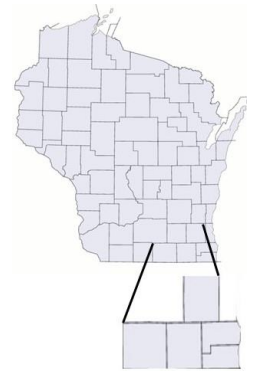




# Wisconsin American Legion First District



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

**November 2021**

Greetings American Legion Family!

**BLUF** – There’s a chill in the air. Football is in full swing, and the World Series is wrapping up. I’ve spent the last few days winterizing the house and yard, getting ready for the cold weather to come.

As I have been traveling around the state this last couple of months, I continue to be in awe of the beauty of our home. The rolling hills, the colors of autumn and the people I’ve met along the way. Wisconsin is truly second to none.

September and October are District Conference season here in the Department of Wisconsin. As you are probably aware, I have begun my campaign for the high office of Department Vice Commander. To that end, I have tried to visit as many conferences and events around the state as possible, all while seeing to 1<sup>st</sup> District responsibilities. It’s fun to attend other District Conferences. Everyone does things a little bit differently, but we all have the same focus, the execution of the many great programs of The American Legion. The hospitality that I’ve received is amazing and greatly appreciated. I’ve had the opportunity to address each conference and introduce myself to the delegates. The few that I have not been able to attend are already on my schedule for the spring.

I have started attending as many 1<sup>st</sup> District Post meetings as I can. With the pandemic raging this time last year, many Posts were not meeting, or were limited to very little activity. Those that did meet, were keeping attendance to a bare minimum, which for the most part kept me away. Hopefully, I can make up for that this year. I urge any Post Commander to contact me with your meeting dates and times, and I will do my level best to get to your meetings. At the meetings that I have attended so far, I’m happy to see the enthusiasm and willingness to press forward with our programs and get things back on track. I am glad to answer questions and when asked, provide whatever help I can in the way of information and suggestions. I usually have a 2930 list with me for each Post, and the membership committees have been very happy to get that resource.

All 5 County Councils have returned to a regular schedule, and I am able to attend all of those meetings as well. I am able to provide updates on new programs and changes being implemented at the Department and National levels. I will detail some of those later in the newsletter. Attendance has been very good at the County meetings. It is of vital importance that Posts try to get a delegation to attend the Council meetings to keep up on what is going on. With the District only meeting twice a year, the County Council meetings are where our best communication efforts take place. Posts that do not send delegates to their Council miss out on a wealth of information that can only help them. As a rule, I and the District Vice Commander assigned to that County attend, and we are able to provide updates, news and information about our programs and about other activities around The American Legion. I hope that those delegates that attend the County meetings take that information back to their Posts and discuss it at the monthly Post meetings. Commanders, if you are not one of the County delegates, I hope that you will invite your delegation to give a report at each Post meeting on what they learned. This can only benefit your Post if the information is passed on.

As I mentioned earlier, I will provide 2930 lists to any Post I visit, as well as to any Post that requests a list. Simply email me a list of the zip codes you want included, and I will get a PDF list back to you within a day.



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I urge all Posts to make use of this resource. There are currently nearly one thousand 2930 Legionnaires residing in the 1<sup>st</sup> District. These fellow veterans have already paid their 2021 dues, and many their 2022 dues. You don't need to sell them on The American Legion, they have already made that choice. Your task is to sell them on the benefits of belonging to your Post. We all know that there are members on the list that don't want to belong to a local Post for whatever reason. Having said that, I believe that the vast majority of members just need to be asked to join your Post. You can call them, or send a letter or email. However, I believe you will have much more success if you make a face-to-face visit. Each member on the list has an address included in his or her record. If you are not comfortable with a personal cold call, phone that member and arrange a time when you can meet. Be prepared to talk about what your Post does in the community, and the value that membership in a local Post can bring to them. Be enthusiastic. Your excitement talking about Legion activities is catching. If that member sees that your Post is doing great things, chances are they will want to be a part of it. Invite them to a meeting with a promise of no pressure to join. Let them personally see what this is all about. Remember, they already understand the benefit of belonging to The American Legion, you just need to provide a reason to join your Post.

