

# Welcome Home

VETERANS. ★ FAMILY. ★ FRIENDS.



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### 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)



## A MESSAGE FROM THE DEPARTMENT COMMANDER



**Bob Matheson**  
Department Commander  
[commander@floridalegion.org](mailto:commander@floridalegion.org)

Thank you, Department of Florida, for the heartfelt honor of electing me as your Department Commander. I am truly humbled by your trust and deeply grateful for the opportunity to serve alongside each of you. This moment means more to me than I can fully express, and I step into this role with a sincere sense of gratitude and purpose.

My mission statement, "The Florida American Legion proudly serves all who served and their families, ensuring every veteran feels one

thing above all: Welcome Home," reflects the spirit I hope to carry throughout this year. These words are gentle but meaningful, reminding us of the importance of appreciation, understanding, and compassion. They also speak to the welcoming nature of our organization, where anyone connected to a veteran's journey can find comfort, connection, and a true sense of belonging. I hope every person who walks into a Post feels that warmth and knows they have a place they can call home.

This year, my motto, "Veterans. Family. Friends.," is meant to be

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### PROJECT: VetRelief

Emergency assistance, benefits support, and community engagement for veterans and their families across Florida.

[floridalegion.org/donate](http://floridalegion.org/donate)

GOAL: \$50,000

CURRENT: \$300.50



### DISASTER RELIEF

Providing immediate support when Florida communities are impacted by disasters.

[floridalegion.org/donate](http://floridalegion.org/donate)

GOAL: \$50,000

CURRENT: \$300.50

## UPCOMING EVENTS

AUGUST  
2026

- 1-31 Anti-terrorism Month
- 1-31 National Purple Heart Month
- 1 BE THE ONE Day
- 2 Start of Persian Gulf War (1990)
- 2 Start of Operation Desert Shield (1990)
- 2 Friendship Day
- 4 US Coast Guard Birthday (1790)
- 5-9 Baseball: Regional Tournament ★
- 7 Purple Heart Day
- 7-9 Membership Workshop ★★
- 10 US Dept of Defense Birthday (1949)
- 10 Agent Orange Awareness Day
- 13 District 7: Dept Commander Visit ★
- 13-18 Baseball: World Series ★
- 14 Navajo Code Talkers Day
- 14 V-J Day (1945)
- 15 Legion Link Articles Due for September ★
- 16 National Airborne Day
- 19 Aviation Day
- 21 Senior Citizens Day
- 23-27 ALR: Legacy Run ★
- 26 Women's Equality Day
- 28-3 National Convention - Louisville, KY ★★
- 29 US Marine Corps Reserve Birthday (1916)
- 30 End of War in Afghanistan (2021)
- 30 End of Operation Freedom's Sentinel (2021)
- 31 End of Operation Iraqi Freedom (2010)

See our Full calendar at  
[floridalegion.org](http://floridalegion.org)

★ Commander attendance tentative.

★ Department of Florida event.

★ National event.

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



<< Department Commander continued from page 1

simple, warm, and heartfelt. It highlights the relationships that make our Legion Family special: the familiar faces we rely on, the shared experiences that bring us closer, and the friendships that grow through service and fellowship. My hope is that this motto encourages us to slow down, connect more deeply, and appreciate the people who stand beside us.

As your Department Commander, I will do my best to listen, support, and encourage. I want to help strengthen

our Posts, uplift our programs, and ensure that everyone who comes to The American Legion feels welcome and valued. I believe in the good we do together, and I believe in the compassion that defines our Legion Family.

Thank you again for this incredible honor. I look forward to a year filled with connection, kindness, and shared purpose, and to reminding all who come through our doors that they are always, truly, Welcome Home.

## Building a Successful 2026-2027 Membership Year



Bruce Carl  
1st Vice Commander  
[1stvice@legionmail.org](mailto:1stvice@legionmail.org)

Welcome to the 2026-2027 year! Thank you for your support during my time as your Department 2nd Vice Commander. I look forward to serving as your Department 1st Vice Commander this year.

My main focus this year will be membership. We must strive to retain 90% of our current members, bring in new members, and help the Post 400 members find a home. Membership is the backbone of The American Legion. Without our members, we have no volunteers, no voice in Congress, and eventually our organization will cease to exist.

Find out what your members want and use that information to build on

your events. We especially need younger veterans to join our ranks and participate. Listen to what they are looking for, and in most cases, it is not the canteen for inexpensive drinks. They are looking to become involved, which may mean changing the way things have always been done. We have 1.4 million veterans in Florida, and our membership is only 100,000. We definitely need to do a much better job of recruiting!

A large part of our problem is the infighting among members of the Legion and even among our families. We are all here for the same reason, so let's learn to act like a family and do what needs to be done. Veterans who visit a Post see and hear what is going on, and they often decide not to join the Post or The American Legion. The Posts that work together

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<< 1st Vice Commander continued from page 2

thrive together!

I will be working closely with

our membership chair, Doug Hockenberry. We are here to help with any questions, problems, or assistance you may need. Please

don't hesitate to reach out to us. Let's have a fun and successful year!

## Serving Our Posts Through Leadership and Training



Rick Orzechowski  
2nd Vice Commander  
2ndvice@legionmail.org

This month's article will be brief because I simply want to thank you, fellow Legionnaires, for the love and support you have shown me over the past few years. I am deeply humbled and grateful that you elected me to serve as Department Second Vice Commander for the Department of Florida, and I will do my best to meet your expectations, just as I promised while attending your District and Post

meetings.

### Supporting Our Posts, Districts, and Areas

My goals are to support all Posts, Districts, and Areas through training and by attending events. The Department recently completed its retreat, which included training for newly elected District Commanders, Area Commanders, and several District First Vice Commanders. I can honestly say the officers you elected are outstanding, and they will do a fantastic job in the coming year.

### Training and Looking Ahead

I was fortunate to co-instruct with Department First Vice Commander Bruce Carl, and together we covered many topics to help our leaders prepare for success in their roles. This was my first time serving as an instructor for The American Legion. While I know I have room to improve, I promise my presentations will continue to get better.

If you ever need assistance setting up training, please feel free to contact me. Let's have FUN this year!

## Continue Learning, Continue Serving



Jim Ramos  
NEC (2025-2026)  
nec@legionmail.org

As always, I will continue to help the Department of Florida and any member who needs guidance or assistance with Legion matters. However, I ask that you first follow your chain of command for the current Legion year.

As a member in good standing, be sure to pay your Post dues each year. For the current membership year, that should now be for 2027. I also recommend paying by check,

credit card, or online so you have a receipt or paper trail showing your payment.

I have already received calls from Legionnaires asking, "What can I do?" I want everyone to know that I am not going away. I am simply stepping aside from this position and doing what I need to do for myself.

This is my final article as your National Executive Committeeman (NEC). For the 2026-2028 term, you will be represented by NEC Michael Raymond and Alternate National Executive Committeewoman (ANEC)

Jessica Moore. Congratulations to both of them. I know they will do an outstanding job representing the Department of Florida.

One thing I strongly believe is that we all need training. Here are a few places to start:

### 1. American Legion Basic

**Training** – This free online course covers the history of The American Legion, beginning with the American Expeditionary Forces in Europe in 1919 and continuing through today. It is available to

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members of The American Legion, Sons of The American Legion, and the American Legion Auxiliary.

**2. Department Training** – Attend your District training, Area training (when available), Fall Conference, and Department Convention.

**3. Florida American Legion College (FALC)** – This four-day program is some of the best training you will ever receive. There is a registration fee, but it is well worth the investment.

**4. National Convention** – National Convention offers valuable training classes and educational sessions. Even if you are not a delegate, you may attend many meetings and classes as an observer. Listen, learn, and

take advantage of the information and handouts that are available.

**5. Reference Materials** – Every Legionnaire should have access to these publications:

- Current Officer's Guide and Manual of Ceremonies
- National Constitution and Bylaws, Department of Florida Constitution and Bylaws, and your Post Constitution and Bylaws
- Rules of the National Executive Committee
- Uniform Code of Procedure for the Organization of National Conventions of The American Legion

Most of these resources can be downloaded free of charge from

[floridalegion.org](http://floridalegion.org) and [legion.org](http://legion.org) to your computer, tablet, or phone.

I also encourage you to stay involved with your legislative leaders, especially during election years. They represent you, and it is important to let them know what matters most to veterans and to The American Legion.

Finally, remember this: Anyone can become a better Legionnaire, but it takes a willingness to learn, get involved, and continue serving.

Thank you for allowing me to serve as your National Executive Committeeman from 2022 to 2026. It has been an honor to serve the Department of Florida and each of you.

## Serving Florida on the National Stage



Michael Raymond  
ANEC (2025-2026)  
[anec@legionmail.org](mailto:anec@legionmail.org)

Let me start by saying thank you to the entire Legion Family for supporting me throughout this amazing journey. Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine I would have the opportunity to serve as your National representative for this great organization. For that, I sincerely thank you, and I promise to do everything I can to represent the Department of Florida in the best possible light. I will not let you down.

Many of you have heard about the

**Take Care of America's Veterans Act (TCAVA)** and may have questions. The National organization understands that members have comments, concerns, and, most importantly, questions. The National Legislative Commission is launching a series of videos to provide additional context, address common questions, and explain the reasoning behind our advocacy.

More resources, tools, and important information are on the way. If you have questions, please take a few minutes to visit the dedicated information page at [legion.org/](http://legion.org/)

[advocacy/legislative/take-care-of-americas-veterans-act](http://advocacy/legislative/take-care-of-americas-veterans-act).

If you have the opportunity, I also encourage you to read or listen to National Commander Dan Wiley's statement on this important legislation.

Again, thank you for your support, and let's have a great year!



## Understanding Bonding for Post Officers



Shirley Douglas  
Finance Officer  
[financeofficer@legionmail.org](mailto:financeofficer@legionmail.org)

Do you have questions about bonding of Post officers?

Under Article VI, Section 1, of *The American Legion National Constitution & By-Laws*, it states:

*"All national employees and volunteers handling all American Legion monies and negotiable instruments shall be covered by fidelity/crime insurance. It is recommended that American Legion Posts should have insurance to cover members who handle post funds."*

Check your Post Constitution and By-Laws to determine what is required for your Post.

### Why Bonding Matters

Bonding protects a nonprofit from financial loss if an employee engages in theft, embezzlement, or other fraudulent acts. It is not a sign of distrust in individuals, but rather a safeguard against the potential misuse of entrusted funds.

### Florida State Law

**State Requirement:** Under Chapter 617, Florida Statutes, nonprofits are required to have at least a president and a secretary, as well as a board of directors. Bonding these officers

is not required by statute unless the nonprofit acts as a professional solicitor, receives certain government grants, or operates in specific regulated fields.

**General Protection:** Because officers and treasurers often have access to bank accounts and donations, obtaining a fidelity bond (also known as an employee dishonesty bond) is strongly recommended to protect the organization's funds.

### Key Situations When Bonding Is Required by the U.S. Department of Labor

- **Handling union funds or property:** This includes receiving dues, fees, or other contributions, managing accounts, signing checks, or having access to cash or negotiable assets.
- **Authorized signers on accounts:** Even if an individual never physically handles money, the authority to sign checks or authorize payments is considered handling funds.
- **Union officers and key staff:** Elected and appointed officers, business agents, trustees, and certain administrative or professional staff are generally required to be bonded.
- **New employees before handling funds:** Before a new officer or employee is assigned duties involving funds, they must

be bonded for the required amount.

### Types of Coverage to Consider

While a general statutory bond is not universally required, you may want to consider the following:

- **Fidelity Bond:** Protects the organization against financial losses directly caused by fraudulent or dishonest acts committed by employees or officers.
- **Directors and Officers (D&O) Insurance:** Although not a surety bond, D&O insurance is highly recommended for nonprofits because it protects leadership against lawsuits alleging mismanagement or breach of fiduciary duty.

### Bond Amount

- **Minimum:** 10% of the funds handled during the preceding fiscal year, up to a maximum of \$500,000, according to the U.S. Department of Labor.
- **Formula:** Liquid assets plus total receipts, multiplied by 10%, equals the required coverage per person.
- **New unions:** A minimum bond of \$1,000 is required.

### When Bonding May Not Be Required

If a nonprofit's property and annual receipts total \$5,000 or less, bonding is not required under U.S.

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<< Finance Officer continued from page 5

Department of Labor guidelines.

### Legion.org and NFP Insurance

The American Legion has a relationship with NFP Insurance Agency to assist each department and Post with fiduciary/crime bond insurance that helps protect organizations and their members against financial loss.

This insurance program through NFP Insurance Agency is recommended, not required. It allows American Legion members to purchase fiduciary/crime bond insurance through a purchasing group provided by NFP Insurance Agency using Chubb Insurance.

The program was developed to assist both domestic and international locations.

On [Legion.org](https://legion.org), you can download the American Legion Scheduled Position Crime Policy application required to obtain coverage, along with information on the available coverage levels and associated costs.

**Bottom line:** Bond employees or officers who have any duty or authority to handle funds or property that could be misused.

## Serving the Department With Faith and Support



Eric Linthicum  
Chaplain  
[chaplain@legionmail.org](mailto:chaplain@legionmail.org)

Greetings, my fellow Legionnaires!

I sincerely thank you for trusting me with the high office of Department Chaplain. I do not take that trust lightly. Please know that I am here to support the Areas, Districts, and Posts throughout the Department.

My focus this year is to promote involvement in our Religious Emphasis programs. I have resources available to help Chaplains with these programs, so please let me know how I can assist you.

I also encourage Posts to make the Columbia Protocol and The Fire Watch available to their members. Both are excellent resources for suicide prevention and can make a

meaningful difference in the lives of veterans and their families.

I look forward to traveling throughout the Department this year and meeting many more of my comrades.

Please let me know how I can serve you. You can email me at [chaplain@legionmail.org](mailto:chaplain@legionmail.org) or call me at 301-213-8989.

## Every Story Matters: Preserving Our American Legion Legacy



Seven Beebe  
Historian  
[historian@legionmail.org](mailto:historian@legionmail.org)

Hello, American Legion Family!

What an incredible honor it is to serve as your Department Historian this year. From the bottom of my heart, thank you for the trust you've placed in me.

I promise to give this responsibility

everything I have.

If you've heard me speak, you've probably heard me say these words time and time again:

**Our American Legion Family is the heartbeat of this organization.**

That heartbeat is found in every volunteer who arrives early and

stays late. It's found in every veteran helping another veteran, every Auxiliary member serving behind the scenes, every Son of The American Legion and Legion Rider giving back to their community, and every family member who quietly makes a difference without ever asking for recognition.

Those moments deserve to be

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remembered.

