



Annual reports to the Convention of The American Legion Department of Minn.

Commander

As we approach the end of the 2023 Legion year, it's time to take a moment to reflect on our journey.

The Department of Minnesota has always been a leader of our American Legion pack. Even when we struggle, we stand together and move forward for our veterans.

Our year started off with our Department Finance Committee making some difficult decisions about budgeting in an effort to ensure a balanced budget that our members can be proud of. We have created an Internal Affairs Ad-hoc Committee that has worked hard on issues from reviewing our Department By-laws, Administrative Manual and our Outline of Authorizations. All these documents are designed to assist our department at all levels in accomplishing our mission.

This committee and our department vice commanders have assisted posts and districts with internal issues and conflicts. There will be a resolution to make this important committee a standing committee of the department.

Our training committee completed the first of two Minnesota Legion College sessions in 2023. They also conducted training around the department requested by posts and districts.

Our Media & Communications Committee has been traveling around the department providing livestreaming of department and district events throughout the year, along with maintaining all 11 Facebook pages (department and 10 districts), Instagram and TikTok accounts.

Our Veterans Administration & Rehabilitation Committee hired two staffers — a department service officer and an assistant department services officer. Both the DSO and ADSO will be fully accredited

and working around the clock for veterans and their families across Minnesota.

Another rock star committee is our Legislative Committee. For months, it worked hard to get our veterans omnibus bill passed for the second year in a row. They were also the tip of the spear when it came to responding to the Minnesota legislators' damaging tax omnibus bill. This bill has a devastating impact on revenue for e-pull-tabs in our charitable gambling efforts, which aid all of our communities and programs.

Even after the close of the legislative session, this team continues to work hard to ensure that veterans issues are front and center with our elected officials.

I could go on and on about the dedicated volunteers who continue to work the programs of The American Legion, but I don't have enough space. I want to take a moment to thank all our posts for their dedication to the mission of The American Legion. Your dedication and hard work for veterans is unparalleled.

We still have some work to do in membership. We are still struggling with department at-large renewals and overall new member recruiting. I would like to encourage all our members to be visible as Legionnaires in their communities. Visit your schools, city councils, county commissioner meetings, county fairs and local events to remind our neighbors the great work we do in our communities. Remind them we are the greatest veterans service organization not only in Minnesota but in the

nation.

In closing, thank you all for your support throughout this year. Keep up the great work, and get out there and do great things.

**Jennifer Havlick
Commander**

President

On July 16, 2022, I was honored and a bit emotional to be installed as the president of the Department of Minnesota American Legion Auxiliary. Being installed with 1st Vice President Sharon (Thiemecke) Cross and 2nd Vice President Judy Ackerman along with the 10 district presidents began a year of service for all of us to our Department of Minnesota.

I was so proud to take that oath of office in front of my husband, children, son-in-law, grandchildren, a sister, two brothers and a sister-in-law. To see them in the front rows was very special and especially to have our grandchildren involved in the ceremony.

With the theme of "Serve and Honor Every Day," this year has been very exciting. The Department President's Project was to collect donations to install stained-glass windows in the three new veterans home. These windows are coming from the old Minneapolis Veterans Home and will be refitted for the meditation rooms. I am so excited to see the finished projects. If money is left over, they will go to the five other veteran homes toward their activity funds.

This Auxiliary year has been so fun and rewarding! I have

been on the go from being in the Hopkin's Raspberry Parade the day after installation to the Fourth of July parade in Forest Lake. I attended unit meetings from almost in Canada (Roseau) to district meetings in Blue Earth. I have seen more of Minnesota than I have ever seen before!

Thank you to all the units and districts for your invitations to meetings, Veterans Day dinners, Christmas dinners, birthday dinners, and membership dinners. Attending events at the Minneapolis Veterans Home, Minneapolis VA Medical Center, St. Cloud VA Medical Center and the Silver Bay Veterans Home was an experience I won't forget.

I was able to attend meetings or events in all 10 districts! Attending the National Convention in Milwaukee with my two granddaughters was the biggest highlight as this was their first time at a national convention. Traveling to Evansville, Ind., for the National President's Homecoming and to Springfield, Ill., for the Pilgrimage to Abraham Lincoln's Tomb were two other highlights.

One more highlight: My husband, Bill, and I were the chase vehicle drivers for the Legacy Run! That was a lot of fun! With all of these journeys and adventures to the many events, I (and often we) traveled at least 22,024 miles.

I didn't travel alone. I want to thank my traveling buddies:

- Department Photographer Ashley Stai, a granddaughter.
- National Northwestern Division Honorary Junior Vice President Samantha Stai, a granddaughter
- Department Membership Chairman Sandy Wersal
- Bev Dresser my only biological sister
- My husband, Bill.

Without them, my travels would have been lonely and a bit quiet. Thank you all so much!

Our theme song became "On the Road Again."

Serving this year with The American Legion Commander Jennifer Havlick, Sons of the American Legion Detachment Commander Tim Weaver, Minnesota American Legion Riders Director Ted Berg, and Department Honorary Junior President Sydney Borntrager has been awesome. Thank you all for your service to our Department of Minnesota American Legion Family. Our year may be coming to an end, however you all will have a special place in my heart!

To those 10 who call me "mom", thank you for your service to your Districts and to the Department of Minnesota! The 10 District Presidents (daughters) are: Tonia Bettermann, Robin Olson, Kim Carlander, Jenny Nelson, Jill Davis, Bev Grose, Wanda Seidler, Zandra Davenport, Cheryl Grover, and Lorinda Kies. I am so proud of your commitment and dedication to the American Legion Auxiliary. 6th District President Dolly Zitour passed away soon after the Auxiliary year began, and Bev Grose was appointed to fill her position. Sadly, we lost 8th District President Zandra Davenport on Memorial Day. May we always remember Dolly and Zandra for their many years of service to the American Legion Auxiliary.

Thank you to all the members of the Department of Minnesota American Legion Auxiliary for your service and commitment to the veterans in your areas and beyond. Your dedication to the Auxiliary programs ensures that the Department of Minnesota will continue to support our veterans, military and their families, and our communities. Thank you to the Chairman of all of those programs. Thank you for saying yes when I called and to promote all that the program involves!

A committee and I were able to interview and hire a new Department of Minnesota Executive Secretary, Christie Avant. She and two other employees- Cathy Radil and Jocelyn Yasis-are who keep our Department of Minnesota office running as smoothly as possible. I want to give a huge "Thank you" to Cathy Radil for agreeing to be the Interim Secretary as well as the Treasurer while the hiring process was taking place. She did an awesome job! Thank you to Jocelyn as well for all her help! Welcome back to Minnesota Christie! Christie is acclimating very well, and she keeps me on my toes!

Thank you to my New London Unit 537 for all of your support this year and in the past. Thank you to 7th District for your support and endorsement as I moved up the chairs. You all mean so much to me!

As I close, I want to make sure I thank my family. Thank you for understanding if I wasn't able to attend everything you had planned. Thank you to my husband Bill for keeping our home a place I could come home to and crashing from the sleep I wasn't getting.

This has been a rewarding and humbling experience. Thank you all for your support, kindness, tears, and laughs. I will never forget this year!

**Mary Kuperus
President**

Adjutant

As anticipated, The American Legion Department of Minnesota had another busy year with some wins and some losses.

The big win is how The Minnesota Veterans Assistance Fund (MVAF) has taken off. To date we have assisted our Minnesota veterans with donations of over \$200,000. This program puts the true meaning into the last clause of our preamble, "To consecrate and sanctify our comradeship by our devotion to mutual helpfulness."

However, we have a few posts and members that are struggling with the concept of the last clause of the Preamble and have refused to assist a veteran in need. I won't call them out here, but they know who they are, and I pray they will see the light and be a part of the good of The American Legion.

The department has enrolled in a program called Unite Us to aid in not only managing the growing caseload but to refer our Minnesota veterans to agencies outside The American Legion for help and guidance. This tool can be used by the posts to help refer the veteran to other agencies for help. The MVAF is not a quick Band-Aid fix as it is evolving into a long-term program that will assist our veterans long term so they can enjoy life as they are so deserving.

The Department Legislative Committee worked their tails off this year to voice the department's praise and concerns on legislation our representatives debated this year.

We commend our state senators and representatives for passing the stand-alone omnibus bill for veterans again this year for the second year in a row. This sets a precedence. Another win is homeless veterans who seek shelter can keep 30 percent of their income versus less than 10 percent in past years.