Lastly, on a personal note, don't forget about the upcoming Department Mid-winter conference in January. I have sent along registration and housing forms with the newsletter. If you attend this great event, and I hope you do, I invite you to stop by my hospitality room and have something to eat and drink. This is a great opportunity to interact with your fellow Legionnaires without the pressure of a formal meeting structure.

Have a great Thanksgiving, and remember **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 October 28, 2021.

1. Walworth County (753) (goal) 539 (paid), 71.58%
  2. Rock County (758) 491, 64.78%
  3. Racine County (691) 430, 62.23%
  4. Waukesha County (2765) 1681, 60.80%
  5. Kenosha County (545) 301, 55.23%
- First District (5512) 3442, 62.45% (9<sup>th</sup> place in the Department)

2022 National Targets: 65% - 11/10/2021; 75% - 12/8/2021; 80% - 1/20/2022

### **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 13, 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](mailto: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 as we enter 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:
  - **Veteran Memorial Benefits** – Veterans, service members, and their families may be entitled to VA burial benefits to help plan and pay for burial, funeral service, and transportation costs. [Learn](#) about each burial benefit, how to apply, and where to go for assistance.
  - **Improve Your Finances with VA** – Want to reduce your debt, secure a home loan, or create a family budget? VA and its partners provide money management tools, financial counseling, Will preparation services, and more to help you and your family [manage your financial well-being](#).
  - **VA Benefits for PTSD** – Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can occur after exposure to extreme stress, such as combat, an assault, or a disaster. If you're living with PTSD caused by military service, you may be entitled to VA disability benefits and compensation. [Find out if you qualify and how to apply!](#)
  - **Walk off War with Warrior Expeditions** – [Warrior Expeditions](#), a nonprofit outdoor therapy program, provides Veterans with everything they need to complete a long-distance outdoor expedition! To receive the gear and skills training needed at no cost to you, check out the Warrior Hike, Warrior Bike, and Warrior Paddle programs available across the country.
  - **Transition to Civilian Life with TAP Online Courses** – Are you currently transitioning or planning for your transition out of active-duty service? VA's Transition Assistance Program's (TAP) online courses provide helpful information about available benefits, financial planning, and career transition. [Check out the TAP online courses today!](#)
  - **Advance Your Nursing Career** – If you've been continuously employed in a permanent VA registered nurse position for at least one year and accepted into an approved academic program, you may be able to take advantage of the National Nursing Education Initiative (NNEI) scholarship program to seek an advanced nursing degree. [Learn more about the program!](#)
5. **New education benefits help veterans who lost jobs during the pandemic** – The US DVA announces the creation of The Veteran Rapid Retraining Assistance Program (VRRAP) which offers education and training for [high-demand jobs](#) — including health care, education and engineering — to veterans who are unemployed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Veterans

participating in VRRAP will receive up to 12 months of tuition and fees and a monthly housing allowance based on Post-9/11 GI Bill rates. Learn more [here](#).

6. **VA Announces Plan to Get Ahead of Surge in Backlog of Claims** – Starting in October, the Department of Veterans Affairs will hire and train new staff to ensure Veterans' claims are adjudicated quickly and help reduce an expected increase in the backlog of claims pending more than 125 days. VA is taking the following proactive steps to help in the reduction:
  - Hire and train 2,000 new employees to assist in claims processing.
  - Leverage authority to transfer CARES funding to VBA and utilize the American Rescue Plan to fund overtime to ensure timely claims processing.
  - Deploy requested Fiscal Year 2022 budget resources to support Agent Orange presumptive processing, as well as for general Compensation and Pension claims processing.

As of October 11, there were more than 204,000 backlog claims in an inventory of 603,000 total claims. VA identified more than 70,000 claims to review for additional entitlement stemming from the presumptive relationship between Agent Orange and Parkinsonism, bladder cancer, and hypothyroidism. Many of these will enter the backlog in October, which is projected to reach 260,000 pending claims.

