



**A Message from the Department Commander**

**Jessica Moore, Commander**

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



As we reflect on this past year, it is hard to put into words just how grateful and proud I am to be part of such an amazing American Legion Family. This year has been filled

with camaraderie, fellowship, learning, service, laughter, hard work, and countless moments that reminded us why this organization means so much to all of us.

From the many buddy checks and membership calls to the meetings, events, dinners, ceremonies, community outreach, and fundraisers, every single act of kindness and dedication mattered. Each phone call made someone feel remembered. Each event brought people together. Every fundraiser helped support our mission and strengthened our ability to continue serving veterans, their families, our youth, and our community.

What stands out most is not just everything we did, but how we did it:

together. Throughout the year, I watched members step up time and time again without hesitation. Whether it was volunteering behind the scenes, decorating halls, preparing meals, organizing programs, selling tickets, making calls, checking on fellow members, or simply offering encouragement and friendship, everyone contributed in their own meaningful way. Those efforts may sometimes seem small in the moment, but together they created something truly extraordinary.

This year reminded us that The American Legion is more than an organization; it is a family in every sense of the word. We celebrate together, support one another through challenges, learn from each other, and stand united in service and compassion. The friendships we have built and the memories we have shared are priceless.

I am especially thankful for the spirit of teamwork and positivity that carried us through every project and event. There were long days, busy schedules, and plenty of hard

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



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# UPCOMING EVENTS

## JUNE 2026

- 31-5 National Veterans Golden Age Games
- 1-30 PTSD Awareness Month
- 1-30 Homeownership Month
- 1 BE THE ONE Day
- 1 Youth Law Cadet Application/Fee Due
- 1 Post Officer Reports Due
- 1 Certification of Officers Due
- 1 History Books Due to Department
- 3 Jefferson Davis's Birthday
- 3 Chapter 136: ALR Meeting
- 6 D-Day (1944)
- 6 Chapter 194: ALR Fallen Riders Ride
- 6 Chapter 316: ALR Meeting
- 6 Post 359: Bike Day
- 10 Chapter 10: ALR Meeting
- 11 History Books to to Dept HQ at Convention
- 12-14 107th Department Convention
- 12 Women Veterans Day
- 13 Baseball Team Rosters Due to Dept Chair
- 14 Army Birthday (1775)
- 14-20 National Flag Week
- 14-20 82nd Boy State Session
- 14 Chapter 8: ALR Meeting
- 15 Baseball Team Roster Frozen
- 15 Department HQ Closed
- 19 Juneteenth (Department HQ Closed)
- 21 First Day of Summer
- 21 Father's Day
- 23 Coast Guard Auxiliary Birthday (1939)
- 25 Start of Korean War (1950)
- 27 National PTSD Awareness Day
- 27 ALR 250 Stars & Stripes Freedom Ride

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



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work, but there was also laughter, encouragement, and a shared sense of purpose that made it all worthwhile. Your dedication does not go unnoticed, and it is deeply appreciated.

Most importantly, thank you for the fellowship and camaraderie that make this organization so special. Together, we will continue honoring our mission, supporting our veterans and community, and building on the strong foundation we have created.

I could not be more proud of everything we achieved this year, and I could not ask for a better group of people to stand beside.

Thank you all for making this such an incredible and unforgettable year.

With heartfelt gratitude and appreciation,

**Jessica Moore**  
**#OneTeamOneDream**

**COMMANDER'S CHARITY:** 

**\$124,600.44 RAISED**


\$150,000 GOAL

Go to [www.floridalegion.org/donate](http://www.floridalegion.org/donate) and choose support Commander's Charity: Special Olympics

### A Year of Gratitude and Service

**Bob Matheson, 1st Vice Commander**  
[1stvice@legionmail.org](mailto:1stvice@legionmail.org)



#### Thank You!!!

As this year comes to a close, I want to sincerely thank everyone for the support, encouragement, and friendship you've shown me throughout my time as 1st Vice Commander for the Department of Florida. Serving in this role has been one of the greatest honors of my life, and I have been truly blessed by the experiences it has given me. From memorable visits to meaningful training sessions, from long conversations to quick handshakes, every moment spent with the American Legion Family has

strengthened my appreciation for who we are and what we stand for.

This year allowed me to travel across our great Department, meeting dedicated Legionnaires, Auxiliary members, Sons, and Riders who give their time and energy to serve veterans, families, and communities. Each Post I visited welcomed me with open arms, and I am deeply grateful for the hospitality, the stories shared, and the passion I witnessed everywhere I went. Your commitment to service is inspiring, and it has been a privilege to learn from you and work alongside you.

I want to thank each and every Post,

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<< 1st Vice Commander continued from page 2  
whether I visited you once or many times, for the kindness and respect you showed me. You reminded me, time and again, why the American Legion Family is so special. We are united not only by our mission, but also by our shared values, our

camaraderie, and our willingness to lift one another up.

As I look ahead to the coming year, I do so with excitement and optimism. I look forward to continuing to serve, to support our programs, and to stand beside all of you as we

move forward together. Thank you for an unforgettable year, for the privilege of representing you, and for reminding me what it truly means to be part of the American Legion Family.

### Closing the Year Strong

**Bruce Carl, 2nd Vice Commander**

[2ndvice@legionmail.org](mailto:2ndvice@legionmail.org)



Another year has come to a close. We only have less than two weeks until Department Convention. It has been a year of

ups and downs, but we survived the year without seeing any hurricanes! That is always a great thing. In another month, we will be celebrating our 250th birthday as a country! Many of us older folks (just saying) were around when we celebrated our 200th birthday.

I would like to thank everyone for their support this past year and for all the requests for training. Many of those were well attended, with some

not so much. For those Posts that did not attend training, I encourage you to attend your District trainings this coming year. There is a wealth of knowledge disseminated, and usually the people who need it are not there.

It was an honor and privilege to be a part of such a great leadership team! Thank you, Jessica, for leading the way! This past year was the beginning of bringing changes to the Department and moving Florida forward. Your up-and-coming leaders are all on the same page with the direction we are going and hope everyone is also on board. Increasing membership, working as a team with the family, and better retention are just a few of the things

we are working on. You will also notice changes to the classes and instructors, as we are focused on making the Legion more inclusive and looking for new ideas. Please feel free to voice your opinion on what you like and don't like, and come forward with any suggestions you might have. They will not just be tossed in a corner somewhere, but will be looked at by the team.

In closing, I hope to see many of you at the Convention and look forward to serving as your Department 1st Vice Commander for the year 2026-2027! Thank you again for your support!

### Integrity, Honesty, and Loyalty: A Message of Gratitude and Service

**Jim Ramos, NEC**

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



These are the three words I committed myself to when I became your NEC, and they are values I strive to live by every single day.

First and foremost, I want to thank the Legionnaires of the Department

of Florida for giving me the opportunity to serve as your NEC for the past four years. Your trust and support made this journey possible, and I am truly grateful for each and every one of you.

Serving two terms from 2022-2026 has been an honor. Throughout that time, I worked hard to uphold the integrity of The American Legion

and the Department of Florida. I sincerely hope that my commitment to this position reflected the trust you placed in me and that I represented our Department with honor and dedication.

Loyalty has always been extremely important to me. I hope my loyalty to the Department of Florida and

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all of its members was evident in everything I did at the National level. I have always believed that I work for you, the Legionnaires of Florida. Every decision, every meeting, and every effort I made was done on your behalf and in the best interests of our Department.

Communication has also been one of my priorities. Each Friday, whenever I received updates from National Headquarters, I made every effort to share that information with Posts, Districts, and Area Commanders throughout the Department. I firmly believe that nothing should be hidden in THE LEGION. Open communication is essential, and information should always flow from top to bottom and bottom to top while respecting the chain of command.

