

Welcome Home

VETERANS. ★ FAMILY. ★ FRIENDS.



IN THIS EDITION

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| 7 Northern Area | 10 District 7 |
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Submit Articles at

floridalegion.org/submit or legionlink@floridalegion.org
Questions? legionlink@floridalegion.org

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A MESSAGE FROM THE DEPARTMENT COMMANDER



Bob Matheson
Department Commander
commander@floridalegion.org

Leadership in The American Legion has never been about titles. It has always been about standards. This month, I want to speak directly to

the leaders of our Posts, Districts and programs across Florida about the standard that defines us more than any other:

"Welcome Home." Not as a motto or a sentiment, but as an expectation we set and uphold every single day.

"Welcome Home" is the foundation of our mission. It reflects who we are, who we serve and how we carry

ourselves as Legionnaires. But it only becomes real when leadership turns it from words into action. That is our responsibility and our opportunity.

Strong leadership begins with clarity. For Post Officers, that means ensuring your Post is a place where veterans feel respected the moment they walk in. A clean, organized space sends a message. A warm greeting sends another. The way we conduct meetings, communicate with members and manage our facilities all contribute to the culture we create.

Leadership also requires consistency. For District Commanders, this means



PROJECT: VetRelief

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

floridalegion.org/donate

GOAL: \$50,000 FUNDS RAISED: \$12,098 24.2%



DISASTER RELIEF

Providing immediate support when Florida communities are impacted by disasters.

floridalegion.org/donate

GOAL: \$50,000 FUNDS RAISED: \$4,623 9.2%

**UPCOMING
EVENTS**

OCTOBER
2026

- 1 BE THE ONE Day
- 1-31 ALR: Merry-Go-Round ★
- 1-31 Breast Cancer Awareness Month
- 1-31 Disability/Employment Month
- 4 National Fallen Firefighters Memorial
- 5 Child Health Day
- 5-8 National Fall Meetings ★★
- 7 Start Operation Enduring Freedom (2001)
- 7 Start War in Afganitan (2001)
- 7 Dept Membership Goal 55% ★
- 9 ALR: District 3 State Ride-In
- 10 Post 259: Car & Motorcycle Show
- 10 District 12: Fall Picnic
- 11 District 5: Meeting
- 12 Columbus Day
- 13 Navy Birthday (1775)
- 15 Legion Link Articles Due (Nov Ed.) ★
- 15 Halloween Safety Book Orders Due ★
- 15 Start Operation Inherent Resolve (2014)
- 16 Boss's Day
- 23 Beirut Bombing (1983)
- 24 Citrust County Veterans Stand Down ★
- 24 Women Veterans Expo ★
- 24 SW Area: Rider Rally
- 25 Grenada Invasion (1983)
- 25 Celebration of Life for Alan Cohen ★
- 26 Day of the Deployed
- 27 Navy Day
- 28 Emergency Responders Day
- 29 District 13: Dept Commander Visit ★
- 31 Halloween

For the full calendar, additional
details, and updates visit our website
at www.floridalegion.org.

★ Commander attendance tentative.

★ Department of Florida event.

★ National event.

Events are subject to change. More details at floridalegion.org.

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helping Posts evaluate their strengths and identify areas for improvement. A Post that excels in outreach can mentor one that struggles. A Post with strong family programs can share best practices with others. When leaders set expectations and follow through, the entire Department grows stronger.

Leadership also demands accountability. For program chairs, this means ensuring that every initiative, from youth programs to veterans' services, reflects our values. If something isn't working, we fix it. If something is working, we expand it. Leaders don't wait for

change. They create it.

This month, I'm asking every leader in the Department of Florida to take one deliberate step to raise the standard of "Welcome Home." It might be improving communication, refreshing your Post environment, strengthening outreach or simply reconnecting with members who haven't been seen in a while. Small actions, taken consistently, build a culture worthy of our mission.

Leadership is not about being in charge. It's about taking charge of what matters. And nothing matters more than ensuring every veteran who enters a Florida Post feels one thing above all: Welcome Home.

National Convention Success and the Push Toward Our Next Membership Goal



Bruce Carl
1st Vice Commander
1stvice@legionmail.org

It is hard to believe we have finished the first quarter of this year already! Time seems to be moving rapidly. The National Convention is in the books, and what a great Convention it was. Florida came home with awards for 100% CPR completion and VA&R. There were six teams in the JROTC competition, and they placed 3rd, 5th, 7th, 8th, 9th and 10th. Congratulations to all of them! In the Honor Guard competition, Post 347 finished 1st overall, and Post 55 came in second. This marks two years in a row that Post 347 has won this competition. What a great accomplishment!

The sessions were great, and there

were some wonderful speakers. There was also time for meeting up with old friends, networking and socializing. Louisville was a great host, and there was plenty to see and do!

Our first goal of 50% has passed, and we met that goal! That was a great team effort, and congratulations to everyone who met or surpassed the goal! We are now approaching our 55% goal, with two weeks left to get there. Keep doing your "Buddy Checks," working the renewals and contacting those DMS 400 members. Our last report shows we have more than 6,500 in the state. Let's do our best to bring them into a Post home. I know with the great team we have that we can hit every goal!

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As we get further into the year, it becomes harder to get members, so we should be trying to stay ahead of every goal. The better we can do early, the easier it will be to reach those goals when it slows down. As a rule, if you are at 90% or higher by February, you should reach 100%. Don't forget the Race to the Top

for District Commanders is 100% by March 31. Let's get as many qualified for that competition as possible! In addition, reaching 100% by Dec. 31 makes you eligible for other National Awards!

Thank you to everyone for all you are doing with membership! If you need assistance, please reach out

to the membership team. We are all here to help you with whatever you need to succeed! There are Posts out there that are definitely struggling and look like they could use the help.

Thank you, Team Florida, and let's keep our momentum going!

Mentoring Members and Preparing Future Leaders



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

The second vice of the Department is responsible for training and programs, and for that reason, I am going to share some training ideas each month. Because mentoring is so important to any organization's ability to grow and prosper, I have started with it first.

Mentoring is one of the most important ways we protect the future of our organization. When we mentor a successor, we do more than prepare someone to fill a role. We pass on knowledge, judgment, relationships, values and a sense of responsibility. When we mentor our members, we help them grow in confidence, strengthen their commitment and become more prepared to serve, lead and support others.

Why We Mentor Our Members

- **To preserve our mission and values.** Mentoring helps newer members understand not only

what we do, but why we do it and how we do it.

- **To build confidence and capability.** Members learn faster when they have someone available to answer questions, model expectations and provide encouragement.
- **To strengthen engagement.** People are more likely to stay involved when they feel seen, supported and useful. Remember, those we are mentoring may also have ideas on how to improve our organization, so listen to them.
- **To develop future leaders.** Mentoring creates a pipeline of prepared members who can step into greater responsibility when needed.
- **To create continuity.** Shared knowledge reduces confusion and disruption when roles change hands.

How to Mentor Your Successor

1. **Start early.** Do not wait until the transition is urgent. Involve your successor before they are expected to lead on their own.

2. **Explain the role clearly.** Review responsibilities, recurring tasks, deadlines, key contacts and expectations. Remember not only to explain the rules, but also to show them where they can find those rules.

3. **Share the "why" behind decisions.** A successor needs more than instructions; they need context, judgment and an understanding of priorities. Never guess the answer to a question. Research it and find the best answer.

4. **Model the work.** Let them observe how you prepare, communicate, solve problems and follow through.

5. **Give them real responsibility.** Gradually increase their involvement so they can practice with support before taking full ownership.

6. **Introduce them to relationships.** Help them connect with members, leaders, partners and stakeholders who are important to the role.

7. **Offer honest feedback.**

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Encourage what they are doing well and coach them through areas where they can improve.

8. Step back at the right time.

A good mentor prepares the successor to lead with confidence, not dependence.

The Mentor's Mindset

Mentoring requires patience, humility and generosity. The goal is not to create someone who does everything exactly the same way, but to prepare someone who understands the mission, respects the work and is ready to lead in their own voice. A strong mentor shares lessons learned, admits mistakes,

encourages questions and celebrates growth.

We mentor because the organization is bigger than any one person. By investing in successors and members, we protect what has been built, strengthen today's team and prepare tomorrow's leaders. Mentoring is how we turn experience into legacy.

Your Voice at National



Michael Raymond
NEC
nec@legionmail.org

It's official!

It is truly an honor to represent the Department of Florida as your National Executive Committeeman for the next two years. Although I have very big shoes to fill, I know that both of our previous NECs will

be there to assist if needed.

There is so much going on right now, and it's time to get our priorities in order. It is my job to listen to you and bring your concerns to the attention of the National organization.

If you have anything that you feel is important to you, your Post or your District, please contact me, and I

will do my best to make your voice heard. This is the reason you have a voice at National.

Please contact me or your Alt. NEC, Jessica Moore, and we will see what we can do.

Let's have a great year. I'm looking forward to hearing from you.

Ready to Serve the Department of Florida



Kevin Mook
Department Adjutant
kmook@floridalegion.org

Bruce E. Comer retired following the National Convention on Sept. 3. He served as Department Assistant Adjutant from September 2016 to July 2021 and as Department Adjutant from July 2021 until his retirement. No one replaces Bruce. My goal is to continue the great work he did for the Department of Florida.

I'm Kevin Mook, and I now serve as Adjutant of The American Legion,

Department of Florida. I'm a member of Horizon West Post 419.

I served 21 years in the United States Navy, from 1982 until I retired as a Chief Petty Officer in December 2003. My service included leadership roles in technical and operational environments, specializing in computer and communications systems.

I joined The American Legion in 2008 and the Sons of The American Legion (SAL) in 2017. As a member of Post 171 in Damascus, Maryland, I held numerous leadership positions,

including Post Commander, Post Adjutant, County Commander and District Vice Commander. I served on the Department of Maryland Convention Corporation and the National Americanism Council. Post 171 recognized me with an honorary life membership, and I'm a Paid-Up-For-Life (PUFL) member.

In December 2018, I joined the national staff at The American Legion National Headquarters as Membership Engagement Coordinator. From December 2018 to May 2022, I served as

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the Northeast Region Liaison, and from May 2022 to June 2026, I served as the National Liaison for SAL, ensuring that the program aligned with organizational policies, financial guidelines and strategic

objectives. My time at the National office has given me great insight into the work of the Adjutant in Florida. My wife, Marilyn, and I live in Orlando. She is a member of the American Legion Auxiliary, and our son, Donald, and I are both SAL

members. I look forward to meeting many of you at Post, District and Department events in the months ahead.

Please don't hesitate to reach out to me at kmook@floridalegion.org.

Preparing Your Post for the Nov. 15 IRS Filing Deadline



Shirley Douglas
Finance Officer
financeofficer@legionmail.org

If you haven't started thinking about filing your Post's IRS tax forms, you have only 45 days, from Oct. 1 to Nov. 15, to file if your Post's fiscal year ended June 30, 2026.

The first thing to do is check your Post's IRS tax filing history by using the Tax Exempt Organization Search on IRS.gov. You can search using the Employer Identification Number, the Post's name, or city and state. This website will show the Post's filing history and the tax forms that have been filed. To remain tax-exempt, an organization must have filed the required return or notice within the last three years.

The second thing is to determine which form to file. The Post's gross receipts and total assets determine which Form 990 needs to be filed. The following information is from the 2025 Instructions for Form 990:

1. Form 990, Return of Organization Exempt From Income Tax: Must be filed by an organization exempt from income tax that has gross receipts greater

than or equal to \$200,000, or total assets greater than or equal to \$500,000 at the end of the tax year.

2. Form 990-EZ, Short Form Return of Organization Exempt From Income Tax: Can be filed if an organization exempt from income tax has gross receipts less than \$200,000 or total assets less than \$500,000 at the end of the tax year.

3. Form 990-N (e-Postcard), Electronic Notice for Tax-Exempt Organization Not Required to File Form 990 or 990-EZ: Can be filed if the Post's gross receipts are \$50,000 or less.

4. Form 990-T, Exempt Organization Business Income Tax Return: In addition to one of the forms above, Form 990-T must be filed if gross income from unrelated business income is \$1,000 or more for the taxable year.

