

Wisconsin American Legion First District

Serving 60,000+ veterans from the shores of Lake Michigan to the idyllic Sugar River

December 2021

Greetings American Legion Family!

<u>BLUF</u> – Thanksgiving 2021 is in the books. I had a great dinner with family and friends and I just finished the last of my sister-in-law's scrumptious turkey soup. I hope everyone had an enjoyable holiday and are looking forward to the real start of the Christmas season.

Looking back over the last 6 months, I've been very busy with all things Legion. State Convention was most enjoyable, and it was so refreshing to be able to meet and greet in person again. Our own David Latimer was elected Department Vice Commander, and all enjoyed celebrating this momentous achievement with him.

August began with our District Christmas in August picnic hosted by Lake Geneva Post 24, and a good time was had by all. The attendance was phenomenal. It was much better attended than the regular District Christmas party, to the point the Vice Commanders and Vice Presidents are recommending that we do this every year instead of a traditional Christmas party. More on that in the coming months. In midmonth, I represented the 1st District in Beloit, at a V-J Day commemoration that was sponsored by Vets Roll. It featured several WWII veterans, all in their late 90's or early 100's and their stories were a treasured part of the event. I also sat in on a virtual Post Commander's conference hosted by Department Commander Greg Eirich. This was a great idea, and I hope that it can continue in the future. I finished out the month with the National Convention in Phoenix, AZ, and like our Department Convention, it was well attended and very informative. It was good to see old friends again face to face, and the 1st District was well represented with some new faces in the delegation.

September started with a day and a half drive from Arizona back to Wisconsin to arrive in time for my daughter's COVID postponed wedding dance, and then it was back to Legion business. I participated in the 9/11 commemoration and parade, hosted by Darien Post 450. The annual POW/MIA Silent March was hosted by Genoa City Post 183 and was very well attended. All 5 County Councils were back to meeting and I attended those, interspersed with several District conferences, as I hit the campaign trail for Department Vice Commander. The Department's Celebration of Freedom rounded out the month. To those of you who have not attended this event, I urge you to put this on your calendar for next September. Headquarters staff puts on a fun and informative program, and it is also a great fund-raiser for the Department.

October saw another successful 1st District Conference, this time at Orfordville Post 209. We had 60 delegates in attendance, but only half the Posts were represented. Post officers really need to make it a point to attend these conferences, as there is a lot a great information put out that can only help you be successful in running your Post and your programs. I attended the Department Fall meetings and a few more District conferences. I was also was able to start to visit 1st District Posts beginning with Menomonee Falls, New Berlin and Silver Lake. I was not able to do much of this last year, due to the virus that shall remain unnamed. I hope to be able to continue this for the remainder of my term as your Commander, and I already have more scheduled.



November brought a visit by our National Vice Commander, Jerry Wilson of the Department of Ohio. I represented the 1st District at a reception held for him at Hubertus Post 522. He enjoyed his time here and is looking forward to a return visit next spring. I attended Congressman Bryan Steil's Veteran of the Year selection ceremony hosted by Burlington Post 79. This featured Past District Service Officer John Margowski and Department Service Officer James Fialkowski as runners up and the winner was Bob Boulden, one of the Chosin Few. His story was riveting. Next was the Edgerton Post 30 holiday party and the month rounded out with 4 County Council meetings.

December promises to be just as busy until everyone takes a break for the holidays. On the schedule are Post meetings at Mukwonago, Racine 310 and Beloit. Kenosha Post 21 will be having a Pearl Harbor Day commemoration which will include re-naming the street in front of the Post for namesake Paul Herrick, KIA in the attack on December 7. The Caledonia Post 494 annual Christmas party and Kenosha County Council are next up, followed by the annual distribution of wreaths for the Wreaths Across America event in Union Grove. Rounding out the month will be the 1st District Riders Christmas party in Mukwonago.

As you can see, there is a lot happening in our District. I'm happy to be able to attend so many events after last year's lockdown and I look forward to the coming year with great anticipation. I enjoy seeing our Legionnaires in action, and appreciate the invitations to be a part of your events and the hospitality you all show me. If any Post would like me to attend a meeting or event, just shoot me an e-mail, and I'll put you on the schedule. Being retired has its advantages.

