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THE AMERICAN LEGION
Dispatch
September 2016 A National Headquarters Publication

FAMILY SUPPORT

Photo by Lucas Carter

TFA: A LIFE-CHANGING LEGION PROGRAM

Temporary Financial Assistance cash grants meet the basic needs of veterans and their families during financial difficulty.

By The American Legion

A knock on Brent Wightman's front door several years ago changed his life.

The U.S. Army veteran and father of two children lost his job due to the inability to work after multiple back surgeries from a service-connected injury. Without a job, Wightman faced the reality of losing his home to foreclosure. After hearing of Wightman's plight, Legionnaire Howard Hudson – who has since passed – visited him to offer support through The American Legion's Temporary Financial Assistance (TFA) program.

"We filled out a TFA application and my whole life changed after The American Legion got involved," said Wightman, a member of Post 176 in Waverly, Iowa. "If it hadn't been for the Legion, I would have been trying to figure out how to clothe, house and feed my kids. The American Legion gave me a mission and a purpose again. They saved my life."

The Legion's TFA program has provided more than $15.2 million in cash grants to eligible veterans with minor children since its establishment in 1925. The grants – which benefit nearly 650 families and 1,500 children yearly – help families in financial need meet the costs of shelter, utilities, food, clothing and medical expenses.

Newly elected American Legion National Commander Charles E. Schmidt has made it his mission during his tenure to raise $1 million for TFA and for the Legion's service officers training program. "It is our job to take care of veterans and to take care of their

See TFA: A life-changing Legion program on Page 4

NEWS ALERT

2016 Annual Report

The American Legion's 2016 Annual Report can be viewed and downloaded at www.legion.org/annualreport. Inside the 56-page report, readers can learn about Legion successes from the past year and find information on the organization's programs that support its four pillars.

Get Out the Vote

As 2016 ushers in presidential and congressional elections, American Legion posts are encouraged to promote "Get Out the Vote" (GOTV) efforts while remaining nonpartisan in the process. Legionnaires can serve as poll volunteers, host or participate in nonpartisan candidate forums, place public service announcements in local media that promote registration and voting, and distribute GOTV promotional materials.

During GOTV promotional efforts, remember that the Legion is nonpartisan and will not be used for dissemination of partisan principles nor for the promotion of any candidate. Any impression of endorsement or support of a candidate must be avoided. And Legionnaires engaged in partisan activities – such as attending a candidate's rally – should do so without wearing the Legion cap or other Legion attire.

Start planning GOTV efforts now by downloading the Legion's "Get Out the Vote" and "Vote, America" brochures, found under the Americanism secion at www.legion.org/publications.

For sample GOTV public service announcements and news releases, visit www.legion.org/vote.

COMMANDER'S MESSAGE

Every department has a story to share

Charles E. Schmidt
National Commander

As I begin to travel to American Legion departments during my tenure as national commander, Legionnaires will share all the unique programs and services that their department offers to their community. My challenge to all of you is to share your Legion stories beyond me so they can be promoted nationally for everyone to see the good that The American Legion does.

Throughout The American Legion's nearly 100 years, the programs and services of departments have included ambulance services, hospitals, well-baby clinics, fishing derbies, high school rodeo championships, junior college basketball championships, food convoys and much more.

I want to profile at least one "Department Spotlight" a week on the Legion's national website ***www.legion.org/membership***. The Department Spotlight will focus on a current program, service or figure in the Legion community.

To submit a nomination for Department Spotlight, American Legion department adjutants should send an email to ***magazine@legion.org***.

We have so many programs and initiatives that have become the benchmark for patriotism, service and sacrifice. Good things are happening in every department every day. Share it throughout your communities, through social media and other means.

Charles E. Schmidt

MEMBERSHIP

Recruiters to be awarded with 'Carry the Legacy Forward' pin

American Legion National Commander Charles E. Schmidt will award his national commander pin to any Legion member who obtains three new members into the Legion.

A new member is any eligible person joining for the 2017 membership year who was not a member of The American Legion during the 2016 membership year.