History isn't just found in books or old photographs. **History is being made every single day** in our Posts, Districts, and communities.

Every flag raised, every scholarship awarded, every membership signed, every ceremony conducted, every life touched—that is our legacy.

As your Department Historian, my mission is simple: **to help preserve the incredible story that each of you is writing every day through your service.**

I also want to recognize our amazing **Post and District Historians.**

Thank you for the countless hours you dedicate to documenting your Posts, preserving your histories, and ensuring that future generations will know the impact of your American Legion Family.

Your work is far more important than you may realize. You are preserving a legacy that cannot be replaced.

And to those who have ever thought about becoming a Historian, I want to personally encourage you to take that step.

If you have a passion for preserving memories, telling stories, and celebrating the people around you, then you already have the heart of a Historian.

Together, let's make this a year where no act of service goes unnoticed, no volunteer goes unrecognized, and no story is left untold.

The Department of Florida has an extraordinary story to tell—not because of one person, but because of **all of you.**

I cannot wait to travel and serve alongside Department Commander Matheson this year, meet more of our American Legion Family and capture the moments that will become tomorrow's history.

Thank you for everything you do for our veterans, our communities, and one another.

## Building a Stronger Central Area Together



Kalvin Thompson  
Central Area Commander  
[central@legionmail.org](mailto:central@legionmail.org)

I would like to thank the Posts and members of the Central Area for your confidence and support. It is an honor to serve as your Central Area Commander, and I am committed to working hard on behalf of every District, Post, and member throughout the coming year.

As we begin this new Legion year, it is important to remember why we do what we do. We often hear the phrase, "Membership, Programs, and Veterans," but those are more than just words. They are the

foundation of The American Legion. Membership gives us our strength, our programs fulfill our mission, and everything we do is ultimately in service to our veterans, their families, our youth, and our communities.

I believe this will be a fun and rewarding year. My goal is to help reignite the excitement, pride, and sense of purpose we all felt when we first discovered what The American Legion is all about. If your Post would benefit from training on a specific topic, please let your District Commander know. We will work together to bring a team to your Post to provide the training and support

you need to succeed. Together, we can make the Central Area stronger than ever.

★ CENTRAL AREA ★

**MYLEGION TRAINING**

[MyLEGION.org](http://MyLEGION.org)

**STRONGER TOGETHER**

**DATE:**  
AUGUST 22,  
2026

**TIME:**  
10:00 AM

**LOCATION:**  
DADE CITY  
POST 15  
37745 Church Ave  
Dade City, FL 33525

**BRING YOUR LAPTOP & BE READY TO  
LEARN ★ CONNECT ★ GROW!**

**HANDS-ON TRAINING**  
EXPLORE ALL THAT  
MYLEGION HAS TO OFFER!

**TRAINING PROVIDED BY**  
**DOUG HOCKENBERRY**  
DEPARTMENT OF FLORIDA  
MEMBERSHIP CHAIR

★ **FULL FLYER ON PAGE 42** ★

## Leading the Northern Area Through Service and Teamwork



Miguel Garcia  
Northern Area Commander  
[northern@legionmail.org](mailto:northern@legionmail.org)

I want to begin by thanking the members of the Northern Area for the opportunity to serve as your Northern Area Commander for the 2026-2027 service year. I am honored and humbled by your support, and I look forward to working with each of you as we continue to strengthen our organization and serve our communities.

As I travel throughout the Area, I am encouraged by the enthusiasm of our new officers and members. Their energy is inspiring and reminds me that our strength comes from people who are willing to step forward, lead, and serve.

To our newly installed officers, congratulations on answering the call. Your willingness to serve moves our organization forward and inspires others to do the same. Leadership is more than a title, it is a commitment to support your members, advance our mission, and lead by example. Never

forget the oath we took as leaders in The American Legion: "On your shoulders rests the responsibility for the success of the year's programs." That is a significant commitment, but I know you are ready to take on the challenge.

As we begin this new service year together, I ask all members to take action: stay active, support your officers, reconnect with former members, and invite one new person to visit or join the Post. We are one team, and leadership cannot succeed without the support of its members. Post officers need your commitment and active participation to ensure this year's Legion programs are successful. If you are passionate about a specific program within your Post, I encourage you to step forward and volunteer to lead it.

My goal as your Northern Area Commander is to be present, approachable, and supportive while collaborating with officers and members to increase membership, strengthen our programs, and expand our presence in the communities we serve. Another

goal for this year is to expand the Oratorical and Women Veterans programs and hold a Northern Area Riders Unity Ride. I am open to suggestions on how to make these programs successful at your Post.

Over the years, I have seen firsthand how dedicated Legionnaires can make a lasting difference in their communities, and that inspires me as I begin this journey with you. I ask each of you to bring your ideas, energy, and commitment to the table. We are a team. Let us celebrate our successes, learn from our challenges, and remain focused on the mission. Our members are counting on us.

Thank you again for the trust you have placed in me. I am proud to serve as your Northern Area Commander, and I look forward to a productive and successful service year working alongside all of you. Together, let us lead with purpose, serve with pride, and keep our mission moving forward. Together, there is no obstacle we cannot overcome and no goal we cannot accomplish.

## Hitting the Ground Running in the Southern Area



Geo Bograkos  
Southern Area Commander  
[southern@legionmail.org](mailto:southern@legionmail.org)

First, allow me to extend a big **THANK YOU** to the members of the

Southern Area for the confidence you showed by re-electing me as your Southern Area Commander for the 2026-2027 service year. This is a responsibility I do not take lightly. I

appreciate the opportunity you have given me to work for you again this year!

My 42 years as a Legionnaire,

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along with the valuable experience I gained serving three years as 9th District Adjutant, two years as 9th District Commander, and one year as your Southern Area Commander, combined with the opportunity to learn from some amazing mentors over the years, has provided me with the tools for a successful 2026-2027 year.

For 2026-2027, the Southern Area is fortunate to have three highly capable District Commanders: newly elected and highly energetic 9th District Commander David Hurst; 11th District Commander Stan Brown, who returns for a second term; and past 14th District Commander Angela Glover, who returns to lead the 14th District once again after previously guiding this very large District to some of its highest membership percentages.

So, here's how we plan to hit the ground running in the Southern Area this year.

Our four main objectives for 2026-2027 are Membership, Communication, Training, and Mentoring.

## 1. Membership

Our membership goal is for every Post in the Southern Area to achieve at least 101% membership for 2026-2027 because at 100%, we do not grow. All three of our District Commanders have plans in

place to assist Posts that need a little help. Department Post Development Chair Judith Richards and newly appointed Southern Area Membership Chair Rick "T-Man" Molina are also standing by to help. Please reach out to them, me, or your District Commander to schedule assistance sooner rather than later.

## 2. Communication

Improving communication is a key element to cohesiveness and unity within our four Legion Families. Use Facebook, email blasts, and Buddy Check calls to get the word out. Hold an informal monthly calendar meeting with the other Legion Families at your Post to share event dates and plans so activities are not scheduled on the same day. Let us know what tips or techniques you use to improve communication within your Post.

To help with that effort, we have created the first-ever Southern Area Facebook page where everyone can post their Post and District events and activities.

Please visit and "Like" the Southern Area Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/SouthernAreaFL>

## 3. Training

Southern Area training will once again make a big comeback this year. Our plan is to host four centrally located PowerPoint training sessions across the three

Districts: one in the 9th District, one in the 11th District, and two in the 14th District, one in Miami-Dade County and one in the Florida Keys.

Training topics will include Membership Mechanics, Conflict Resolution, and How to Conduct a Post Meeting. Department-level Convention trainers will once again travel to the Southern Area to deliver Department Convention-level training. Please plan to attend.

## 4. Mentoring

Lastly, we believe it is important to continue emphasizing mentoring. We encourage all leaders to praise publicly but correct privately. Public praise encourages repeat behavior and creates a positive atmosphere that motivates volunteers to continue doing their best. Correcting volunteers in public is never a good idea. It discourages them and is not good leadership. Always look for opportunities to mentor by sharing your knowledge with newer members. Help them grow the way others once helped you.

## District Meetings

Please plan to attend your 9th District, 11th District, and 14th District meetings. Be sure your Post is represented when the Roll Call of Posts is announced. Not only will you gain valuable insight into what is happening, but you will also have

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a voice in what is taking place within your District.

## Upcoming Events

The "Hoe-Down" themed Southern Area Ball will be held Saturday, Jan. 30, 2027, at 6 p.m. at centrally located Post 321, 9081 SW 51st St., Cooper City, FL 33328. Dress is "Farm Hand Chic" casual. Extra points for cow dung on your boots. Rumor has it there might even be bull riding in the building.

The award-winning 9th District Four Chaplains Ceremony will be held the following day, Jan. 31, 2027, at 2 p.m. at the I.T. Parker Center, 901 NE 3rd St., Dania Beach, FL 33004. Once again, I am honored to serve as Master of Ceremonies for this esteemed event. Rumor has it the Rev. Cynthia Johnson will once again provide the narration of the events of Feb. 3, 1943.

Immediately following the Four Chaplains Ceremony, American Legion Post 304 Commander and

newly elected 9th District 2nd Vice Commander Kevin "Gunny" Savage invites everyone to the Official Four Chaplains After Party, Awards Ceremony, and Dinner at American Legion Post 304, 41 NE 1st Ct., Dania Beach, FL 33004.

In closing, I wish every Post in the Southern Area the very best for a successful year.

Remember, **we are here to support you.**

## Making a Good District Even Better



Alan Adams  
District 6 Commander  
[district6@legionmail.org](mailto:district6@legionmail.org)

Greetings from the Mighty 6th District!

First things first, a massive thank you to everyone in the 6th District for putting your trust and confidence in me to serve as your District Commander for this upcoming year. Taking on this cap represents a major responsibility, and let's be honest, I'm here to help you and your Post be even better. You're already good, so this year we're looking to make every Post even better.

I would be remiss if I didn't extend my sincere gratitude to our past District Commander, Dave Musser, for his mentorship and for making the transition so smooth as we handed off the baton. I learned so much

about leadership and how to be an effective District Commander by working alongside you.

Congratulations are also in order for all of our newly installed Post Commanders and officers across District 6. You stepped up to lead, your peers chose you because they know you can do the job, and I'm looking forward to a fantastic year working right alongside you.

During our Leadership Retreat, Department Commander Bob Matheson gave us a clear roadmap for the year with the motto "Veterans, Family, Friends." We volunteer our time to take care of all our veterans, those in our Legion Family, and along the way we all become friends. He reminded us that families sometimes have disagreements, but they always pull together for a common purpose. Ours is helping

veterans.

Speaking of the Commander's goals, let's keep his designated charities top of mind as you plan your fundraising calendars. We are fully backing PROJECT: VetRelief and Florida Disaster Relief this year, so let's show the rest of the state how District 6 supports great causes.

I'm sure by now you've seen it and are wondering, "What's up with all the gnomes?" The short version is that when Bob's picture was uploaded into AI, it generated a Santa Claus-looking gnome. He wants to see us all find fun ways to incorporate that into our year. I look forward to seeing the creativity across our District!

By the time you read this, the first month of the new Legion year will

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<< District 6 Commander continued from page 10 already be underway, and we have work to do.

### Membership & Renewals:

Membership is the absolute lifeline of what we do. Cards are out, so let's hit the ground running by focusing on the Three R's: Renew, Recruit, and Reinstate. Pull your list of members who didn't renew and call or text them to ask why. Don't take offense to their answers. Instead, use them as constructive feedback about what is important to your members.

**Post 400 Members:** These members either don't know they aren't in a local Post or have never been invited to join one. Look at the ZIP codes in your area and reach out to them now. Don't wait until January to

begin looking for them. When talking with your members, encourage the three-year renewal option. It's a great way for them to lock in their membership at the current rate while saving everyone time down the road.

### Getting Training on the Books:

We want things done the right way and consistently across the board, especially when it comes to properly conducted meetings, MyLegion, and general recruiting ideas. There's no need to make things complicated or wait until the end-of-year crunch. Start by encouraging your members to take the free online Basic Training course at legion.org. Be on the lookout for upcoming District-level training sessions where you can bring your questions, and we'll get them answered on the spot.

### Immediate Youth Program

**Outreach:** It's hard to believe, but we're only days away from school hallways being filled with students. Don't wait for school counselors to call your Post. Have your Post Chairs reach out to counselors and JROTC instructors now to educate them about our programs that directly benefit their students.

Finally, please send me your upcoming Post calendars and event dates as soon as possible. I want to visit as many Posts and events as I can, and I promise to bring plenty of enthusiasm and energy along the way.

**Make today AWESOME!!**

## Time to SHINE in District 7



Karen Warren  
District 7 Commander  
district7@legionmail.org

First and foremost, thank you, District 7, for your trust and confidence in electing me to serve as your District Commander for 2026-2027. It is truly an honor and a privilege to serve such an outstanding group of Legionnaires. I am excited about the year ahead and look forward to working alongside each of you as we make this a spectacular year.

Our theme this year is **"Time to SHINE!"**

As we begin this journey together, I want us to focus on one simple but powerful word: TIME.

### T – Trust

Let us trust one another. Every one of us is here because we believe in the mission of The American Legion and want what is best for our veterans, our communities, our youth, and our nation. When we trust each other and work as one team, there is no limit to what we can accomplish.

### I – Inspire

Let us inspire one another to become the very best leaders we can be. Whether you are a new member, a

seasoned Legionnaire, a Post officer, or a committee chair, each of us has the ability to encourage someone else to grow, serve, and lead. Together, we can inspire excellence at every level of The American Legion.

### M – Motivate

Sometimes motivation begins with the smallest gestures, a smile, a handshake, or simply saying, "Hello." Conduct a Buddy Check. Reach out to someone who may need encouragement or support. Be present during times of need. Strive to be the person who makes others

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smile when you walk into the room,  
not the one who makes them smile  
when you leave it.

## E – Empower

Let us empower the members of our  
Posts, our committee chairs, and our  
officers. Every person has unique,  
God-given talents and abilities.

When we encourage others to use  
those gifts and provide opportunities  
for them to serve, everyone benefits.  
Great leaders do not do everything  
themselves. They help others discover  
what they are capable of achieving.

As we move through this Legion  
year, let us remember that our  
success depends on working

together with purpose, respect, and  
enthusiasm. By trusting, inspiring,  
motivating, and empowering one  
another, we will strengthen our  
Posts, our District, and The American  
Legion.