5. Form 990-W, Estimated Tax on Unrelated Business Taxable Income for Tax-Exempt Organizations: If the Post's unrelated business taxable income is expected to be \$500 or

more, the Veterans Organization must make estimated tax payments. Form 990-W is used only to compute the estimated tax liability. Payment must be submitted using the Electronic Federal Tax Payment System (EFTPS). A Post that does not pay the estimated tax when due may be charged an underpayment penalty.

Other important information can be found on [IRS.gov](https://www.irs.gov) by searching for "Veterans' Organizations." The search will show "Found 115 Matching Items." Click on "Veterans' Organizations." This page initially lists the requirements to qualify as a Veterans Organization. At the bottom of the article, you will find links to PDFs and an audio slideshow.

If you click on the PDF button located by "Veterans Organization," the PDF contains numerous examples of when unrelated business income needs to be recorded and taxes paid.

Remember to vote Nov. 3, 2026.

Seeing the Legion Family Across Florida



Eric Linthicum
Chaplain
chaplain@legionmail.org

As I have been traveling the state, I am so impressed by the many different ways our Posts do "Legion." From Posts in veterans homes, to those with no Post home, to our larger Posts with many different programs going strong, each one is unique. Yet despite the differences, everywhere I go I meet brothers

and sisters who are welcoming and happy to tell me about their Post. It is truly amazing.

I encourage all of us to be in prayer throughout the month for our American Legion Riders as they take part in the Riders Merry-Go-Round. They will spend the month riding statewide to raise money for our Children & Youth programs. So let us be in fervent prayer for their safety! October is a great time for Posts to

be planning your Religious Emphasis Programs. Remember, I am here to help you with that planning. Also, remember to send me your photos and write-ups for our Chaplains Facebook page!

I look forward to meeting you and hearing your story.

Pro Deo et Patria ~ For God and Country

Moving Forward Together in the Central Area



Calvin Thompson
Central Area Commander
central@legionmail.org

As I travel throughout the Central Area and visit our Posts, I am reminded of something that can sometimes get lost in reports, percentages, meetings and deadlines: The American Legion is about people.

It is about the veteran who walks through our doors looking for assistance or simply a place where they belong. It is about the member who continues to volunteer year after year. It is about our Legion Family working side by side to make a difference in the communities we serve.

Every Post is different. Some are thriving, while others are facing challenges. Some have a full calendar of activities, while others are working to rebuild participation

and find that spark again. Wherever your Post may be today, I want you to remember that yesterday does not determine where you go tomorrow. Sometimes all it takes is one new idea, one successful event, one new member or one person willing to step forward and say, "Let's make this happen."

That same attitude applies to membership. We talk a lot about percentages and goals, and those numbers are important, but there is a person behind every membership number. Pick up the phone and call the member we have not seen in a while. Invite a veteran to attend a meeting or an event. Ask someone why they have not renewed. More importantly, listen to their answer.

We cannot strengthen our Posts simply by asking people to join. We strengthen them by giving people a reason to stay.

Our programs give us another tremendous opportunity. Oratorical, Boys State, Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation, Americanism, Children & Youth and the many other programs of The American Legion allow us to make an impact far beyond the walls of our Posts. When we introduce a young person to one of our programs, help a veteran receive the benefits they earned, support a family in need or simply show up for our community, we demonstrate exactly why The American Legion still matters.

I have said from the beginning that communication, training and teamwork will be priorities for the Central Area. That has not changed. If your Post needs help, ask. If you have a successful program, share it so another Post can learn from it. If a neighboring Post is struggling, reach out a hand. We are not competing against one another. We are on the

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same team, serving the same mission.

There is a great deal of work ahead of us this year, but there is also tremendous opportunity. I believe in what our Posts can accomplish, and I believe in the Legionnaires and

Legion Family members who make it happen every day.

Let's keep moving forward together. Let's bring some excitement back into our Posts. Let's take care of our members, welcome the next generation of veterans, support our

communities and never lose sight of the reason we are here.

Veterans first. Mission always. And together, we will make the Central Area stronger.

Keeping the Northern Area Moving Forward



Miguel Garcia
Northern Area Commander
northern@legionmail.org

Things have been busy, and your Northern Area delegates have just returned from representing you at the National Convention in Kentucky.

Over seven days, they participated in commission and committee meetings, training sessions, networking opportunities and plenty of walking, all with one purpose: ensuring the voice of the Northern Area was heard.

Thank you to every delegate who gave their time and energy to ensure that the important work of The American Legion was carried out.

Member Recognition

I want to recognize Huey Fouquet, 3rd District Adjutant and Northern Area Oratorical Chair, for being selected to attend National American Legion College this year. Congratulations, Huey. The Northern Area is proud of you.

Membership Milestone

I also want to congratulate the Northern Area on meeting its first

major membership goal of 50%.
Bravo Zulu!

This accomplishment matters not only because of the number itself, but also because it shows that our Posts and Districts are doing the hard work of keeping members engaged.

Membership is not just about recruiting someone in the moment. It is about building lifelong connections with our members. As Department Commander Matheson reminds us, we are veterans, family and friends. That means we must continue to treat one another like family.

Member Engagement and Buddy Checks

Keep engaging your members and continue making those all-important buddy checks. Each one reminds our brothers and sisters that they are valued members of the Legion Family.

Engaging Younger Veterans

As we focus on attracting younger veterans, I would like to share a few ideas that came from conversations with those members.

If you have younger veterans in your

orbit, ask them directly what brought them to your Post and what would encourage them to stay involved. Then invite them into meaningful leadership opportunities as Post officers, committee members or program chairs.

With the average age of Legionnaires now in the 60s, we need to engage younger veterans and make room for their ideas, knowledge and skills. Too often, we forget that we were once in their place: newly out of the service, motivated and ready to bring our skills to the mission. We need to let them into the game.

Let us not overlook younger veterans because they remind us of our children or grandchildren. They are veterans who have earned the right to stand and lead beside us.

As we work to make better use of technology and social media, many younger veterans bring valuable experience in those areas because that is the world they grew up in. Take advantage of the knowledge and ideas they bring to your Post. Who better than younger veterans to help teach us what they need?

Mentoring: Seven Ways to Support a Fellow Legionnaire



Geo Bograkos
Southern Area Commander
southern@legionmail.org

Sharing what you know with someone coming up behind you is an inherent part of American Legion service and leadership.

Those of you who have heard me speak over the years have undoubtedly heard me extol the virtues and benefits of mentorship. If you think about it, we've learned most of what we know about The American Legion from other Legionnaires. The information you learned is only on loan to you. It does not belong to you. It was simply entrusted to you to share with others. Pass it on. Pay it forward.

Have you considered how you could help a fellow veteran navigate The American Legion? They may simply be curious about how our organization functions or interested in the detailed intricacies of leadership at the Post, District, Department or even National level.

As someone who is a bit further down the path than your fellow Legionnaire might be, you have valuable skills, insights, experiences, information and other resources to share.

Here are seven ways you can mentor a fellow American Legion member:

1. Tell them what does, doesn't or didn't work for you. You're

successfully navigating The American Legion and, hopefully, doing well. What did you do that you're glad you did? What do you regret? What was the best or worst advice you received? Share this insight with a fellow Legionnaire embarking on their journey.

2. Help expand their Legion network. Whether they are newly transitioning out of the military or just new to The American Legion, it's likely that the veteran still knows other active-duty service members or veterans. If you've started to form your own network of American Legion contacts, consider making some introductions for your new Legionnaire to other people who would be good influences. These people can help that veteran jump-start the development of their own network within The American Legion. Remember, it's who you know.

3. Check in with them often. The Buddy Check is alive and well! Even if you don't have anything specific to review or discuss, drop your American Legion mentee a quick email or phone call to check in. See if they are doing OK. Are they getting out? Have they attended any meetings? Is there anything you can do to help? You know, as a veteran, that asking for help is challenging. Provide the opening by initiating the call.

4. Meet them for coffee, lunch or breakfast. If it's at all possible,

try to meet with your mentee in person. Even a quick coffee meeting in the middle of the day can help someone who might just need a little help connecting with their new American Legion community. Physically checking in with them, if you can, works.

5. Invite them to American Legion events and gatherings, and go with them. Invite your mentee to go with you to a Legion event or social gathering. Having someone with them can ease any tension they may have.

6. Cheer them up. If you come across a funny joke email, one that isn't potentially offensive, send it to your mentee. Your email might arrive at just the moment they were feeling down or lost.

7. Keep their perspective in check. Think back to those first days, weeks and months of your early Legion days: fear, anxiety, hope and excitement. Every feeling you had is likely going through the mind of the new American Legionnaire you are mentoring. Use that information to help them keep things in perspective.

Remember, sharing what you know with someone coming up behind you is an inherent aspect of our Legion service.

Finding a fellow Legionnaire who seeks guidance, support and information, and mentoring them to success, is a rewarding way to serve

<< Southern Area Commander continued from page 8
those who've served.

We are fine-tuning the details for our upcoming Department-level training sessions in the Southern Area: one each in Districts 9 and 11, and two in District 14. Department Convention trainers and others, to be announced, will be joining us to help present these training sessions. Subject matter will include Membership and Post Operations.

Other noteworthy events coming up in the Southern Area:

The country hoedown-themed **Southern Area Ball** will be held Saturday, Jan. 30, 2027, at 6 p.m. at Post 321, 9801 SW 51st St., Cooper City, FL 33328. Dress is "Farmhand

Chic."

The award-winning District 9 **Four Chaplains Ceremony** will be held the very next day, Sunday, Jan. 31, 2027, at 2 p.m. at the I.T. Parker Center, 901 NE 3rd St., Dania Beach, FL 33004.

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

If you have not already done so, please visit and "like" or "follow" the Southern Area Facebook page, where you may share your event posts with everyone in Districts 9,

11, 14 and beyond: facebook.com/SouthernAreaFL

You may also use the QR code provided to go directly to the page.



Please remember, if you have any Post or District events you wish me to attend, or if I may be of any assistance to you or your Post, please reach out to me.

Remember, we are here to support you.

#Veterans-Family-Friends
#WelcomeHome

Halloween reminds me of The American Legion and our Posts!



Robert "Oz" Osmon
Western Area Commander
western@legionmail.org

Open the Door: Halloween, Family and Community. There is something special about Halloween.

Maybe it's the little ghosts and goblins running from house to house, the princesses who somehow manage to trip over their own costumes, or the superheroes who are absolutely convinced they can fly.

The veterans looking for a place to belong.

Maybe it's the parents walking behind them carrying jackets, flashlights, candy bags and approximately 47 things their children suddenly "need."

The veterans bringing their family and friends to the Post with the sense that this is where we belong.

Or maybe it's simply the sound of laughter filling the neighborhood or your Post. Halloween has a funny way of reminding us what community is supposed to be about and what we are about.

It's about opening your door and the feeling of being welcomed.

It's about turning on the porch light and saying, **"Come on in, or at least come get some candy or come in for some camaraderie!"**

It's about having enough candy for the neighborhood kids, the kids from down the street, the kids who somehow appear with a bucket bigger than they are, and yes, even the teenager who shows up wearing a hoodie and says, "Trick or treat," while clearly hoping nobody asks how old they are.

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We welcome them all!

Because Halloween isn't really about the candy. It's about the memories and the friends we make at our Post.

It's about watching a little one proudly walk up the sidewalk in a costume they've been talking about for three months. It's about grandparents seeing their grandchildren dressed up. It's about parents remembering when their own children were little. It's about neighbors meeting neighbors and families spending an evening together.

And let's be honest, sometimes the ghosts and goblins aren't even the scariest thing you'll see.

Have you ever seen a parent trying to keep up with three sugar-filled children after 8 p.m.? **Now THAT is frightening.**

But underneath all the costumes, candy, decorations, pumpkins and

spooky music is something much more important: **community.**

We have an opportunity to make our neighborhoods places where people feel welcome. Places where families know they belong. Places where kids can make memories and adults can remember what it felt like to be a kid.

So this Halloween, let's open our doors a little wider. Let's fill the candy bowls. Let's laugh with the kids.

Let's compliment the costumes, even when we're not entirely sure what the costume is supposed to be.

Let's look out for one another. I have your six.

Let's make sure every child feels welcome, including those who may need a little extra patience or understanding. And most importantly, let's spend time with our families.