Each member listed must be eligible for membership in The American Legion. Forward names of SAL members or Auxiliary members to your detachment or unit for use in their respective incentive programs.

To maintain the integrity of the national commander's pin incentive program, only one pin will be awarded per individual.

Upon receipt, national membership staff will confirm the names and mail the pin directly to the person who earned it. Commander Schmidt's incentive program will end June 30, 2017, or when supplies are exhausted.
www.legion.org/commander/pin

MEMBERSHIP

National Commander Honor Ribbon

American Legion National Commander Charles E. Schmidt will award his National Commander Honor Ribbon to any American Legion Family that achieves 100 percent membership by May 30, 2017.

For this award, the Legion Family is defined as a post and any combination of an Auxiliary unit, Sons squadron or Legion Riders chapter. Each branch must achieve 100 percent membership to qualify for the award.

The National Commander Honor Ribbon membership incentive program will end May 30, 2017.

Download the form online:
www.legion.org/commander/ribbon

100% American Legion Family

FUNDRAISING

Commander's $1 million fundraising goal

American Legion National Commander Charles E. Schmidt's fundraising goal this year is to raise $1 million for the Legion's Temporary Financial Assistance (TFA) program and service officer training program.

TFA provides cash grants to help eligible veterans with minor children in financial need meet the costs of shelter, utilities, food, clothing and medical expenses. And accredited American Legion service officers are specially trained to provide expert assistance, free of charge, to veterans and their families.

To donate, visit ***www.legion.org/donate***.

NATIONAL ADJUTANT'S MESSAGE

Report highlights ways the Legion makes a difference

The Consolidated Post Report shows how posts, Legionnaires are making an impact in their communities and beyond.

By Daniel S. Wheeler

The American Legion's Consolidated Post Report is an opportunity for posts to document every activity they fulfilled in a 12-month (June 1-May 31) reporting period – whether it's providing funeral honors, hosting Memorial Day or Veterans Day ceremonies, sponsoring youth to attend a Legion program, conducting fundraising efforts and more.

The recently compiled 2015 CPR revealed that posts provided more than four million community service volunteer hours, conducted more than 7,000 Memorial Day and Veterans Day services, participated in 1,065 veteran job fairs, provided 123,014 funeral honors, awarded 10,308 scholarships to youth, performed 30,023 U.S. flag presentations, presented 8,426 ROTC medals, and much more.

These, however, are not the final numbers for the entire American Legion. Only 8,900 posts submitted a CPR – a 67 response rate from the 13,290 total posts worldwide, leaving a third of posts' activities unaccounted for.

It's important for the CPR response rate to increase so that the great work Legion posts and members are doing in their communities is reflected. Especially since newly elected American Legion National Commander Charles E. Schmidt will deliver the report to Congress during his testimony in February, but will only be able to share part of the figures. In a day when we have to fight for all we can from Congress, whether it is funding for the VA system, military pay for our troops or direct benefits for our local communities, it is imperative that we speak as one voice. The best, and at times most influential, way we can do that is when our posts let National Headquarters know what they are doing in their respective communities.

Posts are strongly encouraged to fill out and submit CPRs, whether in paper-based form or online through ***www.mylegion.org***. Only 22 percent of post officers filled out the 2015 CPR form online, which required American Legion national staff to manually type in the more than 6,000 reports submitted by paper – a time-consuming endeavor. Submitting CPRs through MyLegion is not only faster, but posts can continually update the form throughout the reporting year. And once finalized and submitted electronically, a PDF of the CPR is automatically generated and sent to the posts respective department and to National Headquarters.

The 2016 CPR will be available Nov. 1 on ***www.mylegion.org***, and it will be located on the left-hand side under "Member/Post Processing."

Newport Beach Post 291 honor guard presents the colors during a Memorial Day ceremony at the Pacific View Memorial Park in Newport Beach, Calif.

Photo by Jon Endow/The American Legion

Share your post-related success story

Email: ***dispatch@legion.org***

Dispatch

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From TFA: A life-changing Legion program on Page 1

families," Schmidt said. "Touching the lives of veterans and their families is who we are."