“VA is committed to ensuring timely access to benefits and services for all veterans. This includes making sure that veterans who may have experienced adverse health effects from military related exposures can get access to the benefits they need,” said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. “As we process claims such as those for three new disabilities presumptively linked to Agent Orange exposure, including proactive application of [Nehmer provisions](#), as well as three new Gulf War particulate exposure presumptives, we anticipate the claims backlog to increase this fall. The hiring of new employees will help us resolve these claims more quickly.”

Several factors have contributed to the recent backlog. Beginning in March 2020, operational changes necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in an untimely delay of the [Federal Records Centers'](#) retrieval of documents and suspended [Compensation and Pension \(C&P\) examinations](#). While these actions were necessary to protect the health and safety of employees and veterans, they slowed the processing time for claims. VA workload has also increased as a result of the aforementioned recent decisions and actions, including [a court order](#) mandating the review of previously denied Veterans on the basis of qualifying service in the 12 nautical miles surrounding Vietnam.

The backlog has decreased by more than 14,000 claims since the end of August 2021. With continued improvement of VA's ability to obtain C&P examinations and Federal Records, and with all requested resources received, VBA plans to address the impending increase and then further reduce the current claims backlog to 100,000 claims by April 2024.

7. **Veterans Can Apply to Become Wildland Firefighters** – Squads work on fire mitigation and fuels reduction projects on public lands, giving back to the surrounding communities. Veterans must be flexible, adaptable and able to work in a fluid, changing work environment. The program is open to Veterans ages 18-35 who can meet a host of qualifications. Veterans must also pass a three-mile hike with 45 pounds in 45 minutes. Training locations are in Georgia and Tennessee. Applications are open thru December or until positions are filled. Learn more [here](#).
8. **Wisconsin DVA Secretary Addresses CVSO Association** – Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Mary Kolar participated in the 2021 Wisconsin County Veterans Service Officers Association Fall Conference.

"The WDVA is pleased to be a longtime partner with the County Veterans Service Officers and the Tribal Veterans Service Officers to ensure that we reach and assist as many veterans possible in Wisconsin," said Kolar.

She expressed her gratitude and gave updates regarding the WDVA support programs to all the attendees during remarks at this event. More information on the Wisconsin CVSO Association can be found [here](#).

- 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** – Post mailings can be viewed at <https://wilegion.org/post-mailing/>.

**Membership Cards** – A fillable PDF of the official American Legion membership card is now available from Department Headquarters. Contact Chet at [membership@wilegion.org](mailto:membership@wilegion.org) or District Commander Stuvengen at [orfywi@gmail.com](mailto: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:

- The PUFL green bar roster should be coming out soon.
- There was some bad code and PUFL applications were sent to some SAL and current PUFL's. Please inform your PUFL's not to be offended or concerned over their current memberships. Also please inform your SAL members that if they received an application to disregard it because there is not currently a PUFL program for SAL.
- Renewal notices are being sent out. Members who opt-in to receive their renewal notice via email are suppressed from the first two paper notices. If they haven't renewed by the third notice, they will automatically receive subsequent paper notice mailings.
- Membership transfers in/out of state will need to be submitted to National through Department on a data form with signatures. This is to avoid any discrepancies with members, Posts and Departments. Posts should fill out the Member Data Form and submit it to me and I will forward it to National.

**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 it 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 [here](#). It has not been revised, simply disregard the insurance requirements.

**Department Announces Holiday Calendar Raffle - FUNDRAISING OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL POSTS!** The Department has launched a calendar raffle. Posts will have the opportunity to purchase tickets for \$3 and sell them for a suggested \$5/ticket. There will be a winner each day, December 1-31. Here is more:

Of the \$3 paid to Department, \$2 to the Troop & Family Support fund to directly assist Wisconsin veterans and families in need, and \$1 goes to the prize pool.

We encourage everyone to reach outside of the membership to patriotic non-members as part of the effort to sell tickets. This will increase the total amount of money raised and relieve pressure on our members. If every member sold just 4 raffle tickets, there would be more than \$200,000 of prizes and \$800,000 raised for Legion programs and Your Posts.

