes, that is because we are on the beach, in a motorcycle town, three blocks from Main Street.

When comparing true "out-of-pocket" costs between the Orlando

Holiday Inn and the Hilton on the beach, the difference, depending on how you spend, is \$220 over last year's "out-of-pocket" costs. As for ALR Department expenses, those nearly doubled.

One of the biggest reasons for the move is simply the Summit's growing popularity. Participation has increased significantly over the last few years, and Orlando could no longer manage our size. The most telling sign is that when reservations opened this year, the room block sold out in sixteen days. We renegotiated the contract with Hilton and nearly doubled our room block, and as of today (12/10/2025), there are only a small handful of rooms left.

One more important housekeeping note: several of you have booked multiple rooms for your Posts or Chapters. That is great, and we appreciate the planning. But if you would, please take a moment to review your reservations and release any rooms you no longer need. Doing so will help accommodate others who are still trying to secure a spot.

### Safety

We are available to support your

upcoming events and promote motorcycle safety throughout the year.

To schedule participation or request safety materials and brochures, please contact us so we can add your event to the calendar and ensure all resources are prepared in advance.

If you have any ideas or suggestions, please share them!

### Your 2025–2026 Schedule

- **Summit, Meet & Greet**  
February 18, 2026
- **Summit Classes**  
February 19–21, 2026
- **Round Robin**  
April 2026
- **Children & Youth Picnic**  
April 11, 2026
- **State Unity Ride**  
April 20–24, 2026
- **Rally**  
April 25, 2026

Thank you for all that you do. Bev and I are proud to be part of such an outstanding leadership team!

 **AMERICAN  
LEGION**

Department of Florida

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UPCOMING EVENTS, AND MORE

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## The American Legion's Path Forward in 2026: Aligning Community Needs with the Four Pillars

**Joe Marcheggiani, Americanism Chair**  
[americanism@legionmail.org](mailto:americanism@legionmail.org)



As we approach 2026, we face both challenges and opportunities in serving veterans, families, and communities. To thrive in the years ahead, the organization must move beyond a reactive posture and embrace initiative-taking, intentional alignment of our work with the Four Pillars: Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation, National Security, Americanism, and Children & Youth. By doing so, we can become visible, trusted hubs of community service, scaling our efforts according to local capacity while remaining united in our mission.

With Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation, it is key to meet veterans where they are. Traditionally, veteran support has often relied on individuals reaching out in times of need. In 2026, we can reverse this by going directly to the spaces where veterans already gather. Outreach pop-ups at libraries, farmers markets, and VA clinics can provide immediate access to benefit checks, PACT Act guidance, and membership opportunities. Training ourselves as benefit navigators ensures that veterans receive timely assistance with claims, housing, and mental health resources. Informal peer support circles, whether coffee meetups, walking clubs, or similar groups, can normalize conversations around mental health and reduce

stigma. Employment and transition support, including resume clinics and employer roundtables, further strengthen veterans' reintegration into civilian life. Special attention should be given to aging veterans and caregivers, post-9/11 service members, and suicide prevention initiatives.

In the area of National Security in the modern era, we must extend beyond military readiness to encompass community resilience. The Legion can lead by organizing disaster preparedness teams in partnership with emergency management offices, ensuring volunteers are trained to assist during crises. Cyber and infrastructure awareness forums can educate communities, particularly seniors and small businesses, on safeguarding against digital threats and misinformation. Military family support networks, offering care packages and home maintenance assistance, reinforce the Legion's commitment to those who serve. Community defense dialogues on emerging domains such as space and cybersecurity highlight our evolving advocacy role. In 2026, focus areas must include climate-related disasters, cybersecurity literacy, and the integration of the Space Force into national defense conversations.

Patriotism must be lived, not only celebrated. We can expand Americanism by fostering civic engagement programs in schools,

such as Constitution workshops and mock city councils. Flag stewardship campaigns, including inspections and retirement ceremonies, reinforce respect for national symbols. Community storytelling projects preserve local history by recording oral accounts from veterans and leaders, while civic unity events bring together diverse groups to strengthen dialogue and shared values. The emphasis in 2026 should be on civil discourse, media literacy, and the preservation of local heritage, ensuring that patriotism remains relevant and inclusive.

Our commitment to children and youth must be visible and consistent. Mentorship and tutoring programs can pair Legionnaires with students to support academic growth and career readiness. Expanding youth leadership pathways through programs like Boys and Girls State, Junior Shooting Sports, and the Oratorical Contest ensures that young people develop civic responsibility and leadership skills. Veteran-connected children benefit from school supply drives and holiday assistance, while partnerships with schools can advance mental health awareness and anti-bullying initiatives. In 2026, priorities should focus on youth mental health, workforce readiness, and support for military families.