Our biggest disappointment is the tax bill that hurts our posts with charitable gambling rolling back what and how e-pulltabs will look like in the future to what they were when no one played them. No one with any common sense would or should want to hurt our veterans or any of the many Minnesota charities. However, I guess that is what politicians want. One side voted for this bill, arm in arm, that hurts not only veterans in need but all charities in Minnesota.

Be assured our Department Legislative Committee is already strategizing for the 2024 session to overturn this disrespectful act by our state representatives. Remember 2024 is an election year and don't forget those who voted to hurt our veterans, our youth, our posts and our programs in The American Legion.

On a bright note, our younger veterans from Minnesota are beginning to step up and take on leadership roles in the department. I know in the 3rd and 4th districts officers are younger with energy and new ideas to hopefully stop the slide in membership, we have been in for the past 20-plus years. For our old-timers — of which I am fast becoming one — don't be afraid to turn over the reins. Remember at one point in our Legion career an old-timer had faith in

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us to take over and helped us grow in the ranks. It’s time for us to do the same, to mentor and guide these young Legionnaires to success.

Finally, the Department of Minnesota is lucky to have the personnel that care about The American Legion and its programs. It takes a lot of coordination between our many committees, 530-plus posts and 60,000 members to make our department successful. We are here to help, and we want all our members and posts to do the good of The American Legion. Watch out 2024 here we come!

Respectfully Submitted

Mike Maxa
Adjutant

Vice Cmdr. 1st & 3rd Districts

I wish to thank the 1st and 3rd districts for the opportunity to serve as their department vice commander for the past year. It has been both a rewarding and challenging service. The year has flown by quite rapidly as we are approaching its conclusion. It has been interesting to see how each district approaches challenges differently in the process of accomplishing the Legion mission.

It has been a pleasure also to be in a position to try to aid and assist Department Commander Jennifer Havlick.

The 3rd District has gone to several changes to try and achieve moving into the new digital age under the leadership of Commander Gary Richardson. The past and future Executive Board members are being represented by a younger generation of leadership for the district and will be very capable and responsible in assisting the district moving forward.

The 1st District had a very successful and challenging year as they experienced the loss of several of this year’s Executive Board members. Mary Hanson did a great job serving the district as commander. It was a pleasure to experience the hospitality and inclusion that the 1st District provided to me during the past year.

I wish Chuck Stone, the incoming department vice commander, a great and successful 2023-2024 service to the Legion and offer any assistance I may provide him.

The most uplifting and rewarding thing that happened to me this year was receiving a thank-you card from one of the district vice commanders that thanked me for assistance and making her feel welcome to the Legion in her new position. I think this made my year.

Duane Anderson
Districts 1&3
Vice Commander

Vice Cmdr. 2nd & 7th Districts

No report.

Vice Cmdr. 4th and 5th

Districts

As our year draws to a close, I would like to thank all the members of the 4th and 5th districts for their encouragement and support. It has been an exciting and educational opportunity.

Commander Jennifer Havlick, it has been an honor and a pleasure serving the Department of Minnesota alongside you and my fellow vice commanders. Thank you for the appointment to be one of the members of the Internal Affairs Ad-Hoc Committee.

We were tasked with updating the By-Laws and Mandates, Administrative Manual & Membership Form and Outline of Authorizations. These documents will help our current staff and all new staff, commanders, vice commanders and committee chairs to learn what is expected of them and what they need to know to do their job to the best of their ability. These proposed changes will be presented to the membership for adoption at the Department Convention in July.

The 4th and 5th districts had a joint Post Revitalization and Mid-Winter Conference. Both had several other community events, such as pancake breakfasts, booyas, corn and brat feeds, meat raffles, chicken and rib cookout, dignified flag disposal program, and many more.

We changed our weekly Zoom meetings to bi-monthly. The change was made to lessen the amount of time we spent on Zoom meetings. However, our attendance may have slipped a bit. I will let the incoming vice commander from the 5th District evaluate this subject and adjust as needed. These meetings do help keep both districts informed as to upcoming events, deadlines for reports and news for department and national.

Congratulations, Commander Jennifer Havlick and Membership Director Linda Dvorak, on their great leadership and devotion to The American Legion Department of Minnesota. I hope you had a great year. I know I did. Thanks to you both.

Thanks to all for your support and an opportunity to serve as department vice commander.

Randy Bastyr
Districts 4&5
Vice Commander

Vice Cmdr. 6th and 9th Districts

Department Commander Jennifer Havlick and Membership Director Linda Dvorak did a fine job in doing the follow-up work it takes to keep our districts well-informed in pursuing the membership challenge.

The 6th and 9th districts worked hard to contact the posts to meet the goals through 85 percent. The 90 percent goal was tougher but at this writing it has been completed and 95 percent is being worked very hard. A couple of posts in each district are considering turning in their charter and contact is being made to resolve each situation at this time. New leadership is lacking in each case.

We held a MyLegion.org training for the second year at the Detroit Lakes Post 15 on Saturday, Oct. 15. Tim Haugen

from Moorhead Post 21 lead the presentation using direct access to the website. Attendees brought their laptops and participated in the question and answer session.

The history of the National and Minnesota American Legion was presented and a live Zoom connect was done for posts unable to attend.

Got the opportunity to attend the Washington. D.C., Conference, which had not been held in person for the last two years. Attended the Senate Veterans Affairs hearing in the Dirksen Building where National Commander Jim Troiola shared the desires of our organization for the Congress to achieve.

Attended the testimonials of District Commander Terry Buraas at Bagley Post 16 and for 6th District Commander Karen O’Bar at Long Prairie Post 12. The department convention is coming up.

Gary H. Olson
Districts 6&9
Vice Commander

Vice Cmdr. 8th & 10th Districts

Wow! Another Legion year is in the book for the 2022-23 membership year. I can’t believe it has been 11 months since being elected Department of Minnesota vice commander in Willmar.

I have greatly enjoyed the last year with all the activities that are associated with this very important position. This, along with being post and district adjutant, has kept me busy three to five days a week.

The year started with the national membership workshop in Indianapolis in late July. This was a great way to get to know the Minnesota membership team. It was very informative, a great way to network and to hear success and failure stories firsthand.

It was an honor to represent Department Commander Jennifer Havlick at a strong handful of events that she could not make in the 4th, 5th, 8th and 10th districts. Events included dinners, open house, testimonial, parade and Memorial Day speaker.

It is amazing to see how other districts conduct their business at their mid-winters and district gatherings while getting the word out. We all conduct them slightly differently, but the Legion message and programs are still the same. Just like each post conducts their meetings a bit differently.

Membership is unfortunately down again this year, to some 5,000 members. While our 90.28 percent retention rate is 13th best nationally, we need to do better to maintain our numbers. Our 91 percent overall is good but it does not maintain our number and puts Minnesota 30th nationally.

We, as an organization, need to find multiple avenues to increase member to just maintain our numbers, let alone grow. New members and post officers are out there. We all need to work at telling our story of why we belong.

I helped work a revitalization for the Edina post, which was held at community center, and

we had two CVSOs and an attorney there to assist over a dozen veterans that stopped by. We got two members to transfer into the post and they want to get active. Now, we have to go door knocking to get more members and eligible non-members involved this summer. The city was very supportive.

Assisting posts to improve or streamline activities is the best way to pass along my knowledge. Many were fairly simple tasks like online renewals, MyLegion access, member information, continuous years, ways to get new members. A handful were assisting posts that have strayed too far and need assistance to righten their ship back onto the Legion path. A couple are long-term projects.

It has been an honor to be one of your department vice commanders this past year. Thank you. I plan to continue serving the Department of Minnesota, the 10th District and Fridley Post 303 for the near future and for years to come.

Paul Orson
Districts 8&10
Vice Commander

Treasurer

No report.

Chaplain

Larry Otto was elected Minnesota American Legion chaplain at the Department of Minnesota Convention, July 2022.

I am not aware of services, prayers provided by Chaplain Otto during his tenure; however, by all accounts, he performed his duties well.

On Dec. 31, 2022, Otto experienced a cardiac event resulting in his death. Chaplain Kelley Adelsman, upon request of Department Commander Jennifer Havlick, assumed the duties of department chaplain to complete Otto’s term of service.

Department Chaplain:

- Jan. 2, 2023: Officiated Richard William “Dick” Majerus Memorial Service, Bellechester.

- Jan. 8, 2023: Attended Larry Otto’s Funeral, Ellendale.

- Jan. 8, 2023: Department Leadership Meeting via Zoom.

- Feb. 18, 2023: Attended and taught Heart and Soul of a Legionnaire at 1st District Training Event, Rochester.