No matter what title or cover someone wears, we are all Legionnaires first. Never feel intimidated by position or rank. I am a Legionnaire just like you. The color of the cap does not define the person wearing it. What matters most is our dedication to serving veterans, our communities, and this

organization we all care deeply about.

Honesty has also guided my service. I always tried to provide truthful, fair, and accurate answers to anyone who called, emailed, or spoke with me in person. My role was never about authority. It was about helping members, guiding them in the right direction, and working together to make the Department of Florida stronger and better for everyone.

I have always believed that leadership is about service. You elected me to represent you and work on your behalf. Wearing the red cover was a responsibility I never took lightly. The Department Adjutant and I worked together closely to keep communication strong between National Headquarters and the Department of Florida so we could continue improving and strengthening our organization. Whether coordinating National Commander visits or supporting Department initiatives, our goal was always to represent Florida with pride and professionalism.

Loyalty also means standing together

as a Department. We should always support our members, officers, and one another with respect and unity. Loyalty means staying committed to the mission, improving ourselves, and working together as a team. Sometimes challenges arise, but each of us has the responsibility to do the right thing and continue moving forward together.

In May, I attended the NEC Spring Meeting, and all information from that meeting is available online at [legion.org](http://legion.org).

I will soon wear a blue cap once again, and I will proudly do so. But no matter what cap I wear, my name will always simply be Jim. Thank you again for allowing me the honor of serving as your NEC.

When you read this article in the Legion Link, please know these are the same heartfelt words I share during my closing remarks at Convention.

Thank you, and God bless The American Legion, the Department of Florida, and every Legionnaire who continues to serve.

## Honored to Represent Florida at the National Level

**Michael Raymond, ANEC**

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



Since this is the last Legion Link for the fiscal year, I'd like to reach out and thank you all for having the faith in me to represent the Department

of Florida for the last two years at National. I've learned a lot and hope I can fill the very large shoes of the past NECs who have represented us with honor over the last few decades.

Although the position I've filled for the last two years did not carry a lot

of responsibility, I still used my time for the betterment and success of the Department of Florida.

Thank you for all your support, and I'm hoping for great things in the next two years.





## Fair Winds and Following Seas: A Final Thank You

Edward Lewis, Historian

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



So..., this is the last time I am submitting an article for the Legion Link. Where do I begin?

The only place to start and finish is to say thank

you.

I want to say thank you to EVERY single Legion, SAL, Auxiliary, and Rider member and officer I have met in my Legion travels through the three different times I have had the privilege to be your Department Historian. You are the ones that make this the greatest Veterans organization in the world! Your hospitality and friendship will always hold a place in my head and heart. Thank you to all of the officers I have met; it has been a heck of a ride. I have learned from all of you, and I hope I can pass on some of that knowledge to those that are

following up the ranks.

I want to thank everyone at the Department headquarters. I don't think most members know how valuable you are to the day-to-day operations of this great organization. I know I have often requested a favor at the last minute, and not once did you ever turn me down, nor did a favor go unanswered. Thank you for doing what you do. I would mention each of you by name, but I know I would forget someone. So..., thank you.

To the Department Commanders I have had the privilege to serve under, you have taught me various leadership styles while maintaining the same goals: to ensure this organization stays relevant and useful for our Veterans and communities for decades to come. I hope to utilize a mixture or combination of those styles in any endeavors I should undertake

going forward.

The picture is from the Lady Lakes to Indianapolis Legacy Ride when Rick Johnson and I supported the ride the entire distance. At a stop in Shelby, North Carolina, I ran into a photographer from the local newspaper, and he said to me, "You look like you are having fun on this trip." I simply smiled and said, "I'm surrounded by my brothers and sisters, of course I am."

Fair winds and following seas.



## Know the Law: Florida Fundraising Requirements Every Post Should Understand

Shirley Douglas, Finance Officer

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



Florida Statute Title XXXIII Regulation of Trade, Commerce, Investments and Solicitations Chapter 496

Are you familiar with the 2023 Florida Statutes, Title XXXIII, Regulation of Trade, Commerce, Investments and Solicitations,

Chapter 496, Solicitation of Funds? I have provided a few key excerpts from the statute that you should become familiar with.

**496.406 Exemption from registration:** (1) The following charitable organizations and sponsors are exempt from the requirements of s. 496.405: (c) Any division, department, post, or chapter of a veterans' service organization granted a federal charter under Title

36, United States Code.

**496.4072 Financial statements for specific disaster relief solicitations:** (1) A charitable organization or sponsor that solicits contributions in this state for a charitable purpose related to a specific disaster or crisis and receives at least \$50,000 in contributions in response to such solicitation shall file quarterly disaster relief financial statements

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with the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services on a form prescribed by the department. The quarterly statements must detail the contributions secured as a result of the solicitation and the manner in which such contributions were expended.

**496.411 Disclosure requirements and duties of charitable organizations and sponsors:**

(2) A charitable organization or sponsor soliciting in this state must include all of the following disclosures at the point of solicitation: (a) The name of the charitable organization or sponsor and the state of the principal place of business of the charitable organization or sponsor. (b) A description of the purpose or purposes for which the solicitation is being made. (c) Upon request, the name and either the address or telephone number of a representative to whom inquiries may be addressed. (d) Upon request, the amount of the contribution which may be deducted as a charitable contribution under federal income tax laws. (e) Upon request, the source from which a written financial statement may be obtained. Such financial statement must be for the immediately preceding fiscal year and must be consistent with the annual financial statement filed under s. 496.407.

The written financial statement must be provided within 14 days after the

request and must state the purpose for which funds are raised, the total amount of all contributions raised, the total costs and expenses incurred in raising contributions, the total amount of contributions dedicated to the stated purpose or disbursed for the stated purpose, and whether the services of another person or organization have been contracted to conduct solicitation activities.

**496.413 Contributions solicited for or accepted on behalf of a named individual:**

(1) Contributions solicited for, or accepted by or on behalf of, a named individual must be deposited in a trust account opened by a trustee named in a properly established trust document or must be deposited in a depository established in accordance with Florida Statute 69.031. The circuit court has jurisdiction over the contributed funds placed in such depository accounts. (2) Disbursements of contributions may be properly made from a trust account only upon written verification from the trustee that the disbursement is in furtherance of the purpose for which the funds were solicited, with documentation reflecting the identity of the proposed payee and the justification for the proposed payment. Disbursements of contributed funds from a depository account may be made only as allowed by the court. When a trust account is to be closed and a balance remains in that account in excess of the amount needed for the benefit of the named individual, such excess funds may be transferred to

another trust account for the benefit of another named individual who is in the same or similar circumstances. (3) Any person or organization that violates the provisions of subsection (1) or subsection (2) is guilty of a felony of the third degree, punishable as provided in s. 775.082, s. 775.083, or s. 775.084.

**496.418 Recordkeeping and accounting:**

(1) Each charitable organization, sponsor, professional fundraising consultant, and professional solicitor that collects or takes control or possession of contributions made for a charitable purpose must keep records to permit accurate reporting and auditing as required by law, must not commingle contributions with noncharitable funds as specified in s. 496.415(19), and must be able to account for the funds. When expenditures are not properly documented and disclosed by records, there exists a rebuttable presumption that the charitable organization, sponsor, professional fundraising consultant, or professional solicitor did not properly expend such funds. Noncharitable funds include any funds that are not used or intended to be used for the operation of the charity or for charitable purposes. (2) Each charitable organization, sponsor, professional fundraising consultant, and professional solicitor must keep true and accurate records for a period of at least 3

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years as to its activities in this state which are covered by ss. 496.401-496.424. The records must be made available, without subpoena, to the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services for inspection and must be furnished no later

than 10 working days after being requested.