To maximize impact, we must adopt strategies that cut across all

*continued on page 13 >>*



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<< Americanism Chair continued from page 12

four pillars. Visibility is key: posts should be present in community spaces and use social media to highlight service rather than internal meetings. Partnerships with schools, libraries, nonprofits, and local governments expand reach and credibility. Engaging younger veterans requires flexible meeting formats and purpose-driven roles that respect their time and interests.

Finally, tracking volunteer hours, veterans assisted, and youth served provides measurable data for grant writing and community outreach, ensuring that the Legion's story is both compelling and evidence based.

In 2026, we can redefine our role as more than a veterans' organization. We can become a cornerstone of community resilience and civic unity. By meeting veterans before

crisis, building resilient communities, modeling civic engagement, and investing in the next generation, we will not only honor the Four Pillars but also secure the Legion's relevance for decades to come. The path forward is clear: proactive service, intentional alignment, and unwavering commitment to both veterans and the communities they call home.

## Competition Underway – Support Those Students

**Doug Hockenberry, Oratorical Chair**  
[oratorical@legionmail.org](mailto:oratorical@legionmail.org)



Hello, Department of Florida American Legion Family. Let me start by wishing everyone a Happy New Year!!! May your New Year be filled with joy, love, and the continued passion we all share in The American Legion Family to ensure our veterans and their families are taken care of day in and day out.

Team, we are now decisively engaged with Post-level contests that finish on January 18, followed by District contests from January 19 through February 8. Then we move on to the Area contests from February 9 through February 22, culminating with the Department of Florida Oratorical Contest in Orlando on March 14, 2026. On that note, continue to work with your students on their speeches and their presentations. Providing that continued support helps build

confidence as they progress through Post, District, and Area-level contests.

This past month, we continued to receive additional requests from National about students interested in the Oratorical Program. Just as in the previous three months, I have contacted the respective District Commanders where these students reside. Based on the high number of requests received over the past three months, I have no doubt we will have candidates for the next couple of years. Remember, this program is open to students from 9th through 12th grade. That means first-year high school students, sophomores, and juniors are eligible to compete in the coming years.

Let's ensure we keep the lines of communication open with our students and provide them every opportunity for success as they embark on this journey. As we move forward into the new year, I encourage everyone to continue promoting the Oratorical Program at

your local schools and within your communities. Spreading awareness can help us reach students who may not yet know about the opportunities this contest provides.

As we reflect on this year's achievements, it is important to recognize the dedication each of you brings to the Oratorical Program and The American Legion. Your tireless efforts have not only elevated the quality of our contests but have also inspired students across Florida to reach their highest potential, and for that I THANK YOU. Your dedication makes all the difference, and it is your commitment that ensures our programs thrive.

In closing, I want to thank everyone for their continued support. Keep up the splendid work, and best of luck with your Post, District, and Area-level contests. As always, if you have questions, please email me at [oratorical@legionmail.org](mailto:oratorical@legionmail.org) or call me at 727-514-3742. Again, Happy New Year. **"Hang Tough"**



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## POW/MIA Report

**Denny Luke, POW/MIA Chair**

[powmia@legionmail.org](mailto:powmia@legionmail.org)



You may have noticed a lapse in identification activity by the DPAA. They fall under the Department of Defense and are funded through

the Department of Defense.

The DPAA was affected by the government shutdown. Regardless, they strived to move forward in areas where they could. Despite the lapse of appropriations forcing the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency to cancel its Joint Field Activities in Vietnam that were planned for late October through early December, the mission did not stop thanks to two Vietnamese recovery teams.

These teams, consisting of host nation officials trained by DPAA and augmented by more than 60 local workers, are unilaterally excavating challenging recovery sites, with one team recovering possible remains.

Locally, the POW/MIA Memorial is moving forward. Phase I is almost 80 percent complete, and they are looking forward to beginning Phase

II. The third plane, an S-3 Viking, is being painted and will hopefully be mounted by Christmas. A dedication will be held soon thereafter in January or February. The last stage of the irrigation system has been installed.

## Stay Connected

- Florida POW/MIA Facebook Page: [facebook.com/falpowmia](https://facebook.com/falpowmia)
- Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA): [dpaa.mil](https://dpaa.mil)
- National POW/MIA Memorial and Museum: [powmiamemorial.org](https://powmiamemorial.org)

## DPAA Missing Personnel Identified in FY 2026

- World War II: 31
- Korean War: 7
- Cold War: 0
- Vietnam War: 0

## Accounted For During November

- **Nov. 25, 2025**
  - **World War II**  
Dunning, F.

- **Korean War**  
Carlsen, A.

- **Nov. 19, 2025**
  - **World War II**  
Ropinski, R.
  - **Korean War**  
Smith, L.; Martin, J.

- **Nov. 18, 2025**
  - **World War II**  
Hoffmeyer, H.; McNeill, L.; Walker, J.; Shorts, H.; Akers, L.; Veal, R.; Huzarewicz, P.; Ruth, T.
  - **Korean War**  
Brewster, R.; Hicks Jr., V.; Carroll Jr., C.