- Feb. 26-28, 2023: Attended American Legion Spring Legislative Events in Washington, Veteran Affairs and Rehabilitation Council Member, advocated for Legislative Agenda items to Minnesota representatives.

- Chaplain Training via Zoom was scheduled and completed.

- Contributed to the Minnesota American Legion Suicide Prevention Coalition as an active member, met via Zoom.

- Contributed to the Minnesota American Legion Training Committee monthly meeting of planning, preparing classes.

- March 15, 2023: Chaplain Training via Zoom (1 hour), 22 attendees.

- March 22, 2023: Chaplain Training via zoom (1 hour), 14 attendees.

- April 1, 2023: Chaplain Training via zoom, 24 scheduled for training, cancelled due to scheduling conflict with Zoom.

- March 25, 2023: Legionville

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Department Committee Reports

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Board of Directors Board Meeting attended.

- March 25, 2023: Brainerd, upon request provided Invocation and Benediction for Hortense McKay Congressional Gold Medal Ceremony, Brainerd Public Schools & 194th Tank Regiment.

- April 11, 2023: Attended Alberta “Berta” Victoria Marth-Wohlfeil funeral, New Ulm.

- April 15, 2023: DEC Meeting and Appreciation Rally, New Prague Post 45.

- Legionnaire columns: Six 500-word articles: February, March, April, May, June and July 2023, submitted and published.

- Make-up Chaplain Zoom Training (one hour), June 17.

Kelley Adelsman
Chaplain

National Executive Committeeman

We began the Legion year with a good 103rd Department Convention in Willmar followed by a good 103rd National Convention in Milwaukee.

Then it was back home for annual Camporee weekend at Legionville and many rallies.

Off we went to Indianapolis for Fall Meetings. Eight days after that, we went home for our Fall Conference in St. Cloud.

Al and Tess Davis, along with the Convention Corp., did an outstanding job in St. Cloud. We enjoyed the new seminar format arranged by Adjutant Mike Maxa.

We welcomed the candidate from Wisconsin for national commander, Dan Seehafer, as our main speaker. Dan is an outstanding Legionnaire. He is a 25-year member of Horicon, Wis., Post 157.

November witnessed more training and rallies. Pearl Harbor was a full house in Osseo with National Vice Commander Glenn Wahus from North Dakota, and National Chaplain Mark Antal, also from North Dakota, were our speakers.

We hit the ground running as Donna and I made it to seven out of the 10 midwinter conferences. It was good to see they were all well-attended. There was a lot of excited American Legion Family members.

In February, I attended the Washington Conference with many other Legionnaires. Kristi Janigo did an outstanding job as our legislative chair.

There were many birthday dinners to celebrate the American Legion birthday in March. Also, we faced many state legislative issues. On March 30, Donna, Underwood Post 489 Commander Sean Savage and I attended Veterans Day on the Hill in St. Paul.

As I write this, we were dealt a BIG disappointment in our governor and legislature. They passed a tax bill that aims to hurt an important revenue source for all charities by scaling back e-tabs to be less interesting. All those dollars go to help our local communities, schools and emergency departments, throughout our communities.

The legislators displayed no common sense on this issue, whatsoever, and they would not listen to concerned constituents

at all.

I am proud of my post, Underwood Post 489, and others for hosting stops on the National Commander’s Tour of Minnesota, and of Bloomington Post 550 for providing the transportation. National Commander Jim Troiola enjoyed seeing scenic northern Minnesota.

District conventions have begun and July 12-15, 2023, the Department Convention in Redwood Falls will begin. Please attend; elections will be held as usual.

I thank you, Alternate NECman Peggy Moon and her husband, Carl, for all their work and travel this past year also. A BIG thank you to the entire Department HQ staff and to Adjutant Mike Maxa and his wife, Nancy. It takes a team effort to accomplish all that they all do.

In closing there are many veterans to sign up. *Be the One*. Do Buddy Checks. Personally go and see those that have not renewed. A little interest by you goes a LONG way.

Donna and I thank you all for the hospitality and friendships this past year. We all work for the veterans and their families.

Bill Barbknecht
NECman

Judge Advocate

The American Legion Family attempts to address so many veterans issues. To support that, solid and well-written by-laws or constitutions are needed. This is to address the unexpected.

Murphy’s Law being what it is, this happens more often than you might expect. Hence, the need for good governance documents.

My most frequent calls concern three subjects:

- Authority of post officials to do certain things.
- How to deal with a member out of control.
- Liability if things go wrong.

Gave the Memorial Day address to a nice large crowd in Bayport. Music was provided by the high school band and a group of bagpipers. And there was a very loud cannon fired off by a group of Civil War re-enactors.

Greg Colby
Judge Advocate

Americanism

I would like to thank Department Commander Jennifer for allowing me to serve as the Americanism Committee chairman for The American Legion Department of Minnesota. We wish you a successful convention in Redwood Falls.

I would also like to thank my Americanism Committee members, Larry Pocrnich and Art Tobkin, for their able assistance during the past year.

I would lastly like to thank the Americanism Subcommittee chairpersons and their assistants for their dedication and hard work over the past year. They are:

- Boys State: Kyle Oldre and Lee Tallakson
- Community Service: Thomas Clabo
- Education: Don Skow
- Junior Shooting Sports: Jared Sturgill

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- Oratorical: Jamie Woods and Amanda England
- Safety School Patrol: James Blakesley
- Scouting: Chip Manson
- Youth Law Cadet Enforcement: Larry Ryan

District Americanism chairs. Please see the individual committee reports for further information concerning these Americanism subcommittees.

The last meeting of the Americanism Committee was at the 2021 Fall Conference in Mahanomen. Attending the meeting were the Americanism Committee and the respective representatives from Boys Scouts, Community Service, Education, Oratorical, Safety-School Program and six District Americanism chairpersons.

The Scholarship Selection Committee met at the Forest Lake Post 225 in April 2022. There were three Minnesota Legionnaire Insurance Trust scholarships, six American Legion Memorial scholarships awarded and three Nurses Training scholarships awarded.

This Americanism information is then transmitted to the various Americanism Subcommittees and to the respective district Americanism chairpersons. Americanism is an unfailing love of country, loyalty to its institutions and ideals, eagerness to defend it against all enemies, individual allegiance to the U.S. flag, and a desire to secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity.

Our forefathers laid the foundation for a civilization that is the envy of the world. It has brought us greater spiritual and material wealth than any people have ever known. This is our heritage.

Tess Davis
Chairwoman

Boy Scouts

No report.

Boys State

No report.

Community Service

No report.

Education

The Scholarship Committee met on Saturday, April 29, 2023, at the American Legion Post 225 in Forest Lake.

Six \$500 American Legion Memorial Scholarships, three \$500 Minnesota American Legion Foundation Scholarships, and five \$1,000 Minnesota American Legion Nurse’s Training Scholarships were awarded.

The six Memorial Scholarships were awarded to: Megan Johnson of Dover, Austin Kelzer of Sauk Center, Peyton Moe of Appleton, Casey Miller of Balaton, Amaya Hughes of Mound and MiCayden Schmitz of Eden Valley.

The three Minnesota American Legion Foundation Scholarships were awarded to: Greta Perpich of Chisholm, Reed Damon of Eyota and Keaton Skarupa of Storden.

The five Minnesota American Legion Nurse’s Training Scholarships were awarded to Alexis Roberts of St. Joseph, Ali Netland of Bagley, Kylee Stoner Plymouth, Timothy Schultz of Brooklyn Park and Jeremy VanLaningham of Eagan.

We congratulate the scholarship recipients and wish them well in their continuing education.

I would like to thank the other members of the selection committee, Tess Davis, Art Tobkin, Larry Pocrnich and Paul Orson. I would like to thank Department Commander Jennifer Havlick for this appointment; it’s always a pleasure serving the department.

Don Skow
Chairman

Jr. Shooting Sports

No report.

Oratorical Contest

No report.

Safety-School Patrol

The Minnesota Twins are off to a fair start this year. They are currently leading their division and playing a good game of baseball. Their play has been better than the record shows.

The Legionville Safety School Patrol Center is a valuable part of the Safety-School Patrol Program. It is the only facility ever developed for this purpose. When I last checked, there were still some openings available for this year’s sessions. I am saddened to see Gene Leifeld leave the board this year. Gene spent many years on the Legionville board. His activity over the years is without equal. I am happy to report the board awarded him member emeritus status. He will be missed.