Every officer in your Post Family (Legion, Sons, Auxiliary, Riders) who conducts fundraising events must be familiar with Florida Statute 496. All Post Family officers are responsible

for ensuring every fundraising event complies with the requirements in this statute.

<https://www.flsenate.gov/Laws/Statutes/2023/Chapter496/All>

## Serving with Honor and Preparing for Convention Success

**Troy Horsley, Sergeant-at-Arms**

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



As I conclude my term in office as Department Sgt-at-Arms, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude for the trust, support, and friendship

you have shown me during my time serving the Department. It has been both an honor and a privilege to work alongside such dedicated individuals who remain committed to the values and mission of our organization.

Together, we have faced challenges, celebrated accomplishments, and continued the important work that strengthens our programs and supports our members and community. I am especially thankful to the officers, committee members, volunteers, and families whose hard work and dedication made our successes possible.

No accomplishment is achieved alone, and I deeply appreciate every person who contributed their time, effort, and encouragement throughout my tenure.

As I step away from this office, I do so with confidence in the future

leadership of this organization. I know the commitment and passion of our members will continue to guide it toward even greater success in the years ahead. While my term may be ending, my support and dedication to this organization will remain strong. I look forward to continuing to serve wherever I may be needed.

Thank you once again for allowing me the opportunity to serve.

### Volunteers Needed for Department Convention

The success of any Department Convention depends on the dedication, teamwork, and spirit of volunteers willing to step forward and serve. In preparation for this year's Department Convention, I am asking for a few members to join me in helping make this event productive, welcoming, and memorable for all attendees.

Whether you can volunteer for a few hours or throughout the entire convention, your support will make a meaningful difference. Serving as a volunteer is also a great opportunity to meet fellow members from across the Department, strengthen friendships, and contribute directly to

the success of our organization. It is through service and participation that we continue to uphold the values and traditions we proudly represent. Areas where volunteers may be needed include:

- Assisting with the Internal Affairs Meeting (1:00-2:30 Thursday, June 11)
- Department Executive Committee Meeting (3:00-4:30 Thursday, June 11)
- General Session (8:00-12:45 Friday, June 12)
- General Session (8:00-2:00 Saturday, June 13)

No special experience is required, just a willingness to help and a positive attitude. Training or instructions will be provided as needed. Your time and effort will help ensure a successful event for everyone attending.

If you are interested in volunteering or would like additional information, please contact me, Troy Horsley, at [sgtatarms@legionmail.org](mailto:sgtatarms@legionmail.org). Together, we can make this Department Convention one of the best yet.



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## One Team, One Dream: Central Area Strong

**Rick Orzechowski, Central Area Cmdr**  
[central@legionmail.org](mailto:central@legionmail.org)



Our Department Commander, Jessica Moore, had a motto, "One Team One Dream," and the Central Area epitomized that by doing more this year than ever before! I would like to thank Calvin Thompson, 7th District Commander; Andrew Davis, 15th District Commander; and Mike Harley, 16th District Commander, for their hard work and

dedication as District Commanders. I would also like to thank all the Post Commanders and members in the Central Area for supporting the Legion and myself throughout this year. Without their hard work, dedication, and support, we would not have been able to accomplish our goals.

I realize we did not have any storms this year, but the past year was still very trying for some of the Posts as they sustained major damage from

the hurricanes. They pulled together as a team and are now thriving. I am proud to say all of the damaged Posts are open and doing well.

Despite all the damage, the Posts still concentrated on membership, with several Posts in each district raising their membership levels to all-time highs and participating in programs such as Boys State, Children and Youth fundraisers, Oratorical competitions, etc.

## The Mission Continues: Building on a Year of Success

**Doug Hockenberry, Northern Area Cmdr**  
[northern@legionmail.org](mailto:northern@legionmail.org)



Let me start by saying thank you. Thank you for an outstanding year, and please accept my sincere gratitude for your support throughout the past year. Together, we raised the bar in the Northern Area through your hard work, commitment, and belief in our mission and the four pillars of The American Legion.

To the 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 17th District Commanders of the Northern Area, it has been a true pleasure and honor to serve alongside you. Your dedication to our mission has been

a driving force behind our success this past year. We shared both good times and challenges, and we faced them together.

For those attending the Department Convention in two weeks, I look forward to seeing you as we gather to conduct business, attend training, and elect officers for the 2026-2027 year.

Lastly, I want to thank our Department Commander, Jessica Moore, for a fantastic year. Your sincerity, strength, and caring leadership have united the Department of Florida and truly bring credence to your motto, "One Team One Dream."

With the new year upon us, I challenge everyone in the Department to carry that momentum, drive, and spirit forward as we carry out our programs while supporting our fellow veterans, their families, and our communities. Together, we are that positive force that can make a difference.

In closing, thank you again for your support over the past year. I look forward to the future and to making the Department of Florida American Legion even stronger.

As always, I am available to help; simply call me at 727-514-3742. "Hang Tough."

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## Southern Area Strong: A Heartfelt Thank You

**Geo Bograkos, Southern Area Cmdr**

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



As the 2025-2026 Legion administrative year draws to a close, I write this final article filled with a deep sense of pride, gratitude, and reflection. It has truly

been one of the greatest experiences of my 42 years in The American Legion to serve as the Southern Area Commander for the Department of Florida. Thank you!

Being elected to this office and entrusted with this responsibility was a great honor. I have learned a lot during my term, and I am looking forward to using that knowledge during my second term, if elected, as your Southern Area Commander for 2026-2027!

I hope I have again earned your support at the Southern Area Caucus on Friday, June 12.

Big kudos to all 52 Southern Area Posts in the 9th, 11th, and 14th Districts, who gave it their very best during the past year. Inevitably, while

some did better than others, every Post contributed to any successes we've enjoyed this year. Well done!

Now is the time to take a breath, recharge, and get ready to hit the ground running in 2026-2027 for our Veterans and communities!

I would be remiss if I did not express my thanks to Department Commander Jessica Moore, who displayed exemplary leadership this year.

#OneTeamOneDream

Please apply everything you've learned this past year and build upon it for the upcoming year.

Please plan to join us for the Department of Florida's 107th Convention, June 11-14, 2026, at the Hilton Orlando in Lake Buena Vista ... our last year at this venue.

Attending Convention is a great opportunity to connect, learn, and prepare for the 2026-2027 year ahead. Be sure to check the agenda online to plan your time at Convention. <https://www.floridalegion.org/news-events/>

[department-convention/welcome/](#)

Take full advantage of the available training sessions and classes, not only for newly elected officers but anyone else who wants or needs a refresher. Remember that the training changes from year to year, so just because you took a certain class last year, the content of that training may be different. Program content is constantly changing as we work to improve and update information to share with you.

Finally, 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>

Or just use this QR code to take you right to the page:



Thank you again for a really great year!

## Third District Finishes Strong with National Recognition

**Enrique Cabrera, District 3 Cmdr**

[district3@legionmail.org](mailto:district3@legionmail.org)



I would like to congratulate the American Legion 3rd District Team and all Posts for a fantastic year. Through your dedication, hard work, and unwavering commitment, the 3rd District, throughout the year, has

led the Department in membership and achieved an outstanding accomplishment by finishing second in the nation in the "Race to the Top."

This achievement reflects the strength, teamwork, and determination of every Post, officer, Legionnaire, Auxiliary member, Sons of The American Legion member, and Legion Rider who worked tirelessly to support our

veterans, our communities, and our programs.

Thank you all for your continued service, leadership, and commitment to the values of The American Legion. Together, you have made the 3rd District a source of pride across the Department and the nation. Congratulations on an incredible year and a job well done.