Just a word on membership. We all know as the year goes on, renewals will be harder and harder to come by. I urge you to make contact with your members, preferably in person, if possible, and not sit back and wait for the mail. I also remind you that I will generate a 2930 list for any Post that wants one. Just send me a list of Zip codes that you need, and I'll get you a list, usually within a day.

Finally, I want to stress the importance of Buddy Checks. Although the holiday season is normally a joyous time, many of our brother and sister veterans can find themselves overwhelmed by it all. A call to check in with them, to see how they are doing, or if we can help them with anything, can make all the difference in the world to someone who might otherwise have nowhere else to turn. Please don't overlook this important part of "taking care of veterans".

Debi and I wish you a wonderful holiday season, and hope that your celebrations are filled with love and happiness. See you at Mid-winter, and *GO RECRUIT THE NEXT YOU!*

Membership Report

In the interest of saving space, I will only publish the totals for the 5 Counties. Your County Commander will have the numbers for each Post. These are the totals as of November 24, 2021.

- 1. Walworth County (753) (goal) 574 (paid), 76.23%
- 2. Rock County (758) 551, 72.69%
- 3. Kenosha County (545) 384, 70.46%
- 4. Racine County (691) 486, 70.33%
- 5. Waukesha County (2765) 1845, 66.73%

First District (5512) 3840, 69.67% (10th place in the Department)

2022 National Targets: 75% - 12/8/2021; 80% - 1/20/2022; 85% - 2/9/2022;

2022 100% POSTS

Ingalls - Koeppen Post 102, Walworth

What's News?

- 1. 2022 Department Mid-winter Conference The 2022 Mid-winter conference will take place January 13 16, 2022 at Ho-chunk Casino Hotel and Convention Center in Wisconsin Dells/Baraboo. The theme for this year's event is *A Time to Shine*. Friday will have the Department standing committee meetings, exhibits, social gatherings and hospitality rooms. Training Saturday promises to be the best ever. There will be classes for most Post officer positions, myLegion.org training by Department Membership Coordinator Chet Faith, Fundamentals of Information Technology for Posts, Mental Health Education and Training, Consolidated Post Report training, Funeral Honors and M-1 Garand training, ALA in the Know and much more. Saturday evening will host *Our Time to Shine* celebration featuring food, music, dancing and a performance by Elvis Presley. The Department Executive Committee will meet Sunday morning to wrap up the conference. This promises to be an informative, entertaining and fun-filled event for every member of The American Legion Family. Don't delay, register today!
- 2. High School Oratorical Contest District Chair Lisa Fauster is hard at work promoting this year's contest. Posts should already be scheduling the local contests for December, and the County contests should be set for the first two weeks in January. The District contest will be held on January 29, 2022, hosted by Harvey Funk Post 494 in Caledonia. The Department contest will be held on Saturday, February 12, 2022 at Ripon College. This National scholarship program is of tremendous benefit to our country's youth and Posts are urged to contact local schools and solicit contestants. Parochial and home-school students are also eligible to participate. For more information, contact Chair Fauster at lisav1124@hotmail.com or 414-902-0461.
- 3. Buddy Check Program National Commander Paul Dillard's theme of No Veteran Left Behind and Department Commander Greg Eirich's theme of Positive Impact both lend themselves well to promoting a successful Buddy Check program. Making contact with our members and other veterans that you know, just to check and see how they are doing, lets them know that they are not alone, and that someone cares. Especially during the holiday season, feelings of loneliness and even thoughts of suicide increase dramatically. When you factor in PTSD and other mental health issues suffered by our veteran population, the holidays can be crushing. Hearing a friendly voice, and just knowing that someone cares can often be the difference between a better mental state and a tragic outcome. Please take the time to reach out to our brother and sister veterans during this festive time of the year.
- **4.** News from the US Department of Veterans Affairs The following articles were recently published by the US DVA:
 - Travel discounts, airfare deals for Veterans Veterans can now get travel deals and discounts through, American Forces Travel, the Department of Defense's MWR initiative offering a wide selection of discounted rates on hotels, air fare, rental cars, vacation packages, cruises and much more! Check out all the great deals and discounts available exclusively for those who served, here.
 - Veterans: Four steps to get your community flu shot It's that time of year: flu season is here. With COVID-19 circulating in our communities, getting a flu shot is more important than ever. In addition to your local VA medical facility, flu vaccines are available at no cost to eligible Veterans at more than 70,000 in-network community care providers nationwide. Learn more here.
 - Veterans Needed to Serve as Youth Mentors The Travis Manion Foundation (TMF) is seeking Veterans to serve as youth mentors and help develop character and leadership skills in young adults. Veterans can become a Veteran Mentor through TMF's Character Does Matter youth mentorship program and help lead positive change in their communities. Learn more here.