The latest preliminary data from the Department of Public Safety’s State Fire Marshal Division reports that 70 people died in fires in Minnesota last year. This is the highest number of death due to fire since 1995. The leading cause of fire deaths in each of these years was careless smoking. The bulk of the deaths were in people 50 and over. A non-working smoke detector was found in about a third of the fires that resulted in death. The numbers will be confirmed later in 2023, after hospitals in the state report the last of their data to the Minnesota Department of Health.

Authorities are reminding Minnesotans to not leave their space heaters, candles or food cooking on the stovetop unattended. There are many little things we can do to prevent a devastating fire from happening in our homes. It is important to practice fire prevention and safety every day. Officials recommend that homeowners test their smoke and carbon monoxide alarms monthly, and also create a family escape plan in the event of an emergency. Sprinkler systems have been proven to save lives and reduce the dollar losses.

Last year had a reduction

in traffic deaths compared to the previous year. Preliminary numbers show 444 people died, down from 488 killed in traffic crashes in 2021, compared with 394 last year and 364 in 2019.

Of the 444 fatalities 22 people died in distracted driving-related crashes, 128 people died in speed-related crashes, 141 people died in alcohol-related crashes, 89 people died who were unbelted, 45 were pedestrians, six were bicyclists, 80 were motorcyclists.

Alcohol was a major cause of crashes on our roadways this past year. The Minnesota State Patrol has been joined by other agencies concentrating on speed enforcement with saturation patrols. Increased presence during high travel times has helped to reduce crashes. There were 25,872 reported arrests for impaired driving last year. Drinking and getting behind the wheel is also a bad idea. Use of drugs is also not to be done when operating a motor vehicle.

The highest number of arrests were made during the month of May. Public safety organizations increase patrols during this period. Motorcyclist deaths also increased this past year. I encourage bikers to make themselves visible. Dark clothing on a dark road doesn’t help you to be seen.

I encourage everyone to watch for pedestrians, bicyclists, motorcycles and, yes, farm equipment.

I remind everyone, too, of the need for safety on the water and on recreational vehicles. There were 22 deaths resulting from ATV/OHV operation last year. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources reports 15 boating fatalities and 30 non-boating drownings. We are known for our outdoors activities. I encourage everyone to think safety first. Nothing takes the joy out an activity as much as would an injury or death at an activity designed to be enjoyable.

Safety is not just for our youth. I encourage posts to invite your district Minnesota State Patrol safety officer to a general membership meeting to present a program on this and other issues. Fire, police and other safety program professionals are available most times just for the asking. I encourage you to use them.

Every community has its own safety concerns. I encourage Legionnaires to identify these areas of concern and implement programs of safety education. I am aware of many posts that are hosting safety programs and networking with other groups to provide safety training in many areas. Let’s all think safety.

Jim Blakesley
Chairman

American Legion Riders

No report

Armed Forces Service Center

The Armed Forces Service Center (AFSC) at the Minneapolis/St. Paul International Airport (MSP) is open seven days a week. Current hours are 0800-2245 (8 a.m. to 10:45 p.m.).

These hours will be extended when there are more trained volunteers to staff the center. The goal is 24 x 7 x 365 — as it was for nearly 50 years.

The AFSC is located inside security on Level 2 at the entrance to the A Concourse and is open for traveling active-duty military (including National Guard/Reserve traveling on orders), their dependents, former POWs, Purple Heart Recipients, and Medal of Honor Recipients. Retirees and their dependents are welcome on a space-available basis. Due to current COVID and DoD travel restrictions, they currently offer grab-and-go lobby seating for recruits, DoD civilians, and PHS personnel. An update will be posted as soon as the restrictions are lifted.

The AFSC is a one-of-a-kind facility, supported by a volunteer workforce and contributions (financial and in-kind product donations) received from various veterans’ organizations, corporate and personal contributors. It is not affiliated with the USO, and does not receive funds from the US Government. It is a 501(C)(3) organization, so Post gambling funds may be used for donations. Individual donations are also encouraged. Donate now via GiveMN.org (https://www.givemn.org/donate/Armed-Forces-Service-Center-1).

Volunteers at the Armed Forces Service Center (AFSC) set their schedules via an online scheduling system. They are asked to work two four-hour shifts per month for a minimum of one year.

Volunteers must be at least 21 years old. A 10-year background check will be conducted on all volunteers prior to an airport badge being issued.

The AFSC relies on their volunteer workforce to provide a hospitable environment to maintain a top-rated Military Center. Duties include meeting and greeting guests, checking eligibility identification, limited food preparation, offering Center amenities, and light housekeeping tasks. Please sign up today to become a volunteer at the AFSC! The signup URL is https://www.mnafsc.org/volunteer-ii/.

David Dahl
Liaison

Baseball

Minnesota American Legion Baseball is going strong. We originally had over 400 teams registered to play baseball this summer, that number has since fallen to 382 because some registered teams failed to field enough players, then had to un-register.

Still, 382 is the best in the country. We’ve had the most teams in the nation for 10 years.

This is our 100th season. Our first season was 1923, and with no season in 2020, that makes 2023 the 100th. It will be our 97th postseason. Minnesota American Legion Baseball’s first state tournament was in 1927, and it is 21 years older than the high school state tournament.

The state tournament hosts for 2023 are Rochester for Division I, Roseau for Division II, Burnsville for Division I Juniors, and Granite Falls for

Division II Juniors. The second annual All-Star series for select Junior Legion baseball players from across the state will take place in Roseville in August. You will see many scouts at that.

Our baseball committee is made up of the following members: Vice Director Jeff Miller oversees Division II and Vice Director Brandon Raymo is the administrative director. Jim Peck is the assistant to the director. Mike Perry is the director for DI Juniors. Scott McCready is the director for DII Juniors. Bruce Young is the chairman for the DI Senior State Tournament. Gail Kalata serves as an administrative assistant.

The following are the District Directors: District 1 is Scott McCready, District 2 is Vern Kitzberger, District 3 is Bruce Young, District 4 is Gail Kalata, District 5 is Kyle Nutting, District 6 is Wes Thompson, District 7 is vacant, District 8 is Tom Coombe, District 9 is Mike Arvidson, and District 10 is Luther Dorr.

We thank Mike Gort of District 7 for his many years of service to Legion Baseball. He is in the Minnesota American Legion Baseball Hall of Fame.

Likely to replace Gort is SAL member Joe Dollerschell of Olivia.

Brady Sweitzer coordinates the Tier I level. Many others who are too numerous to be named run the substate leagues and tournaments leading up to the state tournaments.

The Baseball Committee has its two annual meetings, fall and spring. We have many other work items to deal with through Zoom meetings throughout the year or in person at our tournaments.

All coaches in the state must complete background checks, abuse training and certification, and concussion training. Brandon Raymo makes sure all coaches complete these requirements. We have well over a thousand coaches/managers who must meet this standard annually!

Tim Engstrom from the Department of Minnesota is the baseball secretary. He handles the media relations and many administrative tasks needed to be done at the state-level for baseball. This year, he helped us save money on printing and mailing rulebooks by launching a cellphone app. Find scores, rules, rankings and more by searching “Minnesota Legion Baseball” in your app store.

Rachael Hill keeps track of expenditures and pays the bills.

For the second year, Scheels Inc. is our sponsor.

God bless the veterans of our Minnesota American Legion for making this program successful!

Randy Schaub
Director

Blood

Thank you, Commander Jennifer Havlick, for this appointment.

Every two seconds someone in the United States needs blood. Three people out of 100 donate and spring into action to change this statistic!

More blood donors are needed to help patients. Having a readily available blood supply at hospitals is critical for kids and adults fighting cancer, patients

undergoing surgery, people living with sickle cell disease, those with traumatic injuries and many other conditions.

Those who lived in Europe may now give blood! If you were previously deferred due to living in U.K., Ireland or France, stay tuned as they update donor records.

Hosting a blood drive is a partnership where everyone wins: Start a new tradition this year — a tradition that brings about togetherness and strength with your family, friends and community.

Organizations gain goodwill from their community and build morale and camaraderie as their members work together for a good cause.

Blood donors feel good about giving back together with colleagues, friends, or peers,

Patients in the community and across the nation receive the gift of life.

1st District: 20 Posts reporting total of 400 units.

- Winona Post 9: 203 units.
- Albert Lea Post 56: 70 units
- Le Roy Post 161: 45 units.

2nd District: 18 posts reporting total of 333 units.

- Brewster Post 464: 72 units.
- Charles Flentje Post 461: 66 units.
- Colburn Post 286: 42 units.

3rd District: 17 Posts reporting total of 4,079 units.

- Charles Borak Post 45: 1,066 units.
- Forest Lake Post 225: 420 units.
- Chanhassen Post 580: 336 units.