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## Honored to Serve the 7th District

**Kalvin Thompson, District 7 Cmdr**

[district7@legionmail.org](mailto:district7@legionmail.org)



Serving as the 7th District Commander for the past two years has been one of the greatest honors of my Legion journey. I want to sincerely thank the

officers, Posts, and every member of the 7th District for the trust, support, friendship, and dedication you have shown throughout this time. Working alongside so many committed Legionnaires who continue to serve veterans, our communities, and one another has been both inspiring and rewarding.

During these two years, I have had the privilege of witnessing the strength and growth of our District through increased community involvement, membership efforts, mentorship, and the fellowship that makes the American Legion Family so special. Each Post has contributed in its own way to making the 7th District stronger, and I am proud of what we have accomplished together.

The respect and cooperation shared among our leadership and members are what continue to move this District forward.

As a new team of 7th District officers begins its term, I want to wish them great success and offer them my full support. Leadership may change, but our shared mission remains the same.

Please know that I will always remain available to assist the District, our Posts, and our members whenever needed.

Thank you again for allowing me the honor of serving as your 7th District Commander, and I look forward to seeing you all at Department Convention.

## Giving the Gift of Life Across Florida

**Jamie Grinis, Blood Donor 25-26**

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

This year, our Legion Families have held many blood drives, helping the Legion Family and their local communities throughout our great state of Florida. As you read this article right now, someone from our family organization is donating a pint or two of blood to replenish the diminished supply we are currently facing today.

Post members all over the state have been quite creative in drawing in the public to donate blood. There are Posts that have blood drives every month, some that have a regular schedule every other month, and a few that have only one annual blood drive.

It truly is amazing to see how

creative our Posts have been in their Blood Drive Programs, many of which unknowingly created new membership revival. You never know how many members your Post will find during a blood drive.

Hurricane season is knocking at our doors. Now is the time to stock up for those who will need this Elixir of Life after a catastrophic event. Your disaster relief efforts for food and supplies should also include a blood drive. We never know when your Post will be called upon to assist after a catastrophic weather or wildfire event.

Florida has become one of the fastest-growing states in the nation, with many snowbirds relocating permanently to Florida. What a great way to meet your new neighbors

during your event.

Remember to always go to the Department's website to report the results of your activities. It's really easy to submit your information. Even I can do it. Once you are on the site, go to Programs. Look for Blood Donor, click on that tab, and a pop-up Report Form will be on the left-hand column. Click on that tab and just fill in the blanks. Make sure you hit send when finished.

We then go through all the reports to determine the winners for the program awards. When filling out your reports, make sure you submit your activities. This is how the Blood Donor Committee determines the winners for the Margaret Skaggs Memorial Award.

*continued on page 11 >>*





<< *Blood Donor continued from page 10*

It has been quite a humbling task serving as Blood Donor Chair for the past 3 years. I have been all over the state for different creative events during my term and met the greatest, kindest, and most loving people along the way. As I look back, I was so honored to be

the #1 Blood Chairman of all the Departments worldwide representing Florida. It was not me that won the award; it was all of you who won that award.

There comes a time in life when one must pass the torch along to a younger person who is just as

enthusiastic as I am about one of the oldest programs of The American Legion.

Now is that time for me. Thank you all for your help, guidance, and motivation along the way. Hope to see you all at Convention. May God bless you all.

### Blood Saves Lives: Make Monthly Drives a Florida Legion Tradition

Corelene Ziegler, Blood Donor 26-27

#### EVERY POST. EVERY MONTH.

Let's make monthly blood drives the norm, one Post at a time.

#### Why it matters (fast facts):

- 95% of people will need a transfusion in their lifetime.
- Only ~3% of eligible donors give blood.
- About 1 in 4 units goes to cancer patients.

Small drives add up: 5 units/month = 60 units/year. Each unit can help up to 3 patients, so that's 180 lives impacted! Pretty big deal!!

**Our goal:** Consistent monthly drives

so local blood banks stay ready: no waiting, no shortages.

#### Can't donate? You can still make the drive succeed:

- Open the Post early so the team can access restrooms and set up.
- Greet donors, help with check-in flow, and keep the area welcoming.
- Offer a simple thank-you: coffee/breakfast cards, subs/wings, or snacks (keep it modest; don't over-ask local businesses). This is optional, not necessary!
- Promote the drive monthly. People build a habit when it's consistent.

#### Set it up in 4 steps:

1. Find your county contact at <https://www.oneblood.org/our-impact/locations/florida.html> Call the number listed for your county to get started.
2. Pick a repeating schedule for the year (e.g., 1st Monday or 3rd Wednesday) and book all dates at once.
3. Post the monthly flyer/ads (OneBlood provides materials).
4. On drive day: open on time, be welcoming, and make it fun!

**Need help getting your Post started?** Call/text: 850-687-1819

### Growing the CAP Cadet Program Together

Rico Thomas, Civil Air Patrol

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



Thank you for allowing me to be your CAP Cadet Chair. We have made some good strides in growing this program.

Wishing you the best as you continue to grow in this amazing veteran and community service organization. I

trust and believe you will continue to do well in your next endeavors.

Also, thanks to all the Posts that have a CAP Cadet squadron. Please continue to support your local squadrons at their awards ceremonies.



*Cadet/Lt. Col. Clarkson, CAP Crystal Lakes Middle Squadron, is Southeast Region and Florida Cadet of the Year.*



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## Legislative Update: Reflecting on the Present and Preparing for the Future

Stuart Scott, Legislative

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



### A Time to Reflect and a Time to Consider What's Next

As we publish our final article under the current Department leadership, it is fitting that we find ourselves reflecting not only on the legislative process, but also on how we operate as an organization moving forward.

Recently, the Legislature concluded a Special Session, lasting just two days, to adopt a new Congressional Map. It is what it is, but one thing is certain: your congressional representation may have changed as a result. With legal challenges already looming over the map, its long-term stability remains to be seen.

But this raises a broader question, one that hits closer to home.

### Should We Consider Redistricting Our Department?

For those newer to The American Legion, Department of Florida, within the last 15 years or so, you may have already asked yourself: *Why are our Districts drawn the way they are?* It's a fair question.

Take, for example, District 17, which is geographically wedged into the Northern Area, positioned just south of District 5 and north of District 12. It's not the only instance where

the layout raises eyebrows. We even have a District that spans two separate time zones, which presents its own set of logistical challenges.

Over the past six years, Florida has seen an influx of more than 2 million new residents. Population shifts, community growth, and changing demographics all naturally lead to one question:

### Should we consider making adjustments as well?

What would a newly designed district map look like today? What would be the cost, both financially and operationally, of such a change? Should we maintain our current Area structure, or is it time to reevaluate? And for those who remember, what ever happened to District 10?

These are not criticisms. They are considerations.

### A Conversation Worth Having

While I certainly have my own opinions, this is not about pushing a specific outcome. Instead, it is about starting the conversation.

Do we continue operating the way we always have? Or is it time to evaluate whether change could better position us for the future?

Organizations, like the communities they serve, must evolve or risk becoming disconnected from the very

people they represent.

### Budget Update and What's Ahead

On May 12, 2026, the Legislature began another Special Session to address the unfinished business of the state budget. As we have discussed in previous updates, the inability to finalize the budget during the regular session has extended the process into additional legislative work.

Due to upcoming deadlines and ongoing negotiations, please be on the lookout for a special announcement regarding our budget requests, including items important to our programs and mission.

### Closing Thoughts

As this marks our final legislative update under the current Department leadership, I want to take a moment to thank each of you who stayed engaged, made calls, attended meetings, and supported our efforts throughout the year.

Advocacy does not end with a session. It continues through conversations, reflection, and the willingness to ask important questions.