U.S. Army veteran William Henry understands the power of TFA first-hand.

Henry had difficulty finding viable work after returning home in 2013 from his second deployment. With a meager weekly unemployment check, he found himself in financial strain with the possibility of losing his home and family.

"I did what a lot of folks do when they get home from deployments and are faced with financial and family hardships – I shut down, I tried to fix it with alcohol, I became a recluse," said Henry, a member of Post 329 in Plainfield, Ind. "I was in a really dark place in my life."

Henry's life positively changed once he sought mental health counseling from VA and made a plea for financial assistance on social media. "I didn't know where to turn, but I hoped someone I knew did," he said. "Luckily that was the case."

American Legion Internal Affairs Division Assistant Director David Elmore, who had deployed to Afghanistan with Henry, saw his plea and reached out. Elmore connected Henry with the Department of Indiana which assisted him with filling out a TFA application. Henry not only received a TFA grant, the connection with the Department of Indiana resulted in employment due to his experience as a public affairs specialist with the Indiana Army National Guard. He was hired as the department's communications director.

"We were so close to losing everything before Elmore contacted me; he is a great friend," said Henry, now the department's assistant adjutant. "I couldn't believe or understand how everything fell into place like it did. It was divine. I got my life back. I finally felt in control again.

"The TFA program is essential to help veterans and their families. Every day I see and hear about veterans being helped by this crucial program. The TFA program changed my life and gave our family a hand up."

TFA is limited to minor children (17 years or younger) whose biological parent, or legal guardian, is a veteran and is, or would have been, eligible for American Legion membership. However, Legion membership is not required.

Veterans who wish to apply for a TFA grant must first contact their local Legion post.

LEGION FAMILY

Husband, wife lead Department of Arkansas

History has been made once again in The American Legion Department of Arkansas.

For only the second time in the department's nearly 100 years, a husband and wife are leading the department as American Legion commander and Auxiliary president. J.W. and Carol Smith, members of Post and Unit 29 in Siloam Springs, were both elected June 12 during the Department of Arkansas' convention in North Little Rock.

"This is a good opportunity for veterans and Legionnaires to realize that The American Legion is a family organization," J.W. said. "When you're working together, you're stronger together. We are a Legion Family."

While they have simultaneously held the position of post commander and unit president, they didn't foresee leading the department together.

Upon J.W. announcing his candidacy last year for Department of Arkansas commander, Auxiliary members encouraged Carol to run for president – having a husband and wife lead the department was viewed as an opportunity to help "improve communications between the Legion and Auxiliary," J.W. said. Carol was approached a few years ago to run for department president and respectfully declined, but this time around she said yes and is glad she did. "I am really enjoying it; I really am," Carol said. "Communication is a vital part of our Legion Family. We can all work together to make it larger, make it better."

Married for nearly 53 years, J.W. and Carol have had great success working as a team at the post and unit level. As Post 29 commander, J.W. helped grow membership from 63 to 202 members; as Unit 29 president, Carol helped grow membership from 12 to 72 members. J.W. attributes membership growth to "a little thing called teamwork, recognition of your Legionnaires, welcoming of all new members, encouraging your members, and offering praise and recognition when a job is well done," he said.

For Carol, membership growth makes "me feel proud," she said. "I enjoy working with the ladies and the things that we do in the community to help the veterans."

J.W. and Carol are proud of one another for earning the opportunity to lead the Department of Arkansas as Legion commander and Auxiliary president for 2016-17.

"My wife has the ability to get people to work together and not against one another," J.W. said. "I am so proud that she decided to run for (department president). She has the skills to lead and to manage."

"I am proud that we are president and commander at the same time," Carol said. "We work pretty good together. And I think it shows The American Legion Family that we can all work together."

J.W. views the strong, successful working relationship that he and Carol share as a benefit to both the Legion and Auxiliary.

"We work together well and because of our working relationship it's going to help with the programs of our department and help increase the camaraderie within our two organizations," J.W. said. "I can't help but think this is a good thing for our Legion Family."