- **Nov. 17, 2025**
  - **World War II**  
Summers, R.; Gala, J.; Dorman, D.; Whipple, M.; Simantz, E.; Bordner, A.; Atteberry, C.; Knecht, C.; Pagliuso, J.; Wyatt, D.; Burke, S.; Jones, M.; Lichty, D.; Sher, M.; Chitwood, R.; Polvado, D.; Newton, W.; Geary, P.
  - **Korean War**  
Levesque, N.; Birmingham, D.; Dulyea, H.; Neiswinger, T.; Kibbey, E.

## Resolution Writing Checklist and Submission Guidance

**Clarence Hill, Resolutions Chair**

[resolutions@legionmail.org](mailto:resolutions@legionmail.org)



The following is a resolution writing checklist. It should be used as a guide when you are composing your resolution and used 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 that approved it in the header

*continued on page 15 >>*



<< Resolutions Chair continued from page 14

- 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 address the issue
- One subject per resolution
- Signature(s) on each page of the resolution
- Entire Resolved clause(s) in **bold**
- Authority noted before 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](mailto:cehill316@aol.com). All resolutions should be reviewed before the deadline for Department to mail them to all Posts.

## Honoring Service and Sacrifice: Florida Sea Cadets Participate in Wreaths Across America

Jeff Hawk, Sea Cadets Chair

[seacadets@legionmail.org](mailto:seacadets@legionmail.org)

On December 13, U.S. Navy Sea Cadets from across Florida participated in the annual Wreaths Across America ceremony, joining veterans and community members to honor fallen heroes laid to rest in veterans' cemeteries throughout the state. One of the key ceremonies took place at Rose Hill Cemetery in Kissimmee, Florida, where Sea Cadets took part in laying wreaths on the graves of veterans. This event, as part of a larger national initiative, aimed to remember, honor, and teach the next generation the importance of military sacrifice, service, and patriotism.

### A Tradition of Remembrance and Respect

Wreaths Across America was founded in 1992 when Worcester Wreath Company, based in Maine, donated 5,000 wreaths to be placed at Arlington National Cemetery. Since then, the event has grown significantly, with millions of

wreaths placed annually at veterans' cemeteries nationwide, including across Florida. These wreaths serve as a powerful visual tribute to those who made the ultimate sacrifice in defense of our freedom.

The Sea Cadets, young men and women aged 11 to 18, were active participants in the ceremony at Rose Hill Cemetery, along with their fellow cadets across the state. By laying wreaths on the graves of veterans, the cadets helped contribute to the national effort to ensure that the sacrifices of our military heroes are never forgotten.

### Why It Matters for Young People to Participate

For the Sea Cadets, participating in Wreaths Across America is much more than a ceremonial act. It provides an educational experience that instills respect for veterans, fosters a sense of service, and deepens their understanding of history and sacrifice. This event gives young cadets a chance to learn

valuable life lessons while connecting with their community in a meaningful way.

### 1. Building Respect for Veterans

Laying wreaths on the graves of fallen veterans allows Sea Cadets to create a tangible connection to the history of military service. This hands-on experience offers them the chance to reflect on the sacrifices made by those who served before them. It is an opportunity to directly honor and respect the lives of men and women who gave everything for their country.

### 2. Instilling a Sense of Service

The Sea Cadet program is grounded in the principles of service, leadership, and discipline. By participating in Wreaths Across America, cadets learn that service is not just about individual gain, but about contributing to the greater good. The experience reinforces the importance of civic engagement and community

*continued on page 16 >>*



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<< Sea Cadets Chair continued from page 15

support, helping young cadets understand their role in preserving the legacy of military service.

### 3. Preserving the Legacy of Sacrifice

The Wreaths Across America ceremony is a powerful reminder of the sacrifices made by military service members. For the Sea Cadets, participating in this event reinforces the lesson that the freedoms they enjoy today are the result of sacrifices made by countless men and women throughout history. By helping lay wreaths across Florida, the cadets actively contribute to preserving this legacy for future generations.

### 4. Fostering a Strong Sense of Community

The Wreaths Across America event brings together veterans, families, local residents, and young cadets in a shared mission of remembrance. It fosters a sense of community and camaraderie, helping the Sea Cadets connect with veterans and civilians alike. This experience deepens their understanding of the importance of supporting one another, especially when it comes to honoring those who have served.

### 5. Instilling Values of Discipline and Teamwork

Organizing and executing the logistics of placing thousands of wreaths requires careful coordination and teamwork. This aspect of the ceremony allows cadets to practice key skills they learn in their training,

such as discipline, leadership, and teamwork. It is a chance for them to work together toward a common goal and understand the importance of collective effort in honoring those who served.

### The Lasting Impact on the Sea Cadets

For many Sea Cadets, the Wreaths Across America ceremony will be a moment they remember for years to come. The experience of laying wreaths on the graves of fallen veterans teaches them not just about respect for the past but also about the values of leadership, sacrifice, and patriotism. Some of these young people may be inspired to pursue military careers, while others may continue their journey of community service in different ways. Regardless of the path they take, the experience will shape their understanding of what it means to serve and honor others.