And perhaps the most important question right now is:

### Are we positioned today for where we need to be tomorrow?



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## A Fantastic Year for Oratorical: Thank You

**Doug Hockenberry, Oratorical**

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



I would like to begin by expressing my sincere appreciation for your support of this year's Oratorical Program. We have seen a notable increase in the number of Posts promoting the program, along with a significant rise in online inquiries from both students and parents. This growth reflects your dedication to engaging with schools, guidance counselors, teachers, and students. It is also encouraging to see many Posts using social media to spread awareness, an excellent use of a valuable tool.

As noted in previous updates, we received a record number of electronic inquiries this year, including several more in recent weeks. Many of these students will

be sophomores, juniors, or seniors next year and will be eligible to compete. To support continued engagement, I will provide incoming District Commanders with a detailed list of these students and their contact information at the Leadership Retreat. This will allow you to connect with them over the summer and ahead of the new school year, giving both mentors and students additional time to prepare, develop topics, and rehearse, setting the stage for success.

As we conclude the 2025-2026 American Legion year at the upcoming Department Convention, we will proudly recognize Brianna Pe Aguirre as the Department of Florida Oratorical winner. Brianna, of Tampa, attends Academy of the Holy Names High School and was sponsored by Post 5, representing the Central Area. I encourage

you to join us in celebrating her accomplishments and wishing her continued success.

As this will be my final article of the year, I would like to extend my gratitude to all the Post, District, and Area Oratorical Chairs for their continued support and promotion of The American Legion High School Oratorical Scholarship Program. This program remains one of our premier initiatives supporting Children & Youth, one of our Four Pillars. Thank you for your commitment to mentoring and inspiring the next generation.

In closing, I want you to know that I remain available to answer your questions and provide support. Simply call me at 727-514-3742. Thank you, and have a wonderful summer. "Hang Tough."

## From Monopoly to Freedom: The Hidden POW Escape Network of World War II

**Denny Luke, POW/MIA**

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



I am proud to have been able to represent The American Legion, Department of Florida, at Senator Ashley Moody's press conference on 9 April 2026 at the Cecil Field POW/MIA Memorial. She announced she is teaming up with Congressman Aaron Bean for the passage of the National POW/MIA Memorial Act, which

will officially designate the Cecil Field Memorial as a National Landmark. See her press conference here: <https://www.moody.senate.gov/press-releases/video-release-senator-moody-leads-effort-to-designate-a-florida-museum-the-only-national-pow-mia-museum-and-memorial-in-the-country/>

When I accepted the position as the POW/MIA Chair for Florida, I wondered how I would be able to find enough material to write the 11 monthly news articles for our Legion

Link. I have got to tell you there is so much interesting information out there that we have no knowledge of. For instance, do you know the connection between the board game Monopoly and POWs? Monopoly boards are believed to have helped over 11,000 American and British POWs escape.

The idea came from a former British magician, Christopher Clayton-Hutton. During WW II, he stopped performing and went to work for a

*continued on page 14 >>*





<< POW/MIA continued from page 13

new, top-secret British organization known as MI-9, which stands for Military Intelligence 9. His job was to figure out two things. First was how to help downed airmen evade capture, and the second was to develop escape aids for POWs to use. The most obvious was a map of the area they were operating in. Secondly, there were tools for the POWs to use in their efforts to escape the Stalags. But how to sneak them in under the watchful eye of the Germans?

Needing maps that were durable and quiet, he decided to have them printed on silk. At the time, there happened to be only one company in the UK with the needed skill of printing on silk material. John Waddington Ltd. was also the same company that made and sold the Monopoly game. Knowing the Waddingtons were a highly reliable company that kept secrets well, he approached them with an idea. He wanted to experiment with hiding escape aids inside the game board. At that time, the boards were much thicker than today's version.

They were able to design little compartments in the board that housed maps, files, money, a tiny compass, etc. They would place a colored dot on various squares indicating what material was under the board game's covering. The next challenge was how to get the games to the POWs. As luck would have it, that was easy. Under the Geneva

Convention, Germany allowed charities to send games for the POWs to play. Germany assumed if the POWs were being self-entertained by playing board games, they would not be trying to escape or create disturbances they would need to deal with.

These "special" board games were distributed to fake charities to send to the German prison camps. Looking and feeling no different than the legitimate game boards, the German guards allowed them to be distributed to the prisoners. However, each camp had someone who had been briefed on the significance of a board game containing dots on specific squares. The German soldiers were never suspicious of the Monopoly games, and they never discovered the hidden escape kits.

### 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 & Museum: [powmiamemorial.org](https://powmiamemorial.org)

### DPAA Update (FY 2026 as of 14 May 2026)

- World War II: 96 accounted for
- Korean War: 24 accounted for
- Cold War: 0
- Vietnam War: 0

During April, the DPAA accounted for numerous service members from

World War II and the Korean War. These brave Americans are now being returned to their families with the honor and dignity they deserve.

### April 3, 2026

- James Gadsey – World War II

### April 7, 2026

- Edwin E. Ross – World War II

### April 10, 2026

- Donald L. Durand – World War II

### April 14, 2026

- Celestino Chavez, Jr. – Korean War

### April 15, 2026

- Harry R. Dobbins – Korean War
- Richard E. Roe, Jr. – Korean War

### April 17, 2026

- Austin K. Neely – World War II
- Joshua Corruth – Korean War, buried in Lake Worth, FL, on 23 April 2026

### April 21, 2026

- Richard A. Veal – World War II
- Delmor W. Erwin – World War II
- Ingwell V. Bartleson – World War II
- Lloyd W. Irvine – World War II
- William P. Keele – World War II
- Harlan W. Melinsky – World War II
- Albert H. Marks – World War II
- Duane W. Payne – World War II

### April 29, 2026

- Roy L. Reed – World War II
- Wayne E. Newton – World War II





# FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT

JUNE 2026 EDITION

CURRENT YEAR FIGURES : SINCE JULY 2025

 **169** VETS RECEIVED FUNDS

 **\$285,476** PROVIDED AS EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE

 **14** SPI PARTNERS

 **\$153,500** GIVEN TOWARDS SUICIDE PREVENTION

## ANOTHER YEAR, MORE PROGRESS

As we close out another remarkable month, we're also celebrating the completion of our 12th year as a program, and **what a year it has been**. Over the years, PROJECT: VetRelief has reached significant milestones, including record-breaking numbers of veterans served through our Emergency Assistance Program and the development of one of the strongest networks for Suicide Prevention through our Strategic Partners.

This year alone brought exciting growth and innovation. We **expanded our team** by adding Doug, our Engagement Coordinator, who is already helping strengthen our outreach and support efforts. We also welcomed Caitlin to the team as our Case Manager, allowing us to **better serve veterans** in need with greater efficiency and compassion.

In addition, we **launched our newly enhanced website**, **introduced improvements** to the application process, and **created new resources** to better connect with and support our veteran community.

PROJECT: VetRelief exists because of the generosity and dedication of the Florida Legion Family and our

supporters. **Your continued commitment makes it possible for us to respond when veterans need us most.**

As you plan your fundraising events during the next Legion year, please continue to keep PROJECT: VetRelief in mind, and don't forget to let us know what you have planned. We're always excited to support and promote your efforts whenever we can.

**Together, we are making a meaningful difference in the lives of Florida's veterans.**

## DON'T MISS THIS BIG PLAY!

**MAJOR NEWS** is about to **hit the field** at Convention! Trust us, you won't want to be left on the **sidelines**.

A special opportunity is being announced, and it just might be the **game-changer** everyone's been waiting for. **Stay in the huddle**, keep your eyes open, and get ready for a **major play** from PVR.