- Secretary McDonough answers Veteran questions VA Secretary Denis McDonough recently answered questions on Inflation, Burn Pits, Mental Health Services, Disability Claims, Medical Marijuana, Caregivers and Survivors, Community Care, Billing, Post-9/11 GI Bill, LGBTQ+, Electronic Healthcare Record, COVID-19, Dental, and Homeless Veterans. Additionally, VA experts answered more than 400 questions submitted by Veterans. Read more here.
- Veterans Eligible to Use CaringBridge for Free Veterans experiencing health challenges can stay connected with loved ones for free thanks to CaringBridge, which replaces countless texts and emails with an easy-to-use and secure communications platform. Learn more here.
- Attention Women Veterans In an effort to help us serve women Veterans better, we need your help. We want to hear from women who have served in the military. The <u>survey</u> is designed to help VA gain a basic understanding of why women Veterans may not be using the VA and what VA can do to help change that. This survey is intended for women Veterans who do <u>NOT</u> use their VA benefits and services. The survey is anonymous and takes less than five minutes to complete.
- 5. WDVA 2021 Woman Veteran of the Year WDVA Secretary Mary Kolar and Governor Tony Evers announced the 2021 Woman Veteran of the Year at a ceremony at the Milwaukee VA Clinic on November 9th. US Army veteran, Lieutenant Colonel Darcie Greuel, was recognized for her exemplary volunteer work, service in the US Army Reserve with medical and humanitarian roles, and efforts in developing the Military to VA (M2VA) program in Milwaukee an effort to better serve post-9/11 veterans.

Greuel's life experiences in the Army shaped her passion for helping veterans. She saw active military service on humanitarian and medial missions to South American countries. More recently she was deployed in the early 2000's to Afghanistan treating American and Coalition forces, as well as offering humanitarian assistance to the local population there. These vivid defining experiences gave her a calling to help post-9/11 servicemembers with their eventual transition from military to civilian life.

She became the first registered nurse case manager for a new VA program dedicated to caring for post-9/11 era veterans. Her team screens for veterans' medical needs and aid by connecting them to VA healthcare, benefits, and community resources. Most recently, her team was rebranded as Military2VA (M2VA) as they continue to reach record numbers of younger veterans who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In the community, she has also given her time and skills to volunteer with special events including volunteering to help local senior citizens and handicapped individuals over age 50, delivering care packages, extending support for veterans taking honor flights to Washington D.C. war memorials and volunteering with the annual Milwaukee Veteran's Day Parade.

We applaud and are pleased to recognize Darcie Greuel as our 2021 WDVA Woman Veteran of the Year! Watch the video presentation here of WVOTY!

- **6. SCAM ALERT -** The Social Security Administration will never threaten, scare, or pressure you to take an immediate action. If you receive a call, text, or email that:
 - Threatens to suspend your Social Security number, even if they have part or all of your Social Security number
 - Warns of arrest or legal action
 - Demands or requests immediate payment
 - Requires payment by gift card, prepaid debit card, internet currency, or by mailing cash
 - Pressures you for personal information
 - Requests secrecy
 - Threatens to seize your bank account

- Promises to increase your Social Security benefit
- Tries to gain your trust by providing fake "documentation," false "evidence," or the name of a real government official

...it is a SCAM!