District 7, we've got this! **Now is  
our TIME to SHINE!**

## Building on a Legacy of Service



Jason Skobel  
American Legion Riders Chair  
[legionriders@legionmail.org](mailto:legionriders@legionmail.org)

Let me start my first article by  
expressing how honored I am to  
lead the American Legion Riders into  
the coming year. Julie and I have the  
privilege of following in the footsteps  
of two individuals who led this  
program for the past eight years and  
positioned Florida's American Legion  
Riders as a program to emulate  
nationwide. Words cannot express  
the gratitude we owe them for their  
leadership over the last eight years.  
Thank you, Jim and Beverly.

The Riders have just completed  
another outstanding year, raising  
more than \$400,000 for PROJECT:  
VetRelief's Suicide Prevention  
Initiative, \$10,000 for our Children  
& Youth programs, and dedicating  
countless miles and hours to  
supporting the mission of The  
American Legion. I look forward  
to seeing what this group of nearly  
6,000 Riders can accomplish this  
year.

With a new year comes many new  
officers serving in various positions  
for the first time. I encourage those  
new officers to become familiar with  
the duties that come with wearing  
that patch and to help lead your  
respective Chapters, Districts, and  
Areas while promoting the aims and  
purposes of The American Legion.  
There is a wealth of information and  
resources available on [floridalegion.org](http://floridalegion.org)  
to help you in your endeavors.  
Remember to lead by our guiding  
principles:

- To promote motorcycle safety  
programs and provide a social  
atmosphere for members who  
share the same interest.
- To participate in events and  
ceremonies that are in keeping  
with the aims and purposes of The  
American Legion.
- To organize and participate  
in charity events that help our  
veterans, their families, and the  
local community.
- To use our association to promote

and support the programs of The  
American Legion.

Denny Luke, our Department  
POW/MIA Chair, has been busy  
planning the next escorted Seven  
Bridges POW/MIA Remembrance  
Day Ride, which will take place  
Saturday, Sept. 19, 2026, in  
Jacksonville. Registration and hotel  
information are currently available  
on the website. The ride will begin  
at Adamec Harley-Davidson and  
end at the National POW/MIA  
Memorial on Cecil Field.

Here is a look ahead at the  
**upcoming events** over the next  
year:

- **Seven Bridges POW/MIA  
Remembrance Day Ride**  
Sept. 19, 2026
- **Merry-Go-Round**  
October 2026
- **Fall Conference**  
Nov. 20-22, 2026
- **Summit Meet & Greet**  
Feb. 24, 2027

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- **Summit Classes**  
Feb. 25-27, 2027
- **Round Robin**  
April 2027
- **Children & Youth Picnic**  
April 10, 2027
- **In-State Unity Ride Meet & Greet**

April 18, 2027

- **In-State Unity Ride**  
April 19-23, 2027
- **ALR State Rally**  
April 24, 2027

Julie and I, along with the rest of the ALR leadership team, are excited to

get this year started and accomplish great things, just as you always do. Thank you all for everything you do!



## State Qualifier Tournaments Begin Across Florida



Terry Phillips  
Baseball Chair  
[baseball@legionmail.org](mailto:baseball@legionmail.org)

The baseball season has flown by, and now we enter our State Qualifier Tournaments for the Northern and Southern Divisions.

These tournaments will determine the top four Northern Division teams and the top four Southern Division teams that will earn bids to the Department of Florida State Championship Tournament.

Please visit our website at

[floridaamericanlegion.sportngin.com](http://floridaamericanlegion.sportngin.com), click on the **2026 Manual**, and scroll to **Important Dates** for additional information.

Thank you for supporting this great program!

## Building a Lifesaving Tradition, One Blood Drive at a Time

Corlene Ziegler  
Blood Donor Chair  
[blooddonor@legionmail.org](mailto:blooddonor@legionmail.org)

### EVERY POST. EVERY MONTH.

*A plan for Florida Posts to host a monthly blood drive*

From your 2026-2027 Blood Chair, Corlene Ziegler:

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

### Why It Matters

- 95% of people will need a blood transfusion during their lifetime.
- Only about 3% of eligible donors give blood.
- About one in four units of blood

goes to cancer patients.

Small drives add up. Just five units each month equals 60 units a year. Since each unit can help up to three patients, that's the potential to help 180 people from a single Post. Multiply that by 300 Posts, and that's 18,000 units of blood available statewide, enough to potentially impact 54,000 lives. That's a pretty big deal!

### Our Goal

Host consistent monthly blood drives so local blood banks stay ready, with no waiting and no shortages.

**Can't Donate? You Can Still Help Make the Drive a Success.**

- Open the Post early so the blood drive team can access restrooms and set up.
- Greet donors and thank them for donating.
- Offer a simple thank-you, such as coffee, breakfast, subs, wings, or snacks. Keep it modest, and don't overburden local businesses. This is completely optional.
- Promote the drive every month. People are more likely to donate when it becomes a habit.
- If your Post doesn't have enough parking or a building, partner with a local business. Get out into your community and help people understand what The American

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<< Blood Donor Chair continued from page 13

Legion really does. We are a service organization. Let's serve!

### Set It Up in Four 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 recurring schedule for the year, such as the first Monday or third Wednesday, and book all of your dates at once.
3. Post the monthly flyers and advertisements. OneBlood provides the promotional

materials.

4. On drive day, open on time, be welcoming, thank your donors, and make it fun!

Need help getting your Post started?

**Call or text:** 850-687-1819

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

## The Lasting Impact of Boys State



Darcy Bockman-Wright  
Boys State Chair  
[boysstate@legionmail.org](mailto:boysstate@legionmail.org)

By the time you are reading this in the August Legion Link, most of the counselors and delegates have probably caught up on their sleep, though the lingering cough may or may not still be around. This session was amazing and filled with many milestones as delegates won and lost multiple elections. Alonso was escorted out of the House more than four times by the pro tem, more than 50 bills were passed, and the walks to the Tucker Center were filled with stories from the day or memories from "back home." The halls echoed with sincere laughter and a newfound brotherhood that gives me hope for this generation. It was a humble, driven, and spirited group that truly seemed to "get it."

Legionnaires, you sent us the best of the best, and for that, Director Andrew Satterlee, Department Commander Bob Matheson, and I thank you. The nights were sometimes long, the losses brought

tears, and the wins brought cheers. This year, I received a documented map from some of my delegates, and I wanted to share a few of the touching journeys you may not have heard about, since the letters sent home left Tallahassee before some of the transformations were complete or fully understood.

Please enjoy this behind-the-scenes look at the evolution of "Mrs. Darcy's" Boys State delegates.

#### Steven wrote:

"Wednesday, when we talked for a few minutes, might have changed my life. My last speech this week was so short because I was starting to choke up talking about it. You changed my whole perspective, not just on what it means to be a Boys State citizen, but on who I am as a person."

#### Jacob wrote:

"Thank you for believing in me. When I first saw you, I knew you were going to challenge

us and push us, but ultimately for the betterment of ourselves. Speaking in front of 500-plus people was out of my comfort zone. However, the only way to grow is by being uncomfortable. I've become more comfortable being uncomfortable because of your belief in me."

#### Breck wrote:

"You have no idea how much you have impacted my Boys State experience, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart for sacrificing part of your summer in order to help develop each of us as individuals, leaders, and citizens."

#### Caden wrote:

"Without your help and advice, I don't think I would've accomplished nearly as much. I would've gone home with so many more regrets. The things I learned this week will stick

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*with me for the rest of my life. I aspire to be as motivational and inspirational as you are someday."*

**Nishant wrote:**

*"I wanted to make sure I found the perfect words to share with you, but I realized quickly that I would struggle to find the right words I was looking for. These last few days have been unlike any I've ever experienced. Never before have I felt closer or more loved than with this incredible group of boys. It's truly humbling to be surrounded by a group as passionate and thoughtful as these boys. This experience was made what it was because of the people I was surrounded with: you, the counselors, the alumni, and most importantly, my brothers in Smiths Bay."*

He went on to share four lessons that will stay with him:

1. "You taught me to stay true to who I am. No matter the pressure around me, conforming is not the answer. You reminded me that there is nothing more valuable than my integrity. I will never forget when you said, 'You are enough.' Stay true to who I am."
2. "You reminded me that I am not defined by a single

moment or even a series of moments. Failure is a part of the journey and is not who I am. There are some things in my control: my character, my effort, and my intelligence. By doing my best with what I can control, I will get better at being the person I want to be."

3. "You made me feel like I could be something far beyond anything I had previously considered. I do not personally believe in natural-born leaders, but I want to thank you for sharing your confidence in me and inspiring me to run for executive office, shooting for the stars."
4. "You created a place where failure is accepted and counseled me when I did fail. The toughest battles create the strongest soldiers."

**Edward wrote:**

*"I have some regrets about my previous school years, opportunities I could have taken but didn't, events I could have prepared for better but didn't, and experiences I missed out on because I felt like I wasn't worthy of them. But now, with your support and a seed of newfound confidence within me, I won't let my senior year go by for nothing. Once again, thank you for sponsoring me,*

*thank you for listening, and thank you for being willing to do this for me and the others. I'm going to make this the best senior year I possibly can."*

So, on that note, I close the chapter on the 82nd session of Boys State. It was a journey filled with memories that will last a lifetime and opportunities for growth, inspiration, motivation, and brotherhood that every Post across the Department that participates in Boys State helps create.

Thank you, Department Commander Bob, for appointing me as chair. Thank you, fellow counselors, for the fun and friendship. Thank you, Posts, for sending us the best of the best.

Thank you, Bekki, for the attention to detail you bring to a program that spans so many days each year, creating a level of excellence that only you can achieve. To my family and friends, thank you for your unwavering support this past year.

I know I can be a little obsessive about Florida's premier leadership program, Boys State.



## Supporting Tomorrow's Leaders Through Civil Air Patrol



Rico Thomas  
Civil Air Patrol Chair  
[civilairpatrol@legionmail.org](mailto:civilairpatrol@legionmail.org)

"Aiming High" with Civil Air Patrol (CAP)

First, I would like to take this opportunity to thank our Department Commander, Bob Matheson, for appointing me as Civil Air Patrol (CAP) Cadet Program Chair. The Children and Youth program is a fundamental pillar of The American Legion's mission, and we have ambitious goals for the year ahead. We look forward to serving our Department Commander while making a positive impact on the youth in our communities. It is truly an honor and a privilege to lead this

growing and meaningful program.

Throughout the year, my team and I will work to keep you informed, with the hope that your Post will adopt a local squadron and show these young men and women that we support their growth, discipline, and commitment to achieving more than what has become the new norm. If your Post has already adopted a local squadron, please reach out to me so we can recognize your efforts and share how you're supporting your local cadet squadron. If you're still looking for a squadron to partner with, visit the link below to find one in your area:

<https://flwg.cap.gov/locations>

Let's make this a great year as we support, encourage, and uplift the future leaders of our communities.



## Why Every Post Should Attend Department Events



Eric Loyd  
Credentials Chair  
[credentials@legionmail.org](mailto:credentials@legionmail.org)

Fall Conference and Department Convention

There are many Posts that do not attend the Fall Conference or Department Convention. Every Post should be represented at both

events. There are numerous classes that help strengthen your Post's leadership, and your Post should have a voice in the future of The American Legion. If your Post is not sending anyone to these events, ask why.

In addition to the many excellent classes, you have the opportunity to learn from senior leadership as

they share their experience and knowledge. I value these events, if for no other reason than the wealth of experience gathered in one place. If you have questions, you will get answers.

Encourage your Post to send officers and members to these events. Let your Post be heard.

## Preparing Today for Tomorrow's Storms

Joe Humet  
Disaster Preparedness Chair  
[southern@legionmail.org](mailto:southern@legionmail.org)

Yes, it's that time of year again.

First, I want to thank those who have chaired this program before me, and I also want to thank our Department

Commander, Bob Matheson, for putting his faith in me to continue

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their great work. I'll do my best not to let you down, but I'm going to need help, and I'll be reaching out to Posts, Districts, and Areas across our great state of Florida.

First, please allow me to introduce myself. My name is Joseph (Joe) Humet. I am a PUFL, have been a member of The American Legion for 35 years, and am currently a member of Post 418. I've had the honor of serving in nearly every leadership position over those years. I've been married to my wonderful wife for 58 years, and we have two grown children and four grandchildren, one of whom is currently serving in the U.S. Marine Corps.

I retired from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. During that time, I served 11 years at the United States Military Academy at West Point and later at the New York District Office at 26 Federal Plaza. I was also deployed around the world in support of hurricane and other disaster response operations, as well as an 18-month deployment to Afghanistan.

OK, enough about me. Let's get down to business!

### Weathering the Storm: A Guide to Hurricane Preparedness

When a tropical system develops, coastal communities face a ticking clock. Because structural damage,

prolonged power outages, and blocked evacuation routes can develop within hours of landfall, advance planning is the single most effective way to protect your household. True hurricane readiness requires a systematic approach built around four key areas: assembling emergency supplies, protecting your home, planning for evacuation, and staying safe after the storm.

#### 1. Assemble Your Survival Kit

If emergency managers determine it is safe to shelter in place, your home must function independently. Widespread power outages and compromised water systems can last for weeks. A basic survival kit should sustain every member of your household, including pets, for at least three to seven days.

**Water:** Store at least one gallon of water per person, per day. Half should be reserved for drinking and the remainder for food preparation and basic sanitation.

**Food:** Stock nonperishable foods that require no refrigeration or cooking, such as canned meats, canned fruit, protein bars, and peanut butter. Be sure to include a manual can opener.

**Power and Communication:** Keep multiple flashlights or headlamps with fresh batteries available. Avoid using candles because of the fire hazard. Fully charge portable power banks

and have a battery-powered or hand-crank NOAA Weather Radio available to receive emergency information if cell service is unavailable.

#### 2. Fortify Your Property

A home's ability to withstand hurricane-force winds depends on preventing wind from entering the structure. Once wind breaches a window or door, interior pressure can increase rapidly and lead to catastrophic roof failure.

**Protect openings:** Install approved storm shutters or pre-cut 5/8-inch exterior-grade plywood over windows and glass doors. Taping windows is a myth. It does not prevent glass from breaking and may create larger, more dangerous shards.

#### Brace the garage door:

Standard residential garage doors are often one of the weakest points of a home. If yours is not impact-rated, install a vertical bracing kit.

#### Secure outdoor items:

Patio furniture, grills, potted plants, and trash cans can become dangerous projectiles during high winds. Move them indoors or secure them before tropical-storm-force winds arrive.

#### 3. Prepare for Evacuation

Property can be replaced. Lives cannot. If local officials issue a mandatory evacuation order for your area, leave immediately. Remaining in a storm surge zone places you and first responders

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at unnecessary risk.