This is one announcement you won't want to **fumble!**



## TRAINING OPPORTUNITY - FRI, JUNE 12 @ 3:15PM

We're excited to see everyone at the Department Convention, taking place June 11-14 at the Hilton Orlando Lake Buena Vista!

Join us for our informational training session on **Friday, June 12 at 3:15 PM** in Hibiscus/Iris (*class details are subject to change*). During this session, we'll provide an overview of the PROJECT: VetRelief program, including how we support Florida veterans through financial assistance and suicide prevention efforts. We'll also introduce the new PVR website and share how it will be a valuable resource for veterans. Plus, the new application process helps streamline and determine

eligibility. Class registration is not required, as **all are welcome!**

While we won't have a table in the vendor area this year, our team will be around throughout the weekend. Be sure to stop by Headquarters to say hello and pick up copies of the latest revision of the PVR brochure, available at the Programs table.

Convention is a great opportunity to ask questions, share feedback, and tell us about the fundraising events you're planning for the upcoming year. We look forward to connecting with you. **See you there!**



## Resolution Submission Deadline Approaching for Department Convention

### Clarence Hill, Resolutions

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



The Internal Affairs Committee will meet on Thursday afternoon, June 11th at 1:00 PM in International North/Central. During the Resolutions report portion of the meeting, only the **RESOLVED clauses** of each resolution will be read prior to a motion being made to accept or reject the resolution, followed by a discussion and a vote on the motion being taken. It is important that the entire resolution be reviewed prior to the meeting. Each

Post can have one delegate at this meeting to vote on all matters to be decided. All **voting members must have the black ribbon** received by the delegation chairman with the convention registration package. We ask that voting members please sit in the center section. **Attendees without the black ribbon have no voice and no vote.** We ask that non-voting members please do not sit in the center section and please do not speak. The results of any vote taken at this meeting becomes a recommendation to the General Assembly when the Resolutions portion of the

Internal Affairs Committee report is presented. At the General Assembly, only the **RESOLVED clauses** of each resolution will be read, the recommendation of the Resolutions Committee will be announced and I will make a motion citing that recommendation. **Every delegate to the Convention** has a vote on the convention floor for the final disposition of these resolutions. Everything The American Legion does is based on a resolution. If there is no resolution on a topic, The American Legion has no position on it.

## Forging Future Leaders Through Service and Patriotism

### Jeffrey Hawk, Sea Cadets

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

The partnership between the United States Naval Sea Cadet Corps and The American Legion in the State of Florida represents one of the strongest examples of veterans continuing their legacy of service through mentorship, leadership, and youth development. Across Florida, Sea Cadet units and American Legion Posts have worked side by side to instill patriotism, discipline, community service, and leadership in young Americans who seek to serve something greater than themselves.

The United States Naval Sea Cadet Corps (USNSCC) is the nation's premier youth leadership program focused on maritime service, military customs, citizenship, and personal

development for young men and women ages 10 through 18. In Florida, Sea Cadet units operate in communities throughout the state, providing opportunities for cadets to participate in advanced training, color guards, community events, disaster relief support, ceremonial functions, STEM education, and leadership development exercises. These cadets are taught the values of honor, courage, commitment, and respect while learning firsthand the importance of teamwork and service to country.

The American Legion has long stood as a pillar of support for veterans, youth programs, and patriotic education throughout the United States. In Florida, the relationship between The American Legion and the Sea Cadets has continued to

grow stronger year after year. Many American Legion Posts across the state actively sponsor or support Sea Cadet units by providing meeting facilities, financial assistance, mentoring opportunities, scholarships, transportation support, and participation in civic events. Legionnaires regularly attend Sea Cadet ceremonies, inspections, graduations, and awards presentations, reinforcing the bond between generations of servicemembers.

This partnership is rooted in shared values. Both organizations believe deeply in developing responsible citizens, preserving military traditions, and ensuring the future of American leadership. Veterans within The American Legion serve as mentors and role models to cadets,

*continued on page 17 >>*



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<< Sea Cadets continued from page 16

passing down lessons learned through military service, sacrifice, and dedication to country. In return, Sea Cadets honor the legacy of those veterans through their professionalism, volunteerism, and commitment to excellence.

Throughout Florida, Sea Cadets have proudly participated in American Legion events, including Veterans Day ceremonies, Memorial Day observances, patriotic parades, flag retirement ceremonies, military funerals, and community outreach programs. These events provide cadets with invaluable opportunities to engage with veterans and better understand the sacrifices made by previous generations. The presence of Sea Cadets at these functions also demonstrates to communities that the next generation of leaders is prepared to continue the tradition of service.

The support provided by The American Legion has had a direct and lasting impact on the success of Sea Cadet programs in Florida. Contributions from Posts and Departments have helped fund uniforms, scholarships, transportation to training, leadership academies, and specialized educational opportunities. More importantly, the encouragement and belief shown by Legionnaires have inspired countless cadets to pursue military service, public service careers, and leadership roles within their communities.

Over the past year, I have had the distinct honor of serving as the Sea Cadets Chairman, and I would like to personally express my sincere gratitude to everyone who supported both myself and the program during that time. The dedication shown by The American Legion Department of

Florida, local Posts, Legionnaires, volunteers, instructors, parents, and supporters has been nothing short of extraordinary. Your belief in our cadets and your commitment to investing in the next generation have helped strengthen our mission and expand opportunities for young people across the state.

Thank you for your continued encouragement, mentorship, and unwavering support over the last year. It has truly been an honor to serve alongside individuals who care so deeply about our youth, our veterans, and our nation's future.

Together, we are ensuring that the values of honor, service, patriotism, and leadership continue to thrive in the State of Florida for generations to come.



**U.S. NAVAL  
SEA CADET CORPS**  
CHART YOUR COURSE

### Real photos matter.

Seven Beebe, Social Media

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



Real moments matter.

Authentic storytelling matters.

Some of the most meaningful images are not perfectly edited, filled with graphics, or designed to be flashy. Often, the most powerful moments are the genuine ones captured naturally through a camera lens.

A veteran shaking hands with another veteran.

Riders coming together for a mission. Volunteers serving their communities. Members of our American Legion Family sharing camaraderie, laughter, encouragement, and support.

These are the moments that truly tell the story of continued service, dedication, and the incredible spirit of our veteran community.

American Legion content creators

play an important role in preserving history in real time.

Every photograph and every story shared helps capture the heart of our mission and the lasting impact our veterans and American Legion Family continue to make every single day.

Most importantly, representing veterans online is an opportunity to honor service with professionalism, authenticity, positivity, and heart.

*continued on page 18 >>*



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<< Social Media continued from page 17

It allows us to showcase the compassion, unity, patriotism and dedication that exist throughout our American Legion Family and veteran communities.

Every post matters.  
Every photo matters.  
Every story matters.

Because when we represent veterans online, we are helping preserve

a legacy of sacrifice, courage, commitment, and continued service to our nation.

And that is something truly worth sharing.

### Why Young Women Veterans Need Organizations Like The American Legion

**Stephanie Bryant, Women Veterans, District 7 Chair**

When I first walked into my American Legion Post, I felt completely out of place. Like many younger women veterans, I assumed organizations like The American Legion were built mostly for older men swapping war stories and reliving the past. I wasn't sure there would be room for someone like me.

Many young women veterans are searching for exactly what veteran organizations can offer: connection, purpose, and community.

Leaving the military can feel isolating. In service, there's structure, camaraderie, and a shared understanding that doesn't require explanation. Once that chapter ends, civilian life can feel disconnected. For women veterans especially, that transition can be even harder because we are often overlooked in conversations about veterans altogether.

That's why organizations like The American Legion matter.

Beyond the stereotypes, these

spaces are filled with people who understand service, sacrifice, deployments, and the challenge of rebuilding your identity after the military. Even across generations, there's a bond that exists because of shared experience.