### Conclusion

The participation of U.S. Navy Sea Cadets in the Wreaths Across America ceremony across Florida

serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of remembering and honoring our fallen heroes. This tradition not only allows young people to pay their respects but also provides them with an opportunity to learn valuable life lessons about sacrifice, service, and community. By taking part in Wreaths Across America, the Sea Cadets help ensure that the legacy of those who have served in defense of our freedom will never be forgotten, and that the values of service and patriotism will continue to be passed on to future generations.



SR Pagan (Lone Sailor Division, Windermere, FL) and the Dept Commander wreath-laying at a veteran's grave.







## Carrying the Legion Legacy Forward Through Social Media

**Seven BeeBe, Social Media Chair**

[socialmedia@legionmail.org](mailto:socialmedia@legionmail.org)



My name is Kimberly "Seven" Beebe, and I am honored to serve as your newly appointed American Legion Department of Florida Social Media Chair.

### Social Media:

Every day, we stand on the shoulders of those who served before us, men and women who believed in duty, honor, and the power of coming together for a cause greater than themselves. As members of The American Legion, we have inherited that legacy.

Today, in an age driven by connection and communication, we have a new arena where that legacy must shine: social media.

Our presence online is more than a post or a comment. It is a voice. It is a reflection of who we are: veterans, volunteers, leaders, and advocates. When we represent The American Legion on social media, we carry with us the credibility of our service and the strength of our values.

That is why we must always be knowledgeable, honest, competent, and accurate in everything we share. When people see a member of our American Legion Family speak with integrity, they see the character of the entire organization. When they see accuracy, they see trust. When

they see professionalism, they see leadership.

Our actions on social media can inspire others to serve, to volunteer, to support veterans, and to believe in the power of community. Beyond that, quality posts that are professional, uplifting, and filled with genuine purpose can reach far beyond our current membership. They show the world who we are and what we stand for. They open doors. They spark curiosity. And yes, they can attract new members who want to be part of something meaningful.

Every well-crafted post has the potential to bring someone new into our family, someone who may one day carry forward the very mission we serve today.

So let us take pride in this responsibility:

### 1. Inspiring and Purpose-Driven

As Administrators and Moderators, we have the privilege of being the digital voice of our American Legion Family. Every post, comment, and connection is a chance to honor our veterans and strengthen our community.

### 2. Unity and Pride Focused

We represent more than a Post. We represent a legacy. Through our online presence, we carry forward the pride, honor, and service that define The American Legion.

### 3. Empowering Tone

Our role on social media is a powerful opportunity to inspire, to inform, and to bring people together. As Administrators and Moderators, we are the bridge between our Post's mission and the community we serve.

### 4. Legacy and Leadership Driven

Every time we communicate online, we lead. We show what The American Legion stands for: respect, service, camaraderie, and commitment, and we motivate others to join in that mission.

### 5. Community Impact Oriented

With our words and actions, we help build a stronger, more connected American Legion Family. What we share online has the power to uplift veterans, support families, and inspire future generations.

We are The American Legion. We stand for honor. We stand for service. And we stand for each other, everywhere we go, even on the screens in front of us.

Together, let us be the voice that uplifts, the example that inspires, and the presence that strengthens The American Legion mission and grows our future.

***Ooh Rah and Semper Fi.***



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# FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT

JANUARY 2026 EDITION



## CURRENT YEAR FIGURES : 2025-2026



**72**  
VETS  
RECEIVED  
FUNDS



**\$116,528**  
PROVIDED AS  
EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE



**14**  
SPI PARTNERS



**\$103,500**  
GIVEN TOWARDS  
SUICIDE PREVENTION

## NEW YEAR SAME GOALS

As we step into 2026, it is the perfect time to reflect on what we accomplished in 2025. Despite challenges along the way, our program reached major milestones; thanks to the unwavering support of our Legion Family and community partners.

In 2025, PROJECT: VetRelief surpassed 2,000 veterans served and has provided more than \$2.2 million in aid. To put that growth into perspective: it took a little over seven years to reach our first 1,000 veterans served and \$1 million in support. With increased awareness of our mission and impact, we achieved the second 1,000 veterans served and another \$1 million in assistance in a shorter time frame: less than five years. We're incredibly proud of what those numbers represent—**real relief for real veterans!**

But, that's not all we accomplished this year, we also:

» Welcomed two new Board members: Shirley Douglas, Treasurer, and Bob O'Neal, our new SAL representative

» Added one new SPI strategic partner, Here Tomorrow

» Hired our second full-time PVR team member: Doug Prusak, focused primarily on grant writing

### Looking ahead to 2026

PROJECT: VetRelief is moving full steam ahead. We're seeing an increase in financial assistance requests, and the average case amount is rising, largely due to higher housing costs across Florida. As more veterans rely on this program each year, securing sustainable funding is more important than ever.