Protect yourself and others from Social Security-related scams

- Try to stay calm. Do not provide anyone with money or personal information when you feel pressured, threatened, or scared.
- Hang up or ignore it. If you receive a suspicious call, text, or email, hang up or do not respond. Government employees will not threaten you, demand immediate payment, or try to gain your trust by sending you pictures or documents.
- Report Social Security-related scams. If you receive a suspicious call, text, or email that
 mentions Social Security, ignore it and report it to the <u>SSA Office of the Inspector</u>
 <u>General(OIG)</u>. Do not be embarrassed if you shared personal information or suffered a
 financial loss.
- Get up-to-date information. Follow SSA OIG on <u>Twitter @TheSSAOIG</u> and <u>Facebook</u> @SSA Office of the Inspector General for the latest information on Social Security-related scams. Visit the <u>Federal Trade Commission</u> for information on other government scams. Spread the word. Share your knowledge of Social Security-related scams. Post on social media using the hashtag #SlamtheScam to share your experience and warn others. Visit <u>oig.ssa.gov/scam</u> for more information. Please also share with your friends and family.
- 7. Wreaths Across America District Coordinator Mary-Ellen Crandall reports: At this time, we have 50 volunteers from The American Legion Family that have committed to join us for our wreath placement. Please join us if you are able. The distribution will take place on Saturday, December 18, 2021 at 11:00 AM, at Southern Wisconsin Veterans Memorial Cemetery, 21731 Spring Street, Union Grove. Unless plans change, the ceremony will be held by the flag pavilion down the hill from the Chapel. Plan to be there by 10:30 AM. Bundle up and dress warm.
- 8. From Department Assistant Chaplain Raymond Peterson Dear Legionnaires: I take my Department assignment seriously! Humbly may I add, as a Pastor, I take my Department' a lot more seriously! The truth again is that many people simply do not understand or comprehend the Reverence and Holiness when one comes before a Holy GOD. Some Posts have assigned Legionnaires as Chaplains who have no idea what to do as a Chaplain, and often Legionnaires are stunned to be assigned to be one. Sadly, I also hear some were assigned because they failed to attend a monthly meeting. I understand that other Posts have no Chaplain at all. I have heard rote prayers flippantly recited to the Creator of the Universe, as if they were throwing a bone to the dog in the backyard. Many tragically do not understand what they are doing, and really that is only indicative of what has been allowed to happen across this nation for many decades.
 - I am respectfully 'requesting' that as District Commander this letter be forwarded to each Post within your District.
 - If that Post has a Chaplain, I request that Chaplain to forward me their name, their email address, and Post mailing address.
 - If the Post has no Chaplain, may I respectfully again request for the Post Commander, or the Adjutant, to email me that their Post has no Chaplain; and may I know the Post number and city.

My contact information is: Raymond Peterson, Assistant Department Chaplain

Ray@HBBH10.com (262) 939-8259 4899 181st St. Chippewa Falls, WI 54729 9. Across the Pond Veterans Park – Across the Pond Veterans Park, Inc. is a 501 (c)(3) charitable organization that is building an ADA compliant recreational park on 23 acres that were purchased from Bayfield County. The Park is to honor our veterans, especially those who may need extra considerations to enjoy outdoor recreational activities and is also open for everyone to use.

Thus far, The Circle of Flags and Honor Wall are constructed. The first 150 tiles on the Honor Wall were dedicated May 29, 2021. With a grant from the Green Bay Packer Foundation, a quarter mile trail through the forest has been completed. Sidewalks are in; electricity will soon be connected to light the parking lot and replace the solar lights for the Circle of Flags and Honor Wall. Other phases of building will have water and septic, RV/tent camping sites, picnic areas, bathroom facilities, trail to Iron River Flowage and a dock for fishing and launching canoes and kayaks (all ADA). Memorials to each conflict where our military has served will be erected throughout the park. A memorial sculpture for Vietnam will be installed next spring. It was designed, built and donated by a local artist and grant money has been received for the installation.

Everything is being accomplished through grants, donations, fundraisers and volunteers. The Board of Directors is all volunteer, some are veterans and others just want to help veterans. For more information follow this link.