Keep a waterproof emergency  
“Go-Bag” near your exit with the  
following items:

- Government-issued  
identification, passports, and  
Social Security cards
- Copies of insurance policies  
(home, auto, and flood)
- Property deeds, vehicle titles,  
and medical records
- Essential prescription  
medications (at least a seven-  
day supply)
- Emergency cash, since ATMs  
may not function during power  
outages

Also establish your evacuation  
destination ahead of time,  
identify alternate travel routes,  
and keep your vehicle’s fuel  
tank at least half full throughout  
hurricane season.

#### 4. Stay Safe After the Storm

Many hurricane-related injuries  
occur after the storm has passed.

**Generator Safety:** Never  
operate a portable gasoline  
generator inside your home,  
garage, or near windows or  
doors. Carbon monoxide is  
colorless, odorless, and deadly.  
Generators should always be  
operated outdoors at least 20  
feet from any structure, with the  
exhaust directed away from  
buildings.

When inspecting damage,  
assume every downed power  
line is energized. Stay at least  
35 feet away from downed

utility lines. Never drive or walk  
through floodwaters. Just six  
inches of moving water can  
knock an adult off balance, and  
one foot of water can sweep  
away a vehicle.

Before making temporary  
repairs, thoroughly document  
all property damage with  
photographs and video to assist  
with insurance claims.

This is only the beginning of  
being prepared for a storm.  
There is much more to come.  
We will also be sending a  
survey to all Posts and District  
Commanders to collect  
information on where we are as  
a Department program and what  
we need to do to make it even  
better.

Commanders, when you receive  
the survey, please complete it  
and return it as soon as possible.

#### Disaster Relief

Florida is no stranger to devastating  
storms that have caused tremendous  
hardship, not only for our members  
but also for our Legion Posts. During  
these difficult times, we have always  
been ready to rally together by  
collecting and distributing supplies,  
providing financial assistance, and  
volunteering our time and services.  
These operations require careful  
planning and preparation to reach  
affected areas safely, quickly, and  
efficiently. We must always be  
prepared to mobilize with little or no  
notice when disaster strikes.

In 2017, the Department of Florida  
established the Disaster Relief Fund  
to provide financial assistance for  
disaster-related needs, including  
water, generators, food, paper  
products, and other essential  
supplies. The fund was created  
following the catastrophic damage  
caused by hurricanes Matthew,  
Irma, and Michael. Since then, it has  
enabled the Department to assist  
Legion Family members and Posts as  
they rebuild their homes, facilities,  
and lives.

The Disaster Relief Fund is **your**  
program because it exists through  
your generosity. We hope you will  
continue to support this mission by  
making financial contributions and  
being ready to volunteer when the  
need arises.

Help us ensure that when the  
next disaster strikes Florida, your  
Department will be ready to  
respond.



## Closely Monitor Changes to USCIS Policy, Requirements and Law

Omer "Gene" Smith

Immigration Chair  
[immigration@legionmail.org](mailto:immigration@legionmail.org)

Good day to you as we begin our new year. I want to personally thank Commander Matheson for allowing me to continue serving as the Department Immigration Chair. I wish everyone a prosperous and rewarding 2026-2027 membership year.

National immigration laws and policies seem to change monthly and, in many cases, are very complex. I want to point out that I am not an attorney. What you read in my column is for informational purposes only. For legal clarification of immigration laws and policies, you may contact me, and I will provide the telephone number for our partnering immigration attorney, Elizabeth Ricci of Rambana & Ricci, P.L.L.C., for legal advice, opinions, and representation in immigration court proceedings. You may also visit [ImmigrationLawHelp.org](http://ImmigrationLawHelp.org) to find legal aid in your area.

I was recently asked whether a naturalized U.S. citizen can be deported. Based on my research, a naturalized citizen may only be deported if the federal government first initiates a legal process to

revoke that person's citizenship, known as "denaturalization." Anyone facing Immigration Court for this purpose should obtain an attorney who specializes in removal defense or federal litigation.

Many active-duty service members and veterans are married to foreign-born spouses who reside in the United States because of military assignments or retirement. I strongly encourage them to contact an immigration attorney to ensure their spouse is current with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) policies and requirements. The Green Card renewal process has recently changed, so it is important to ensure Green Card holders remain in compliance with USCIS requirements.

U.S. immigration law strictly requires foreign-born non-citizens to carry their original Alien Registration Receipt Card (Form I-551) at all times and to present it to immigration officers when requested as proof of legal status. Naturalized U.S. citizens are not required to carry proof of citizenship. However, to avoid unnecessary delays or misunderstandings, especially in today's environment, carrying proof

of citizenship may help resolve an encounter more quickly.

Green Card holders should closely monitor changes to immigration requirements. Recent changes to the renewal process have caused confusion for some people I know. I suggested they contact an immigration attorney for the most current information. You may contact me at [immigration@legionmail.org](mailto:immigration@legionmail.org), and I will provide information for contacting Rambana & Ricci, P.L.L.C., a full-service, multilingual immigration law firm located in Tallahassee.

My advice is simple: contact an immigration attorney before interacting with immigration authorities if you have questions about your status or responsibilities.

In closing, the last time I spoke with the foreign-born U.S. Marine I have been working with for more than five years, he told me he is still fighting to remain in the United States and become a citizen. I certainly pray he is successful in his effort to remain in this country.

Remember, a Marine is always a Marine.



**WIN BIG.  
SUPPORT BIGGER.**

Proceeds benefit Florida veterans and support programs that make a difference.

**PLAY TODAY!**

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

IT COULD BE YOU.  
IT WILL BE THEM.

## Building Stronger Connections With JROTC Programs



Loretta Young  
JROTC/JSSP Chair  
jrotc@legionmail.org

I would like to thank Commander Bob Matheson for the opportunity to once again serve as the Department ROTC/JSSP Chair for 2026-2027. After a busy end to the semester with year-end awards and JCLC Summer Leadership Camps, it is now time to prepare for the next semester beginning in August.

Over the past several months, I have worked with several JROTC Color Guard teams on fundraising for the upcoming American Legion National Convention in Louisville, Kentucky, where the National JROTC Color Guard Competition will be held on Aug. 28. Details about the

competition were sent earlier this year to all teams that participated last year in Tampa. At the time of this writing, National has advised that five teams from Florida are registered. I will be attending the National Convention this year and look forward to watching these outstanding young people compete at the National JROTC Color Guard Competition.

When schools return to session in mid-August, it is an ideal time for Posts to have their ROTC/JSSP Chair contact local schools to ensure they are supporting these outstanding programs, which move quickly throughout the school year. With JROTC programs placing an increasing emphasis on STEM, science, technology, engineering,

and mathematics, alongside drill and ceremony, the year passes quickly.

Email is the most effective way to contact the Senior Instructor. Taking time to visit the classroom or attend an event is also an excellent way to introduce yourself and demonstrate your support. Many schools are not familiar with the Posts in their area, so reaching out is the best way to establish a connection.

I would like to see greater participation from our Posts this year. If anyone has questions regarding either the JROTC or JSSP programs, please do not hesitate to contact me at any time.

I wish you all much success in the coming year.



Legion COY 2026 Leah VanArsdale, w/Post 273



Dept Con, COY 2026, Leah VanArsdale



JSSP State Sporter Team w/Post 273

## TCAVA: Ask the Hard Questions, Know the Facts



Stuart Scott  
Legislative Chair  
legislative@legionmail.org

Over the past several weeks, many of us have watched social media become flooded with posts, videos,

and opinions regarding the **Take Care of America's Veterans Act (TCAVA)**. Some have hailed it as one of the most significant veterans' bills in decades, while others have described it as one of the greatest threats to future veterans' benefits.

If you've found yourself wondering what to believe, you're not alone.

As members of **The American Legion, Department of Florida**, it is important that we approach issues

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affecting veterans with thoughtful analysis rather than emotional reaction. While social media has become an effective tool for rapidly sharing information, it is equally effective at spreading incomplete information, opinions presented as fact, and content designed to generate outrage rather than understanding.

The American Legion has long encouraged its members to become informed advocates. That means taking the time to review credible information, understand differing viewpoints, and ask thoughtful questions before reaching conclusions. Complex legislation deserves careful examination—not quick reactions.

### The American Legion's Position

The American Legion's National Headquarters has publicly endorsed TCVA after what it describes as an extensive review of the legislation. According to National leadership, the bill would advance more than sixty long-standing veterans' priorities—including provisions addressing caregiver support, survivor benefits, mental health services, suicide prevention, expanded community care, and the long-awaited Major Richard Star Act.

National leadership has also addressed several concerns circulating online, emphasizing that:

- The legislation does not reduce the disability ratings of veterans currently receiving compensation.
- Proposed changes involving conditions such as sleep apnea and tinnitus originated through the Department of Veterans Affairs' regulatory process prior to TCVA's introduction.
- The bill itself does not retroactively reduce existing benefits.
- Any savings generated through future regulatory changes would remain dedicated to veterans' programs.

The American Legion believes the legislation represents the best opportunity to move decades of veteran-focused priorities that have remained stalled in Congress.

### Why Are So Many Veteran Organizations Divided?

This is where members should begin asking questions.

Several respected Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs), including some of The American Legion's closest partners in advocacy, have expressed significant concerns regarding portions of TCVA. Much of their concern centers on how future Department of Veterans Affairs regulations could affect disability compensation for conditions such as tinnitus and obstructive sleep apnea. While many acknowledge that current beneficiaries may not be affected, they question how future generations of veterans could be

impacted.

Conversely, The American Legion and numerous other national veterans' organizations have concluded that the overall benefits contained within TCVA outweigh those concerns and have publicly urged Congress to pass the legislation.

When organizations that have worked together for generations find themselves on opposite sides of an issue, it should remind all of us that reasonable people can review the same legislation and reach different conclusions. Rather than choosing sides based solely on headlines or social media posts, we should take the opportunity to better understand the reasoning behind each position.

### Timing Matters

Another important factor deserving attention is where TCVA currently stands in the legislative process.

Despite strong advocacy efforts by many Veterans Service Organizations, including those supporting and opposing various aspects of the legislation—the bill has remained stalled in Congress. According to statements from the Speaker of the House, the House is not expected to consider TCVA until September, the final month of the Federal Fiscal Year.

### Why does this matter?

As Congress approaches the end

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<< Legislative Chair continued from page 21

of a fiscal year, legislative priorities often become compressed. Bills that have been negotiated for months can undergo additional revisions, negotiated compromises, or become part of larger legislative packages in an effort to secure enough support for passage. This is a common part of the legislative process, but it also means that legislation considered late in the session may not be identical to the version originally introduced.

With time becoming increasingly limited before the close of the fiscal year, it is entirely possible that additional compromises or negotiated provisions could be proposed. Whether those changes strengthen or weaken the legislation will ultimately be for Congress—and the veterans' community—to evaluate.

For that reason alone, veterans should continue paying close attention—not only to what TCVA contains today, but also to any amendments or revisions that may occur before a final vote.

### Ask the Hard Questions

Rather than asking whether someone supports or opposes TCVA, perhaps we should ask:

- Have I read the actual legislative summaries instead of relying

solely on social media?

- What specific provisions concern supporters and opponents?
- Are current veterans protected differently than future claimants?
- Are the concerns being raised based upon the bill itself, future VA regulations, or both?
- What compromises, if any, may become necessary as the legislative process continues?
- If this legislation does not pass, what becomes of the more than sixty veteran priorities packaged within it?
- How might any future amendments affect the final product that reaches the President's desk?
- These are not simple questions, and they deserve more than simple answers.

### Staying Informed

The American Legion has always encouraged informed advocacy. Healthy debate is not only acceptable, it is essential. Our strength has never come from everyone agreeing; it comes from members being informed, respectful, and engaged.

It is also important to remember that **legislation is a living document**. Bills frequently change as they move through committees, negotiations, and floor debate. Particularly when

legislation is considered late in a congressional session, amendments and negotiated compromises are common. The version of TCVA debated in September may not be identical to the version being discussed today.

Whether you ultimately support or oppose TCVA, your opinion should be based upon facts rather than algorithms. Continue reviewing official sources, reading the legislative language whenever possible, listening to differing viewpoints, and evaluating the bill as it evolves—not solely through headlines, memes, or short video clips.

The American Legion's official position is available through National Headquarters, where members can review detailed explanations, frequently asked questions, and the organization's rationale for supporting the legislation. Our companion Veterans Service Organizations have likewise shared their concerns and perspectives, offering veterans the opportunity to examine the issue from multiple viewpoints.

Ultimately, every Legionnaire should make it a priority to become informed before becoming convinced. Our responsibility as advocates is not simply to react to legislation, it is to understand it.



facebook.com/floridalegion

## “Stronger Together”: Ensuring Our Future



Doug Hockenberry  
Membership Chair  
[membership@legionmail.org](mailto:membership@legionmail.org)

Hello, Team Florida!

I hope this article finds everyone doing well and energized for the year ahead. For those who may not know me, I am Doug Hockenberry, your Department Membership Chair for Legion Year 2026-2027. My motto for this year is “Stronger Together.” I genuinely believe that when we work in unity, we can accomplish any mission placed before us.

We are just beginning a new membership year, and based on early numbers and conversations with several District and Area Commanders, it looks like we are off to a strong start. That momentum matters, so let’s build on that energy and enthusiasm.

I would like to thank those of you who attended the Membership Training sessions during the Department Convention in June. We had great participation, valuable information was shared, and the question-and-answer session was excellent.

A successful membership program rests on three pillars: Recruit, Renew, and Retain. If we commit to all three, collectively and proactively, we will make this year one of our strongest

yet.

This year, I encourage you to approach membership with an offensive mindset rather than a defensive one. Offensive thinking is proactive. You get out in front, anticipate needs, and act early. Defensive thinking is reactive. You respond only after something happens. Being proactive keeps us ahead of challenges instead of chasing them.

With that in mind, getting started early sets the tone for the entire year. Renew your honorary members right away, and as renewals begin arriving at your Posts, transmit them promptly. Make a plan to work your Post 400 list consistently. These lists are updated regularly by National, so download the latest version often.

Most important is recruitment. Every new member who joins your Post strengthens The American Legion as a whole and helps carry on the legacy of our great organization.

We all know there are periods, such as Thanksgiving and the Christmas holidays, when membership may be placed on the back burner. Unfortunately, this can have a significant impact on your Post’s membership program. Being proactive early allows you to meet, and in many cases exceed, the goals established by Department and National. Once you fall behind, it

becomes a real challenge to catch up, so take that defensive posture immediately and success will follow.

This year’s Membership Team is ready to assist and provide training. Be prepared to see us out in the field as we travel throughout the Department, visiting Areas, Districts, and Posts. If you would like Membership Training, please let your District and Area leadership know.