Because one day those little ghosts and goblins won't be little anymore.

The costumes will be packed away. The candy buckets will be replaced by car keys. And the children who once ran through our neighborhoods screaming with excitement will have families and traditions of their own.

What they'll remember won't necessarily be how much candy they got.

They'll remember **who opened the door.**

They'll remember feeling safe, welcomed and part of something.

So turn on the porch light and make them feel welcome.

Because sometimes the greatest treat we can give our veterans or community isn't something that comes in a wrapper.

It's making people feel like they belong.

Happy Halloween, everyone!

Let us do something Spooky this month. Let Us Be the One



Karen Warren
District 7 Commander
district7@legionmail.org

It is October. Step outside your comfort zone. One conversation could make all the difference.

October is the season of spooky things: costumes, scary movies, haunted houses and things that make us a little uncomfortable. We

often choose to be scared because we know the feeling will pass. But another kind of spooky is not fun or make-believe. Spooky is how that one veteran may feel when they are all alone.

Spooky is sitting in a quiet room, wishing someone were there to talk to. It is carrying memories, worries or struggles that are difficult to put

into words. Sometimes, it is simply wanting another person to listen without judging, fixing or walking away. Yes, sometimes being the person who reaches out can feel spooky, too.

You may wonder: What do I say? What if I make things awkward? What if I do not know them very well? What if they do not want to

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talk?

Those feelings can make it easier to stay inside our comfort zones. But reaching out does not require having all the right words. Sometimes it starts with something as simple as, "How are you doing?" "Want to grab a cup of coffee?" or "I'm here if you want to talk."

Then comes the important part: **Listen.**

You do not have to solve every problem. You do not have to know exactly what someone is going through. Your job may simply be to give that person a few minutes of your time and remind them that

someone sees them, hears them and cares enough to stay.

That one conversation might seem small to you. However, to someone who feels completely alone, it might be enormous. That is why being **the one** matters.

Be the one who notices when someone seems different. **Be the one** who makes the phone call. **Be the one** who sends the text. **Be the one** who sits down and listens. **Be the one** who is not afraid of an uncomfortable conversation.

Because sometimes one spooky encounter could be the difference between life and death.

So, this October, do something new and a little spooky. **Be The One!**

Instead of only walking through a haunted house, walk across the room and introduce yourself to someone sitting alone. Instead of only watching a scary movie, make the phone call you have been putting off. Instead of wondering whether someone is OK, ask them.

Step outside your comfort zone. Start a conversation. Listen. Connect. You never know when you might **be the one** person someone needed that day.

Sometimes the bravest thing we can do is simply show up.

Riding With Purpose This Fall



Jason Skobel
American Legion Riders Choir
legionriders@legionmail.org

The fall riding season is in full swing, and it is great seeing all the Posts on social media showing what The Florida American Legion Riders do best: riding, raising money, supporting the mission of The American Legion and being the most visible arm of The American Legion FAMILY.

As the most visible part of the family, that also brings a level of responsibility that we all bear when we put on that vest and proudly wear the emblem of The American Legion Riders. All Riders should become familiar with the guidance

and standards for wearing the official emblem and back patch. Wear it proudly, but wear it within the specified guidance.

September was an event-filled month, with a long holiday weekend, honoring and remembering those lost during the 25th anniversary of the events of September 11, 2001, and riding to honor those who were prisoners of war (POWs) and those who are still missing in action (MIA).

Thank you to our Department POW/MIA Committee Chairman, Denny Luke, for organizing the 6th Annual POW/MIA Seven Bridges Remembrance Day Ride and Ceremony. We were able to continue supporting the efforts to

designate the POW/MIA Memorial Museum in Jacksonville, Florida, as the NATIONAL POW/MIA Memorial and Museum.

Rolling into October and Merry-Go-Round, we will start our dedicated month of riding for our Children & Youth programs. I am already seeing plenty of flyers and events scheduled to support these programs.

A new one this year will be the State Ride-In to District 3, Oct. 9-11, 2026, in Steinhatchee, Florida. District 3 and Post 291 Commander Shelley Jefferson has opened up his Post for a three-day event of live music, good food, good company and a place for all of us Riders and American

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Legion FAMILY members throughout the state to meet up, share our stories and good times, and raise money for our Children & Youth programs.

Remember, if you are participating in

any Merry-Go-Round or Unity rides during October, please make sure you are registering and reporting your rides through the website. We will see if District 15 continues to hold on to the trophy or if another District will step up and snag it.

I would like to thank everyone for their continued support, and I hope everyone riding and traveling throughout the state to attend the many scheduled events stays safe to and from their destinations.



Florida American Legion Boys State: Investing in the Why



Darcy Sisson
Boys State Chair
boysstate@legionmail.org

Not the who, but the why.

When we talk about Florida American Legion Boys State, we aren't simply talking about a week in June. We aren't talking about a classroom, a campus, an election or a government simulation. We are talking about **young men discovering what they are capable of becoming.**

We are talking about leadership. Character. Service. Responsibility. Patriotism. We are talking about an experience that, for many of these young men, will become a defining moment in their lives. And protecting that experience takes all of us.

For the 83rd session of Florida American Legion Boys State, the delegate fee will increase from \$495 to \$550.

Why, you may ask? Well, because the economic challenges we are all experiencing at home, in our businesses and throughout our communities are now making their way into our programs.

Last year, just weeks before our session began, an unexpected **\$3-per-delegate, per-night increase** was imposed on the program. When you are preparing to house, feed, transport and care for hundreds of young men, those unexpected increases add up quickly. And here's the reality: Based on the way our contracts are written, we can anticipate additional increases across the board in the coming years, including during this upcoming 83rd session.

So, our Board of Directors made a very deliberate decision. **We are going to be proactive instead of reactive.**

The increase to \$550 isn't about simply raising a number on a piece of paper. It is about planning ahead. It is about protecting the financial health of the program. It is about making sure we can continue to provide the quality experience that Florida American Legion Boys State has provided for more than eight decades.

We want to be prepared for tomorrow, not scrambling to fix yesterday. And that takes the entire Legion Family.

I want to take a moment to recognize and thank the **Post, District and Area leadership** who have been instrumental in making this program successful. Every chairperson who makes a phone call, every volunteer who visits a school, every Legion Family member who sponsors a young man and every person who says, "You need to hear about Boys

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State," is helping build the future.
That matters.

This year, one of my biggest priorities is communication. Our first Zoom meeting for Post, District and Area Boys State chairs will be Sept. 27. If you are the chairperson and are not currently included on the Zoom link, please reach out to **Bekki Boorman** so we can make sure you are connected and receive the information for our next meeting, which we anticipate holding in early to mid-December.

And if you're a new Boys State chair, or you've been doing this for a while and feel like you could use some training or an update, **I am here.** That is part of my job.

I am not here just to tell you **what Boys State is.** I am here to talk about **what boys need from Boys State and what Boys State needs from the boys we select.**

Because the program has changed. The needs have changed. And our recruiting approach needs to change with it.

We have identified some key areas that require more communication, more education and, frankly, a little more thinking outside the box. And that's where I need you.

When those packets arrive, don't simply put them on your desk and wait for the guidance counselor to give you a list. **Get out there. Knock on some doors!**

Go to the football field. Go to the soccer field. Talk to the debate team. Talk to history and civics teachers. Talk to ROTC. Talk to the young entrepreneur. Talk to the student who may not have the highest GPA but is the person everyone turns to when something needs to get done.

Because here's the secret: **Leaders don't always come with a résumé attached.**

There are leaders sitting in classrooms, standing on sidelines, competing on athletic fields, participating in clubs and sometimes sitting quietly in the back of the room. Our job is to find them.

And that brings me right back to the **why.**

Why does this young man need Boys State? Why will he challenge himself? Why will he step outside his comfort zone? Why will he learn to work with someone who doesn't think exactly like he does? Why will he take what he learns here and carry it back into his school, his community, his career and, ultimately, his life?

That's the conversation I want us to have. Not just, **who are we sending? But why him?**

And I also want to remind everyone about our upcoming **Florida American Legion Boys State Alumni Dinner on April 3 at Department Headquarters.** Dinner and appetizers will begin at 5 p.m., with more details to follow. The flyer and

ticket-purchase link will be coming next month, so be on the lookout!

Our alumni are an important part of this program's story. They are living proof that Boys State doesn't necessarily end when that bus leaves campus. Sometimes, that is just where the journey begins.

So, as you receive your Boys State packets this year, I have one request: **Don't let that packet sit on a desk.**

Take it with you. Take it to the schools. Take it to the coaches. Take it to the teachers. Take it to the young men who may not realize they are leaders yet.

Knock down some doors. Start some conversations. Find the why.

And if you need help, please reach out. Visit www.floridalegion.org/programs-services/boys-state/ and send me an email. I am happy to assist, answer questions, provide training and help you grow this incredible program.

Because Florida American Legion Boys State is not just another program. **It is the premier leadership program in the state of Florida, and together, we have a responsibility to protect it, strengthen it and make sure it is here for the next generation.**

The \$550 fee is part of that preparation. The training is part of that preparation. Recruiting is part of that preparation. And you are part of

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that preparation.

Let's not just continue what we've
always done. Let's make it better.
Let's make it stronger.

Let's make sure the young men
walking onto that campus in June
are exactly where they need to be
and ready to discover what they can
become.

**Not just the who.
The why.**

God bless you all.

Supporting Child Health and Safety in Our Communities



Toni Sutherland
Children & Youth Chair
cy@legionmail.org

Welcome to October!

Have you ordered your Halloween
Coloring Books yet? You have
until Oct. 15 to get your order in to
receive them in time for Halloween.
You can order a pack of 100 for
\$25 at floridalegion.org/merch.

Please get your order in as soon
as possible, stamp your Post's
contact information on the back of
each book and hand them out at
your local childcare centers and
kindergartens. Kids love them and
learn some valuable lessons, and
their parents will know where they
came from and, hopefully, reach out
to you for more information about
The American Legion.

Did you know that Oct. 5 is Child
Health Day? Child Health and
Safety, which always go hand-in-
hand, is one of the key goals of The
American Legion's "Whole Child
Plan." As a result, the Committee
on Children & Youth maintains The
American Legion's positions, policies
and legislative directions on issues
related to:

1. Financially assisting families
faced with their child's
catastrophic illness
2. Funding alcohol and drug-
trafficking prevention programs
3. Locating missing children and
preventing child victimization,
maltreatment and child sexual
exploitation
4. Supporting the National School
Lunch Program
5. Supporting the physical fitness
and overall wellness of our
nation's youth
6. Promoting child safety, including
fireworks safety
7. Reducing or preventing teenage
pregnancy
8. Supporting funding for
comprehensive health care
for children & youth, including
efforts to immunize all children
9. Supporting the Children's Organ
Transplant Association
10. Supporting youth suicide
prevention education, among
others

Assistance for all of these issues, in
one form or another, exists in your
community, no matter how small,
and is therefore accessible to your
Post.

Fireworks safety? Call your local fire
department chief.

Reducing or preventing teenage
pregnancy? Call your local county
health department. They have a
wealth of knowledge on all sorts of
health-related issues.

Alcohol and drug-trafficking
prevention? Physical fitness? Child
maltreatment? Another great
resource is any county extension
office you might have in your area.
Have a college or university nearby?
Wonderful! Use them! They love
showing off and have collected
tons of data and organized it into
usable platforms that you might find
beneficial to use within your Post and
community.

So, what IS Child Health Day? It is a
national observance established in
1928 by President Calvin Coolidge
on the first Monday of every
October to promote the physical and
mental well-being of children, from
prenatal care through adolescence.
It came about because of growing
concern over child welfare and the
belief that early intervention and
year-round health initiatives were
essential for the nation's future.

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Organizations such as The American Legion can use the day to encourage parents to safeguard their children's development by addressing health needs through preventive care, including regular health checkups, proper nutrition, physical activity, safe environments and supportive communities.

How can your Post contribute to The American Legion's overall goal of

supporting the health and safety of children?

- Attend or hold workshops focusing on children's health topics, such as nutrition, physical activity, mental health and preventive care, for parents, caregivers and educators.
- Partner with providers in your area and participate in or host health screening events for children, offering free vision and

hearing tests, dental checkups or immunization clinics.