- **10. Resolution Writing: How to Start -** The American Legion is a resolution-based organization. Any Legionnaire, or group of Legionnaires, can impact the priorities and positions of The American Legion through a resolution a position-driven initiative written by members and put to a vote. Resolutions can be categorized as:
 - A statement of position on veteran issues
 - Related to Congressional legislation, matters at the Departments of Veterans Affairs or Defense, or a state legislature or department.
 - The ability to create, change or support programs of The American Legion, such as Legion Baseball, Boys Nation or Legion Riders.
 - The ability to create, change or support programs of The American Legion, Department of Wisconsin, such as Legion Baseball, Badger Boys State or Legion Riders.
 - Authorization of change within the organization (e.g., use of funds, create and manage corporate relationships, make changes to the constitution and bylaws).
 - Opportunity to recognize an individual or organization.

Resolutions can be directed to issues at both the National and Department organizations. Resolution writing was the topic presented for The American Legion's Training Tuesday session Oct. 26, 2021, held through Microsoft Teams. The presentation will be available here in the coming days.

11. Notes from Wisconsin American Legion Headquarters

Post Mailings - Get HQ updates here: https://wilegion.org/headquarters-updates-news/.

Membership Cards – A fillable PDF of the official American Legion membership card is now available from Department Headquarters. Contact Chet at membership@wilegion.org or District Commander Stuvengen at orfywi@gmail.com for a copy. This can be used for new members or to replace a lost or damaged one for a current member. You will still need to fill out the National and Department portions of the card for new members, but this will now allow you to provide a smart-looking, typewritten membership card to those new members.

From the Department Membership Coordinator – Chet Faith recently released the following information:

- 50-year certificates will be generated and mailed in February.
- When sending in Last Bugle requests, you do NOT need member data forms. The Last Bugle request takes care of that. If you're sending in a Last Bugle request without membership renewal, add "ATTN: Last Bugle".
- I've been asked countless times to remove members from Post rosters. The thing is I can't. Here is why:
 - Members have to be current on their dues to transfer them. Members stay on your Post roster for 3 years. (Currently last paid in 2019)
 - ➤ I cannot transfer a member without their consent.
 - Deceased members cannot be transferred. (National is working on the algorithm to remove them from rosters automatically)
- Online renewal notices are a little late this month.
- The HQ staff is working diligently to make your life at the Post level easier. Please be patient.

Changes to Mission Blue Post Assistance Grant Requirements – In 2021, National announced the creation of the Mission Blue Post Assistance Grant to aid Posts that were in financial distress due to the COVID shut-downs. Unfortunately, the program was woefully under-utilized, with many Posts unaware that is even existed. National traced this under-utilization to the somewhat stringent qualifications, specifically a provision that Posts name the National organization as an additional insured on Post insurance policies. This requirement has now been eliminated. The following provisions are now in place:

- Any post that does not have insurance that names the national organization as an additional insured and/or has not filed a 2021 Consolidated Post Report but meets the other grant qualifications identified in Resolution No. 36, may receive up to \$1,000.
- Any post that has met the insurance requirement and has a 2021 Consolidated Post Report on file and meets the other grant qualifications identified in Resolution No. 36, may receive up to \$2,000.
- Posts that previously applied for and received a \$1,000 grant, can reapply to receive another \$1,000.

The application can be found <u>here</u>. It has now been revised, and the insurance requirement has been eliminated.

Ceremonial Rifles – HQ is getting more inquiries on ceremonial rifles, especially when closing a Post. Please reference the links or the FAQ's below to help answer your specific questions when you get a local inquiry.

How does a Post apply/qualify for ceremonial rifles?

The individual Post is required to have their Commander or Adjutant fill out the form located at www.tacom.army.mil. This form must be sent to your Department Adjutant to validate the Post is in good standing and will forward the form to the National Security Division Director for further processing. The Officers Guide and Manual of Ceremonies (available for download from the Legion.org website) has the procedures for requesting rifles, ammunition and static military equipment.

Can our Post's rifles be loaned to another Post or an organization within the respective Post/Detachment?

No. Rifles are only to be used by the issued organization's Post. The weapons are not to be shared or loaned or utilized by anyone other than that organization's members. The Sons of the American Legion may use the ceremonial rifles provided they comply with

local, state, federal law (i.e., no felonies); over 18 years of age; and have weapon safety training. Sons are not authorized to have their own Honor Guard using US Army ceremonial rifles and at least one veteran member of the Post is required to participate.