The membership goals have been published and are included in this year’s Membership Manual, which can be downloaded from the Department of Florida American Legion website. Click on **Resources**, then **Membership**, and you will find everything you need for your Post, District, or Area.

In closing, I want you to know that we are here for you. I can be reached at [membership@legionmail.org](mailto:membership@legionmail.org) or by phone at 727-514-3742. The Membership Team intends to be visible and provide the support you need to ensure your success. Remember, that same unity and shared purpose will enable us to achieve every goal because we are Stronger Together.

I look forward to a successful year ahead.

**#StrongerTogether**



# FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT

AUGUST 2026 EDITION

FINAL FIGURES : YEAR 12 (2025-2026)

YEARLY OVERVIEW

## Emergency Assistance



201

VETERANS RECEIVED FUNDS



\$333,747

PROVIDED IN  
FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

## Suicide Prevention



14

SPI PARTNERS



\$210,300

GIVEN TOWARDS  
SUICIDE PREVENTION

## Mission Accomplished: A Year of Milestones Achieved

This past year marked historic growth for PROJECT: VetRelief. We launched a redesigned website, streamlined our financial assistance application, expanded online resources, and strengthened our team to better serve Florida's veterans.

Together, we celebrated *all-time* milestones by surpassing 2,000 veterans and families served and \$2 million in Emergency Assistance since our founding. We also made our highest level of funding to our Suicide Prevention Initiative (SPI) Strategic Partners, expanding access to Veteran-centered mental health programs.

As the need for assistance continued to rise, approved Emergency Assistance cases increased by 45%, while total funding provided grew by an impressive 74%. This meant we delivered a greater support to veterans and their families when they needed it most.

These achievements were made possible by the generosity of our donors, volunteers, Strategic Partners, and The American Legion Family. Together, we continue changing lives and ensuring Florida's veterans never face hardship alone.

## Congratulations, Commander Matheson!

Congratulations to Bob Matheson on being elected the 2026–2027 Department Commander! We are honored that he has selected PVR as one of his Commander's Charities, alongside the Department's Disaster Relief Program.

Commander Matheson has set a goal for \$100,000 for both charities. If you'd like to support his efforts, please include "**Commander's Charity**" with your donation. Give donations during his District visits or mail to Department Headquarters.



## Football with Purpose: Tampa Bay Bucs Game Day Event

Join PROJECT VetRelief and The American Legion, Department of Florida on Sunday, November 1 as we partner with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers for Football with Purpose; a game dedicated to raising awareness and support for veteran mental health.

Purchase your specially priced game tickets through our special link, and a portion of every ticket sold will benefit PROJECT VetRelief's Suicide Prevention Initiative (SPI), helping connect Florida veterans with life-changing mental health resources.

**Want to get involved?** Our new corporate sponsorship brochure is now available! It's a great opportunity for businesses to support Florida veterans while gaining valuable exposure through this exciting event.

We're also gearing up for a motorcycle ride-in from American Legion Post 138 to our official tailgate area. Registration details are being finalized and will be announced soon.

**Don't miss the tailgate!** We'll be in a high-visibility location, showcasing Legion pride to thousands of Buccaneers fans and The Krewe while promoting PROJECT VetRelief and our Suicide Prevention Initiative.



For game day tickets, sponsorship opportunities, and the latest event details, visit:  
**[www.projectvetrelief.org/fwp](http://www.projectvetrelief.org/fwp)**

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

(407) 295-2631

(407) 299-0901

1912 Lee Rd, Orlando

[facebook](https://www.facebook.com/ProjectVetRelief)  
@ProjectVetRelief



## Start Strong With Post Development and Revitalization



Judith Richards  
Post Development Chair  
[revitalization@legionmail.org](mailto:revitalization@legionmail.org)

We are at the start of a new membership year!

At Convention, many of you mentioned that you would like to work together on Post Development and Revitalization. Now is the time to begin planning these efforts.

Membership early bird incentives are an excellent way to revitalize your Post while encouraging members to renew. Some ideas include sending a communication to your membership encouraging them to renew between now and Sept. 30. Let them know what their dues support and remind them they are part of something bigger in the community.

You might also consider offering members who renew by July 30, or another date chosen by your Post, a \$5 discount on membership dues. Hold a Membership Renewal Day at your Post and offer a free lunch or spaghetti dinner for members who renew that day.

Be sure to assist members with registering for [mylegion.org](http://mylegion.org).

Getting involved in your community is another excellent way to revitalize and develop your Post. Consider joining your local Chamber of Commerce, advertising in community newspapers, using social media and community forums, and participating in school recognition programs, including School Medals at the elementary, middle school, high school, and college levels. Support programs such as JROTC, Oratorical, Boys State, and Scouting in your community.

Use the vehicle tags and staple your Post business card over the 800 number or at the bottom of the card. Your Post can always assist a veteran in finding the Post closest to their home.

Carry membership applications in your vehicle or with you whenever possible. Use the long-form application because it requests all the information needed.

Work with your local active-duty

installations, Reserve units, and National Guard armories.

We are partnering with several Districts on Post Revitalization and Post Development efforts. Are you in an area that could benefit from developing a new Post? Are you wondering what qualifies for Post Development or Revitalization? Please refer to the resources below:

<https://www.floridalegion.org/resources/legion-post-documents/membership/>

I cannot stress enough the importance of getting Post Revitalization efforts on our calendars as soon as possible. When we wait until the end of the calendar year, we compete with holidays, vacations, the Fall Conference, and year-end time constraints.

I look forward to working with all of you and partnering together. Please contact me with any questions or to schedule a planning meeting.

## Honoring the Promise: Florida's Commitment to the POW/MIA Mission



Denny Luke  
POW/MIA Chair  
[powmia@legionmail.org](mailto:powmia@legionmail.org)

Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Denton "Denny" Luke from Dewitt B. Tilden Post 316 in Atlantic

Beach, Florida. First and foremost, I would like to thank Department Commander Bob Matheson for the honor and privilege of serving as your 2026-2027 Department of Florida POW/MIA Chair.

As Chair, I will strive to keep you informed about developments concerning America's Prisoners of War and Missing in Action, provide updates on the progress of the

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<< POW/MIA Chair continued from page 25

National POW/MIA Memorial and Museum being constructed in Jacksonville, Florida, and share information about POW/MIA-related events throughout our Department and across the nation.

I would also like to introduce the other members of our Department POW/MIA Committee: Lance Maiden from the Central Area and Mike Lowell from the Southwest Area. Together, we form a dedicated team committed to advancing awareness of the POW/MIA mission throughout Florida.

I encourage every member to visit the American Legion Department of Florida POW/MIA Remembrance webpage at:

<https://www.floridalegion.org/programs-services/powmia-remembrance/about/>

There you will find information about our program and available resources, including links to the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA), the Library of Congress Vietnam Era POW/MIA Database, the National League of POW/MIA Families, the National Alliance of Families for the Return of America's Missing Servicemen, and the POW/MIA Chair's Manual.

Additional information is available through The American Legion National Headquarters POW/MIA

webpage:

<https://www.legion.org/information-center/honor-remembrance/pow-mia>

I also encourage you to visit the National POW/MIA Memorial and Museum website:

<https://powmiamemorial.org/>

There, you can follow the progress of this remarkable project, the only National POW/MIA Memorial and Museum in the United States, proudly being built here in Florida. I invite each of you to visit the site and witness its growth firsthand. While you're there, please take a moment to sign the petition urging Congress to pass H.R. 3057, legislation that would officially designate the site as our nation's National POW/MIA Memorial and Museum.

At our meetings, we honor the sacrifices of America's POWs and MIAs in accordance with Resolution 288, adopted by the 67th American Legion National Convention. However, our responsibility extends beyond reciting words. I challenge every Post and District to actively support the POW/MIA mission.

If your Post is planning a POW/MIA-related event, please share the information with us. We would be honored to help promote your event through the Legion Link, Department social media platforms, and other communication channels. Whenever

possible, we will also strive to attend and support your efforts.

The Department of Florida American Legion Riders have demonstrated what meaningful action looks like. Their commitment has helped establish what is becoming one of the premier POW/MIA Recognition Day events in the Southeast. While National POW/MIA Recognition Day is observed on the third Friday of September, we partner with the National POW/MIA Memorial Committee to hold our event on the third Saturday, allowing greater participation by working families and community members.

This year marks the 6th Annual Seven Bridges POW/MIA Remembrance Ride. This police-escorted ride crosses the seven bridges spanning the St. Johns River and concludes at the National POW/MIA Memorial and Museum, where participants attend the annual POW/MIA Recognition Ceremony. This is a Department event, and I encourage every Legion Family member to participate.

Florida made history during the 2023 ceremony. We were, and remain, the only American Legion Department to have our Department Commander, Area Vice Commanders, Department Auxiliary President, Squadron Commander, numerous Department officers, and Chairs all attend the ceremony together at the National POW/MIA

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<< POW/MIA Chair continued from page 26

Memorial. That level of commitment demonstrates Florida's dedication to remembering and honoring those who have not yet returned home.

I sincerely hope to see you at this year's ceremony. If you ride, I encourage you to join us on the Seven Bridges POW/MIA Remembrance Ride before attending the ceremony. More information

will be available on the Department website as the event approaches.

The annual DPAA POW/MIA Recognition Day poster is available free of charge. Quantities are limited, so I encourage you to order yours as soon as possible and proudly display it at your Post, workplace, school, or other community location to help raise awareness of the POW/MIA mission.

You can order your poster here:  
<https://dpaa-mil.sites.crmforce.mil/dpaaFamWebPosters>

Thank you for your continued dedication to America's veterans, service members, and their families. Together, we will ensure that the promise remains strong:

**You Are Not Forgotten.**

## Resolutions Shape the Future of The American Legion



Clarence Hill  
Resolutions Chair  
[resolutions@legionmail.org](mailto:resolutions@legionmail.org)

This past Department Convention featured some excellent resolutions for consideration. Authors began submitting them early for review, then incorporated suggestions or made improvements of their own. Thank you for a job well done. I look forward to another successful year.

Any Legionnaire can influence the priorities and positions of The American Legion at any level because the organization's direction is guided by resolutions. A resolution is a position-driven initiative written by members and presented for a vote. Resolutions can be adopted at any level, beginning with the Post, and can have an impact throughout the organization.

The best time to write a resolution is during the winter and early spring, before the Department Convention

in the summer. If you plan to submit a resolution, please start early and stay in contact with me so we can work together to develop a strong document.

This past year, several resolutions were submitted after the deadline. This not only created procedural challenges for the committee and the Convention, but it also prevented Posts from reviewing the resolutions and determining an official position before Convention. Please submit your resolutions by this year's deadline, **40 days prior to the Department Convention.**

Resolutions are not difficult to write, but they do require careful attention to detail. The rules are straightforward, but they must be followed.

When writing a resolution, keep these general considerations in mind:

1. A resolution should include

supporting documentation when required, and its intent should be clearly defined.

2. A resolution should be free of factual and legal errors.
3. A resolution should have material relevance to the purposes and programs of The American Legion.

A resolution should address only one topic. Resolutions covering multiple topics are more difficult to process, especially when they involve issues that fall under the jurisdiction of more than one committee. They may be rejected or amended to eliminate all but one topic. As a result, issues you intended to address may have to wait until the following year.

Resolutions have two major parts: the preamble and the resolving section. Each consists of one or more clauses, and the entire resolution is read as one continuous sentence, beginning with the preamble and

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ending with a single period after  
the final **Resolved** clause. The  
preamble explains the reasons for

the resolution, while the resolving  
section states the action or position  
being proposed.

In future editions, I will discuss  
resolution writing in greater detail,  
beginning with the resolving section,  
since it should be written first.

## Help Us Spread the Word About Scholarship Opportunities



Michael Raymond  
Scholarships Chair  
[scholarships@legionmail.org](mailto:scholarships@legionmail.org)

What a fantastic year we had for  
Scholarships! The team and I are  
looking forward to another great  
year, but we need your help to  
spread the word.

Last year, we had many qualified  
applicants, but unfortunately,  
not everyone could receive a  
scholarship. Please help us promote  
the many scholarship opportunities  
available to both high school and  
college students by sharing this  
information at your Post and District

meetings.

If you would like me to give a  
presentation, just ask, and I'll be  
happy to be there. Thank you for  
your continued support, and let's  
make this another outstanding year  
for our scholarship program!

## Supporting Sea Cadets, Investing in Our Future



Eric Loyd  
Sea Cadet Chair  
[seacadet@legionmail.org](mailto:seacadet@legionmail.org)

### The Youth Is Our Future

I am looking forward to the year  
ahead as your Sea Cadets Chair  
and hope we can grow the Sea  
Cadets program throughout the state  
of Florida.

I encourage every Post to consider  
sponsoring a Sea Cadet unit and  
welcoming them into your community  
and your Post. We brought the Gulf  
Eagle Division Sea Cadets into Post  
103, and it has been a great fit. Our

members enjoy having the youth at  
the Post, and the Sea Cadets enjoy  
being there.

During major events, they provide  
a Color Guard, help with setup and  
cleanup, and take on a variety of  
tasks. We also encourage them to  
spend time talking with our veterans  
by asking them to find someone  
who served on a submarine, drove  
a tank, landed on an aircraft carrier,  
or shared other unique military  
experiences. These conversations  
create meaningful connections  
between generations.

Once again, I emphasize that they

are our future.

If your Post is interested in the Sea  
Cadets, send me a text or email, and  
I will gladly help connect you with  
the right people. There are always  
Sea Cadet units looking for a home.  
JROTC and Sea Cadets are  
outstanding programs. My grandson  
participates in both, and he enjoys  
the structure and opportunities they  
provide.

Let's make 2026-2027 the year  
the Sea Cadets thrive within The  
American Legion Department of  
Florida.

## Post 199 Honors Forgotten Heroes Through Memorial Day Tribute

Edna Frazier  
Post 199

American Legion Post 199 proudly

presented its 2026 Memorial Day  
Program under the theme, "**From  
the Grounds of Evergreen to the**

**Heart of Post 199.**" This year's  
observance carried deep historical

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meaning, honoring the African American Soldiers laid to rest at Evergreen Cemetery, many of whom served during eras of segregation, discrimination, and limited recognition.

Evergreen Cemetery holds a unique and solemn place in our community's history. As a segregated cemetery, it was once the only burial ground available to African Americans in West Palm Beach. Many African American Soldiers were laid to rest there, yet over time their service was nearly forgotten. For years, Post 199 has faithfully placed flags at Evergreen, ensuring these veterans were remembered even when no one else stood watch.

This Memorial Day, Post 199 took

a meaningful step. After honoring them at Evergreen, we symbolically brought them home to the Post, carrying their legacy into the heart of our community.