- Teach children about balanced diets and healthy eating habits.
- Organize or support sports events, outdoor games or family fitness activities.
- Educate children and parents about safety practices, such as using car seats, wearing helmets and following safety rules at home, at school and during

Getting to Know the Civil Air Patrol Cadet Program



Rico Thomas
Civil Air Patrol Chair
civilairpatrol@legionmail.org

Did You Know?

How old does a cadet have to be to join?

Youth members must be at least 12 years old and not yet 19 years old. Special school squadrons accept cadets under the age of 12 as long as they are in the sixth grade. You'll know it's a school squadron because the units have 800-series charter numbers. Additionally, the unit name usually includes the name of the school. Example: GLR-IN-806 John Adams High School Cadet Squadron.

How often do cadets meet?

To get the most out of the Cadet Program, you should participate regularly. Like any other activity, you'll get out of CAP only what you put into it.

Most squadrons meet weekly for about 2 to 2 1/2 hours and offer

special activities on weekends and during the summer. You can find the meeting day and time of your local squadron by using the online unit locator.

How do cadets earn rank in CAP?

Cadets are promoted in CAP through self-study and group study. To progress, cadets must (1) participate actively; (2) pass a written leadership test; (3) pass a written aerospace test; (4) pass a physical fitness test; (5) participate in character development forums; and, most of all, (6) demonstrate they have the maturity to accept increased responsibility. In some stages of the Cadet Program, these requirements differ slightly.

How can your Post become a CAP Squadron Supporter?

Supporting a CAP Cadet unit is a less formal way for a Post to provide assistance. It often involves donating money, providing opportunities to earn money, or allowing Post

property to be used for activities, service projects or meetings without the formal agreement required for sponsorship.

Posts can provide this type of support to as many CAP Cadet squadrons as they can reasonably handle. There is no formal written agreement required for this type of support.

For more information: <https://www.gocivilairpatrol.com/join/youth-in-cadet-program/cadet-faqs>

Post Visitation

Key West Post 28, 162
Marathon Post 154



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I had a great time meeting with Post 28 Commander Dan Dedeo. That Post has a thriving CAP Cadet program. CAP Cadet Squadron Commander Will Berlunga explained how appreciative they are

that Commander Dan has allowed them to hold their meetings there. The squadron leaders are current military members and veterans. It is a great opportunity for recruitment.

Learn more: flwg.cap.gov/about

Find a squadron and support: flwg.cap.gov/locations

Always feel free to contact me with your thoughts and questions. Don't forget to share your Post's local squadron activities and pictures.

Make Your Voice Count at Conference and Convention



Eric Loyd
Credentials Chair
credentials@legionmail.org

Has your Post reserved rooms yet for the November Conference? Has your Post decided who is going? The November Conference is a great way to meet other

members and gain valuable Legion knowledge, from classroom training to conversations throughout the hotel.

June Convention will be here before you know it. We need enough Posts represented at Convention to establish a quorum and elect our

2027-2028 officers. Make sure your Post is represented.

Come to Convention, vote, take advantage of the training classes and meet with other members to learn from their knowledge and experience.

Florida JROTC Teams Shine at National Competition



Loretta Young
JROTC/JSSP Chair
jrotc@legionmail.org

The JROTC Color Guard Competition at the 107th National Convention in Louisville, Kentucky, was an exciting time for the Cadets as well as the attendees.

The competition was held Friday afternoon following the Post Color Guard Competition. This gave the Cadets time to get in some practice and attend the competition briefing before the event so they could become familiar with the rules and Convention floor and prepare themselves for the big event.

I would like to thank the Legion Posts that sponsored and assisted



Florida JROTC Color Guard Teams that participated in the National JROTC Color Guard Competition

with fundraising for the teams so they were able to make the trip without having to cover the expenses themselves. This was a

collective effort that involved months of preparation leading up to the competition.

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There were a total of 14 Color Guard Teams from across the country. The Department of Florida was fortunate to have six Color Guard Teams participating in the competition, and they should all be commended for an outstanding performance.

The teams, in order of their scheduled competition times, were Coral Glades AJROTC, Falcon #1 NJROTC, Falcon #2 NROTC, Hudson Cobras AJROTC, Western Wildcat AJROTC and Mariner AJROTC. All teams did very well overall, with the Mariner Team placing third in the competition.

Trophies and certificates were presented to the winners at the end of the competition by National

Commander Dan Wiley and other dignitaries.

The JSSP Postal Competition has been open for registration on the National website since Sept. 1. I cannot emphasize enough the importance of starting the Postal First Round registration process as soon as possible.

First Round targets are due Feb. 1, and the time goes very quickly when completing registration, Risk Management training through Protect Youth Sports at \$25, background clearance, the Post Affiliation Form and returning the targets. There were teams last year that started the process but ran out of time to complete everything by the deadline.

There are no extensions on the deadlines, and the process is the same as last year with the CMP login, allowing additional competitors to be added if you want more than the minimum four-person team.

These Marksmanship Teams can be from JROTC Units, 4-H Clubs, Scouting Units, Athletic Clubs or any youth group sponsored by your Post that meets the age and other requirements listed on legion.org.

If there are any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me or the Department of Florida online. Thanks in advance for your efforts this upcoming year, and may you all have much success.

Preparing for 2027: Advocacy in Tallahassee and Washington



Stuart Scott
Legislative Chair
legislative@legionmail.org

As we prepare for the 2027 Florida Legislative Session and begin closing out the 119th Congress, The American Legion, Department of Florida, is preparing for another important year of advocacy on behalf of veterans, their families and our communities.

This will be a year that requires our members to remain engaged, not only in Tallahassee, but also in Washington, D.C., and within their own communities.

Building a Stronger Voice Through Coalition

As we begin the 2027 Florida legislative year, we have taken an important step by forming a coalition with many of our brother and sister organizations within the Veterans Service Organization community.

The purpose is simple: work together where our interests align and make sure our elected officials hear a consistent, informed voice regarding issues affecting veterans.

By bringing organizations together, we can bridge advocacy efforts across the state. Instead of individual organizations approaching

legislators separately on the same issue, the coalition provides an opportunity to identify common concerns, share information and communicate the needs of Florida's veterans more effectively.

Our priorities extend beyond traditional veterans' legislation. We also recognize the importance of ensuring that charitable fundraising laws and regulations keep pace with the technology available today.

Veterans' organizations, fraternal organizations and other charitable groups operate in a very different environment than they did decades

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ago. Technology has changed the way Americans communicate, make payments, conduct fundraising and interact with charitable organizations.

Our laws and regulations should be examined with that reality in mind.

Modernizing charitable fundraising does not mean abandoning safeguards or accountability. It means asking whether existing laws adequately recognize today's technology while continuing to protect the public, charitable organizations and the communities they serve.

Learn More About the Coalition

We encourage our members to learn more about this effort and the organizations working together through the Florida Service Coalition.



Scan to visit the [Florida Service Coalition](#) website.

The coalition will continue to develop as we move toward the 2027 legislative session, and we look forward to keeping our membership informed about its priorities and activities.

Get Involved: The American Legion Grassroots Advocacy

Coalition advocacy is only one part of the process. Your voice as a Legionnaire matters, too.

The American Legion has established a grassroots advocacy network that allows Legionnaires to stay informed about legislative issues and communicate directly with their elected representatives when action is needed.

We encourage every Legionnaire to take advantage of this resource. When Congress is considering legislation affecting veterans, elected officials need to hear from the people they represent.



Scan to visit [The American Legion Grassroots Advocacy](#) website.

Being an advocate does not require you to be an expert on every piece of legislation. It requires you to be informed, engaged and willing to make your voice heard.

Legislative Summit: Bringing Ideas Together

On Sept. 18 and 19, we held a Legislative Summit in Tallahassee that brought together representatives for meaningful discussions about the issues facing veterans, their families, VSOs and charitable organizations.

The Summit provided an opportunity to exchange ideas, identify common

concerns and discuss how we can improve our collective advocacy efforts. There was a great deal of discussion, and we look forward to sharing many of those ideas with our members at the Department of Florida Fall Conference in November.

The work does not end with the Summit. In many ways, it is where the work begins.

Our goal is to take the ideas discussed, turn them into meaningful legislative priorities and then communicate those priorities to legislators throughout Florida.

Looking Ahead to the 2027 Florida Legislature

The Florida Senate currently identifies March 2, 2027, as the opening date of the regular 2027 legislative session. Florida's regular session is limited to 60 consecutive days unless extended through the constitutional process.

That means the advocacy work cannot wait until March.

The interim period is when relationships are built, legislation is discussed, concerns are identified and legislators begin determining which issues they will pursue. Our coalition and Department legislative team will be using that time to communicate with legislators and prepare for the upcoming session.

Our message will continue to be straightforward: Veterans deserve

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a strong voice in Tallahassee, and that voice is strongest when we work together.

Closing Out the 119th Congress

At the federal level, we are also approaching an important transition.

The 119th Congress runs from Jan. 3, 2025, through Jan. 3, 2027. When a new Congress convenes, legislation from the previous Congress generally expires and must be reintroduced, with limited exceptions.

That makes the remaining months of the 119th Congress especially important for veterans' legislation that has not yet crossed the finish line.

It also means that the results of the 2026 elections will help determine the membership and leadership of the 120th Congress and, consequently, the federal legislative environment in which veterans' priorities will be considered.

The Midterm Elections Matter

Florida's 2026 General Election is scheduled for Nov. 3, 2026. The election will determine several federal and state offices, including congressional and state legislative offices. The results will help shape the policy environment in which veterans' issues are considered during the next legislative cycle.

As Legionnaires and as citizens, make sure you vote.

But we should also remember that The American Legion is a nonpartisan organization. That does not mean we are apolitical. There is an important distinction.

The American Legion is deeply involved in public policy and legislative advocacy. We advocate for veterans, their families, national security and the issues that affect our communities. Our voice matters.

However, we cannot use the organization, its facilities, official communications or Legion activities to endorse or oppose candidates or political parties.

We encourage every eligible voter to become informed. Look at the candidates. Look at their records. Read their positions. Ask questions. Understand where they stand on issues affecting veterans, military families, national security, health care, benefits and the communities in which we live.

And most importantly, do not assume that a candidate's political party tells you everything you need to know about that candidate's position on veterans' issues.

Your vote is yours. Use it based upon the information you believe is important after doing your own research.

Town Halls: The Dos and Don'ts

As we move closer to the end of the 2026 election cycle, we also

need to be particularly mindful of how we conduct activities involving candidates for public office.

The American Legion is a nonpartisan organization. This does not prevent Legionnaires from being politically engaged as individual citizens. It means that when we act on behalf of The American Legion, we must ensure that our actions do not create the appearance that the organization is endorsing or opposing a candidate or political party.

This is especially important when Posts are considering hosting a town hall, candidate forum, meet-and-greet or another event involving individuals who are running for public office.

Some Basic Dos

- Invite candidates or elected officials to discuss issues affecting veterans and the community.
- Ask questions about veterans' issues and legislative priorities.
- Provide candidates with an opportunity to explain their positions in a fair and nonpartisan environment.
- Apply the same standards to candidates when conducting a forum or event.
- Keep the focus on issues rather than political parties.
- Contact your District or Department leadership if you have questions about a proposed event.

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- Document the purpose and format of the event.
- Make sure Legion communications do not appear to favor one candidate or party over another.

Some Important Don'ts

- Endorse a candidate on behalf of The American Legion.
- Oppose a candidate on behalf of The American Legion.
- Use the Legion name, logo, social media platforms, publications or official communications to campaign for or against a candidate.
- Allow a Legion event to become a campaign rally.
- Give one candidate preferential treatment in a manner that could reasonably be viewed as an organizational endorsement.
- Allow Legionnaires acting in an official capacity to represent their personal political views as the position of The American Legion.
- Assume that something is permissible simply because it is being done at the Post level.

When in doubt, ask before you act.

If your Post is planning a town hall or another event involving candidates for office, please contact your District Leadership, Department Leadership or the Department Legislative Chair with questions or concerns before moving forward.

A quick question beforehand can prevent a significant problem afterward.

Our Voice Matters

The coming year will bring change at both the state and federal levels.