MEMBERSHIP

A district commander's 10-point guide to success

Mark Shreve knows a thing or two about what it takes to be a successful American Legion district commander. The Georgia Legionnaire is a two-time American Legion Race to the Top winner for achieving 100 percent of his districts assigned membership goal. He's also a two-time Gold Brigade winner for recruiting 50 or more new members into the Legion.

"The district commander is the hardest job in The American Legion," said Shreve, a member of Post 189 in Ellerslie. "It says it in the manual; I read it. And never a truer statement was said."

Before Shreve left his role as Georgia's Third District commander to become a department junior vice commander, he wanted to leave behind something that would "make a difference in this organization and my role as district commander," he said. His answer – a district commander's 10-point guide to success.

The following is Shreve's guide:

1. Don't expect what you don't inspect. Review meeting minutes, tax forms, finance reports, membership activities and programs from each post within the district. "If you're not assessing the posts (in your district), or providing guidance to the posts, don't expect anything other than what they do."

2. Build relationships with the post. Know who the post officers are, add value when you visit, communicate regularly and reinforce what the post is doing well.

3. Cast a district vision. Set realistic goals for each post, understand the individual posts priorities and align your priorities with theirs.

4. Plan, evaluate and plan again. Communicate and execute the department's five year strategic membership plan. "We were an early adopter of the plan, and we are seeing the success; to the tune of 800 new members (in the Third District). We customized the plan, we documented the plan, we communicated the plan, and we executed on the plan. We have had to readjust."

5. Share information. "If it's a good idea for one post, it's probably a good idea for multiple posts." For 6 cents per phone call, Shreve used ***www.callingpost.org*** to alert members about things going on in the district.

6. Participate in community events. Make time to attend important events, have the post commander identify role at event, and praise the post in front of the community.

7. Train, educate. Update and train district officers, identify post weaknesses and provide training in that area, recognize potential leaders, and teach the history of The American Legion. During revitalizations, Shreve shared the history of the Legion.

8. Remove barriers. Listen to what's causing posts from meeting their vision, allow post to come up with a solutions, provide the post with your solution, and follow up to see if the issue was resolved. "When you help solve problems at the post level, you've created confidence in post leadership."

9. Program implementation. Select program committee chairs based on skillsets and motivation. "Not only do we have to recruit new members, we have to recruit leaders. The district is on the front line to do that because we are the ones that are moving the bar for the state level." Help posts build their infrastructure, and recognize posts and members for their program participation. "If you recognize what they do for children and youth with programs, they will continue to do it."

10. Membership engagement. Become fluent on why veterans should become members, revitalize yearly, ensure posts are using ***mylegion.org***, help posts secure recruiting materials and membership applications, recognize new members and have fun. "Being a district commander is the most difficult, but the most rewarding, job and you have to have fun doing it."

HONOR & REMEMBRANCE

Help restore World War I memorials

The American Legion's first generation was heavily involved with – if not fully responsible for – design, construction and dedication of hundreds of monuments and memorials to honor those who served, fought and died in World War I.

Over the decades, many of these sacred landmarks have become weathered and aged, if not forgotten altogether, and are in need of restoration. That is why The American Legion's National Executive Committee passed a resolution in May to promote and participate in a joint venture with the U.S. World War One Centennial Commission and the Pritzker Military Museum and Library: "100 Cities/100 Memorials."

Legion posts are encouraged to apply for funds through the program, which is designed to foster a sense of heritage in local communities, recognize local stories and people who were involved in the war, and create a way for community members to participate in the national World War I centennial.

Grants of up to $2,000 per applicant are available for the restoration of sacred places to honor those who served in the Great War.

Videos on the World War One Centennial Commission website at ***www.ww1cc.org/100memorials*** will explain how to conserve memorials, research a memorial's history and create a project plan for submission. The application deadline is June 15, 2017. Memorials need to be located in the 50 states or U.S. territories, and the preservation work must be completed (or have been completed) between Jan. 1, 2014, and Nov. 11, 2018.

DID YOU KNOW?