Does the Post own the rifles?

No. All rifles remain the property of the US Government. The Post is the custodian of the rifles conditionally issued for ceremonial purposes. There is a requirement that the Post must send a rifle inventory to the Army. See current Officers Guide and Manual of Ceremonies (see link above) for additional guidance.

What if the Post thinks they bought the rifles and want to keep the rifles as personal property?

All rifles remain the property of the US Government. The Post is the custodian of the rifles conditionally issued for ceremonial purposes. There is a requirement that the post must send a rifle inventory to the Army. See current Officers Guide and Manual of Ceremonies (see link above) for additional guidance.

What if the Post closes, do the rifles go to the District Commander or to a neighboring Post in need?

No. The Post Adjutant or Commander must contact the Army Donations Program Office for disposition (return) instructions prior to closing the Post. See current Officers Guide and Manual of Ceremonies (see link above) for additional guidance.

- Our Post has different models of rifles on hand (M1897, M1903, M1917, M1, etc.).
 What models of rifles need to be recorded on the Ceremonial Rifle Inventory form?
 You are required to report by model, manufacturer, and serial numbers all types of rifles.
 See current Officers Guide and Manual of Ceremonies (see link above) for additional guidance.
- Does the Officers' Guide and Manual of Ceremonies include Army Donations Program information?

Yes, the current Officers Guide and Manual of Ceremonies (see link above) has information.

Administrative Manual 2021-2022 - The Administrative Manual is completely on-line this year. All forms can be found on the website, can be saved to your computer and are fillable. The manual can be found and downloaded on the Headquarters website. Go to the "MEMBERS" dropdown option and select "RESOURCES & MANUALS". This manual will help you see what your Post/County/District should be working on each month.

If you wish to receive a printed copy at the cost of \$20.00 each, contact Department Head-quarters at 608-745-1090.

Sign up for Department Headquarters Weekly Updates – Go to the Department website and select "GET CONNECTED" from the dropdown menu, select "Contact Sign-Up" and fill out the form. Lots of great information is passed on each week to include important information for Post and veterans, event information, Legislative & VA Updates, and more. The updates are sent out weekly via email each Friday. ALL Legion Family members are encouraged to sign up for these updates, you do not have to hold a leadership position to receive them.

Department Facebook Page - PLEASE, we need to get our word out. Go to Facebook, search Wisconsin American Legion and like our page. When we post information, please SHARE it. WHY is this important? If you share it, 10 of your friends share it, and 10 of their friends share it and so on, soon 100s of people have seen it. For example, we had a Celebration of Freedom Post that had 52 shares and it reached 8800 people. Most of our posts average 4-5 shares and only reach about 500 people.

- 12. Training Time-out The principles that we commonly refer to as the Four Pillars can trace their roots directly to our preamble. Over the course of the last year, we examined each clause of the Preamble. Now we will put those clauses to work. The first pillar Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation is derived from two clauses. They are: To preserve the memories and incidents of our association in all wars, and To consecrate and sanctify our comradeship by our devotion to mutual helpfulness. Some of The American Legion programs and positions that arise out of this pillar are:
 - Protect VA from budget reductions
 - Boost VA construction projects
 - Stop denying VA health care
 - Speed up delivery of electronic health records
 - Reduce delays in Integrated Disability Evaluation System
 - Improve access to health care in rural areas
 - Address environmental exposure issues
 - Increase staffing levels to reduce VA claims backlog
 - Expand Veterans Treatment Courts
 - Increase funding for National Cemetery Administration

For more in-depth information on these items, click here.

13. What's happening around the First District

Santa Claus (aka Rollie Crandall) visits with veterans at Fairchild Hall at the Wisconsin Veterans
Home



(Photo courtesy of Mary-Ellen Crandall)

Full house at Waterford Post 20 Pancake Breakfast



(Photo courtesy of B. Shane Morris)

POW/MIA Ceremonial Chair donated to Clinton Post 440



(Photo courtesy of Carol Pastorius)





Until next time, *recruit, retain and engage*. Have a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Go recruit the next YOU!