The 2026 elections will determine who represents Floridians in Washington and Tallahassee. The 119th Congress will give way to the 120th Congress in January. Florida will then move into its 2027 legislative session in March.

Through all those changes, one thing should remain constant: The American Legion will continue to advocate for veterans and their families.

We will work with legislators of both parties. We will work with Veterans Service Organizations. We will work with community partners. And where appropriate, we will

work with organizations outside the traditional veterans' community when doing so advances issues important to veterans and charitable organizations.

Our strength comes from our members and from the credibility we build through responsible advocacy.

So, as we prepare for 2027, stay engaged. Attend meetings. Participate in town halls. Learn the issues. Ask questions. Build relationships with your elected officials.

Use the resources available to you. Visit the Florida Service Coalition to learn how VSOs are working together. Visit The American Legion's Grassroots Advocacy site to stay informed and participate when legislative action is needed.

And when it comes time to vote, exercise that right as an informed citizen.

We don't have to agree on everything to agree that veterans deserve a strong voice.

Our voice matters. Let's make sure it is heard.

Making the First Impression Count



Doug Hockenberry
Membership Chair
membership@legionmail.org

Hello, Team Florida. I want to begin by thanking you for your commitment

to our great organization and for all you do to promote the benefits of belonging to the nation's largest veterans service organization, The American Legion.

I had the opportunity to attend the National Convention in Louisville, Kentucky, from Aug. 28 through Sept. 3. The convention offered a wide range of training on The

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American Legion's programs, and each session provided valuable information. I was particularly interested in the four membership training sessions, and I attended them all.

One topic addressed at length in every membership session was "First Impressions." We have all heard the phrase, "First impressions are lasting impressions." Take a moment to consider what it means for your Post, and ask yourself two questions:

- How is my Post promoting The American Legion throughout the community?
- What does my Post offer veterans, especially those who have served since Sept. 11, 2001?

With that in mind, consider what happens when a potential member walks through your front door. Are they welcomed? Are they greeted with a smile? Is your Canteen staff prepared to answer basic membership questions? Is useful

information, such as a newsletter or brochure, readily available for them to take? That initial interaction can make the difference between a visitor walking away and a new member joining your ranks.

Another key point was how to keep a new member active in the Post. Many of today's veterans are not interested in the bar scene; it simply is not their cup of tea. Many have young families and full-time jobs. Yet they still miss the camaraderie of military service and want to belong. How, then, do we keep them engaged? We begin by making them feel welcome, needed and valued.

Think back to our World War II veterans as Korean War and Vietnam War veterans began joining their Posts. They, too, had to welcome a new generation with different experiences and expectations. This pattern may repeat with every era of service, but how we respond to it will help define our

future and our legacy.

That first impression can make all the difference. By engaging the entire American Legion Family and ensuring that every veteran feels welcome and valued, regardless of era of service, we can flourish. Let us draw on the skills of younger veterans by inviting them to serve on committees, lead projects and contribute their ideas. Their involvement can strengthen both your Post and The American Legion as a whole. Our future depends on the first impression we make and the opportunities we provide afterward. As I close out this article, I want to reiterate my sincere thanks and appreciation for all you do for The American Legion.

Remember, we determine our future, so make that "First Impression" count.



#StrongerTogether

The Impact of Funding Reductions on POW/MIA Recovery Efforts



Denny Luke
POW/MIA Chair
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First, before addressing the funding issues facing the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA), I want to thank everyone who attended the POW/MIA Remembrance Day Ride and Ceremony at the National POW/MIA Memorial.

I am writing this newsletter prior to the actual event, so I cannot yet provide specific details. I will expand upon the event in the November newsletter. However, based on what I have seen and heard, I believe this year's event will be the best we have had to date.

The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency is facing a decrease of approximately 10% in funding

for fiscal year 2026, followed by another 4% reduction for fiscal year 2027. Why is this happening when the overall Department of Defense budget is projected to increase by an estimated 58% from 2025 through 2027?

The DPAA budget reductions are part of a broader Pentagon spending shift and are also being influenced by

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operational constraints.

There are many factors contributing to the shift in funding allocations. Previous government shutdowns have affected future funding for specific sub-agencies and created administrative backlogs that have compounded financial pressures on agency programs. In addition, the ongoing conflict in the Middle East has contributed to fuel shortages, increased logistical costs and the need to replace munitions expended during the conflict. Together, these factors have contributed to decreased funding for the DPAA, as well as other Department of Defense agencies.

What Is the Real-World Impact of These Budget Cuts?

For the DPAA, the reductions mean the agency is being forced to severely scale back recovery operations.

In Vietnam, the number of recovery teams has reportedly been reduced from 27 to seven. In Laos, the number has dropped from 13 to five, while Cambodia has been reduced from three teams to just one.

Former Army Brig. Gen. Anthony Tata, the new under secretary of defense for personnel and readiness, has pledged to the families of those still missing that he will work with Congress to restore the \$40 million in DPAA funding cuts.

These reductions are not simply

numbers on a budget spreadsheet. Each reduction in recovery operations represents fewer opportunities to locate, recover, identify and return our missing service members to their families.

Florida Remembers Two More Heroes

On Friday, Aug. 28, 2026, U.S. Army Pfc. Robert E. Tyner, a 20-year-old Jacksonville, Florida, native, was laid to rest at Riverside Memorial Park. Pfc. Tyner had remained missing since the crash of a CH-53A Sea Stallion helicopter during the Vietnam War while he was being medically evacuated.

On Nov. 11, 2026, another hero will be repatriated here in the great free state of Florida. Incidentally, this is also Veterans Day, very fitting if you ask me. U.S. Army Air Forces Sgt. Leonard J. McNeill of Orlando died as a prisoner of war during World War II.

In March and April 2022, the DPAA exhumed 39 Unknowns from a Japanese POW prison that had caught fire. Sgt. McNeill was among those ultimately identified through anthropological analysis. As I receive additional information regarding the location of his burial, I will pass that information on to the Department.

The American Legion's Empty Chair Program

The American Legion has long been one of our nation's strongest advocates for POW/MIA

accountability.

On Aug. 27, 1985, during the 67th National Convention in New Orleans, delegates adopted Resolution 288, establishing the POW/MIA Empty Chair Program, often referred to as the "Table for One," at official American Legion meetings.

With the Department of Florida's passage of Resolution #2, POW/MIA Slow Salute, at the 2026 Florida Convention, held in Orlando from June 11-14, we are now officially able to render honors when the POW/MIA flag is retrieved at the conclusion of our meetings. To view the standard procedure for the placement and retrieval of the POW/MIA flag, please see the updated 2026 POW/MIA Program Chairman's Manual: Florida POW/MIA Program Resources.

The Empty Chair serves three important purposes:

- **A Visible Reminder:** It honors the thousands of Americans still missing and unaccounted for from World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War and more recent conflicts.
- **A Call to Government Action:** It reminds our elected leaders that the search for our missing service members must remain a national priority.
- **A Commitment to Accountability:** It reaffirms The American Legion's dedication to bringing home every possible captive,

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<< POW/MIA Chair continued from page 22

recovering the remains of those who made the ultimate sacrifice and achieving the fullest possible accounting of those who remain missing.

Whenever you see the Empty Chair at an American Legion meeting, remember that it represents someone who has not yet come home.

Stay Connected

- Florida POW/MIA Facebook Page: facebook.com/falpowmia

- Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA): dpaa.mil
- National POW/MIA Memorial & Museum: powmiamemorial.org

DPAA Update

FY 2026, as of Sept. 10, 2026

- World War II: 172 accounted for
- Korean War: 41 accounted for
- Cold War: 0 accounted for
- Vietnam War: 1 accounted for

During August, the DPAA accounted

for the following service members from World War II and Vietnam. These brave Americans are now being returned to their families with the honor and dignity they deserve.

Aug. 5, 2026

- Walter A. Renelt, Vietnam War

Aug. 7, 2026

- Charles S. Lanier, World War II

Aug. 24, 2026

- Marvin E. Lancaster, World War II

Writing an Effective Resolution: Building the Preamble



Clarence Hill
Resolutions Chair
resolutions@legionmail.org

Last month's article addressed in detail the **Resolved** section. Once the intent of the resolution has been clearly stated in the **Resolved** section, it is much easier to decide what statements need to be in the Preamble section to make clear the reasons for the resolution. The Preamble should be a clear description of the situation or problem being addressed.

The Preamble section is made up of one or more clauses, each of which begins with "WHEREAS," Two or more of these clauses are joined together by a semicolon followed by "and." Example:

"WHEREAS, The American Legion is an organization of wartime veterans

who have dedicated themselves to the service of community, state and nation; and

"WHEREAS, This service is performed through The American Legion's basic programs; and (etc.)"

Each clause in the Preamble should contain a **statement of fact** that is logically related to the intent of the resolution and explains and justifies the need for the resolution. Accuracy of each statement in the preamble is critical because the intent must be based on fact not misinformation. Sources should be clearly identified, such as "WHEREAS, Public Law 101-22 prohibits..." or "WHEREAS, Title 38 United States Code, authorizes..." or "WHEREAS, in Texas v. Johnson, 1989, the United States Supreme Court ruled..."

Double-check facts and attempt to document the source as much

as possible. Providing supporting materials along with the resolution would be helpful to respective reviewing commissions or committees.

The final clause of the Preamble is joined to the resolving section of the resolution by a semicolon, followed by the phrase "now, therefore be it..." leading to the **Resolved** section.

There is no formula for deciding how many "WHEREAS" clauses a resolution should have. In general, the fewer the better, provided the reason(s) for the resolution is/are adequately stated. It is not necessary to refer in the Preamble to every fact or circumstance that has a bearing on the intent of a resolution.

Study the **Resolved** section and get the exact purpose of the resolution

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<< Resolutions Chair continued from page 23

firmly in mind. Then start writing down the statements of fact which relate to this purpose. Organize them in a logical sequence (throwing out the weak or unnecessary ones).

Remember: **do not use a period in the Preamble.**

Florida had a number of resolutions considered at the General Sessions at the National Convention in Louisville, KY. Here is a status of their disposition:

-Resolution 49 Subject: Housing Continuity During Short Academic Breaks. This resolution was presented by the Veterans Employment & Education National Convention Committee and it was **approved**.

-Resolution 53 Subject: Stay of Foreclosure Proceedings for

VA-Guaranteed Borrowers in Delinquency or Foreclosure Pending Restoration of a Compliant Loss-Mitigation Program. This resolution was also presented by the Veterans Employment & Education National Convention Committee and it was **referred to the Standing Commission on Veterans Employment & Education**.

-Resolution 50 Subject: Change Post Service Officer Title to Post Resource Officer. This resolution was presented by the Internal Affairs National Convention Committee and it was **referred to the Standing Commission on Internal Affairs**.

-Resolution 52 Subject: Red Star Service Banner. This resolution was also presented by the Internal Affairs National Convention Committee and it was also **referred to the**

Standing Commission on Internal Affairs.

Resolution 51 Subject: Use of the Term Post-Traumatic Stress Injury. This resolution was presented by the National Security National Convention Committee and it was **referred to the Standing Commission on Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Commission**.

Florida won numerous awards at this year's National Convention which will probably be announced elsewhere in this edition of the LINK. In case this award announced at the National Convention Committee on National Security isn't mentioned, Florida won an award for most medals awarded to Senior ROTC and Junior ROTC cadets in Category II. Congratulations, well done and keep it up.

Scholarship Opportunities Are Available Now



Michael Raymond
Scholarships Chair
scholarships@legionmail.org

Now is the time to contact your high school guidance counselors and let them know about the many scholarships available to their students.

It could not be simpler to download the applications from our website and get them distributed to students who could definitely use our help. Please contact me for more information or if I can assist you in getting the word out.

The cutoff is March 1, and trust me, it comes fast!

I'm here to help. All you have to do is ask.

★★★

FALL RAFFLE

Grand Prize \$10,000

★ 9 Additional Cash Prizes ★

Drawing November 21, 2026



FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT

OCTOBER 2026 EDITION

YEAR 13 (July 2026 - June 2027)

Emergency Assistance



39

VETERANS RECEIVED FUNDS



\$70,474

PROVIDED IN
FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Suicide Prevention



14

SPI PARTNERS



\$56,800

GIVEN TOWARDS
SUICIDE PREVENTION

13 Years of Golfing for a Purpose: Tournament Nears \$1 Million Milestone

On October 5 is PROJECT: VetRelief's 13th Annual Golf Tournament at The Golden Bear Club in Windermere. Once again, the tournament completely sold out, and is expected to mark an incredible milestone.