The morning began at Evergreen Cemetery with a quiet, reverent tribute by Post 199 members and supporters. The City of West Palm Beach's Historic Preservation Program, which is currently conducting a comprehensive survey of Evergreen, was recognized for its important work documenting marked and unmarked graves and preserving the stories of those buried there.

Following the cemetery observance, the program continued at the heart of Post 199, where the Memorial Day message was delivered. Past District

Commanders, local city officials, and Post 199 leadership each offered reflections honoring the fallen while emphasizing the importance of remembrance, unity, and service.

Auxiliary Unit 199 hosted a warm and welcoming breakfast, providing an opportunity for fellowship, storytelling, and community connection.

This year's program powerfully connected our past and present, from the sacred, segregated grounds of Evergreen to the welcoming heart of Post 199. We remain committed to ensuring the sacrifices of our African American Soldiers are never forgotten and that their legacy continues to guide our mission of service.



## Post 331 Introduces New Leadership and Vision for 2026-2027

George McZeal  
Post 331

Doris "Dorie" Miller Memorial Post 331 in Orlando is proud to introduce its newly elected and appointed officers for the 2026-2027 administrative year.

On behalf of Commander Ron Beasley and the Executive Committee, thank you to our members for your confidence,

support, and continued commitment to our Post. As we begin this new Legion year, we are committed to building on the proud traditions of The American Legion while strengthening service to veterans, their families, our military, and the Central Florida community.

### 2026-2027 Post Officers

- Commander: Ron Beasley

- Adjutant: Renee Anderson
- First Vice Commander: Tonya Bass
- Second Vice Commander: Courtney Dickerson-Pullin
- Finance Officer: Billy Leville
- Chaplain: George McZeal Jr.
- Judge Advocate: Terri Cornileus
- Historian: Felecia Fair

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- Sergeant-at-Arms: Gary Briscoe
- Post Service Officer: Norris Henderson

### Executive Committee Members-at-Large

- Matt Davis
- Malvin Williams-Tyson

We also extend our sincere appreciation to our outgoing officers for their dedicated service to Post 331.

Commander Ron Beasley has introduced **Project H.O.N.O.R.** (Honoring Our Nation Through

**Opportunity, Resilience, and Service)** as the Post's leadership initiative for the coming year, along with the motto, **"New Day, New Way!"**

Project H.O.N.O.R. focuses on strengthening services to veterans and their families, growing membership, expanding youth and community outreach, building partnerships throughout the community, promoting sound financial stewardship and accountability, preserving the history and legacy of Post 331, and fostering a culture of professionalism, teamwork, inclusion, and mutual

respect.

The leadership team is committed to open communication, responsible stewardship, and encouraging every member to become actively involved through meetings, committees, volunteer opportunities, and Legion programs.

Together, we will continue honoring those who served by serving others.

**Project H.O.N.O.R.**  
Honoring Our Nation Through  
Opportunity, Resilience, and Service  
**"New Day, New Way!"**



## Building Momentum for a Successful SAL Year



Michael Nigbor  
Detachment Commander  
[commander@floridason.org](mailto:commander@floridason.org)

Greetings from the Detachment of Florida Commander,

Thank you to everyone who attended our 54th Annual Convention. The information shared and ideas exchanged were outstanding. Thank you to the MT&D instructors, Adjutant Christian Rapp and his team, and all of our dedicated leaders for your time and commitment.

This is going to be a wonderful year as the greatest nation in the world celebrates its 250th anniversary. We need to build on that excitement and carry the momentum into our membership efforts as we work toward our goal of 32,000 members. We can do it:

1. Reinstate our lost members.
2. Renew our current members.
3. Recruit new members.

As I have traveled throughout the state attending installations, I have been thrilled to hear District

Commanders using the script provided by Adjutant Rapp to educate members about our G.O.A.L.S. program and this year's charity, C.O.T.A.



Congratulations to all of our newly elected officers, and thank you to those returning to continue serving. I encourage each of you to challenge

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<<Detachment Commander continued from page 30

your members to recruit at least one new member this year and continue conducting Buddy Checks.

Since Convention, I have had the privilege of attending installations across the Department, including Posts 113, 103, 135, 137, 197, 129, 250, 202, 233, 123, 14, 125, 305, 158, 46, 275, 252, 104, 57, 107, 224, 39, 303, 321, 415, 254, K11, and several others. One of the highlights was attending the installation at Post 57, where William Bell, a dual member, and his three sons were installed as SAL officers.

On July 4, Assistant Adjutant John Jennings and I were honored to participate in the annual Auxiliary Unit 238 Parade. Several of our officers joined us for a wonderful day of patriotism as we celebrated America's 250th anniversary.

The Leadership Retreat in Orlando on July 11-12 was another great

opportunity to work together and prepare for the year ahead.

Looking ahead, I will continue attending installations and events across Florida, including District 12 in August, National Convention in Louisville, Kentucky, Aug. 27-31, the District 1 Children and Youth event in September, the annual SAL Car Show at Post 8, and several C.O.T.A. fundraising events. Invitations are already coming in for events well into 2027, and I appreciate every opportunity to visit your Squadrons.

By now, most installations have been completed, and you should be consolidating your SIR reports. Let's keep the momentum going and continue helping one another. We have an outstanding team of advisors who are always willing to answer questions and assist with completing reports.

Call your members and get them engaged with your Squadron. Teach

them about our G.O.A.L.S., Growth, Opportunity, Action, Leadership, and Support. Visit neighboring Squadrons and invite them to yours.

We are a team. We are stronger together. I look forward to working with all of you in the coming year. Let's go, Team Florida. Let's hit it out of the park.

As always, if you would like me to attend one of your events, please don't hesitate to contact me.



## 107th Annual Department of Florida Convention Highlights - June 11-14, 2026



Bruce E. Comer  
Department Adjutant  
[bcomer@floridalegion.org](mailto:bcomer@floridalegion.org)

The American Legion, Department of Florida, held its 2026 Department Convention in Orlando from June 11-14, bringing together Legionnaires from across the state to conduct Department business, recognize outstanding service, celebrate program achievements,

and elect the Department's leadership for the 2026-2027 administrative year.

### Election of Department Officers

Delegates elected the following Department officers for the **2026-2027 administrative year**:

- Department Commander: Bob Matheson

- First Vice Commander: Bruce Carl
- Second Vice Commander: Rick Orzechowski
- Department Historian: Kimberly Beebe
- Department Chaplain: Eric Linthicum
- Department Sergeant-at-Arms: Sonny Decker

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<< Department Adjutant continued from page 31

The following officers were elected for the **2026–2028 term**:

- National Executive Committee Member: Michael Raymond
- Alternate National Executive Committee Member: Jessica Moore

## Resolutions

Convention delegates approved eight resolutions addressing ceremonial practices, veterans' benefits, organizational terminology, and issues affecting veterans and their families.

### Proposed Resolution #1 – National Historian Endorsement

Submitted by Post 252, this National-level resolution endorsed Edward Lewis for the position of National Historian of The American Legion.

### Proposed Resolution #2 – POW/MIA Slow Salute

Submitted by Post 8, this Department-level resolution permits members to render a slow salute while the Sergeant-at-Arms retrieves the POW/MIA flag during official meetings and ceremonies.

### Proposed Resolution #3 – Recognition of Hallowed Ground

Submitted by Post 15, this Department-level resolution formally recognizes the area between the United States flag and The American Legion flag as hallowed ground during official Department meetings, ceremonies, and functions.

Members are encouraged to avoid unnecessary passage between the colors.

### Proposed Resolution #4 – Post-Traumatic Stress Injury

Submitted by Post 382, this Department- and National-level resolution supports the use of the term "post-traumatic stress injury" to help reduce stigma among veterans. It also encourages Posts, Districts, and Departments to promote awareness, education, early treatment, and peer support.

### Proposed Resolution #5 – GI Bill Housing Continuity

Submitted by Post 98, this National-level resolution urges Congress and the Department of Veterans Affairs to continue GI Bill housing payments during academic breaks of 30 days or less for qualifying student veterans who remain enrolled in consecutive academic terms.

### Proposed Resolution #6 – Post Resource Officer

Submitted by Post 321, this National-level resolution proposes changing the title "Post Service Officer" to "Post Resource Officer." The resolution also requests that the title be updated in The American Legion's governing documents, officer guides, manuals, electronic media, and publications.

### Proposed Resolution #7 – Red Star Service Banner

Submitted by Post 7, this National-level resolution supports legislation recognizing the Red Star Service

Banner as a symbol of hope and remembrance for families who have lost a military service member or veteran to suicide.

### Proposed Resolution #8 – VA Foreclosure Action

Submitted by Post 187, this National-level resolution calls upon the Department of Veterans Affairs, Congress, congressional Veterans' Affairs committees, and the VA Office of Inspector General to address VA-guaranteed home-loan foreclosures and ensure that veterans have access to appropriate loss-mitigation protections.

The Department-level resolutions will guide practices and initiatives within the Department of Florida. Resolutions requiring National action will be forwarded for consideration through the appropriate National Convention process.

## 2026 End of Year Awards

### American Legion Riders

Chapter of the Year  
Small: Chapter 197  
Medium: Chapter 10  
Large: Chapter 9

### Americanism Best Post Program

Winner: Post 57  
Runner-up: Post 250

### Blood Donor – Margaret Skaggs Awards

Winner: Post 296  
Runner-up: Post 63

### Children & Youth Post Program

Winner: Post 167  
Runner-up: Post 250

continued on page 33 >>

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**Children & Youth Post Chair**

Winner: Annie Bennett, Post 167  
Runner-up: Debbie Gentry, Post 420

**JROTC Post Program**

Winner: Post 273  
Runner-up: Post 8

**Shooting Sports Post Program**

Winner: Post 90

**Public Relations Best Post Program**

Winner: Post 419  
Runner-up: Post 90

**Outstanding Post Scouting Program**

**Winners:**

Post 419  
Post 296  
Post 90

**Religious Emphasis Best Post Program**

Winner: Post 250  
Runner-up: Post 58

**Four Chaplains Memorial Service Best Post Program**

Winner: Post 255  
Runner-up: Post 8

**Scouting Program Awards**

Outstanding Post Scouting Program:  
Post 419, Post 296, and Post 90

**School Medal Best Post Program**

Winner: Post 8  
Runner-up: Post 250

**Sea Cadets Program**

Best Post Program: Post 318  
Runner-up: Post 57

**Social Media Best Post Program**

Winner: Post 155  
Runner-up: Post 419

**Best History Book Narrative**

Winner: Post 8

**Best Yearbook**

Winner: Post 40

**Best Legion Riders Yearbook**

Winner: Chapter 252

**Tracy Taylor Award**

Winner: Junnie Watson, Post 83

**Eddie Humer Award**

Winner: Walter Spann, Post 181  
Runner-up: Kim Bean, Post 243

**Best Outstanding Adjutant of the Year**

Winner: Michael Abee, Post 402

**Wilson Timmons Memorial Award**

Winner: Post 103  
Legionnaire of the Year  
Winner: George DeAngelo

**2026 Department Champions**

**Boys State Governor (2025)**

Winner: Mike Beaucejour

**Eagle Scout of the Year**

Winner: William Churchill

**Oratorical Contest**

Winner: Brianna Pe Aguirre

**JROTC Cadet of the Year**

Winner: Leah VanArsdale

**Junior Shooting Sports – Precision Individual**

Winner: Okalani Pinero Hernandez

**Junior Shooting Sports – Precision Team**

Winner: West Port High School  
Okalani Pinero Hernandez  
Layel Michewicz  
Michael Fox  
Yadiel Arroyo

**Junior Shooting Sports – Sporter Individual**

Winner: Zoe Enslin

**Junior Shooting Sports – Sporter**

**Team**

Winner: Mariner High School  
Zoe Enslin  
Elyssa Vazquez  
Jakobe Changasie  
Rylee Kyles

**General Scholarship**

Winner: Jasmine Gaines

**Veterans Service Officer Association Scholarship**

Winner: Matthew Ngo

**Nursing School Scholarship**

Winner: Catherine Rowland

**Medical School Scholarship**

Winner: Lillian McBee

**Baseball Scholarship**

Winner: Jacob McClintic

**Law Officer of the Year**

Winner: Michael Biron

**Firefighter of the Year**

Winner: Robert Meade

**EMT/Paramedic of the Year**

Winner: Andrew Grivois

**Teacher of the Year**

Winner: John Favazza

**Employer Awards**

Employer of Veterans: Pipes Pros. Inc  
Local Veteran Employment Representative: Wilfredo Quiles  
Employment Service – Local Office: Career Source



continued on page 34 >>

<< Department Adjutant continued from page 33

## Membership Awards

### 50% Membership by September 4, 2025

|    |    |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
|----|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 1  | 32 | 64  | 108 | 152 | 220 | 266 | 328 | 374 |
| 3  | 36 | 66  | 109 | 153 | 221 | 268 | 330 | 385 |
| 4  | 37 | 71  | 112 | 155 | 230 | 270 | 332 | 392 |
| 5  | 38 | 74  | 114 | 157 | 235 | 271 | 334 | 402 |
| 6  | 43 | 75  | 116 | 166 | 236 | 272 | 340 | 403 |
| 9  | 44 | 77  | 118 | 167 | 237 | 274 | 347 | 405 |
| 11 | 45 | 78  | 120 | 172 | 238 | 277 | 348 | 413 |
| 13 | 46 | 82  | 121 | 177 | 241 | 284 | 354 | 417 |
| 18 | 47 | 92  | 137 | 182 | 243 | 286 | 356 | 418 |
| 21 | 51 | 98  | 139 | 193 | 246 | 287 | 357 | 420 |
| 22 | 53 | 99  | 141 | 200 | 250 | 293 | 359 | 422 |
| 26 | 54 | 100 | 145 | 202 | 255 | 296 | 365 |     |
| 27 | 56 | 103 | 148 | 215 | 258 | 302 | 372 |     |
| 29 | 57 | 104 | 149 | 217 | 259 | 321 | 373 |     |

### 75% Membership by December 3, 2025

|    |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 3  | 46  | 103 | 157 | 202 | 266 | 322 | 373 | 421 |
| 4  | 47  | 104 | 166 | 209 | 268 | 325 | 380 | 422 |
| 11 | 51  | 114 | 168 | 215 | 272 | 330 | 402 | 423 |
| 13 | 56  | 116 | 172 | 220 | 284 | 331 | 403 | 424 |
| 20 | 57  | 118 | 181 | 234 | 286 | 335 | 405 |     |
| 21 | 58  | 129 | 182 | 236 | 287 | 348 | 413 |     |
| 22 | 68  | 141 | 188 | 238 | 293 | 354 | 415 |     |
| 26 | 74  | 145 | 193 | 241 | 302 | 357 | 417 |     |
| 27 | 77  | 149 | 194 | 243 | 303 | 365 | 418 |     |
| 43 | 78  | 153 | 195 | 248 | 304 | 366 | 419 |     |
| 44 | 100 | 155 | 201 | 255 | 321 | 372 | 420 |     |