4th District: 9 posts reporting total of 348 units.

- North St Paul Post 39: 274 units.
- St Paul Post 8: 29 units.
- 3M Post 599: 19 units .

5th District: 9 Posts reporting total of 22 units.

- Mpls Post 1: 12 units.
- North Side Post 230: 5 units.
- Gopher Post 440: 4 units.

6th District: 24 Posts reporting total of 1,032 units.

- Ben Krueger Post 49: 313 units.
- Kriesel-Jacobsen Post 560: 300 units.
- Billie Bean Post 627: 156 units.

7th District: 25 Posts reporting total of 932 units.

- Willmar Post 167: 285 units.
- Spicer Post 545: 147 units.
- New London Post 537: 111 units.

8th District: 6 posts reporting total of 30 units.

- Virginia Post 239: 14 units.
- Cloquet Post 262: 10 units.
- Grand Marais Post 413: 6 units.

9th District: 10 Posts reporting total of 267 units.

- Roseau Post 24: 68 units.
- Moorhead Post 21: 61 units.
- Argyle Post 353: 34 units.

10th District: 16 Posts reporting total of 1,267 units.

- Edward B. Cutter Post 102: 360 units.
- Woodcock-Herbst Post 216: 232 units.
- Fridley Post 303: 227 units.

Continued on Page 4

Continued from Page 3
Department: 151 posts reported 8,692 total units.

Thank you to all the district Blood Committee chairs for taking their time and energy to support this life saving program of The American Legion.

**Terry Larson
Chairman**

Bowling

The Bowling Committee organized and held the 2023 Minnesota State American Legion Family Bowling Tournament. The tournament was March 18 to April 22 on Saturdays and Sundays at Sundance Lanes in Dayton. The tournament was hosted once again by Osseo-Maple Grove Post 172.

The winning post in the men’s team competition for 2023 was Litchfield Post 104. There were 64 participating teams. The results were printed in the July 2023 issue of The Minnesota Legionnaire.

The winning women’s team was Rushford Unit 94. There were six teams.

The men’s single champ was Adam Moles. The women’s singles champ was Angie Salaba. The men’s doubles champs were Bob Lagoon and Todd Rogers. The women’s doubles champs were Jessica Anderson and Tammy Entiger, and the men’s all-around winner was Roger Roeder.

**Bob Mace
Chairman**

**Children
& Youth**

Thank you, Commander Jennifer Havlick, for this appointment.

We are balancing the care and protection of children of veterans and improving the integrity of the family. The support in our communities provides physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual support for all children through a family support network.

We are providing temporary financial assistance, seeking to locate missing children, education and warning signs of drugs and a child’s personal safety. We are bringing to the nation the commitment of the American Legion Family emphasis on all children. We remain committed to serving our veteran families by caring for their children and our nation’s youth.

**Karen Welanders
Chairwoman**

**Convention
Corporation**

No report.

Employment

No report.

**A.L. Family
Hosp. Assoc.**

No report

Fastpitch

Softball

Minnesota American Legion softball had a great first year. We officially registered 28 teams for our second season, up one over last year.

This year things seem to be going smoother with returning coaches understanding how to use our website. Those interested in following the program can go to minnesotal legionsoftball.com to find rankings, scores, schedules and rosters.

The more we play around with the site, the better it becomes as we are still learning ourselves, all the capabilities it has to offer. Please check it out.

The registered teams were divided into seven geographical substates and the champions will advance to the state tournament in New York Mills, taking place July 28-30. It will have a banquet on Friday and games will be played at newly renovated Lund Park on Saturday and Sunday.

Our Fastpitch Softball Committee is small and really needs more people with a passion for softball and connection to the Legion to help grow this program in the future.

It currently comprises Vice Director Luann McMahon, Vice Director David Thompson, 6th District Director Jim Birchem, 1st District Director Charlie O’Connell, 7th District Director Hal Meyer and 2nd District Director Steve Fosness. Missing district directors are 3rd, 4th, 5th, 8th, 9th and 10th districts. (However, Thompson is from the 10th.) We would like new district commanders in those districts to appoint softball directors.

This group has done a lot to promote the values of Legion and the game of softball. I believe we could see a bigger influx of teams next year as the word continues to spread. However, a few more people on board in areas of our state where we don’t have teams could really help.

We would like to thank all those who have donated and supported this program to get it off its feet and continue running in year two.

God bless our Minnesota American Legion veterans for making this program available to the girls of Minnesota and thank you for your service.

**Michael Arvidson
Director**

Finance

As chairman, I want to thank Past Department Commander Tom Fernlund for the original appointment to the Finance Committee during his term.

This year started out with the committee making some very hard choices concerning the department committee budgets. I want to thank all of the committee chairman for their understanding and efforts to remain within their budgets.

I also want to thank my fellow Finance Committee members: Dennis DeLong, Richard Wog, Carl Hendrickson, Mary Jo York, Department Commander Jennifer Havlick, Department Adjutant Mike Maxa, Department Treasurer William Goede and Department Comptroller Rachael Hill for the hard decisions made during the four-hour

budget meeting.

Not all of the budgets have been submitted as of this report but most committees have remained within their budget limits with only a few slightly exceeding their limits.

As of May 30, 2023, the department’s revenue exceeded expenditures for the fiscal year by \$455,622.

Please understand, that the FY budget is based on projected income and that income is based on the projected membership.

Our investments as of May 30, 2023, are:

Fixed Income Investments:
\$1,907,789.90
(Est. annual income: \$60,226.00)

Stock Account:
\$1,046,845.80
(Est. annual income: \$21,968.00)

To all committee chairmen, current and future, if at any time you anticipate exceeding your budget, please notify the Finance Chair and Department Comptroller as soon as possible so your excess expenses can be evaluated and recommendations made. Please do not assume that your request can or will be honored.

I especially want to thank last year’s Finance Committee chairwoman, Mary Jo York, for her guidance and recommendations this past year.

Respectfully submitted,

**Carl R. Moon
Chairman**

Law & Order

Thank you to Commander Jennifer Havlick for asking me to be chairman for the Law & Order Committee and a salute to my committee members for their continued support in the selection process.

The Law and Order Committee includes:

- Pat Logan, Bloomington
- Jeff Brokaw, Winona
- Susan Edwards, Brainerd

Committee responsibility is to review and select the nominees to move forward by the judging guidelines put forward by the American Legion criteria.

Award Categories include:

- Law Enforcement Office of the Year
 - Firefighter of the Year
- This year, candidates were recommended by three districts:
- The 10th District provided recommendations of three firefighters, three law enforcement officers.

- The 9th District provided a recommendation for one law enforcement officer.
- The 3rd District provided a recommendation for one law enforcement officer.

Submitted by Moorhead American Legion Post 21:

This year, we are proud to introduce Scott Kostohryz, sergeant with Moorhead Police Department as our Minnesota selection for Law Enforcement Officer of the Year.

Sgt. Kostohryz has been awarded numerous life-saving awards during his years of service. He is in charge of the Moorhead Police Explorer program, volunteer for Cops & Kids Baseball Hockey Program, Bike for Kids and Shop with a Cop. He also worked directly with a

homeless shelter to identify and assist the children with holiday gifts. Kostohryz has exhibited the epitome of an ideal community police officer, along with commitment to protect and serve.

Submitted by North Branch American Legion Post 85:

Firefighter of the Year was awarded to Jason Russell from North Branch Fire Department.

A 27-year veteran, Russell has served the last four years as captain and has been mentoring younger generation firefighters. He is invaluable in his training as a DNR wildland firefighter. Capt. Russell holds two life-saving awards and Certificate of Special Congressional Recognition. He leads by example and excels not only on the job but in furthering education/and numerous state certificates.

It’s an honor to recognize our recipients of Law Enforcement Officer of the Year and Firefighter of the Year, among the finest applicants put before the committee.

It’s a privilege to serve, “For God and Country.”

**Patrick Logan
Chairman**

**Legionnaire
Insurance Trust**

No report.

Legionville

At the fall meeting of the Legionville Board of Directors, held in September 2022, I was elected president. I want to thank Eugene Leifeld for his years of service to Legionville as our previous president. His leadership and dedication to Legionville is greatly appreciated.

The Legionville Board of Directors met on March 2023. All districts were represented.

Guest speakers were Department Service Officer Ray Kane, who proposed using Legionville to provide retreats for female veterans once a year. This would be conducted over a weekend to discuss how healthcare could be improved for the female veteran.

Another speaker was Kurt Roettjers from the Shine Cody Shine Foundation, whose mission would be for veterans and first responders experiencing PTSD. He was interested in using Legionville a few times a year to provide an environment where veterans would feel safe, open up and share their experiences.