Longtime host, and PVR Board President, Robert "Bob" James and RL James Exteriors expect to surpass \$1 million in **cumulative net proceeds** raised through the tournament's efforts in support of Florida veterans.

For Bob and his wife, Rita, the mission is personal. Both come from families with a proud history of military service. After losing his Navy veteran father at just 12 years old, Bob later learned that veterans' benefits helped support his widowed mother and their six children. That connection helped inspire a desire to pay it forward.

Over 13 years, Bob and Rita have rallied an incredible network of sponsors, donors, friends and family around that mission. In 2025 alone, the tournament raised \$96,992 for PROJECT: VetRelief.

This year's event will also spotlight PROJECT: VetRelief's Suicide Prevention Initiative, with Strategic Partners Spirit Equine Therapy and SOF Missions participating in the day's activities.

Thirteen years, a sold-out tournament and nearly \$1 million raised; it's a powerful example of what can happen when people come together for a purpose.



FWP: Get your Tickets. Grab gear. Meet us there!

The game plan is set for Sunday, November 1—now we need YOU in the stands!

Before kickoff, join our high-energy tailgate packed with food, drinks, DJ, games, giveaways, video board, custom motorcycle, Wall of Honor, photo ops and plenty of PVR and Legion pride! Check out our site map for a sneak peek of what's coming.

Grab your specially priced game tickets, order your Football with Purpose shirt, and meet us at the tailgate! Every ticket helps grow our game-day presence and the purpose behind it.

A HUGE shout-out to American Legion Post 138! Their team has been working hard behind the scenes: making connections, spreading the word and helping us bring this event to life.



Be part of the PURPOSE!

Get in the game:

www.projectvetrelief.org/fwp



Preparing for a Successful School Medals Year



Randy Holeyfield
School Medals Chair
schoolmedals@legionmail.org

I'm looking forward to commending our youth for their dedication and hard work to achieve their goals.

Let me first say that I am healing well from rotator cuff surgery a couple of months ago. This injury took me out of the loop for a while, with my right arm out of commission. I could not work, type or do any sustained activity, but I am mending well and jumping back in the saddle.

Whether you were your Post's School Medals Chair last year or not, no problem. These positions are often mentored by the previous chair. Even if that is not the case, ask questions of whoever held the position last year.

Previous chairs and officers may have important contact information for the schools you serve. This data will give you a starting point, and being able to communicate effectively is key. Each year, this information can be updated to reflect any changes at the school, and you may also be able to expand to other schools you have not yet reached.

Remember, if a school is not being served by another Legion Post, your Post can adopt it. Make sure you contact another Post if the school appears to be in its area and verify whether it is already being served or whether that Post wants to cover it.

Check with the schools that seem to be yours, then look at outlying areas. My Post is picking up another JROTC high school, bringing our total to four. Two of them are 12 miles away from the Post, but no other Post is serving them.

Also, remember to get into the schools now and develop a relationship with the school representative who administers awards.

Again, I am promoting all of the awards we offer. Besides the JROTC medals, there are 20 more medals, most for students, as well as recognition for community and military/DOD recipients. There is also a new custom medal that can have inscriptions on both the front and back.

These custom medals could be a great way to recognize volunteers. Give them the medal, which goes around the neck, along with a certificate, and recognize them in front of the Post for their efforts. If you have any questions, just drop me a line, and I will get back to you soon.

Right now, get your contacts in place, introduce yourself and lay the groundwork for the year. Know which medals the school is preparing for your Post to present, including the specific medal and level, Gold, Silver or Bronze.

Ordering medals early can prevent backorders or not having what you

need. By working with the school, you'll have a better understanding of the task ahead.

Don't forget to start now to find a sponsor for your Post's School Medals program, or any of our programs. It can be a business or an individual. Getting a sponsor will help the Post's bottom line. A sponsor might donate to a program even if they would not donate toward something like a new ice machine for your Post.

If you can gain sponsors for School Medals, JROTC, Oratorical, Boys State or other programs, it helps retain general funds. So go fishing for sponsors. Any member can find these gems.

Let's get out there and plan our year so that when the school year ends, you'll be ready.

Don't forget the blue binders. I also use the program to make certificates instead of using preprinted ones. They look more professional and personal, and some people's handwriting is not so good, so printing helps. I use beige bond paper, which looks much better than plain white paper. Buy a ream, it will last and can be used for all the certificates the Post prints.

Let's get fishing for sponsors and start communicating with your schools. Thank you for every single effort you make every day.

Strengthening Scouting Across Florida

Angie Walker

Scouting Chair
scouting@legionmail.org

I am honored to serve as the 2026-2027 Scouting Chair. I look forward to working with Posts across Florida to strengthen the partnership between The American Legion and Scouting America and to help more young people benefit from the character, leadership, citizenship, and service that Scouting provides.

I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to Chris Ragusa, our previous Department Scouting Chair, for his outstanding leadership, dedication, and support of Scouting and The American Legion over the years. I am grateful that Chris will continue to serve on the **Department Scouting Committee**, along with Kevin McGarry, providing their experience and assistance as we move this important program forward.

One of my goals as Chairman is to encourage as many Post as possible to become actively involved with Scouting. You don't have to start with a large program—even one Scout unit or helping a unit can make a difference. Posts can formally charter or informally sponsor/support a unit such as a Cub Scout Pack, Scouts BSA Troop, Venturing Crew, or Sea Scout Ship; provide a meeting location; participate in Scout activities and ceremonies; support Eagle Scout recognition; assist with community service projects; or simply build a relationship with a local unit. For Posts interested in starting a

new Scouting unit, the Department Scouting Committee is ready to help connect you with the resources and Scouting America professionals needed to get started.

Most importantly, remember that supporting Scouting is about more than writing a check. Your time, involvement, mentorship, facilities, recognition, and participation can have an equally lasting impact. I encourage every Post to find a way to get involved, support the Scouts in your community, and—most importantly—**brag about your Scouting program!** Hint Hint: There's a Department-level award nomination opportunity which is available in early May called the **"Outstanding Post Scouting Program Award."**

I look forward to working with you and helping make Scouting an even stronger part of The American Legion's commitment to serving our nation's youth and developing tomorrow's leaders.



Troops 340B & 340G Complete First-Ever Philmont Backpacking Adventure

American Legion Post 340 in Pensacola is proud to share the

accomplishment of 15 Scouts and eight adult leaders from Troops 340B and 340G, who this June completed two unforgettable 12-day high-adventure treks at Philmont Scout Ranch in Cimarron, New Mexico.

The two crews began preparing nearly two years ago for their Philmont adventure, completing extensive training that included multiple weekend backpacking trips.

With generous financial support from **American Legion Post 340**, the crews were able to rent a van and drive from Pensacola to Philmont, significantly reducing the cost of the trip. Along the way, **American Legion Harding-Blaine Post 321 in Plano, Texas**, provided another example of Legion support by arranging for the crews to "camp" overnight in its meeting hall at no charge.



The crews then traveled to Colorado Springs, Colorado, where they spent three days acclimating to the altitude and organizing their equipment while staying at the historic Scout Huts at the U.S. Air Force Academy. The huts were provided at no charge,

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and Post 340 made a donation toward their maintenance.



Both crews arrived at Philmont Base Camp on June 14 and hit the trails on June 15. One all-male and one all-female crew spent the next 10 days covering more than 80 miles each, while gaining and then losing more than 7,000 feet of elevation during their treks.

The adventures included summiting Baldy Mountain at 12,441 feet, rock climbing, cowboy action shooting, black-powder rifle shooting, archery, rappelling, spar-pole climbing, horseback riding, and numerous other backcountry activities and skills.

Throughout the 10-day treks, the Scouts themselves led their crews, taking responsibility for meal

preparation, campsite setup, trail navigation, itinerary planning, and execution. Along the way, they experienced the unique beauty and wildlife of the New Mexico wilderness, including towering Ponderosa pines, sagebrush-covered mountains, elk, mule deer, prairie dogs, black bears, and more than a few mischievous—and thieving—chipmunks!



Taking young people to Philmont is about more than backpacking. It is about placing Scouts in an environment they have never experienced and challenging them to accomplish things they may not have believed they could do. At Philmont, the central purposes of Scouting are on full display. **Teamwork, problem-solving, resilience, self-reliance, and leadership** are the real benefits of a Philmont trek—and the Scouts of Troops 340B and 340G learned

those lessons firsthand.

Among the adult leaders completing the trek were Post 340 Legionnaires Ryan Ripley, Scoutmaster of Troop 340B, who served as a Trek Adult Advisor, and Rick Walker, Committee Member of Troops 340B and 340G, who served as Trek Training Coordinator.

A special thank you goes to Post 340 Commander Larry Andrews and Ray Parker of American Legion Post 321 in Plano, Texas, for their personal support, and to the members of Post 340 for their generous financial support. Their commitment helped make this extraordinary experience possible for the Scouts—an experience that will undoubtedly remain with them for the rest of their lives.

This is American Legion support of Scouting at its BEST: investing in young people, building leaders, and helping Scouts discover that they are capable of far more than they imagined.

Submitted by Rick Walker, Scouter and Post 340 Legionnaire

Now Is the Time to Recruit Sea Cadets



Eric Loyd
Sea Cadets Chair
seacadet@legionmail.org

We are now in September, and all the kids are back in school. It's time to go to the schools and recruit Sea Cadets.

We need to be getting into middle and high schools. Also, look at academies that have students who may be interested. Sea Cadets is a great program and is very rewarding for the Cadets.

I enjoy the Sea Cadets and what

they bring to any American Legion Post. If your Post does not have Sea Cadets, you are missing out.

If you need help, please let me know. The Sea Cadet Committee and I are here to help.

Copyright 101 for Graphics



Carrie Kolze
Creative Services Manager
ckolze@floridalegion.org

Just Because You Found It on Google Doesn't Mean You Can Use It

We've all done it. You need a photo for a flyer, Facebook post, newsletter or event graphic, so you search Google Images, find something that looks perfect, save it and move on.

The problem is that finding an image online does not automatically mean you have permission to use it.

Photos, illustrations, graphics, logos and other creative work are usually protected by copyright. In most cases, the person or organization that created the image controls how it can be copied, shared, edited or used publicly. That is still true if the image does not have a watermark, does not show a copyright symbol, is already being shared on Facebook or is being used by a nonprofit organization.

One of the easiest things to remember is this: Google Images is a search engine, not a library of free images.

"But We're a Nonprofit..."

Being a nonprofit does not automatically make it okay to use someone else's work. There are situations where copyrighted material can be used without permission, but simply using

someone else's photo to decorate a flyer, social media post, event announcement or advertisement does not automatically qualify. If you are not sure whether you have permission, it is usually easier and safer to find another image.

Your Own Photos Are Usually the Best Option

Whenever possible, use photos taken at your own Post. They are more personal, more relevant and they actually show the work your members are doing.

Photos from ceremonies, community projects, membership events, Riders activities, fundraisers, youth programs and Post functions can become a great library of material for future flyers, social media posts, newsletters and website updates.

The key is to start saving the good ones. Instead of letting photos disappear into someone's phone after an event, create a shared folder and begin building a collection your Post can use throughout the year.

Of course, use good judgment when posting photos of members, guests and especially children when permission may be needed.

Free Image Resources Are Available

If you do not have the right photo in your own collection, there are several free resources that can help.

[Unsplash](#), [Pexels](#) and [Pixabay](#) all offer large collections of free stock photography. [Wikimedia Commons](#) can also be useful, especially for historical material, although the licensing requirements can vary from image to image. [The Library of Congress](#) is another great resource for historical photographs and public-domain material.

The important part is to still check the usage information for the specific image you want to use. "Free" does not always mean there are absolutely no restrictions.

Use Official Resources for Logos and Branding

If you need an American Legion logo, emblem, program graphic or branded material, you can download it from legion.org/brand or request one directly from National instead of grabbing a copy from a random website.