We also know we can count on our Legion Family to help keep this mission strong. If you're planning an event or fundraiser to benefit PROJECT: VetRelief, please let us know. We'd love to help promote it and include it on our calendar of events.

Contact Jennifer Cooper at 407-295-2631 or [jcooper@floridalegion.org](mailto:jcooper@floridalegion.org) with your event details.

## WELCOME TO THE TEAM, DOUG!!

Doug joined PVR in November as Communications Coordinator. He brings 12 years of nonprofit communications experience, following an award-winning career as a television news executive producer. Doug's responsibilities include grant writing, website development, managing social media messaging, and supporting events.

Doug earned a Bachelor of Science in Journalism from Boston University's College of Communication. Although he did not serve in the military, he is dedicated to supporting veterans in honor of his family members who did serve.

Doug spends time with his wife, children, grandson, and dogs. He is also an avid, low-handicap golfer, a nationally ranked long-drive competitor, and a volunteer coach.

We are fortunate to have Doug on our team, as he brings passion and expertise. Please welcome him to the team!

### UPCOMING EVENTS:



#### Suicide Prevention Event

JAN 3 @ Rotonda West Post 113



#### Veterans Expo

JAN 9 - 10 @ Highlands Post 69



#### Benefits Training

JAN 24 @ Bartow Post 3



#### Benefits Fair

MAR 7 @ Bartow Post 3



#### Suicide Prevention Event

MAR 21 @ Jacksonville Beach Pavilion



## National Emergency Fund and Program Support Highlights

**Dennis Boland, Child Well Being Fdn Pres**  
[pdcboland@legionmail.org](mailto:pdcboland@legionmail.org)



### National Emergency Fund

Since its creation in 1989, the NEF has awarded nearly \$10 million to American Legion members and Posts. Up to \$3,000 is available for members, and up to \$10,000 is available for Posts that, because of a declared natural disaster, temporarily lose the ability to maintain existing Four Pillar programs within the community.

In 2024, we approved 109 grants (95 individuals and 14 Posts) totaling \$313,697.98. The following Departments received grants in 2024: Florida (83), Georgia (1), Indiana (1), Iowa (6), Louisiana (2), New York (1), North Carolina (2), Philippines (1), South Carolina (3), South Dakota (2), Tennessee (4), and Texas (3).

Since Jan. 1, 2025, we have granted \$150,157.76 in emergency

assistance to 32 members and eight Posts. There have been 147 donations for a total of \$303,779.00.

### Operation Comfort Warriors

Nearly 1,000 service members, veterans, and their families were directly impacted by Operation Comfort Warriors in 2024, either by participating in an OCW-sponsored event or receiving care at a grant-receiving facility. A total of \$89,639.57 was distributed through two individual grants and seven event grants. In 2025, eight grants totaling \$95,500.00 were distributed, impacting more than 1,300 service members, veterans, and families.

### Sons of the American Legion

At the SAL 53rd Annual Convention in Tampa, the Sons donated the following:

- \$59,876 to the Child Well-Being Foundation
- \$500 to the Children's Miracle

Network

- \$750 to Fisher House
- \$1,150 to the Legacy Scholarship Fund
- \$8,350 to the National Emergency Fund
- \$22,185 to Operation Comfort Warriors
- \$16,193 to the Veterans and Children Foundation

### At the November Fall Meetings, they donated:

- \$9,290 to the Child Well-Being Foundation
- \$750 to the National Emergency Fund
- \$1,800 to the Veterans and Children Foundation
- \$500 to the Children's Organ Transplant Association
- Additionally, from their Contingency Fund, they donated \$250,000 to the Veterans and Children's Foundation.

## A Message of Commitment and Momentum for 2026

**Michael Nigbor, Detachment Commander**  
[commander@floridasons.org](mailto:commander@floridasons.org)



As we enter 2026, I would like to wish everyone a very prosperous, happy, and healthy New Year. We already have so many events planned that are going to be amazing. I am looking forward to meeting all

of you at your events and District meetings. Area Vice Commanders and District Commanders, continue your communications with all of your members, including reporting training, so we can achieve better results in what we are supposed to be doing as an organization. It is imperative that our members get their 2026 cards to continue the benefits we have access to.

I will report in the next issue about visitations I will be making or have made. For December, I will be joining Department Commander Jessica Moore for the District 13 Tour. We will be visiting 15 of the Posts. I am looking forward to meeting all the Squadron officers and members at this time.