Department Judge Advocate Greg Colby raised concerns that the Legionville Constitution and By-Laws, and Articles of Incorporation, do not provide for year-round use or other programs that deviate from the teaching of safety patrol, Americanism and citizenship.

A motion was made to have the board secretary, department judge advocate and me look into the expansion of the current Articles of Incorporation to expand the use of Legionville.

The camp manager, Adam Felton, provided a report from AAA with concerns that some schools are using Legionville graduates to teach other kids within their schools. We were reminded that the only certification is the training received from AAA and Legionville.

In sections 13 and 14,

July 2023

Department Committee Reports

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approximately 80 acres of land were previously put on sale. They have been taken off the market due to declining land values.

The paver project is complete and the final pavers have been installed. The previously approved Donor Wall project is still in the developmental stage.

As of April 30, 2023, Legionville’s revenue exceeded expenses for the FY by \$24,832. Total donations received as of June 6,2023 are \$57,321.13.

Richard Cross reported that the work and play weekend on May 20 went well but the 6th District was the only one that had workers there. I will follow up on Eugene Leifeld’s previous recommendation of utilizing individuals from Sentence to Serve that would provide labor at no cost.

Another option is to utilize Legion sponsored Boy Scout Troops that need to complete their Community Service projects.

Online registration for Safety Patrol Camp is still open at: www.legionville.org.

The fee is \$500 per camper and must accompany the Camp Registration Form. Seven weekly sessions are scheduled beginning Sunday, June 11, and ending Friday, Aug. 4.

Registrations for this year’s camp are coming in and approximately 100-plus have been received.

The roofing project for the dining hall is complete and the new dishwasher has been installed. All toilets and some of the hot water heaters have also been installed.

Felton also provided an update on camp projects: He is still discussing with several companies on the purchase and disposal of mattresses for the dorms. Approximately 36 are needed.

Auxiliary Jr. fun weekend will be Aug. 4-6; Camporee is Sept. 7-10 (we still need workers), ALR Romp is Sept. 14-17, and the John Zgoda Deer Hunt Oct. 3-8.

**Carl R. Moon
President**

Legislative

The June issue of The Minnesota Legionnaire has full coverage of veterans-related legislation in the 2023 session. Download it at mnlegion.org/legionnaire/.

Also see the adjutant’s report. He touches on legislative matters, too.

It was a very successful year in all areas except for our efforts to prevent scaling e-tabs back. I plan to share more about legislative issues at the convention.

Respectfully submitted,

**Kristy Janigo
Chairwoman**

**Media &
Communications**

The American Legion Media & Communication Committee is pleased to present its end-of-year report for the membership year 2022-2023. Over the past year, our committee has made significant strides in enhancing the media presence and communication efforts of The American Legion. This report

outlines our key activities, achievements and contributions to the organization.

The Media & Communication Committee recognized the importance of visual storytelling in capturing and conveying the spirit of The American Legion. Our team collaborated with various committees to capture high-quality photographs at Legion events, including parades, ceremonies and community outreach programs. These images were shared on social media platforms and utilized for promotional materials, thus showcasing the impactful work done by the organization.

Our committee worked diligently to expand The American Legion’s presence on social media platforms, recognizing their ability to reach a wide and diverse audience. We managed and maintained active accounts on platforms such as TikTok, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. By regularly posting engaging content, including news updates, event highlights, and veteran stories, we aimed to foster a sense of community and patriotism among followers while attracting new members to the Legion.

Recognizing the importance of collaboration and teamwork within The American Legion, the Media & Communication Committee actively supported other committees throughout the year. We provided media coverage and promotion for events organized by various committees, ensuring their efforts received the attention they deserved. By effectively communicating their initiatives through various media channels, we facilitated broader participation and increased community and district engagement.

Increased Social Media Engagement: Through consistent and engaging content, our social media platforms experienced a substantial growth in followers and engagement rates. We observed an increase in likes, shares and comments on posts, indicating a higher level of interaction and interest among our audience.

Enhanced Public Perception: By strategically showcasing The American Legion’s activities and impact through captivating photography and effective communication, we succeeded in enhancing the organization’s public perception. The committee played a crucial role in promoting a positive image of the Legion and its commitment to serving veterans, their families and the community.

Strengthened Collaboration: Our committee actively collaborated with other committees within The American Legion, fostering a sense of unity and shared purpose. By supporting their initiatives through media coverage and promotion, we helped build stronger connections between committees and encouraged increased participation from members.

The American Legion Media & Communication Committee has made significant progress in amplifying the organization’s voice, promoting its initiatives, and supporting the commander’s vision. Through our work in photography, social media management and collaboration with other committees, we have effectively communicated The American Legion’s mission and

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showcased its impactful contributions to the community.

As we move forward, we remain committed to expanding our media presence and fostering effective communication channels to inspire patriotism, honor veterans, and encourage broader engagement within the American Legion Family.

**Teresa Ash
Chairwoman**

Membership

My year as membership director is coming to a close. I have thoroughly enjoyed this position.

At the beginning of the year, I had asked for each district to do a Membership Revitalization. There were a few that did them, but the majority did not. I believe that if each district would have taken the time to do a revitalization, go through the lists of 1982 (AD and MN), we possibly could have made each target.

At this writing there are still 1,440 members that reside in Minnesota that belong to Post 1982 AD (the Minnesota at-large post). Along with that, I made suggestion to get into the armories and National Guard units (which has been discussed for the past several years). How many posts/districts did just that?

Though we didn't make the 90 percent target date, we did make 90 percent. We missed the 95 percent and the 100 percent targets. Most of my time this year was spent on the phone or via email helping people with MyLegion.org. I think the program is a great one and National HQ keeps improving it and adding things and taking our ideas into account, which is good to see. I have had many conversations with National about improvements.

When a person calls me regarding MyLegion.org, I try to engage them in conversation regarding their post and how membership is going. Some posts struggle with the new technology, some have engaged younger members to help with membership because of the technology. The most interesting thing that I have found is that the wives of a lot of the membership directors are the ones helping with the MyLegion program, doing the transmittals, etc. Do the wives have more patience?

I have seen quite a few exciting things coming out of a variety of posts that encourage new and younger members to join — we are not just a bar. It is refreshing to see younger people energized and eager to make needed changes. It is also nice to see the older generation allow these changes, without saying “we’ve always done it this way.”

Thank you to Commander Jennifer Havlick for asking me to be her membership director. Good luck to the incoming Membership Committee; I am only a phone call, email or text away.

**Linda Dvorak
Membership Director**

National Security/

Foreign Relations

The National Security and Foreign Relations Department Committee had a great year. Thanks to all of you who made it happen. We started out the year with our organizational meeting at Camp Ripley. The meeting was well-attended and included Department Commander Jennifer Havlick.

There is always something new and exciting to see and learn about there. We all attend briefings and had a chance to tour some of the training facilities. This gives us a better feel of what our Guardsmen and -women are being trained on.

Our Department NS/FR Committee also judges and selects our Guardsmen and Reservists of the year during this time. We are looking forward to this fall meeting as this is an open house year for the Guardsmen and their families during our meeting there.

Fall Conference is the highlight of our year. Thanks to all of you who submitted applications for the Enlisted Guardsmen of the Year and Reservist of the Year. Once again, we were able to recognize all branches of the National Guard and Reserves this year. It is always good to hear their stories of their time in service.

Two committee members were able to attend the Washington Conference in late February. We met with our political representatives and senators and lobbied for our veterans.

Thanks to your generosity we were able to provide scholarships this year. They went to ROTC cadets at the universities. The Junior ROTC cadets at the high schools. The Civil Air Patrol cadets at the high schools that provide that training.

Our committee has been looking into the Spirit of Service Awards that are presented at our national conventions. Our committee wrote a resolution several years ago to include National Guardsmen, which is now done. We have qualified candidates among those we recognize here in Minnesota. Research was done on the selection process. Our Minnesota National Guard was made aware of this program. Hopefully we may see a Minnesotan recognize in the future.

Thanks to all of you who got involved in our programs this year and we look forward to more of you in the future.

**Jim Kellogg
Chairman**

Pheasant Feed

No report.

Rehabilitation

Fellow Legionnaires,

It has been a productive year for the Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Committee; many changes have been made to our program. The goal was to offer more transparency for any American Legion member by making sure that every member could view and request financial information and meeting minutes. Another aspect we hope to see more participation in is that meetings are open, and any

member is welcome to attend and speak. We rely on all of you to let us know what is happening in your area because we want to find a solution. When I say transparency, there will still be aspects of VA&R that will not be shared due to privacy. However, the goal is for members to have a greater understanding and ability to be involved with VA&R.