The same goes for logos belonging to military branches, government agencies, businesses, sponsors, sports teams or partner organizations.

Logos can create an additional issue because they may also be protected by trademark. Just because you can find a logo online does not mean you can use it however you want.

The names, emblems, logos and other brand marks of The American Legion Family are also protected and

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may require approval before they can be used in certain situations. National's complete brand marks and usage guidelines are available at <https://www.legion.org/about/media-toolkits/brand-marks-guidelines>.

When approval is required, the Emblem Use Request Form must be completed and submitted to Department: https://register.legion.org/documents/legion/pdf/emblem_req_form.pdf. Once approved by the Department Adjutant, the request is forwarded to National for final approval.

This is especially important when creating T-shirts, challenge coins, fundraising items, merchandise, promotional materials or anything that could suggest another organization officially approved or sponsored your event.

When in doubt, check the organization's usage guidelines or get permission.

What About AI Images?

AI-generated images can be useful for creating backgrounds, illustrations and general artwork, but they are not a free pass either.

It is still a good idea to avoid asking an AI tool to copy a specific artist's work, recreate a protected character or duplicate someone else's logo or design.

You should also think carefully about using AI-generated images for real historical events, veterans, ceremonies or actual people. If someone could reasonably mistake the image for a real photograph, it may create confusion rather than help your message.

The American Legion also prohibits AI generation of its logo and emblem.

A Simple Rule to Follow

Before I use an image, I ask myself one question: *Did we create it, buy it, get permission to use it or get it from a source that clearly allows us to use it?*

If the answer is **no**, I usually find something else.

Google is still a great tool. Use it to help locate the original photographer, organization or stock image site and then check whether the image is actually available for use.

Taking a few extra minutes to find the right image can save your Post a lot of trouble later and usually results in better-looking graphics anyway.

Keep Your Post's Sales Tax Exemption Certificate Current



Lois Stachelrodt
Receptionist / Florida Legion Store
lstachelrodt@floridalegion.org

Post leadership is reminded to submit a current copy of your Post's Florida sales tax exemption certificate to Department Headquarters.

Keeping an up-to-date certificate on file helps ensure that eligible Post

purchases through Department are processed correctly and that our records remain current.

If your certificate has been renewed or updated, please send the most recent copy to Department as soon as possible. Even if you believe one has been submitted in the past, it is a good idea to make sure the current certificate is on file.

Having this documentation available helps avoid delays or questions when placing orders and keeps everything in order for recordkeeping purposes.

Thank you for helping us keep our records current.

Honoring the Retirement of Department Adjutant Bruce E. Comer

Department of Florida
Staff



The American Legion, Department of Florida, extends its sincere appreciation and best wishes to Bruce E. Comer,

who retired as Department Adjutant on August 30, 2026, after nearly ten years of dedicated service.

Bruce served more than 23 years

on active duty in the United States Marine Corps, specializing in Military Police and Criminal Investigation Division duties, and retired as a Master Sergeant. After his military retirement in 2008, he continued working in the security field before returning to his hometown of Orlando.

After his military retirement in 2008, he continued working in the security field as Director of Operations for a security firm in Pittsburgh

before returning to his hometown in Orlando.

Throughout his tenure, Bruce was known for his by-the-book approach, transparency, and commitment to responsible and consistent Department operations.

We thank Bruce for his many years of service to The American Legion, Department of Florida, and wish him all the best in retirement.

Honoring Service, Supporting Veterans and Carrying Forward a Legacy

George McZeal Jr.
Post 331

Doris "Dorie" Miller Memorial Post 331 in Orlando continues to honor the legacy of its namesake through service to veterans, their families and the surrounding community.



One of the ways Post 331 serves local veterans is by making the Post

home available to families following the death of a military loved one. Funeral homes in the community often refer veterans' families to the Post when they need a location for a repast, a gathering after a funeral or memorial service where family and friends can share a meal, offer condolences and remember their loved one.

Veterans and their families are given priority when requesting use of the building. Post 331 also provides its Honor Guard, which can render rifle salutes in honor of deceased veterans. Comrade Joe Reed, a member of the House Committee, serves as the point of contact for those seeking information about use of the Post.

That commitment to veterans extends beyond the walls of the Post.



Post 331 Americanism Officer Roan Beasley recently served as keynote speaker for AdventHealth's Neuro Night Out in Orlando. Beasley, a stroke survivor, spoke before an audience that included stroke survivors, caregivers, therapists and physicians, sharing his experiences and perspective on issues affecting the stroke community.

The event provides neuro rehabilitation patients and their families with an opportunity to celebrate progress, hear from inspirational speakers and connect with others facing similar challenges.

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Beasley's personal story and message were well received by those in attendance.

Post 331's commitment to service is closely tied to the legacy of the man whose name it proudly carries, Doris "Dorie" Miller.

Born Oct. 12, 1919, Miller became a national symbol of courage following his actions during the attack on Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941. His legacy continues to be honored by the U.S. Navy. In 2020, the Navy announced that a future Gerald R. Ford-class aircraft carrier would be named USS Doris Miller (CVN 81). The naming recognized Miller's place in American military history and the service of

generations who stepped forward to defend the nation despite facing discrimination at home.

For the officers and members of Post 331, preserving that legacy is more than remembering the past. It is reflected in how they serve veterans today, whether providing a place for a grieving family to gather, honoring a veteran through the Post Honor Guard or sharing personal experiences that may help others. Post 331 will continue that tradition in October with a program honoring Doris "Dorie" Miller. Those interested in receiving a free invitation may contact Post 331 Chaplain George McZeal Jr. at gmczeal@aol.com by Oct. 1, 2026.

From honoring the fallen to supporting veterans and their families in the community, Doris "Dorie" Miller Memorial Post 331 continues to put the spirit of its namesake into action.



Post 404 to Dedicate Vietnam Veterans Memorial

John Apolzan
Post 404

Post 404 will dedicate its Vietnam Veterans Memorial on Nov. 11 at 11 a.m. State officers are invited to attend this special occasion as we dedicate this one-of-a-kind artistic creation.

The memorial is expected to be the largest sculptured Vietnam monument in the United States. We hope members of the Legion Family will join us for this meaningful dedication.



facebook.com/floridalegion

THE AMERICAN LEGION
DEPARTMENT OF FLORIDA

VETERANS ★ FAMILY ★ FRIENDS

www.floridalegion.org
legionlink@floridalegion.org

Honoring Her Service: A Monument for Women Veterans

Lisa Arnold

Post 90

For generations, American Legion posts across our nation have served as guardians of military tradition, remembrance and service to veterans. They have erected memorials, supported military families, mentored youth and ensured that the sacrifices of those who wore our nation's uniform are never forgotten. Today, one American Legion family in Southwest Florida is carrying that mission forward by working to create something long overdue: a permanent monument dedicated exclusively to the women who have served in the United States Armed Forces.

The Sisters in Arms of Cape Coral, Inc., a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, was founded by Post 90 past Commander Lisa Arnold, along with fellow women veterans from the Post who shared a common vision. While serving their community through The American Legion, these veterans recognized that although countless military memorials exist across the country, very few specifically honor the contributions, sacrifices and legacy of America's women veterans.

That realization became a mission.

The organization is now leading an effort to build Southwest Florida's first Women's Military Monument, a lasting tribute to every woman who has answered our nation's call to serve.

Women have proudly served our country since the American Revolution, often overcoming obstacles their male counterparts never faced. From nurses on Civil War battlefields to the Women's Army Corps during World War II, from Vietnam to Operations Desert Storm, Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom, and today's global missions, women have continually demonstrated courage, professionalism and unwavering commitment to our nation.

Today, women serve in every branch of the U.S. military and in nearly every military career field, including combat arms, aviation, special operations support, cyber operations, intelligence, medicine, engineering, logistics and space operations. They command troops, fly fighter aircraft, sail warships, deploy around the world and lead at every level of military service.

Yet despite these accomplishments, their service is often overlooked or minimized.

Many military memorials portray anonymous service members or commemorate specific wars, but relatively few intentionally recognize the millions of women whose dedication has strengthened our Armed Forces for more than two centuries. For many women veterans, their military service remains invisible. Some are not even recognized as veterans by members of the public.

That is why this monument matters.

The proposed monument will stand at Four Mile Cove Ecological Preserve in Cape Coral, Florida, becoming a place of reflection, education and inspiration for generations to come.

At its center will stand a life-sized bronze female service member wearing today's military combat uniform. She will proudly hold an American flag while representing every woman who has served our nation with honor. Rather than depicting a specific military branch, the statue represents all women veterans equally.

The monument's base will display the seals of all six military services: the Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force, Space Force and Coast Guard, symbolizing the unity shared by those who have worn the uniform, regardless of branch or occupation.

Inscribed upon the monument will be a simple but powerful message:

"She Served With Honor and Courage."

- Those six words represent millions of stories.
- They honor the women who volunteered during wartime and peacetime.
- They honor those who left families behind to deploy across the globe.
- They honor those who served quietly without recognition.

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- They honor those who made the ultimate sacrifice.
- Most importantly, they remind future generations that freedom has always depended upon the willingness of both men and women to defend it.
- This project is about far more than bronze and concrete.
- It is about ensuring that young girls visiting the monument can see someone who looks like them and realize that military service is part of their history, too.
- It is about helping communities recognize that women veterans are veterans.
- It is about preserving an important chapter of American military history before it is forgotten.

As veterans ourselves, we know that military service changes a person forever. It teaches resilience, teamwork, sacrifice and servant leadership. Those values continue long after the uniform is hung in the closet.

The American Legion understands that better than anyone.

That is one reason the Sisters in Arms of Cape Coral is especially proud of its roots within American Legion Post 90. The friendships formed through Legion service sparked the conversations that ultimately became this project. What began as an idea among women veterans has grown into a communitywide effort supported by veterans, civic leaders, businesses and patriotic Americans

who believe women's military service deserves permanent recognition.

Although the monument will be located in Southwest Florida, its message belongs to the entire nation. Every visitor who pauses before the statue will remember a mother, daughter, sister, wife, grandmother, friend or fellow service member who answered the call to serve. Every schoolchild who visits will learn that women have always defended America. Every woman veteran who stands before the monument will know that her service mattered.

When future generations walk through Four Mile Cove and see a bronze woman standing proudly with the American flag, they will understand something that history has too often overlooked: America's freedom has always been defended by women as well as men.

The monument will not simply honor those who served yesterday. It will inspire those who serve tomorrow. With the support of The American Legion Family and patriotic Americans everywhere, Southwest Florida's first Women's Military Monument will stand as a lasting reminder that every veteran's service deserves to be seen, remembered and honored.

Projects like this become reality only through the generosity of individuals, organizations, businesses and veterans who believe in preserving military history. The Sisters in Arms of Cape Coral invites members of The American Legion Family, veterans, military supporters and patriotic

Americans across the country to become part of this historic effort.

The organization is in the fundraising phase of its mission and has raised \$32,000 toward its \$400,000 goal. Every donation, large or small, moves the project one step closer to becoming a permanent tribute for generations yet to come. Donations may be made in different ways:

- GoFundMe
- By check: Make checks payable to Sisters in Arms of Cape Coral, Inc. and mail them to:

Sisters in Arms of Cape Coral, Inc.
P.O. Box 100054
Cape Coral, FL 33990

Additional information about the project, the organization and opportunities to support the monument can be found on the Sisters in Arms of Cape Coral

website at siaooffcc.org, on Facebook at facebook.com/groups/sistersinarmsoffcc, or by email at info@siaooffcc.org.



Child Well-Being Foundation Donations Continue to Grow

Dennis Boland
Child Well-Being Foundation

As of Sept. 10, 2026, the American Legion Family's combined donations to the American Legion Child Well-Being Foundation totaled \$116,413.48 since June 1, 2026, which marked the start of our new award year and tracking period. Donations for the 2026-2027 award year end May 31, 2027.

The following are the current donation leaders since June 1. Each organization with the highest donation as of May 31, 2027, will receive the Garland Murphy Shadow Box Award.

Presently, the 8/40 Departmental of Nebraska is leading in contributions with \$1,291.45. The Department of Illinois Auxiliary is leading with \$4,867.80. The Department of Ohio is leading with \$11,871.65, and the Detachment of Ohio is leading with \$11,871.65.