- The nation's largest Veterans Day parade in New York City – "America's Parade" – is making its way to the West Coast. The first "America's Parade: Los Angeles" will be held on Nov. 11, while New York City will host its 97th parade. "America's Parade: New York City" will start at approximately 11:15 a.m. EST on Friday, Nov. 11. Participants will march up Fifth Avenue from 26th Street to 52nd Street; total distance is 1.2 miles. To participate in the New York City parade, visit ***www.americasparade.org***. "America's Parade: Los Angeles" will start at 11 a.m. PST on the West L.A. Veterans Affairs Campus; distance will be 1 mile. To participate in the parade, visit ***www.americasparade.org/LA***.

- There have been 20,000 downloads of The American Legion mobile app, which is available through iTunes and Google Play. The mobile app provides a direct route to join, renew, donate or find a local post from any smartphone or electronic tablet. Download the app at ***www.legion.org/mobileapps***.

- The 11th annual charity motorcycle ride, the Legacy Run, helped raise $1,155,363 for The American Legion Legacy Fund. The Legacy Fund provides college scholarships for the children of parents who died while on active-duty military service on or after Sept. 11, 2001, and for the children of post-9/11 veterans with a VA disability rating of 50 percent or higher. ***www.legion.org/scholarships/legacy***

DATELINE: CAPITOL HILL

Reform VA's broken disability benefits appeals process

Brett P. Reistad,
Chairman, National Legislative Commission

As the legislative days of the 114th Congress dwindle, there is still vital legislation for lawmakers to address. At the top of the list is legislation to address VA's benefits appeals process.

The American Legion is deeply concerned about the broken appeals process. Currently, the Legion holds power of attorney on about 750,000 veterans claimants. The Legion spends more than $2 million a year on veterans claims, appeals processing and assistance. Our membership should take great pride in the Legion's high success rate for assisting veterans with their claims and appeals.

But the Legion's charge goes well beyond assisting individual veterans. We have an obligation to ensure that the institutions and systems that serve veterans are working as intended. And when they are not, we step up to help fix them.

When the claims backlog grew to tremendous levels several years back, the Legion worked with Congress and VA to address it so that VA disability benefits and services would be provided in a timely and efficient manner. That effort resulted in a reduction in backlogged claims by almost 90 percent. For veterans, that means better and faster claims decisions.

But as VA has become more efficient in claims processing, the number of veterans seeking appeals has risen proportionally. That has revealed the unworkability of a process that too often churns claims rather than providing timely appeals decisions for veterans. Unquestionably, the appeals process is time-consuming and frustrating for vets.

This year, The American Legion, along with other major veterans service organizations, state and county service officers, veterans advocate attorneys and others, worked with senior VA officials from the Veterans Benefits Administration and the Board of Veterans Appeals to design the framework for legislation to simplify and expedite the appeals process.

The result was the VA Appeals Modernization Act of 2016. The legislation would provide veterans with a simple, fair and transparent appeals process in which the vast majority would receive a final appeals decision within one year of filing an appeal. We are proud of this legislation. Now we need your help to get it signed into law.

To take action, send an email or letter to your U.S. senators or House representatives by visiting ***http://capwiz.com/legion/home***.

MEMBERSHIP INCENTIVES AND AWARDS

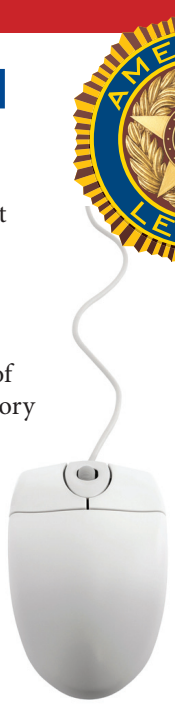
BIG TWELVE COMPETITION

The Big Twelve Competition recognizes departments that meet or exceed their pledged membership goal percentage by the March target date. The percentage does not include members gained through DMS.

The competition is broken down into six categories. The winner in each category will be reimbursed for computer equipment purchases of up to $2,000, while the runners-up in each category will be reimbursed for computer equipment purchases of up to $1,000.