For younger women veterans, these organizations can provide mentorship, leadership opportunities, volunteer work, networking, and something many veterans quietly miss after leaving service: belonging. At the same time, veteran organizations need younger veterans too.

Today's veterans bring new perspectives on mental health, women's healthcare, career development, suicide prevention, and family support. Young women veterans are helping reshape what veteran spaces can look like: more inclusive, community-focused, and reflective of today's military.

Across the country, more women veterans are stepping into leadership roles, organizing outreach programs, mentoring fellow veterans, and using social media to connect with younger generations. They are not replacing tradition; they are building on it and

paving the organization's path to the future.

One of the biggest misconceptions young women veterans have is believing they need to fit a certain image to belong in these spaces. The truth is, there is no single image of a veteran anymore. Veterans today are mothers, professionals, students, entrepreneurs, and community leaders. We belong in these organizations because we earned that place through our service.

The American Legion is not perfect, and like many long-standing institutions, it continues to evolve. But it also has the potential to become stronger, more diverse, and more relevant for future generations.

For many young women veterans, organizations like The American Legion are about more than meetings or traditions. They are places where veterans can rediscover purpose, leadership, and community long after the uniform comes off.

And for many of us, that sense of mission never truly goes away.

*continued on page 19 >>*



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<< Women Veterans District 7 continued from page 18



District 7 hosted its quarterly Women Veterans Meet-Up today at Herman Jenkins American Legion Post 4 in Lakeland, FL. On top of our District 7 members, we were joined by women veterans from AMVETS Post 44 and American Legion Post 26 in District 15.

Special thanks to our guest speaker and retired U.S. Army JAG Officer Amanda Salcido-Newby, Edward Jones, and American Legion Post 4 Auxiliary for providing breakfast! Photo by Bobbie Renaud, American Legion Post 4 Auxiliary President

## Post 331 Honors Service, Sacrifice, and Community

**George McZeal, Post 331**

[gmczeal@aol.com](mailto:gmczeal@aol.com)

Doris "Dorie" Miller Memorial Post 331 had a meaningful month of recognition, remembrance, and service in Orange County.



Ron Beasley

Orange County Mayor Jerry Demings presented the 2026 Mayor's 2nd Place Veteran of the Year Award to Ron Beasley of Doris "Dorie" Miller

Memorial Post 331. Beasley, a retired Navy Captain and Americanism/Oratory Executive Committee Officer for Post 331, was recognized for his continued service and dedication.

Beasley was also recently featured by the Orlando VA Healthcare System for his occupational therapy journey at the Lake Baldwin VA Clinic. After suffering a life-altering stroke, he worked to relearn basic skills and continues to focus on improving his upper extremity function and independence.

"Don't give up on yourself," Beasley said. "Be patient with the process

and celebrate the small successes." The Commander and members of Post 331 extend their congratulations, thanks, and gratitude to Comrade Ronald Beasley for his efforts and service to the Post. We pray for his continued success as he improves his function and independence.



Robert Shealey

Post 331 also joined the community in honoring the life of Robert A. Shealey Jr., a 25-year-old veteran whose life was tragically cut short on April 17,

2026. The Post 331 Honor Guard and comrades paid tribute to his life and service.



On May 25, 2026, Post 331 participated in the Orange County War Memorial Commemoration

Ceremony, presented by Orange County Mayor Jerry L. Demings

and the Orange County Mayor's Veterans Advisory Council. Members were present for the wreath laying at the War Memorial, where Taps was played and salutes were rendered. Later that morning, members of Doris "Dorie" Miller Memorial Post 331 attended the Memorial Day Ceremony at Woodlawn Cemetery. The Honor Guard rendered a Twenty-One Rifle Volley Salute in honor of Memorial Day.

Item submitted by Post 331 Chaplain George McZeal Jr., who also serves as Post 331 Suicide Prevention Officer.



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## Supporting Veterans and Families: The Impact of the Veterans and Children Foundation

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



Resolution No. 14:  
Strengthening Temporary  
Financial Assistance for  
Veterans' Children  
Resolved on May 7-8,  
2025, that Temporary

Financial Assistance is hereby  
updated as follows:

1. A single, one-time, non-repayable Temporary Financial Assistance grant of up to \$2,500 may be permitted for the minor children of a qualifying veteran.
2. A qualifying veteran is defined as a member of the United States Armed Forces currently serving on federal orders under Title 10 of the United States Code, inclusive of all components, or any veteran possessing an up-to-date membership in The American Legion.
3. An inquiry into and verification of the need and cause of need should be conducted

by a personal visitation to the home or other whereabouts of such children by a competent investigator.

4. Formal documentation and/or a signed written testament of an investigator's statement of findings is required as part of the TFA investigation process, along with verification that all other forms of financial assistance available have been sought and applied for, or have already been denied.
5. Maintenance:
6. Essential needs: Groceries, household cleaning supplies, personal hygiene supplies.
7. Shelter: Includes mortgage and rent only; property taxes are excluded.
8. Utilities: Includes electric, gas, propane, water, trash, and sewer.
9. Clothing included.
10. Insurance: Includes medical and dental premiums up to a

maximum consideration of \$500 per month.

11. Educational Expenses: Includes learning fees, basic school supplies, and a basic internet fee up to a maximum consideration of \$50 per month (does not include fees for cable TV or phone connectivity).

Child: The word "child" shall be defined as a youth who is unmarried and under 18 years of age.

A biological child of the veteran or servicemember, a child legally adopted by the veteran or servicemember, a stepchild by marriage of the veteran or servicemember, or a child who is under the legal guardianship of the veteran or servicemember.

In 2024, the Department of Florida received \$2,991.56 from TFA. So far in 2026, the Department of Florida has received \$2,028.00.

## C.A.R.E. in Action: Finishing Strong Together

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



Greetings from your  
Detachment of Florida  
Commander!

Thank you to Detachment  
Adjutant Christen Rapp  
for the fantastic job you and your  
American Legion Post 323 Family did  
for the Commander's Homecoming.  
A thank you does not emit the true

appreciation for all your hard work and dedication in making this event a true success. Thank you, everyone, for coming and showing your generosity for our charity, C.O.T.A. Christen sent out numerous letters to many squadrons and members, and the response was amazing. God bless you all.

In last month's article, I asked our Area Vice Commanders to get back to me regarding our recruiting challenge.

"0" responses were given. This is not acceptable. We obviously need more training and dedication in how to do our jobs effectively and improve our communication skills. Our mission, C.A.R.E., Communication, Action, Renewals, and Education, was put in place for a reason. We have to engage with our organization and our members. If you are an officer, this is especially what you should be doing. Motivate the rest of your team

*continued on page 21 >>*



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<< Detachment Commander continued from page 20  
to be the best they can be. Lead by example. Mentor your replacement to be the best version of himself. What you and our squadrons do every day MATTERS.

As we get close to the end of the 2025-2026 service year, I would like to congratulate all the returning officers and the incoming officers. Thank you to the outgoing officers for your support over the past year. As I have met so many dedicated

and positive members throughout my travels, I need to impress upon everyone that the amount of work being done by several members of our team is absolutely encouraging. I would not have been able to do my job without the daily input from Adjutant Rapp and Assistant Adjutant John Jennings. Take a little time and contact these two men. Thank them for their dedication and support. They are here for all of us, to help us be the best we can be for our organization. You have heard this before, and I

will reiterate: There is no "I" in team. It is us, we, and ours. Selflessness, cohesion, trust, honesty, unity, knowledge, and mindset are traits that exemplify who we are and what we do. Thank you, everyone, for supporting me throughout the year, and let's work hard to make next year even better.