The Department will handle all promotions through the website and social media. We will also be providing marketing posters for the Posts to highlight the program. For details and to order click [here](#).

**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 Headquarters 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. Madison VA Looking for Volunteers** - The Madison VA has a new opportunity for Veterans of all eras, and family caregivers of Veterans, to get involved in helping VA better serve Veterans and families.

As part of the nationwide movement to engage stakeholders in research, the Madison VA is forming a new Veteran Research Engagement Group (VetREG). The VetREG is an advisory group consisting of Veterans and caregivers who meet with VA healthcare researchers to provide their input on research studies and projects.

This is an opportunity for the Veteran voice to be heard and will help improve the quality and relevance of research and clinical innovation at the Madison VA. We are seeking Veterans and family members in the Madison VA catchment area to join the VetREG – all are welcome, and older Veterans and their caregivers are especially encouraged to apply for membership. Members of the VetREG will receive training and participate in regular group meetings to review project materials and give feedback to healthcare researchers. Training and meetings will be held virtually, and members will be reimbursed for their time. Meetings will occur 4-6 times per year and will be held at a time convenient to VetREG members (likely evenings).

To learn more or complete an application to be part of the VetREG, please contact Sydney Hoel [sydney.hoel@va.gov](mailto:sydney.hoel@va.gov) or +1-608-262-8744. We look forward to hearing from you!

- 13. 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***. For more than 100 years, The American Legion has been the nation's leading advocate for proper health care and earned benefits for America's veterans. The Legion was instrumental in creating the Veterans Administration in 1930, and an ardent supporter of its rise to Cabinet status when it became the Department of Veterans Affairs

(VA) in 1989. As the relationship between VA and veterans evolves, The American Legion will help VA meet its critical mission.

As it has for decades, The Legion continues to aggressively lobby for adequate funding of the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), to provide timely access to quality health care. Additionally, the Legion seeks to ensure fair rulings on claims and other earned veterans benefits for those who have service-connected injuries and illnesses. A nationwide network of more than 2,500 American Legion accredited service officers and other professional staff works diligently to assist veterans in obtaining the benefits and care they have earned and deserve through VHA, the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) and the National Cemetery Administration.

Today, as the number of discharged veterans from Afghanistan, Operations Iraqi Freedom (OIF), Enduring Freedom (OEF) and New Dawn (OND) surpasses 1.2 million, The Legion's congressionally chartered role to support them could not be more relevant. However, The Legion also strongly believes that a veteran is a veteran, regardless of war era or location of service. In this way, The Legion is the only organization that works on behalf of about 23 million U.S. veterans alive today. The Legion has tens of thousands of members who volunteer nearly a million hours annually in VA facilities to help their fellow veterans navigate the VA system (saving the department about \$20 million per year). The American Legion stands on the front line of change for veterans through its pillar of service called Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation (VA&R).

#### 14. What's happening around the First District

Community Post 375, Mukwonago installed new flag poles in September.



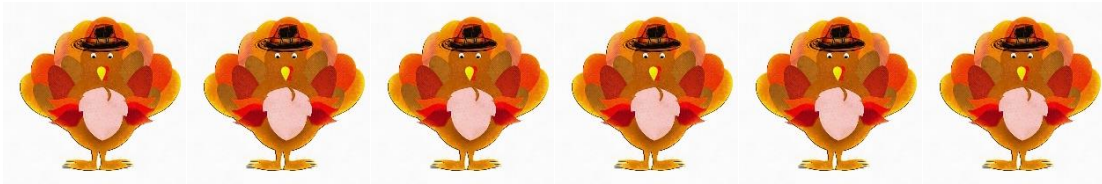
(Photo courtesy of Mike Pook)



First District Commander Karl Stuvengen installs the officers of  
Schultz – Hahn Post 293, Silver Lake



(Photo courtesy of Tom Visintainer, Sr.)



Until next time, **recruit, retain and engage.** Have a wonderful Thanksgiving!

**Go recruit the next YOU!**