### 80% Membership by January 7, 2026

|    |    |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
|----|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 1  | 35 | 77  | 129 | 171 | 221 | 272 | 322 | 372 |
| 2  | 36 | 78  | 135 | 172 | 234 | 273 | 323 | 373 |
| 3  | 37 | 82  | 137 | 173 | 236 | 274 | 325 | 380 |
| 4  | 39 | 90  | 138 | 180 | 237 | 275 | 328 | 402 |
| 6  | 43 | 92  | 139 | 181 | 238 | 283 | 330 | 403 |
| 8  | 44 | 99  | 141 | 182 | 240 | 284 | 331 | 404 |
| 9  | 46 | 100 | 142 | 186 | 241 | 285 | 335 | 405 |
| 11 | 47 | 103 | 145 | 188 | 243 | 286 | 336 | 413 |
| 13 | 51 | 104 | 148 | 193 | 246 | 287 | 340 | 415 |
| 15 | 54 | 108 | 149 | 194 | 248 | 291 | 347 | 417 |
| 17 | 55 | 110 | 153 | 195 | 250 | 293 | 348 | 418 |
| 20 | 56 | 113 | 155 | 199 | 252 | 296 | 354 | 419 |
| 21 | 57 | 114 | 157 | 201 | 254 | 302 | 356 | 420 |
| 22 | 58 | 116 | 158 | 202 | 255 | 303 | 357 | 421 |
| 25 | 62 | 117 | 162 | 209 | 266 | 304 | 358 | 422 |
| 26 | 66 | 118 | 163 | 215 | 267 | 305 | 359 | 423 |
| 27 | 68 | 119 | 164 | 217 | 268 | 309 | 361 | 424 |
| 28 | 72 | 123 | 166 | 219 | 270 | 318 | 365 |     |
| 33 | 74 | 125 | 168 | 220 | 271 | 321 | 366 |     |

### 85% Membership by February 4, 2026

|   |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |     |
|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|-----|
| 1 | 9  | 20 | 27 | 39 | 47 | 57 | 74 | 92  |
| 2 | 11 | 21 | 28 | 43 | 51 | 58 | 77 | 99  |
| 3 | 13 | 22 | 33 | 44 | 54 | 62 | 78 | 100 |
| 4 | 16 | 25 | 35 | 45 | 55 | 68 | 83 | 103 |
| 6 | 17 | 26 | 36 | 46 | 56 | 72 | 90 | 104 |

|     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 108 | 138 | 164 | 200 | 241 | 274 | 318 | 357 | 404 |
| 110 | 139 | 166 | 201 | 243 | 275 | 321 | 358 | 405 |
| 113 | 141 | 168 | 202 | 248 | 283 | 322 | 359 | 413 |
| 114 | 142 | 171 | 209 | 250 | 284 | 323 | 361 | 415 |
| 116 | 145 | 172 | 215 | 252 | 285 | 325 | 365 | 417 |
| 117 | 148 | 173 | 217 | 254 | 286 | 330 | 366 | 418 |
| 118 | 149 | 177 | 220 | 255 | 287 | 331 | 372 | 419 |
| 119 | 152 | 180 | 221 | 266 | 291 | 335 | 373 | 420 |
| 123 | 153 | 181 | 234 | 267 | 293 | 336 | 374 | 421 |
| 125 | 154 | 182 | 235 | 268 | 296 | 340 | 378 | 422 |
| 129 | 155 | 186 | 236 | 270 | 302 | 347 | 380 | 423 |
| 135 | 157 | 193 | 237 | 271 | 303 | 348 | 394 | 424 |
| 136 | 158 | 194 | 238 | 272 | 305 | 354 | 402 |     |
| 137 | 163 | 195 | 240 | 273 | 309 | 356 | 403 |     |

### 90% Membership by March 4, 2026

|    |    |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
|----|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 1  | 35 | 74  | 118 | 153 | 200 | 244 | 293 | 347 |
| 2  | 36 | 77  | 119 | 154 | 201 | 250 | 296 | 348 |
| 3  | 39 | 78  | 123 | 157 | 202 | 252 | 302 | 354 |
| 6  | 43 | 83  | 125 | 158 | 209 | 255 | 303 | 356 |
| 9  | 44 | 90  | 126 | 163 | 210 | 266 | 305 | 357 |
| 11 | 46 | 92  | 129 | 166 | 215 | 267 | 309 | 358 |
| 13 | 47 | 99  | 135 | 168 | 217 | 268 | 318 | 359 |
| 16 | 51 | 100 | 136 | 171 | 220 | 272 | 321 | 361 |
| 17 | 54 | 103 | 137 | 172 | 221 | 273 | 322 | 365 |
| 20 | 55 | 104 | 138 | 177 | 230 | 275 | 325 | 366 |
| 21 | 56 | 108 | 139 | 180 | 234 | 283 | 330 | 372 |
| 22 | 57 | 110 | 141 | 181 | 236 | 284 | 331 | 373 |
| 26 | 58 | 113 | 142 | 182 | 238 | 285 | 335 | 378 |
| 27 | 62 | 114 | 145 | 186 | 240 | 286 | 336 | 380 |
| 28 | 68 | 116 | 148 | 194 | 241 | 287 | 340 | 394 |
| 33 | 72 | 117 | 149 | 195 | 243 | 291 | 344 | 402 |

### 95% Membership by April 1, 2026

|    |    |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
|----|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 2  | 43 | 100 | 138 | 182 | 238 | 286 | 340 | 404 |
| 3  | 44 | 103 | 139 | 192 | 240 | 287 | 348 | 405 |
| 6  | 46 | 104 | 145 | 194 | 241 | 291 | 354 | 412 |
| 9  | 51 | 106 | 148 | 195 | 243 | 293 | 356 | 415 |
| 11 | 54 | 108 | 149 | 200 | 244 | 302 | 357 | 417 |
| 13 | 56 | 113 | 153 | 201 | 250 | 303 | 358 | 418 |
| 16 | 57 | 114 | 154 | 202 | 254 | 305 | 359 | 419 |
| 17 | 58 | 116 | 157 | 209 | 255 | 318 | 365 | 420 |
| 20 | 62 | 118 | 158 | 210 | 266 | 321 | 366 | 421 |
| 21 | 68 | 120 | 166 | 215 | 267 | 322 | 372 | 422 |
| 22 | 72 | 123 | 168 | 217 | 268 | 325 | 373 | 424 |
| 26 | 74 | 125 | 171 | 220 | 272 | 328 | 378 |     |
| 27 | 77 | 126 | 172 | 221 | 273 | 330 | 380 |     |
| 28 | 78 | 130 | 177 | 230 | 275 | 331 | 398 |     |
| 36 | 83 | 136 | 180 | 234 | 283 | 335 | 402 |     |
| 39 | 92 | 137 | 181 | 236 | 285 | 336 | 403 |     |

### 100% Membership by May 6, 2026

|    |    |    |    |     |     |     |     |     |
|----|----|----|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 2  | 16 | 28 | 54 | 78  | 113 | 129 | 153 | 177 |
| 3  | 17 | 36 | 56 | 83  | 114 | 130 | 154 | 180 |
| 6  | 20 | 39 | 57 | 92  | 116 | 137 | 157 | 181 |
| 9  | 21 | 43 | 58 | 100 | 118 | 138 | 158 | 182 |
| 10 | 22 | 44 | 68 | 103 | 120 | 139 | 166 | 188 |
| 11 | 23 | 46 | 72 | 104 | 123 | 145 | 168 | 192 |
| 13 | 26 | 47 | 74 | 106 | 125 | 148 | 171 | 193 |
| 15 | 27 | 51 | 77 | 108 | 126 | 149 | 172 | 194 |

|     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 195 | 221 | 244 | 272 | 296 | 325 | 348 | 373 | 415 |
| 200 | 230 | 248 | 273 | 302 | 328 | 356 | 378 | 416 |
| 201 | 234 | 250 | 283 | 303 | 330 | 357 | 380 | 417 |
| 202 | 236 | 252 | 285 | 305 | 331 | 358 | 398 | 418 |
| 210 | 238 | 254 | 286 | 309 | 332 | 359 | 402 | 419 |
| 215 | 240 | 255 | 287 | 318 | 335 | 365 | 403 | 420 |
| 217 | 241 | 266 | 291 | 321 | 336 | 366 | 404 | 421 |
| 220 | 243 | 268 | 293 | 322 | 344 | 372 | 405 | 422 |

### 100%+1 Membership by May 31, 2026

|    |    |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
|----|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 1  | 28 | 80  | 130 | 181 | 234 | 283 | 331 | 398 |
| 2  | 36 | 83  | 133 | 182 | 235 | 285 | 332 | 402 |
| 3  | 39 | 92  | 137 | 187 | 236 | 286 | 335 | 403 |
| 6  | 43 | 100 | 138 | 188 | 238 | 287 | 336 | 404 |
| 9  | 44 | 103 | 139 | 192 | 240 | 291 | 344 | 405 |
| 10 | 46 | 104 | 145 | 193 | 243 | 293 | 348 | 415 |
| 11 | 47 | 106 | 148 | 194 | 244 | 296 | 356 | 416 |
| 13 | 51 | 108 | 149 | 197 | 250 | 302 | 357 | 418 |
| 15 | 54 | 113 | 153 | 200 | 252 | 303 | 358 | 419 |
| 16 | 56 | 114 | 154 | 201 | 254 | 305 | 359 | 420 |
| 17 | 57 | 116 | 157 | 202 | 255 | 309 | 365 | 421 |
| 20 | 58 | 118 | 158 | 210 | 266 | 318 | 366 | 422 |
| 21 | 62 | 120 | 166 | 215 | 267 | 321 | 372 | 423 |
| 22 | 72 | 123 | 168 | 217 | 268 | 322 | 373 | 424 |
| 23 | 74 | 125 | 171 | 220 | 272 | 325 | 378 |     |
| 26 | 77 | 126 | 177 | 221 | 273 | 328 | 382 |     |
| 27 | 78 | 129 | 180 | 230 | 275 | 330 | 394 |     |

### Department Membership Drive Highest Percentage March 1-15, 2026

90 133 318 328

### Highest Percentage by May 31, 2026

103 138 331 372 424

### Post All-Time High

|    |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 9  | 75  | 115 | 181 | 221 | 267 | 372 | 416 |
| 54 | 83  | 117 | 187 | 236 | 275 | 373 | 418 |
| 57 | 90  | 129 | 194 | 238 | 318 | 382 | 419 |
| 62 | 103 | 144 | 199 | 243 | 325 | 394 | 421 |
| 69 | 108 | 145 | 201 | 252 | 336 | 402 |     |
| 72 | 114 | 166 | 215 | 254 | 357 | 413 |     |

### 5 Consecutive Years All-Time High

221 243



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### Post Retention Awards

#### **90%**

|    |    |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
|----|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 4  | 23 | 62  | 130 | 155 | 220 | 270 | 309 | 356 |
| 11 | 28 | 71  | 133 | 157 | 221 | 273 | 318 | 358 |
| 13 | 33 | 74  | 136 | 166 | 230 | 283 | 322 | 361 |
| 15 | 43 | 92  | 139 | 168 | 238 | 284 | 325 | 375 |
| 17 | 47 | 106 | 141 | 171 | 241 | 285 | 333 | 402 |
| 18 | 55 | 108 | 153 | 200 | 246 | 291 | 335 |     |
| 21 | 58 | 129 | 154 | 202 | 267 | 303 | 347 |     |

#### **95%**

|     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 78  | 120 | 180 | 209 | 243 | 328 | 357 | 403 | 418 |
| 104 | 149 | 182 | 210 | 258 | 330 | 365 | 404 | 419 |
| 116 | 158 | 193 | 236 | 286 | 348 | 385 | 416 |     |

#### **100%**

|    |    |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
|----|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 26 | 51 | 100 | 172 | 194 | 248 | 293 | 372 | 417 |
| 27 | 56 | 114 | 181 | 195 | 255 | 302 | 373 | 420 |
| 44 | 68 | 118 | 188 | 215 | 266 | 331 | 405 | 422 |
| 46 | 77 | 145 | 192 | 234 | 268 | 354 | 412 |     |

### 100% Legion Family Ribbons

|    |    |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
|----|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 2  | 43 | 78  | 123 | 182 | 234 | 302 | 336 | 405 |
| 10 | 44 | 83  | 129 | 188 | 238 | 303 | 344 | 415 |
| 11 | 46 | 92  | 139 | 193 | 243 | 305 | 348 | 416 |
| 20 | 51 | 100 | 145 | 194 | 248 | 318 | 356 | 417 |
| 21 | 54 | 103 | 148 | 195 | 268 | 321 | 357 | 419 |
| 22 | 56 | 106 | 153 | 200 | 273 | 322 | 373 | 420 |
| 23 | 57 | 113 | 166 | 202 | 285 | 328 | 380 | 421 |
| 26 | 68 | 114 | 171 | 210 | 286 | 330 | 398 | 423 |
| 27 | 72 | 116 | 172 | 215 | 287 | 331 | 402 | 424 |
| 28 | 74 | 118 | 177 | 221 | 291 | 332 | 403 |     |
| 39 | 77 | 120 | 181 | 230 | 296 | 335 | 404 |     |

### Post Honor Ribbon Recipients

|     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 44  | 145 | 195 | 236 | 293 | 357 | 403 | 420 |
| 51  | 168 | 201 | 266 | 302 | 365 | 405 | 421 |
| 68  | 172 | 215 | 268 | 322 | 366 | 417 | 422 |
| 114 | 182 | 234 | 287 | 330 | 380 | 419 |     |

### District Honor Ribbon, by May 6, 2026

Rick Cabrera

### District Commander Race to the Top Award

Roxann Dressel, District 2, Category 1

Rick Cabrera, District 3, Category II (2nd in the Nation)

### 100%+1 Highest Percentage of Membership Commander Achievement, by May 31, 2026

Robert Osmond, District 1

Roxann Dressel, District 2

Rick Cabrera, District 3

Darcy Bockman-Wright, District 4

Miguel Garcia, District 5

Daniel Martin, District 12  
Laurene Allen-Flower, District 13  
Michael Harley, District 16  
Doug Hockenberry, Northern Area  
Shelby Windham, Western Area

### Bronze Brigade Membership

Stuart E. Dobro, Post 365  
Rosemarie Yeary, Post 420  
William Pohlman, Post 78

### Silver Brigade Membership

Jerry L. Schwarz, Post 323  
Cathy Butler, Post 240  
Mark Cowan, Post 36  
Philip Preston, Post 252  
Leonard Wingfield, Post 252  
Francis Campbell, Post 252

### Gold Brigade Membership

#### **First Year**

Robert Burgess, Post 347  
Alice Rush, Post 240  
Richard D. Warner, Post 138  
Jamie Smith, Post 252

#### **Second Year**

William Niemiec, Post 250  
Kelly Valliere, Post 57

#### **Third Year**

Tina Charney-Burgess, Post 347  
John Holbert, Post 273  
George Stern, Post 103

#### **Fourth Year**

David Musser, Post 347  
Binion Williams, Post 137  
Susan Kohler, Post 273  
Toshiko L. Moultrie, Post 197

#### **Seventh Year**

Richard Gifford, Post 273

#### **Tenth Year**

Anthony Torregrossa, Post 273

#### **Eleventh Year**

Dan Koker, Post 273

### Recruiter of the Year

Kelly Valliere, Post 57

### **Synopsis of Department Executive Committee Meetings Thursday, June 11, 2026**

The Department Executive Committee (DEC) met in regular session on Thursday, June 11, 2026, with 55 members present.