*continued on page 20 >>*



PLEASE SUPPORT  
**Special Olympics**

**HONOR SERVICE** **INSPIRE FUTURE**

[www.floridalegion.org](http://www.floridalegion.org)  
[legionlink@floridalegion.org](mailto:legionlink@floridalegion.org)



<< Detachment Cmdr continued from page 19

I would like to congratulate everyone for all the hard work they have been accomplishing on membership and "Buddy Checks." Recruit, Renew, Retention. These are key components to our progress and our future. Each new member brings fresh energy, ideas, and hands willing to help where needed. As we work toward our ambitious goals, remind your friends and fellow community members that their membership not only helps veterans and their families, but that they are also helping each other build stronger community service.

We, the Sons of The American Legion, are more than just a group of volunteers. We are a growing and influential force dedicated to serving veterans, supporting our communities, and helping children and youth. We are very important in promoting the principles our nation was built on and are part of a historic tradition, with every new recruit helping extend our impact across the country.

Recruiting is not an isolated act. It creates outward reach, benefiting our youth, schools, and civic institutions. It is up to us to empower programs that support American ideals and patriotic education.

Let your enthusiasm open doors of opportunity for others to get involved. Let your actions speak. People listen, and together we grow stronger.

By emphasizing The American Legion Family, we are setting our organization up for future success. When we work together as a team, we can accomplish anything. New members are our lifeline, as well as existing members. When our members feel a real connection with other members, they will keep coming back and volunteer more often. We work hard for the benefit of our veterans who helped make this country great and for the children who will help make our country even greater, better, and stronger.

Communication and teamwork are the key. I asked everyone to try to recruit at least one new member this year. Please get back to me and let me know what your Squadron is accomplishing. We have been given a list of names from Detachment Adjutant Christian Rapp regarding the 9999 members. These are members you might be able to attain. Call them. The time is now to show that our mission is rooted in service, patriotism, kindness, and community engagement, honoring all who served and those who continue to serve. It is our responsibility to continue the

legacy of service.

Buddy Checks are not just for the holidays. Checking on someone at any time can provide valuable insight into how they are doing emotionally. Do not be afraid to reach out. Be The One to make that call and see how your members are doing. Invite them to your meetings and events. Keep them engaged and involved. Make them feel needed and important to the future of our organization, because they are.



I believe in the Four Pillars of our organization and what they stand for. The Sons of The American Legion can reach new heights and crush our records for volunteer hours and donations. Remember your "WHY." Why did you want to be a member of the world's largest veterans organization? What were you hoping to accomplish? Be The One in more ways than one. Call, text, or email me. I would like to attend your meetings and events. I would also like to hear your feedback on these articles you should be receiving.

***Together, We Can, and We Will***

#### SONS OF THE AMERICAN LEGION DETACHMENT OF FLORIDA

**\$1,463,892 DONATED TO  
AMERICAN LEGION PROGRAMS**

**519,488 HOURS DONATED AT  
\$29.95/HR VALUED AT \$15,558,977**

#### **2024-2025 ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

**TOTAL DONATIONS TO  
AMERICAN LEGION  
PROGRAMS: \$17,022,559**

**'TRIPLE NICKEL' AWARD RECIPIENT  
FOR 107%+ MEMBERSHIP**

**WINNER OF THE 2025 NATIONAL C&Y  
BEST REGIONAL REPORT (SQD 323)**



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[legionlink@floridalegion.org](mailto:legionlink@floridalegion.org)





## Post Everlasting

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

### In Memoriam: Past Southwestern Area Commander Jerry T. Faught



With deep sorrow, we announce the passing of Past Southwestern Area Commander Jerry T. Faught, of Rotonda West, Florida. Jerry

passed away on Tuesday afternoon, November 25, 2025, at the age of 80. He was a proud and dedicated member of Rotonda West Post 113. Jerry is survived by his son, Jerry M., and three daughters: Penny Rae, Candy Lynn, and Amanda. He was

preceded in death by his longtime companion, Past Department President Ruth Proctor.

A U.S. Navy veteran of the Vietnam era, Jerry faithfully served both his country and his community. A devoted Legionnaire with 18 years of continuous membership, he held leadership roles at every level of The American Legion.

At the Post level, he served multiple terms as Commander, Adjutant, and Vice Commander. He went on to serve as 8th District Vice Commander and Commander. At the Department

level, Jerry served as Southwestern Area Commander, National Cemetery Chair, and Chair of the Time & Place Committee. Nationally, he served on both the National Security Council and the Legislative Council.

Service details are pending and will be shared on the Department's website as they become available. Please keep Jerry's family and loved ones in your thoughts and prayers during this difficult time.

Read more at [www.floridalegion.org](http://www.floridalegion.org).



## 4<sup>TH</sup> DISTRICT CHAPLAINS

NATIONALLY  
RECOGNIZED  
COMMEMORATION  
CEREMONY

**FEBRUARY 1 2026**  
**2:00 PM**

I.T. PARKER CENTER  
901 NE 3RD ST.