Proud Possessors of a Priceless Heritage.



## Custom Commander Polos: New Schedule Designed for Faster, Clearer Fulfillment

**Carrie Kolze, Creative Services Mgr**

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



As we prepare to welcome incoming Department Commander Bob Matheson for the 2026-2027 administrative year, now is the time to place your order for the official Department Commander polo.

Before ordering, we would like to share some important updates regarding our custom apparel

ordering process.

The American Legion Department of Florida operates with a small staff at Department Headquarters. Our receptionist, Lois, also serves as our merchandise clerk, and I assist with the technical aspects of the ordering process. Custom apparel is not produced in-house. Instead, we work with trusted vendors who manufacture and personalize our items.

Because custom polo orders require minimum production quantities, fulfillment timelines can vary. In the past, this has sometimes resulted in uncertainty regarding delivery dates and created confusion for members awaiting their orders. To improve

communication and provide more predictable delivery expectations, we have established a scheduled ordering process for all custom polo orders.

Please review the ordering deadlines and estimated delivery dates below and plan accordingly to ensure you receive your polo when needed.

### Custom Polo Ordering Schedule

#### Order 1 (Already Fulfilled)

- **Order Deadline:** May 15, 2026
- **Estimated Delivery:** Mid-June 2026
- **Delivery Options:** Department Convention pickup or home delivery

*continued on page 22 >>*

<< Creative Services continued from page 21

**Order 2**

- **Order Deadline:** July 15, 2026
- **Estimated Delivery:** Late August 2026
- **Delivery Options:** Home delivery

**Order 3**

- **Order Deadline:** October 15, 2026
- **Estimated Delivery:** Late November 2026
- **Delivery Options:** Fall Conference pickup or home delivery

**Order 4 (Final Order)**

- **Order Deadline:** January 15, 2027
- **Estimated Delivery:** Early March 2027
- **Delivery Options:** Home delivery

Members who do not require customization may purchase a standard polo from our limited in-stock inventory. These orders typically ship within three business days when inventory is available.

**2026-2027 Department Commander Polo**

This year's polo celebrates incoming Department Commander Bob Matheson with a design that combines professional appearance, comfort, and performance.

The 2026-2027 Commander Polo features the American Legion Department of Florida logo embroidered on the left chest, a commemorative USA 250 detail on the sleeve, and optional two-line personalization with up to 20 characters per line.

Built on the Sport-Tek ST444 and LST444 performance platforms, the polo offers moisture-wicking and odor-resistant technology, breathable mesh panels, and environmentally conscious construction using recycled materials. The garment also carries a carbon-neutral footprint. Available sizes range from Small through 4XL.

**How to Order**

To place your order, complete the order form included on page 24 or visit: [floridalegion.org/merch](http://floridalegion.org/merch)

We encourage all incoming commanders and members wishing to commemorate the 2026-2027 year to place their orders early and follow the published deadlines to ensure timely delivery.

**Thank You to Our 2026 Convention Sponsors & Exhibitors**

A special thank you to our 2026 Department Convention General Sponsors and Exhibitors for their valued support. Be sure to stop by, meet all of our sponsors and exhibitors, and explore the many products, services, and resources they have to offer throughout the convention.



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# MEMBERSHIP TARGET REPORT

May 28, 2026 (100% Target)

District 3	Rick Cabrera	108.13%
District 2	Roxann Dressel	105.27%
District 5	Miguel Garcia	102.07%
District 1	Robert Osmon	101.74%
District 13	Laurene Allen-Flower	100.87%
District 4	Darcy Bockman-Wright	100.24%
District 12	Daniel Martin	100.19%
District 16	Michael Harley	100.19%
District 17	Jim Bowers	99.27%
District 9	Jim Tewes	99.17%
District 15	Drew Davis	98.90%
District 6	David Musser	97.33%
District 11	Stanley Brown, Jr.	96.57%
District 8	Charlie Magnus	96.18%
District 14	Thomas Frank	95.16%
District 7	Kalvin Thompson	94.76%
Western	Shelby Windham	102.23%
Northern	Doug Hockenberry	101.82%
Central	Rick Orzechowski	99.02%
Southwestern	Eric Loyd	98.78%
Eastern	Joan Suelter	98.63%
Southern	Geo Bograkos	97.00%
Post 400		87.05%

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# COMMANDER SHIRT ORDER FORM 2026-2027



Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Post: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

## DELIVERY METHOD

Pick Up at HQ Orlando  Delivery\*

*\*An additional shipping fee of \$10 is required for delivery.*

*Please allow 4-6 weeks for delivery, schedule at [floridalegion.org](http://floridalegion.org). You will be notified before shipment.*

Shipping Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

## SHIRT OPTIONS *Enter Quantity for each style/size.*

Style	Size	Qty	Size	Qty	Size	Qty	Size	Qty	Size	Qty	Size	Qty	Size	Qty	Size	Qty	Cost
Men's	XS		S		M		L		XL		2X		3X		4X		\$
Ladies	XS		S		M		L		XL		2X		3X		4X		\$

## TOTAL

Shirts are **\$40 each\*** with two lines of personalization\* included. \*Up to 20 characters per line, including spaces and special characters. See next page for options.

If tax-exempt, provide an exemption form if not already on file.

Check here if tax exempt.

Subtotal \$

Tax (6.5%) \$

Shipping \$

Grand Total \$

## PAYMENT

Please return form and payment to Department Headquarters: **Email** ([emblemsales@floridalegion.org](mailto:emblemsales@floridalegion.org)) | **Fax** (407-299-0901)

**Mail** (The American Legion, Dept of FL; Attn: Emblem Sales, PO Box 547859, Orlando, FL 32854)

Cash

Check # \_\_\_\_\_

Credit Card

Card Type:  Visa  Mastercard  Discover  American Express

Card Holder Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Credit Card Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Expiration Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Security Code: \_\_\_\_\_ Billing Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



# COMMANDER SHIRT ORDER FORM

## 2026-2027

**PERSONALIZATION** You are allowed up to **two lines** of personalization, with up to **20 characters** on each line, including spaces and special characters. (Line 1 example: First Name Last Name. Line 2 example: Post # Title)

Style: \_\_\_\_\_ Line 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Qty: \_\_\_\_\_ Size: \_\_\_\_\_ Line 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Style: \_\_\_\_\_ Line 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Qty: \_\_\_\_\_ Size: \_\_\_\_\_ Line 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Style: \_\_\_\_\_ Line 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Qty: \_\_\_\_\_ Size: \_\_\_\_\_ Line 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Style: \_\_\_\_\_ Line 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Qty: \_\_\_\_\_ Size: \_\_\_\_\_ Line 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Style: \_\_\_\_\_ Line 1: \_\_\_\_\_

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Qty: \_\_\_\_\_ Size: \_\_\_\_\_ Line 2: \_\_\_\_\_

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Qty: \_\_\_\_\_ Size: \_\_\_\_\_ Line 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Style: \_\_\_\_\_ Line 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Qty: \_\_\_\_\_ Size: \_\_\_\_\_ Line 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Style: \_\_\_\_\_ Line 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Qty: \_\_\_\_\_ Size: \_\_\_\_\_ Line 2: \_\_\_\_\_

*By signing below, I agree that I have verified the information provided as correct and free of errors. I acknowledge that The American Legion, Department of Florida is NOT responsible for incorrect information provided.*

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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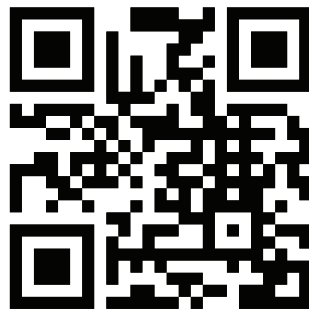


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