The six categories in the Big Twelve Competition are:

- Category I – departments of 100,000 or more members
- Category II – departments of 70,000-99,999 members
- Category III – departments of 40,000-69,999 members
- Category IV – departments of 25,000-39,999 members
- Category V – departments of 10,000-24,999 members
- Category VI – departments of 9,999 or fewer members



Read more about the Big Twelve Competition by downloading the online National Membership Points Award Manual publication located under Internal Affairs.

www.legion.org/publications

DISTRICT COMMANDER RACE TO THE TOP AWARD

District commanders will compete in five categories based on final membership year totals. The District Commander Race to the Top award is given to district commanders who attain at least 100 percent of the district's assigned membership goal by March 31, 2017, and has the highest percentage of membership over the previous year. The five categories are:

- Category I – districts of 15-1,499 members
- Category II – districts of 1,500-2,999 members
- Category III – districts of 3,000-4,999 members
- Category IV – districts of 5,000-7,499 members
- Category V – districts of 7,500 or more members

First place award is a trip to the 99th National Convention in Reno, Nev., Aug. 18-24, 2017. The winner and a guest will receive round-trip airfare, tickets to the National Commadner's Banquet, and hotel accomodations for six days/five nights. The district commander winners also will be awarded a Legion cap that signifies they are a Race to the Top winner and ribbons will be awarded to each post in their district.

Second place award recipients in each category will receive $500.

Third place award recipients in each category will receive $375.

POST EXCELLENCE AWARD CONTINUES

The Post Excellence Award program honors posts that show excellence in membership participation, youth activities, community service, and support to veterans and U.S. troops.

Criteria

- **Membership.** Post membership must be at least one member more than the previous year. A post officer must attend district meetings.
- **Youth activities.** The post must sponsor and actively participate in at least one primary youth program: Boys State, Legion Baseball, Oratorical Contest, Boy Scouts of America or Junior Shooting Sports.
- **Community service.** The post must organize a community service project that involves members of the Legion, Auxiliary or Sons of The American Legion. A monetary donation may only be one part of a project.
- **Service to troops or veterans.** The post must organize a project supporting troops or veterans (for example, Family Support Network or Operation Comfort Warriors) that involves members of the Legion, Auxiliary or SAL outside the post. A monetary donation may only be one part of a project.

Certification. District commanders must certify posts as having fulfilled the four specified criteria, and submit a list of the post's name, number, address and commander's name to department headquarters. If possible, accompany with copies of press releases submitted to local media that raise awareness for the projects and enhance the Legion's public image.

Awards. Each qualifying post, as well as district commanders whose districts have at least 50 percent of posts reach certification, will receive a certificate of recognition.

www.legion.org/commander/postexcellence

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MEMBERSHIP PLAN

Legion billboards create brand awareness

Veterans and civilians in the state of Connecticut are becoming increasingly aware of the presence The American Legion has in their community. It's due to the brand awareness initiative that the Department of Connecticut implemented – advertising on dozens of billboards, of various sizes, throughout the state.

"If people in every town know where we are and are proud to have us there, we'll be regarded as a community asset," said Bob Murray, past Department of Connecticut commander who came up with the billboard concept. "And hopefully veterans will see the advantages of membership and association and will want to be a part of (the Legion)."

The bright yellow billboards display the department's website and the slogan "We need you in The American Legion." "They're eye-catching and hard to ignore," Murray said. "Brand awareness is certainly a quantifiable result of our displays in the community. We are hitting every aspect of public relations hard, and we won't stop until The American Legion is a known commodity to everyone in the state."

The department also implements brand awareness – part of the Legion's five-year strategic membership plan – by hanging banners and placing ads in local newspapers and magazines that replicate the billboards appearance. More than 200 posts have purchased a 3-foot by 6-foot vinyl banner from the department to display outside the post home or at community events – "anywhere the post needs signage and a recruiting message," Murray said.

PLANNER

September

23-25	National Americanism Conference (Legion Baseball, Boys State, Oratorical and Chaplains), Indianapolis

October

10-13	Fall Meetings, Indianapolis
18	Notification of Child Welfare Foundation grant recipients
23-28	National Legion College, Indianapolis
27	Scouting department chairman telephone conference