DANIA BEACH, FL 33004  
(BEHIND HARBOUR TOWN MARINA)

**DINNER & AFTER PARTY**  
**4:00 PM**

AMERICAN LEGION POST 304  
41 NE 1ST CT.  
DANIA BEACH, FL 33004



PLEASE SUPPORT  
**Special  
Olympics**

**HONOR SERVICE**  **INSPIRE FUTURE**

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[legionlink@floridalegion.org](mailto:legionlink@floridalegion.org)



## MEMBERSHIP TARGET REPORT

December 18, 2025 (80% Target)

District 3	Rick Cabrera	83.32%
District 4	Darcy Bockman-Wright	82.76%
District 2	Roxann Dressel	82.50%
District 9	Jim Tewes	80.15%
District 5	Miguel Garcia	79.76%
District 11	Stanley Brown, Jr.	78.76%
District 6	David Musser	78.39%
District 13	Laurene Allen-Flower	78.38%
District 16	Michael Harley	77.37%
District 17	Jim Bowers	77.26%
District 1	Robert Osmon	76.55%
District 12	Daniel Martin	76.37%
District 15	Drew Davis	76.35%
District 7	Kalvin Thompson	75.77%
District 8	Charlie Magnus	75.67%
District 14	Thomas Frank	70.28%
Northern	Doug Hockenberry	80.30%
Eastern	Joan Suelter	77.48%
Western	Shelby Windham	77.38%
Southwestern	Eric Loyd	77.17%
Southern	Geo Bograkovs	76.88%
Central	Rick Orzechowski	76.85%
Post 400		70.28%

### DEPARTMENT TRUSTED. LEGIONNAIRE APPROVED.

The Legionnaire Insurance Trust has been protecting Legionnaires and their families for over 50 years.



LEGIONNAIRE  
INSURANCE TRUST

[www.thelit.com](http://www.thelit.com)



**"JUST BECAUSE I LIVE DANGEROUSLY  
DOESN'T MEAN SHE HAS TO."**

Service often takes you away from family. USAA is always there for them when you can't be. We deliver the financial peace of mind and support you deserve. Checking. Savings. Credit cards. Loans. Auto & life insurance. Mutual funds. Even free financial advice. Get all you've earned. [Visit usaa.com](http://usaa.com) today.

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**50/50 RAFFLE** 4 VETERANS

[www.florida5050.org](http://www.florida5050.org)

**WIN CASH** **WIN MORE CASH** **WIN LOTS OF CASH**

**More Chances. More Winners. More Cash!**

Questions: 1-800-393-3378. Florida participants only.

**AMERICAN LEGION** Department of Florida

**ONE OF DEPARTMENT'S LARGEST FUNDRAISERS!**

**FLORIDA**

**SAMPL**

**SHOW YOUR SUPPORT**

The American Legion official license plate.



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**Special  
Olympics**

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[legionlink@floridalegion.org](mailto:legionlink@floridalegion.org)



DO YOU  
HAVE WHAT  
IT TAKES?

BECOME A  
DEPARTMENT  
CHAIR!

MAKE AN

2026



IMPACT

2027

YEARS IN LEGION



Department  
of Florida

DISTRICT

POST

AREA

NAME

POSITION INTERESTED IN

EXPLAIN YOUR QUALIFICATIONS FOR DEPARTMENT CHAIR

LEGION SCHOOLS ATTENDED: ☐ ALEI ☐ Florida Legion College ☐ National Legion College ☐ Sgt-at-Arms ☐ Chaplain  
☐ National LEAD Classes ☐

POSITIONS HELD	YEARS AT POST LEVEL	YEARS AT DISTRICT LEVEL	YEARS AT AREA LEVEL	YEARS AT DEPT LEVEL
Commander				
Vice Commander				
Adjutant				
Sgt-at-Arms				
Historian				
Chaplain				
Membership				
Americanism				
Baseball				
Blood Donor				
Boy Scouts				

POSITIONS HELD	YEARS AT POST LEVEL	YEARS AT DISTRICT LEVEL	YEARS AT AREA LEVEL	YEARS AT DEPT LEVEL
Boys State				
Children & Youth				
JROTC				
Shooting Sports				
Law & Order				
Oratorical				
POW/MIA				
School Medals				
Women Veterans Advocate				
Youth Law Cadet				
Other				

PLEASE RETURN TO: The American Legion, Dept of Florida, Attention: Bob Matheson, P.O. Box 547859, Orlando, FL 32854

**MIAMI  
VICE**

*Themed Party*

American Legion and Auxiliary

# **VICE'S Event**



Date - Jan 17th, 2026

Time - 1-5 pm

Location - Post 8

300 Ave M NW

Winter Haven, FL

**Food, Raffle Baskets, Auction Items**

**Donation - \$20.00 per person**

**pay at the door**

**To RSVP contact**

**Bruce Carl at [brucel1955@yahoo.com](mailto:brucel1955@yahoo.com)**

Proceeds to benefit the Department Commander  
and Department President charities



AMERICAN  
**LEGION**  
AUXILIARY

AMERICAN  
**LEGION**

SONS OF THE  
AMERICAN  
**LEGION**

THE CENTRAL AREA LEADERSHIP PRESENTS:

# 2026 CENTRAL AREA Mangunitaville Casino Party!

MARCH 7, 2026

AT CLEARWATER AMERICAN LEGION POST 7

5 PM - COCKTAILS/GAMES

6 PM - JIMMY BUFFETT INSPIRED BUFFET

LIVE DJ - CASINO GAMES - RAFFLES - BASKETS

**PUT ON YOUR BEST JIMMY BUFFETT OUTFIT  
AND ENJOY A FUN NIGHT IN PARADISE!**

PROCEEDS BENEFIT: SPECIAL OLYMPICS,  
C.O.T.A., & ALA DISASTER RELIEF

**\$45 PER PERSON  
\$80 PER COUPLE**

RSVP/MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO: MICHAEL SHERMAN  
(813) 541-3452 | [VCCENTRAL@FLORIDASONS.ORG](mailto:VCCENTRAL@FLORIDASONS.ORG)  
MAIL TO: 7519 WINGING WAY DR, TAMPA, FL 33615



# 2026 SOUTHERN AREA BALL



BACK TO THE 50'S & 60'S



## SOCK HOP



LIVE MUSIC BY



HAPPY DAZE ROCK BAND



**SAT. JAN 31, 2026 - 6:00PM TILL ???**

**AMERICAN LEGION POST 321**

**9081 SW 51<sup>ST</sup> ST - COOPER CITY. FL 33328**

***Silent Auctions - 50/50 - Door Prizes***

**\$40. per person - Pickup Wristbands At Will Call**

**Cash Bar ~ Roving Hors DeOuvres**

**Choice of Chicken Cordon Bleu' or**

**Shrimp Scampi with Penne Pasta**



***Please Make Checks Out To: American Legion Post 304***

***With Southern Area Ball In Memo***

***Please Mail Checks To: American Legion Post 304***

***41 NE 1<sup>st</sup> Ct., Dania Beach, FL 33004***

***More Information: [southern@legionmail.org](mailto:southern@legionmail.org) or (954) 868-2990***

**Proceeds To Benefit Special Olympics**



# American Legion Department Of Florida

*Presents*

## SOUTHERN AREA TRAINING

**TOPICS TO INCLUDE:**

**MYLEGION.ORG ~ CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

**HOW TO CONDUCT A POST MEETING**

**ALL LEGION FAMILY MEMBERS WELCOME!**

**ATTEND ONE OR ALL SESSIONS! ~ BRING LAPTOPS & NOTEPADS**

**WHO SHOULD ATTEND? ALL POST, UNIT & SQUADRON OFFICERS**

***Meet Your Dept. of Florida Convention Training Team:***

Dept. of Florida 1<sup>st</sup> Vice Commander: Bob Matheson

Dept. of Florida 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice Commander: Bruce Carl

Dept. of Florida Southern Area Commander: Geo Bograkos

Dept. of Florida Membership Chair: Lena Heredia-Perez

Dept. of Florida Membership Vice Chair: Isaac White

*And Other Guest Trainers*

### **DISTRICT 14 ~ (MAINLAND)**

**SATURDAY OCT. 18, 2025 - 13:00 HOURS**

**AMERICAN LEGION POST 31**

**7710 SW 59TH AVE., S. MIAMI, FL 33143**

### **DISTRICT 14 ~ (FLORIDA KEYS)**

**SATURDAY JAN. 10, 2026 - 13:00 HOURS**

**AMERICAN LEGION POST 154**

**4115 OVERSEAS HWY., MARATHON, FL 33050**

### **DISTRICT 9**

**SATURDAY JAN. 24, 2026 - 13:00 HOURS**

**AMERICAN LEGION POST 304**

**41 NE 1<sup>ST</sup> CT., DANIA BEACH, FL 33004**

### **DISTRICT 11**

**SATURDAY FEB. 14, 2026 - 13:00 HOURS**

**AMERICAN LEGION POST 268**

**1690 AVENUE H W, RIVIERA BEACH, FL 33404**

**Kindly RSVP Via Email: [southern@legionmail.org](mailto:southern@legionmail.org)**





# *Celebrate America* with the **USA250 CHALLENGE!**



**What:** The American Legion's USA 250 Challenge is a yearlong celebration of the nation's 250th birthday. It offers participants three challenge categories — community service, physical activities and mental health awareness — to pursue goals such as 250 hours, miles, Buddy Checks or other measurables.

**When:** Through July 4, 2026.

**Who:** American Legion Family members and anyone else. Participants may pursue their goals individually or as part of a team.

**Why:** In addition to celebrating America, proceeds from the \$30 registration fee and all donations go to the Legion's Veterans & Children Foundation, which supports disabled veterans and military families in need.

**How:** Scan the QR code to learn more and register. Or visit [legion.org/usa250/challenge](https://legion.org/usa250/challenge)

**Scan to  
register**