The current second-place organizations are the 40/8 Departmental De Arizona with \$635; Alabama Auxiliary with \$2,281.12; Department of Massachusetts with \$2,575; and the Detachment of Florida with \$11,810.

The current third-place organizations are the 40/8 Departmental De

California with \$490; Department of South Dakota Auxiliary with \$2,087.32; Department of Florida with \$1,677; and the Detachment of Pennsylvania with \$9,706.

The Child Well-Being Foundation has awarded more than \$22 million in grants for the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual welfare of children and youth.

The deadline for CWF grant applications for 2027 was July 7, 2026. We received 383 grant applications for 2027, which the Board of Directors will review at the CWF meeting during the NEC's fall meeting in October 2026.

Communication, Membership and Moving Our G.O.A.L.S. Forward



Michael Nigbor
Detachment Commander
commander@floridasons.org

I am reaching out to our leadership team and any member who wants to help with our communication issues. We do not have a strong means of interacting with each other, and positivity is a key concern.

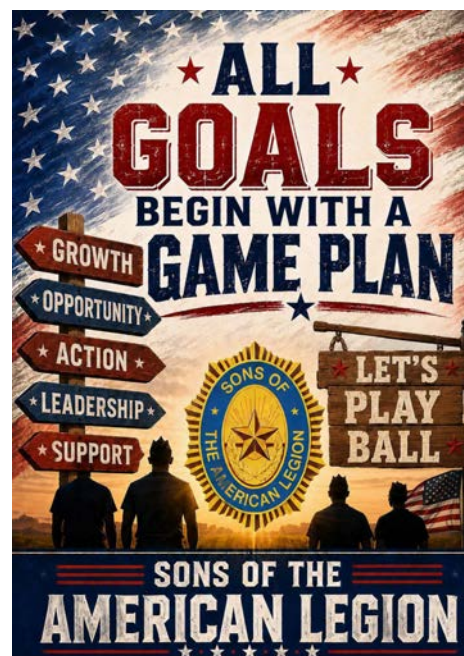
What do you think works for you in your area when it comes to getting our message out to our communities?

I will repeat my information:
Phone: (262) 370-8733
Email: commander@floridasons.org
Easy peasy. I am looking forward to hearing from you.

Area Vice Commanders and District Commanders, I would be specifically interested in knowing how many "Buddy Checks" you have made this year and what has been working for you in establishing contact with members who need to be reinstated. You are the leading officers in the Detachment of Florida. We are members of the world's greatest veterans organization, and this is the 250th anniversary year of the greatest nation in the world.

So, what are you doing to motivate your members?

Challenge your members with the 3 R's of Membership: Reinstating Our Lost, Renewing Our Current and



Recruiting Our New.

continued on page 36 >>

<< Detachment Commander continued from page 35



We have G.O.A.L.S. to meet and need to continuously work on our mission. Get in the game. Lead by example. Get on base, and

when it's your turn, hit it out of the park.

It has been repeatedly expressed that this is not about filling pages with words. It is about communication. One of the toughest challenges we face throughout the Detachment is keeping our members engaged and informed. That responsibility starts with us.

On Sept. 3, I attended the Squadron 273 meeting in Madeira Beach. They presented us with a check for \$6,000 for our charity, C.O.T.A.

On Sept. 5, I attended the Post 138 family event. On Sept. 7, I attended the Brooksville Squadron 186 annual picnic. This was a wonderful event with a lot of hardworking S.A.L. members. Great job, 186.

From Sept. 11-13, I was in District 1 and at Post 382 for their Friday night 9/11 Memorial and, on Saturday the 12th, their family jail lockup event supporting our family charities. Another great event with great attendance. A lot of hard work was put in by these volunteers. Thank you, Western Area Vice Commander Troy Touchton, for your invitation. On Sept. 19, I will be in District 3 for

the Annual Sons Picnic at Squadron 83 and in Jacksonville for the Annual 7 Bridges POW/MIA Remembrance Ceremony.

On Sept. 25, I will be attending the Gold Star Mothers Event in Sebastian at Squadron 189. On the 26th, I will attend the District meeting at 318 and later the Squadron 394 event supporting C.O.T.A.

Oct. 3 will be Red, White and Blue Tutus at Post 323 in beautiful downtown Lehigh Acres. Oct. 10 will be a golf outing at Post 3 in Bartow supporting our charity.

Area Vice Commanders, District Commanders, and Committee and Commission Chairmen, let me know what events you are organizing to support our charity and invite me to attend.

Let's get together and share ideas. Help me help the others I encounter during my visits.

What works for you? What are you doing to raise money? What are you doing to increase membership? What do you want our members to know about your accomplishments?

We have six Area Vice Commanders. I will be looking forward to their submissions in the next publishing of The Source. This is one of the best means we have of communicating throughout the Detachment, and a lot of time and energy is invested by our

Detachment Adjutant, Christian Rapp. Submitting an article is the least you can do to support his efforts.

As always, thank you all for what you do to support our great organization. Work on our G.O.A.L.S. daily and keep the momentum moving forward in a positive way.

Use the hashtag #SALGoals in all of your social media and flyers. Support your neighboring Squadrons and invite me to your events. I love meeting our members and sharing our ideas.

Every day is a learning experience, and tomorrow is never promised.

Post Everlasting

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

Joseph E. "Joe" Nolan



With deep sorrow, we announce the passing of Past Northern Area Commander Joseph E. "Joe"

Nolan of Jacksonville, Florida, who passed away on August 31, 2026, at the age of 83.

Joe proudly served in the U.S. Army during the Vietnam era and was a

devoted member of The American Legion for 45 continuous years. Throughout his decades of service, he held numerous leadership positions at the Post, District, Department, and National levels, including 5th District Commander, Northern Area Commander, Department Internal Affairs Chair, Post Commander, Post Chaplain, and Vice Chair of the National Distinguished Guests Committee.

Joe is survived by his three sons, David, Matthew, and Justin. A Celebration of Life was held September 27 at American Legion Post 316 in Atlantic Beach.

Please keep Joe's family, friends, and fellow Legionnaires in your thoughts and prayers.

Full memorial and service history:
<https://www.floridalegion.org/joseph-e-joe-nolan/>

Steven Slachta

With deep sorrow, we announce the passing of Past Southwestern Area Commander Steven Slachta of Bonita Springs, Florida, who passed away on September 6, 2026, at the age of 84.

Steven proudly served in the U.S. Air Force from 1979 to 2002 and was a devoted member of The American Legion for 34 continuous years. Throughout his decades of

service, he held numerous leadership positions at the Post, District, and Department levels, including Post Commander, Post Adjutant, Judge Advocate, 13th District Commander, Southwestern Area Commander, and Department National Security Chair.

Steven is survived by his wife, Yvonne, his daughters, Vanessa and Katrina, and his son, Eric. Service

details are not yet available and will be shared on the Department website when arrangements are announced.

Please keep Steven's family, friends, and fellow Legionnaires in your thoughts and prayers.

Full memorial and service history:
<https://www.floridalegion.org/steven-slachta/>



MEMBERSHIP REPORT

October 7, 2026
TARGET: **55%**

District 2	Roxanna Dressel	60.32%
District 5	Ken White	55.95%
District 9	David Hurst	55.73%
District 4	Darcy Sisson	55.11%
District 7	Karen Warren	54.57%
District 1	Donald Westfall	54.41%
District 17	Jim Bowers	54.22%
District 6	Alan Adams	52.28%
District 3	Shelley Jefferson	51.62%
District 15	Stephen Tyler	51.60%
District 8	Robert Patierno	50.68%
District 14	Angela Glover	50.02%
District 11	Stanley R. Brown, Jr.	48.84%
District 12	Daniel Ciesielski	48.54%
District 13	Laurene Allen-Flower	48.28%
District 16	Michael Harley	47.69%
Western	Robert "Oz" Osmon	55.23%
Northern	Miguel Garcia	54.84%
Southern	Geo Bograkos	51.33%
Eastern	Dennis Mallon	50.56%
Central	Kalvin Thompson	49.75%
Southwestern	Doug Deierlein	49.32%
Post 400	-	56.95%

CURRENT PERCENTAGE: 52.03% (9/24/26)

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Department of Florida

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11/01



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BIKE RIDE-IN
11:30
AM ET

GAME TIME
1:00
PM ET



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AMERICAN
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Department of Florida

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EXCITING NEWS **FOR FLORIDA VETERANS!**

Veterans who qualify for a Disabled Veteran (DV) plate can now get the DV designation on the **Florida American Legion specialty plate!**

That means you no longer have to choose — show your Legion pride **AND** keep your DV designation and applicable benefits. ★



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NAME

POSITION INTERESTED IN

EXPLAIN YOUR QUALIFICATIONS FOR DEPARTMENT CHAIR

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

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

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

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



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9TH - 11TH

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DISTRICT 6

FAMILY PICNIC

SAVE THE DATE

**ALL POSTS, UNITS,
SQUADRONS AND CHAPTERS
FULL PARTICIPATION IS NEEDED**

MORE INFORMATION TO COME

**SUNDAY, MARCH 14, 2027
NOON – 5PM**

**HICKORY POINT PARK
27341 SR 19, TAVARES, FL**

**MORE INFO:
DISTRICT6PRESIDENT@ALAFL.ORG**



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WHERE:

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TIME:

2-5pm



COST:

\$12 per ticket
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MENU:

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★ *Fun for Everyone!* ★



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DJ



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Riverview, FL 33578

★ **Please RSVP with your ENTIRE POST attendance** ★
district15@legionmail.org

Highlands Post 69



Presents the

12th Annual Veterans Expo

Honoring and supporting those who have served

Friday January 29th 2027, 9 AM – 4 PM

Saturday January 30th 2027, 9 AM to 5 PM

***Veterans Benefits, Services and Resources
available all day both days
for all veterans and family members***

***We invite the whole community to come out for some
fun and to support local Veterans***

See the Traveling Vietnam and Global War On Terror walls and more:
Displays, Music, Food Trucks, Fun, Raffles, 2-day 50/50, Vendors,
Information for all, Kids Zone, Free admission and parking

**Come out to help escort the walls to the Expo
9 AM on Friday January 29th**

Proceeds benefit: ***Local Veterans*** And



**1301 W. Bell St.
Avon Park, FL. 33825**

For more info, contact:

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Women Veterans Advocacy

Saturday, October 24 ★ 10:00 AM – 3:00 PM



Jessica Moore
2025-2026
Department Commander



Eunice Butts
2022-2023
Past Department Commander



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You Served with Pride. Your Future Matters. ★ ★ ★



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★ AMERICAN LEGION POST 155 ★



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24 OCTOBER 2026



9:30AM – 3:30PM

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VA Home Loan Information



Employment Assistance



Dental & Hearing
+ Basic Health Checks



VA Healthcare: Information & Referrals



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On site Counselors & resources



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on Legal Issues



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Janet
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FOR ALL VETERANS AND FAMILIES!**



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Crisis Line**
DIAL 988 then **PRESS 1**

NOT SURE? DON'T CLICK.

A Quick Guide to Avoiding Email Scams

For Florida American Legion Posts, Leadership & Members

Email scams are becoming more convincing. Scammers may pretend to be Department leadership, Post officers, staff, vendors, fellow members, or even friends and family. Spam filters help, but they cannot catch everything. That means you are one of the best defenses.

 RED FLAGS	 STOP & VERIFY	 PROTECT YOURSELF
 "Are you available?" or other vague messages	 Do not reply to the suspicious email	 Use strong, unique passwords
 Urgent requests for gift cards, money, or banking information	 Call the person using a number you already know	 Turn on multi-factor authentication
 Unexpected links, attachments, or QR codes	 Send a separate text message	 Go directly to websites instead of clicking email links
 Messages telling you not to call	 Start a brand-new email from your contacts	 Be cautious with attachments and QR codes
 Requests to keep the matter confidential	 Ask: "Did you send this?"	 If you clicked something suspicious, change your password immediately
 Email addresses that look almost right		
 Always check the full sender address – not just the display name.		



NOT SURE? DON'T CLICK.



A 30-second phone call can prevent a major problem.

Think before you click. Verify before you trust. Protect our Legion family.