The Finance Committee reported that the Department remains in strong financial condition, with approximately nine months of operating expenses in reserve. For the period ending March 31, 2026, the Department reported approximately \$3.58 million in income, \$3.34 million in expenses, and net income of approximately \$238,900. The Department's investments were also reviewed, including a variable portfolio valued at approximately \$4.5 million and additional funds held in brokerage and annuity accounts. The investment portfolio earned approximately 6.3% during the previous 12 months, resulting in approximately \$269,000 in investment earnings. The Committee approved the financial report and the proposed 2026–2027 budgets for the Department, Sons of The American Legion, and American Legion Riders.

The financial results of the 2026 American Legion Riders Summit were also reviewed. The Summit resulted in a net deficit of approximately \$26,700 after hotel, food, beverage, and related expenses exceeded projections. To strengthen financial oversight for future Summits, the DEC approved greater involvement by the Department Adjutant and Finance Officer in hotel selection, contract negotiations, and the review of food and beverage selections, complimentary rooms, and other hotel-related commitments. Several amendments to the American Legion Riders Standard Operating

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<< Department Adjutant continued from page 35

Procedures were also approved, including the addition of an Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms and the reassignment of new chapter development responsibilities to Area and District Chairs.

Permanent charters were approved for Lake City Post 423, Panama City Post 424, and Tradition Post 425. The DEC reviewed several Posts experiencing membership or leadership challenges and approved continued revitalization efforts for Graceville Post 42, Avalon Park Post 409, Pahokee Post 414, West Palm Beach Post 12, Branford Post 59, and Moore Haven Post 416. Angel Christian was appointed Post Administrator for West Palm Beach Post 12 to assist with membership processing and revitalization. Fort Meade Post 23 reported positive progress under new leadership. After multiple unsuccessful revitalization efforts, the DEC approved beginning the charter-closing process for Ruskin Post 389.

The DEC also approved a full membership audit of both The American Legion and Sons of The

American Legion memberships at Post 154 following concerns regarding membership eligibility verification. The meeting concluded with reminders regarding required reports, responsible budget management, proper membership verification, and the importance of continued support for Post revitalization efforts throughout the Department.

### Sunday, June 14, 2026

The DEC met again in regular session on Sunday, June 14, 2026, with 59 members present.

The DEC ratified the appointment of Robert Ballew to fill the Fourth District Second Vice Commander vacancy and Stuart Scott to fill a vacancy on the Department Finance Committee.

The Committee also ratified the Department Commander's appointments for the 2026–2027 administrative year. The appointed Department officers were Curtis McNeil, Department Judge Advocate, and Chip Brunelle, Department Assistant Judge Advocate. Additional appointments, including Commission Chairs,

Committee Chairs, and Committee members, were also approved by the DEC.

The DEC ratified 27 amendments to the Sons of The American Legion Detachment Constitution and By-Laws that had been approved during the Detachment Convention. An enhanced partnership with WellCare was also approved. The partnership would provide the Department with an annual donation while expanding Medicare education opportunities at Department, District, and Post events.

Department leaders were reminded to submit required eligibility documents, monthly reports, and expense vouchers. Announcements were also provided regarding the Leadership Retreat, National Membership Workshop, National Convention, and Fall Conference.

The meeting concluded with encouragement from the Department Commander to begin membership efforts immediately, support local Posts, develop future leaders, and maintain professional conduct while representing the Department.

## Your Voice Matters in the Legion Link



Carrie Kolze  
Creative Services Manager  
kolze@floridalegion.org

The *Legion Link* exists to keep our American Legion Family informed, engaged, and connected with the

work being accomplished throughout the Department of Florida. Every article should help readers better understand your program, office, or area of responsibility.

As you prepare your monthly

submission, ask yourself one simple question: ***“What do our members need to know from me this month?”***

Your article should reflect your

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<< Creative Services continued from page 36

position and purpose. Whether you are a Department Officer, Area Commander, District Commander, or Department Chair, readers look to you for updates, upcoming deadlines, accomplishments, training opportunities, and information that helps Posts and members succeed. Your article should educate, encourage, and provide value to those reading it.

Just as importantly, make your article meaningful. Members are looking for information that helps them become better leaders, strengthen their Posts, support our programs, and better serve veterans and their communities. While it's appropriate to mention visits and events when they support your message, the Legion Link is not the place for travel logs or lists of every Post you visited during the month. Instead, focus on what was learned, what was accomplished, and how it benefits our members.

At the same time, remember that longer doesn't necessarily mean better. You don't need to write a novel to make an impact, but your article should contain enough substance to warrant publication. A few thoughtful, informative paragraphs are often far more effective than several pages of repetitive text. Focus on quality over quantity, and provide readers with information they can actually use.

To help streamline the publication process, please submit your article in an editable format, such as a Microsoft Word document (.doc or .docx), Rich Text Format (.rtf), or directly in the body of an email. Please do not submit PDFs. PDF files cannot be edited efficiently and often slow the production process.

If you choose to include photographs, please send two or three of your best, high-resolution

images as separate attachments. Select photos that support your article and tell the story you're sharing. We want to highlight meaningful moments, not create a scrapbook of every event.

Finally, remember that every submission is reviewed before publication. Articles may be edited for grammar, spelling, punctuation, clarity, formatting, and length while preserving your voice, intent, and message.

The Legion Link is one of the Department's most valuable communication tools. By submitting clear, purposeful, and meaningful articles each month, you help keep our members informed, strengthen communication across the Department, and showcase the incredible work being done throughout The American Legion, Department of Florida.

## Freedom Waters Foundation Receives Children & Youth Fund Grant



Bekki Boarman  
Programs Director  
[bboarman@floridalegion.org](mailto:bboarman@floridalegion.org)

The American Legion Department of Florida Children & Youth Fund is proud to award a \$5,000 grant to the Freedom Waters Foundation, presented by Post 135.

The grant will help provide adaptive and therapeutic boating experiences for 20 children with special health

care needs or developmental disabilities, creating opportunities for recreation, confidence-building, and lasting memories for children and their families.

The Department of Florida is honored to support organizations like Freedom Waters Foundation that

make a meaningful difference in the lives of Florida's children.



## Post Everlasting

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



### In Memoriam: Deborah D. "Debbie" Wheeler



The American Legion, Department of Florida, mourns the passing of Past Department Women

Veterans Chair Deborah D. "Debbie" Wheeler of Dunedin, who passed away on June 27, 2026, at the age of 66.

A proud U.S. Air Force veteran and a dedicated member of Dunedin Post 275, Debbie faithfully served The American Legion for 30 continuous years. Her commitment to veterans and the organization was evident through her many leadership roles at the Post, Department, and National levels, leaving a lasting impact on countless members.

Please keep Debbie's family and friends in your thoughts and prayers during this difficult time.

For Debbie's full obituary, service updates, and additional information, please visit: <https://www.floridalegion.org/deborah-d-debbie-wheeler/>

### In Memoriam: Robert D. "Bob" Plafchan



The American Legion, Department of Florida, mourns the passing of Past Department

Finance Chair Robert D. "Bob" Plafchan of Avon Park, who passed away on June 27, 2026, at the age of 84.

A proud U.S. Navy veteran and a dedicated member of Avon Park Post 69, Bob faithfully served The American Legion for 28 continuous years. Through his leadership at the Post, District, and Department levels, he made a lasting contribution to the organization, most recently serving as Chair of the Department Finance Committee.

Please keep Bob's wife, Carol, along with his family and friends, in your thoughts and prayers during this difficult time.

For Bob's full obituary and additional information, please visit: <https://www.floridalegion.org/robert-d-bob-plafchan/>

MEMBERSHIP  
REPORT

August 1, 2026  
TARGET: 50%

|              |                      |        |
|--------------|----------------------|--------|
| District 1   | Donald Westfall      | 33.73% |
| District 2   | Roxana Dressel       | 34.28% |
| District 3   | Shelley Jefferson    | 28.45% |
| District 4   | Darcy Bockman-Wright | 38.26% |
| District 5   | Ken White            | 36.02% |
| District 6   | Alan Adams           | 33.84% |
| District 7   | Karen Warren         | 31.34% |
| District 8   | Robert Patierno      | 30.47% |
| District 9   | David Hurst          | 34.15% |
| District 11  | Stanley Brown, Jr.   | 32.66% |
| District 12  | Daniel Ciesielski    | 30.47% |
| District 13  | Laurene Allen-Flower | 29.55% |
| District 14  | Angela Glover        | 33.32% |
| District 15  | Stephen Tyler        | 31.74% |
| District 16  | Michael Harley       | 30.10% |
| District 17  | Jim Bowers           | 31.36% |
| Central      | Kalvin Thompson      | -      |
| Eastern      | Dennis Mallon        | -      |
| Northern     | Miguel Garcia        | -      |
| Southern     | Geo Bograkos         | -      |
| Southwestern | Doug Deierlein       | -      |
| Western      | Robert Osmon         | -      |

\*\*\*Percentages are retention rate only.  
Goal percentages have not been finalized.\*\*\*

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# American Legion Child Well-being Foundation

*"Dedicated to the betterment of all children"*

## 100% Per Capita Banner Program Request Form 2026 – 2027

Each American Legion post, American Legion Auxiliary unit, Sons of The American Legion squadron, American Legion Riders chapter or Eight and Forty salon donating at least one dollar for each member during the American Legion Child Well-being Foundation's award year (1 June - 31 May) may receive a beautiful banner/streamer.

To qualify for the 2026-2027 year a post, unit, squadron, riders, or salon must donate one dollar per member based upon its official membership total from their national organization as of June 1, 2026. The post, unit, squadron, riders, or salon has from June 1, 2026, to May 31, 2027, to submit this form, **along with the donation**, to the American Legion Child Well-being Foundation.

Post, unit, squadron, riders, or salon name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

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

Post, unit, squadron, or salon membership total as of June 1, 2026: \_\_\_\_\_

Total enclosed: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

### **Banner Request Form**

Send completed form to:

American Legion Child Well-being Foundation

PO Box 1055

Indianapolis, IN 46206

**ALL REQUEST FORMS MUST BE RECEIVED BY May 31, 2027**



**SEPTEMBER 19, 2026**

# **FLORIDA'S 6TH ANNUAL SEVEN BRIDGES POW/MIA REMEMBRANCE DAY RIDE & CEREMONY**

**Sponsored by: The American Legion Riders Department of Florida**

**Police Escorted Ride from Adamec HD Baymeadows, over the Seven Bridges, crossing the St. Johns River, and ending at the National POW/MIA Memorial (6112 POW-MIA Memorial Pkwy, Jacksonville FL 32221) for a POW/MIA Ceremony at 1:30 PM.**

## **All Riders Welcome!**

**Scan QR for:  
Registration  
Hotel Info  
Event page...**



**limit to 250 motorcycles or trikes (no autocycles)**

- Meet & Greet on Friday Night September 18 at American Legion Post 316 (1127 Atlantic Blvd, Atlantic Bch, FL 32233) at 5:00PM**
- Registration 8:00AM-10:00AM at Adamec Harley-Davidson® 8909 Baymeadows Rd Jacksonville, FL 32256**
- After Event Social following ceremony**
- KSU 10:30AM**
- Cost: \$20 Per Bike/\$5 passenger**

**POC: Denny Luke, POW/MIA Chair**

**904-403-0181**

**POWMIA@legionmail.org**



★ CENTRAL AREA ★



# MYLEGION TRAINING



**STRONGER TOGETHER**

Join us for a hands-on, working training  
and explore all that **MyLegion** has to offer!



**DATE:**  
**AUGUST 22, 2026**



**TIME:**  
**10:00 AM**



**LOCATION:**  
**DADE CITY POST 15**  
37745 Church Ave  
Dade City, Florida 33525

**WORKING TRAINING!**



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**LEARN & EXPLORE**  
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DEPARTMENT OF FLORIDA MEMBERSHIP CHAIR



**EDUCATE.**  
Build knowledge.  
Strengthen our mission.



**EMPOWER.**  
Lead with confidence.  
Support our members.



**ENGAGE.**  
Work together.  
Make an impact.



**TOGETHER, WE STRENGTHEN  
THE AMERICAN LEGION FAMILY.**





DEPARTMENT OF FLORIDA  
LEGION AND AUXILIARY

# ★ VICES EVENT ★

*Fundraiser for*  
**PRESIDENT AND COMMANDERS PROJECTS**

**JANUARY 23, 2027**

~ **NOON - 4 PM** ~  
**POST 8 WINTER HAVEN**

**RAFFLES**



**FOOD**



**LIVE  
MUSIC**



**FUN**

**RSVP - to Bruce Carl**



**brucel1955@  
yahoo.com.**

*or*



**352-942-7948**

# FOOTBALL WITH PURPOSE

RAISE AWARENESS. SUPPORT VETERANS. MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

# FALCONS VS. BUGS

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 2026 | 1:00PM

The Tampa Bay Buccaneers would like to offer special group pricing to members of the American Legion in support Florida Veterans. A portion of the proceeds from every ticket support Veteran's Mental Health.

 AMERICAN  
LEGION

PROJECT  
VETRELIEF   
\*\*\*\*\*

TO PURCHASE TICKETS, PLEASE SCAN THE QR CODE:



TICKET PRICES SUBJECT TO CHANGE – OFFER VALID WHILE SUPPLIES LAST.

FOR QUESTIONS AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT CAM BELL AT  
CBELL@BUCCANEERS.NFL.COM OR 813-638-8509.