We hired a department service officer and an assistant department service officer, dramatically impacting how we move forward with our goals. Ray Kane hit the ground hard and immediately established a strong program. Ray brought a new element to the position that we had never considered: partnership; he used his relationships to strengthen our already robust program. Then Janet Lorenzo joined the team, added some polish to the program, and identified areas for improvement. Janet comes with a background in social work. She does a great job working in partnership with other programs to ensure all our veteran's needs are being met. These individuals have a passion for helping veterans and supporting families, which shows in everything they do. To Janet and Ray, this is more than a job; this is a passion and a lifestyle for these individuals.

At the beginning of the year, we had a massive shift in leadership, which allowed us to build a program that would serve Minnesota veterans for many years. One of the most significant changes that came to light was compliance issues. We did not comply with Minnesota wage and employment laws, which were corrected with a simple hiring contract. The other missing aspect, which is no one's fault, was that we did not comply with National American Legion service officer expectations. Past staff member Sarah Sturner and I created a new job description that envelops the needs of Minnesota veterans and nationals' overall goals. This job description allows every Legion member to understand what our DSOs priorities are, and this allows for performance accountability to be tangible.

VA Medical Center

We have always had and will continue to have a strong relationship with the MDVA. We are a partnership with them and are not there to cause friction. We are the ears to assist veterans with their concerns and help develop solutions. Sometimes, solutions are only sometimes; please keep in mind that Ray and Janet are not miracle workers; they cannot change hospital policy. We moved the primary office location of the DSOs to VA Medical Center Minneapolis; the goal is to ensure our team is accessible and that the American Legion has a presence in all VA facilities.

Minnesota has a massive network of CVSOs, and they are considered the experts in the claim process. With this aspect, claims work will be a minor priority because the CVSOs have around 185 members. Where we come in is veterans admitted for long-term care, it is difficult for CVSOs to get to the hospitals to assist in these cases. Another aspect we identified is that CVSOs struggle with primary complaints about the

hospitals; we have a physical presence where we can use our relationships to support those counties. Things like billing have continued to be an issue, and it has been for over 20 years. However, we can help veterans understand the debt, set up a payment plan, or ask for leniency.

We are still actively working on a way to support the many volunteers at the VA. We will continue working with that team to ensure those needs are met. There hasn't been a lot of us to do as far as the volunteers.

One aspect we are excited to announce is the Nurse of the Year award. Nurses are often overlooked, and Jan Eckert had some great insight on how we can make the award a reality. Nurses often work long hours and have the most time for the patients. A nurse can change a veteran's experience, and nursing is truly a labor of love; in August, a description will go out to the district VA&R reps, and we will rely on them to make this program successful.

Claims Work

We have a relationship with MDVA, where they process all our claims, saving us substantial money. Eight MDVA employees are to work specifically on claims and are considered experts. We have a team with a diverse background, and the majority have over 10 years of experience. Since we do not process our claims, the Whipple Building office was not needed. We would utilize such a space to put our claims workers and VSR (veteran service representatives) in the exact location. We turned in the keys for that office and moved our staff to the department offices, allowing the DSO to be accessible.

One struggle during this transition was accreditation with The American Legion. The staff transition created some confusion and caused a more efficient process to be developed between our DSO and National HQ. We will continue to adjust as necessary to ensure we do our best to get accreditation approved promptly.

Veteran Advocacy

We have always had a substantial role in making changes that benefited our veterans. While we have always been able to enact change, it is essential to remember that there is always room for more. Ray and Janet started attending outreach events and building connections with state and national lawmakers. We utilized our relationship with Hastings Veterans Home. The American Legion is now in the veteran community; we have new contacts and even more resources to serve our veterans better.

Veteran homelessness has become a significant issue, and we have identified many areas that need to be filled in. MACV is not an easy agency to work with, but we intend to continue to bridge that gap and support them. We have done our best to create a network of connections to put a roof over a veteran head and help them succeed going forward. The lack of a place to live is only a tiny piece of the puzzle; we need to ensure that we are working on ending homelessness and assisting veterans to attain sustainability.

Our MVAf is a program that

changes veterans' lives. We are not here to pay veterans' bills to help them in the short term; we are ensuring this helps a veteran forever. We are stewards of this fund, and we are responsible for using those funds responsibly. If you can help us maintain Fund 85, we rely on you to keep us moving forward. One of my goals is to throw a significant fundraiser event that VA&R will take the lead, but I am not sure what year I will get that goal executed.

We have started working with the Department Legislative Committee supporting their efforts. In return, they are supporting ours. We have many opportunities to speak at outreach events; we need to ensure we support the overall message of The American Legion. As different as Legislation and VA&R are, there is much overlap, and we must work together as a team. Kristy Jaingo has done a great job supporting our mission, and we are always there to support the legislative committee's mission. When we work together, veterans win, which is what we are here for.

American Legion Responsibilities

We work for the membership of the American Legion. Our DSOs are still required to attend department meetings and events. I have challenged that further and would like to include our DSOs in at least one district event for all ten districts. Our goal is to make sure the DSOs are accessible to everyone, and every district should feel that they can connect with the department committee no matter what. With Committee members assigned to two districts, every effort should be made to attend those district events.

Post service officers are vital to our success. We need to find out what resources are available in every community, and we rely on you. Post service officers, there is a training, and you are welcome to call a DSO or a committee member at any time if you require additional training. Post service officer should be something other than a role you take to have an office; service officers build a network of resources. The post-service officer should be doing the investigation piece of the MVAf application. Often there is a resource that can help a veteran in a community, and we don't need to use the grant.

When we attend outreach events, the DSOs represent the American Legion. They wear Legion attire, include their cover, and conduct themselves professionally. We are an organization that is accepting of all veterans, and we continue convey this model. The DSOs can sign up members at events or get contact information from the appropriate districts. Membership is everyone's responsibility. When we become a more robust presence, membership will come; one of the biggest hurdles is that many veterans feel the American Legion is nothing but a bar; we are much more than a bar; we are the most extraordinary veteran organization.

Concluding thoughts

This program will always be ever-changing to ensure that we are meeting the needs of veterans. The VA&R committee

and the department service officers are responsible for staying informed on veteran issues. While we had a strong program before, we now have one that will propel us forward to being the most extraordinary veteran organization.

For the remainder of this report, the DSOs will give you a breakdown of site visits. These site visits will continue to be the backbone of the committee. An in-person visit lets us see, talk and experience these facilities. Each site has different strengths and weaknesses and ways The American Legion will support these facilities. I have asked for the remainder of the report to be an overview of each site and explain our concerns and goals for the next year per site.

**Marissa LaCourt
Chairwoman**

Rehabilitation DSO & ADSO

We are pleased to present the annual report for the Department of Minnesota Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Committee, highlighting our significant achievements and efforts toward supporting and rehabilitating veterans. Throughout the year, we have engaged in various activities and collaborations aimed at improving the lives of our honored veterans.

Our commitment to serving veterans has taken us to several communities, including Hastings, Minneapolis, Laverne, Silver Bay, Fergus Falls, Fort Snelling and Sioux Falls. During these site visits, we assessed the needs of local communities and identified gaps in services, allowing us to develop targeted solutions.

In terms of healthcare, we made, three visits to St. Cloud VA Medical Center, Minneapolis VA Medical Center and collaborated with the Anoka Veteran Center, emphasizing the importance of comprehensive and accessible medical care for our veterans. We had the privilege of meeting VA Secretary Denis McDonough and Minnesota Deputy Commissioner of VA Healthcare Eric Meittunen, discussing ways to enhance support services to ensure continuity of care.

Our collaboration with Sen. Erin Murphy and Commissioner Larry Herke demonstrates our commitment to advocating for veterans' rights. Working alongside government officials allows us to address policy gaps and ensure that veterans receive the support they earned and deserve.

The improvement of the Hastings VA home has been a priority. We worked closely with MDVA staff to implement necessary updates, enhancing the quality of life for veterans residing in the home. Attending the signing of the Veterans & Military Omnibus Bill was a significant milestone, reinforcing our dedication to legislative efforts and care of Minnesota heroes.

We actively participated in Legion events throughout the year, including flag retirement ceremonies, district and department rallies, and the celebration of the 25-year anniversary of Fergus Falls. These events provided us with opportunities

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to connect with veterans and recognize their contributions.

In our pursuit of holistic care, we collaborated with volunteer services to bring a coffee cart and entertainment to the flag atrium area, fostering a supportive and engaging environment for veterans. Attending Spam and venison events at the Minneapolis VA Home further strengthened our connections within the veteran community.

Education and empowerment have been key focus areas. Ray taught at Legion College and Janet speaking engagement at a Women's Veterans Day event hosted at Apple Valley Post 1776 allowed us to share knowledge and provide support to veterans; we have been invited for future events and have been considered a one-stop shop for resources and advocacy. We are proud to serve as mentors for veterans court for Ramsey and Dakota counties, ensuring that veterans receive guidance and assistance throughout their rehabilitation journey greatly considering The American Legion was able to get the Veterans Restorative Justice Act passed through the Legislature back in 2021.

We wrote a resolution for Chapter 33 to ensure the VA is following the industry standard after the pandemic, as colleges are moving towards online classes, this ensures our nations heroes are able to fully maximize their education benefits that was earned during time of service. This is an important resolution for the reason that it allows the veterans or service-members to receive a housing allowance to lessen the financial burden as they focus on their future.

Expanding our reach and influence, we have been working closely with National VA&R Director Tiffany Ellett to pilot Unite Us in five additional states. This initiative aims to improve access to essential services for veterans, facilitating their rehabilitation process. We have taken on 92-plus cases, 80 percent of those being a four-day-or-less turnaround, 70 percent less than a two-day turnaround, 63 for income support, 10 for veterans' homelessness of urgency, 22 referral cases to other organization for additional services, 6 cases for adaptable equipment for mobilization of

veteran, and May, we have 16 cases and have increased in June 2023.

We prioritize the well-being of veterans within healthcare facilities, and as part of our efforts, we followed up with the Minneapolis VAMC through the patient advocate, ensuring that veterans receive the best possible care and support.

Preventing homelessness is a critical aspect of our work. By assisting 10 veterans in avoiding homelessness, we have made a tangible impact on their lives. To continue this vital work, we advocate for additional funds to be donated to Fund 85, enabling us to support even more veterans in need.

In collaboration with MDVA and DAV, we have utilized the Hospitalization Fund to provide assistance to members who have been a part of the American Legion Family for over three years. This collaboration strengthens our collective support network.

As we reflect on the past year's accomplishments, we are grateful for the dedication and support of our committee members. Together, we have made a significant difference in the lives of veterans, and we remain committed to our mission of ensuring their successful rehabilitation.

Thank you for your unwavering commitment and invaluable contributions.

Ray Kane
Department Service Officer

Janet Lorenzo
Assistant Service Officer

Resolutions Assignment

The Resolutions Assignment Committee is composed of three members, Chairman Al Davis of Princeton, Cliff Newman of Anoka and Jim Munson of Richfield. Responsibilities of the committee include the review of all resolutions submitted to the Department Convention for consideration.

After reviewing all resolutions, the committee assigns them to a convention committee for action of approval, rejection, or amend and approved. During the convention, each convention

committee reports the actions of their committee to the delegates who have the final authority on all resolutions.

The Resolutions Assignment Committee monitors all reports and prepares a final report on the actions taken by delegates to the convention.

Thank you to the department staff that assists us greatly in getting all the resolutions properly completed prior to the presentation to the delegates at convention.

Al Davis
Chairman

Sons of The American Legion

Greetings and SALutations!

As you are reading this, we have just finished our Detachment of Minnesota Convention. I would like to thank Anoka Post 102 for hosting our convention. I would also like to thank National Vice Commander David Mennel for attending. It was truly an honor and privilege to have you visit Minnesota.

In my last article, I took time out to thank my dart family and work family for everything they do so I can be your detachment commander. The list is too long to name people specifically last month, but they all know what they mean to me.

With this being my last article for the Legionnaire, I would like to give out some final acknowledgements:

To the Gittens-Leidel Post, Unit, and Squadron 595 Family in La Crescent, I would like to thank you for supporting me throughout this journey. It has been 27 years since I was first signed up as a member of my squadron, and if you would have asked me 27 years ago if I would be writing this, I would have laughed in your face and said no way. Thank you all for supporting me and believing in me.

To the 1st District American Legion Family, thank you for everything that you have done. I was district commander in 2011 for the first time and it started a long and winding road. The names are too many in the district who guided me along, but we made it with every step of the way.

To the detachment officers and chairmen, I am just one person and could not have done this alone. We did great things together and raised a lot of money for very worthwhile causes. One that comes to mind is \$17,625.09 for the American Legion Child Welfare Foundation in 2021-22. There are a lot of projects that we worked together on to help raise funds for, and I know that we will continue to do so. Thank you all!

To Tom Fernlund, Patti Coleman, Ashley Stai, Jennifer Havlick, Mary Kuperus, Sydney Borntrager and Ted Berg, it has truly been an honor to serve with you as the leadership of our great state. This has been two years that I will never forget as long as I live. Thank you!

To my father, Gary, thank you for being my chauffeur and my sounding board with ideas. You are the reason I am a member of the Sons of The American Legion. I know there were things that you may have rather been doing, but I appreciated every road trip, hotel stay, meal and everything in between. Most importantly, I appreciate you supporting me in this journey. I love you.

To my wife, Michelle, I love you so much and you have been by my side for 17 years as of this November, and we will have been married for 10 of those years. I cannot imagine doing this journey with anyone other than you at my side. Thank you for everything you did, everything you didn't do, and at times just listening when I needed to rant. I love you.

Finally, to my mother, Chris; and grandmother, Bev, I'm sorry that neither of you are here in person to read this or have been to see the past two years. Both of you are the reason the poppy is my symbol and what pushed me to decide to be detachment commander. When I had ordered my commander pins, I received two pins that were in a separate bag from the rest which I knew was a sign I was doing something right. I can only hope that I did both of you proud. I love you both and miss you every day.

As always, please keep all our service personnel, both domestic and abroad in your thoughts and prayers.

Tim Weaver
Commander

Strategic Planning

First, thank you to Past Commander Tom Fernlund for asking me to be a part of this committee. This year the committee focused on creating an Outline of Authorization for the Department. Most of the year was spent researching the history of the Strategic Planning Committee and what the future would look like.

Before I begin, let me say thank you to the members of the committee who worked tirelessly to be successful in their positions: Carla Tappainer, Mike Costello, Sylvan "Sy" Fix and Pam Krill.

Due to geographical separation of the committee members, we conducted our meetings via Zoom videoconferencing and maintained communication through email.

With only a 2011 mandate that was very brief, the committee decided to revise the mandate with more specific guidance and direction. All opinions were taken into consideration. A revised mandate was turned in to the Department HQ.

There was a request outside of the committee to have a resolution written to dissolve the committee. The entire committee agreed that Strategic Planning was one of the most important committees to have for the future of the Department of Minnesota American Legion. No resolution would be written at this time.

Commander Jennifer Havlick, thank you for the opportunity to chair this committee.

Roxanne Zoet
Chairwoman

Training Committee

The Training Committee continues to do great things — not least of all — holding the Minnesota American Legion College.

This year we had a successful session in April (our fourth year!) with National Commander Jim Troiola stopping by to welcome the students. Those who attended left us with little

to improve upon, as they praised us and had little to say about what we could do better (but we did gather a few improvement nuggets).

We have another coming up, Oct. 12-15, 2023, at Camp Ripley, and we ask you to go to your posts and districts and encourage all to attend. We always ask incoming students, if they have a specific subject they would like to see taught at the college. Just ask! We are Gumby-flexible!

We've opened up the classes to Auxiliary and SAL members. Though we're centered on Legion information, we delve into subjects applicable to all Legion Family members. It is, by far, the best \$200 investment that any post or district could make!

We continue to travel throughout Minnesota with smaller teams to hold trainings on a variety of Legion-related subjects and again, ask you to let your posts and district know that we are available when you need us. With the beginning of a new Legion year, so refresher training might be just what the doctor ordered.

Additionally, Department Chaplain Kelley Adelsman and one of the Training Committee's own held several online trainings for chaplains and they were very well attended.

We are currently working on creating videos to get out on the web, so that any Legion family member can access them at any time and learn about what makes this great organization tick. Again, if there's some particular subject you'd like to see — just ask!

We are working hard to ensure the Department of Minnesota has a successful future with the best-prepared individuals to work at every level of the organization and to help increase membership using knowledge as power — and always battling to bury the "Legion is just a bar" mentality.

The committee values your input and encourages all Legion Family members to provide comments and suggestions to improve future training programs. Together, we can work toward a stronger, more informed Legionnaire community in Minnesota.

Mike Ash
Chairman

SEE YOU AT THE CONVENTION

