Message from the Commander

These are tough times right now for everyone and every post. We need to pull together and support each other. Yes, all the posts have been closed again, but the true statement is: All the canteens have been closed. We are still American Legion posts and we can still hold meetings and work the programs within the restrictions. Posts should be conducting their elections and moving forward with the programs. What is more important is training your members on the programs and becoming mentors for your future leaders.

Use this time wisely and get your district officers involved with the training. If you need training material, contain me and I will see that the training committee sends it. This is the time to let the public really know what The American Legion is about. Just because our canteens are closed does not mean we cannot support the communities. Let the 1st responders and the front-line workers know that we are there to support them also.

I pray that all our veterans, families and active duty personnel are safe around the world. I ask that everyone stay safe and protect yourselves as we fight this COVID-19 virus.

This year will be based on FUN and Devotion to Mutual Helpfulness to support The Four Pillars and to support each other.

Send your ideas to: cdrtxlegion@gmail.com and I will share them with the rest of the Department of Texas.

Thank you for your support and ideas,
Jeff Perkins
Department Commander
Department of Texas
God Bless the United States
God Bless The American Legion Family
Chaplain's Corner

This month we celebrate the birth of our nation. One can only imagine the fear and thoughts that the 56 founding fathers had as they put pen to paper and signed their name on what became our Declaration of Independence. Of the 56 signers of the Declaration, 48 were born in America, the remaining 8 were from Great Britain. With their signatures the foundation of what was to become the greatest and strongest country started.

The Declaration of Independence created a separate nation founded on the principles “that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights.” A nation under God, not of man.

The signing was the easy part. The hard part was to prove to Great Britain that America was a free nation and no longer willing to bow to the crown. They knew that England was not going to accept our independence. A militia would have to be garnered to secure our liberty. Imagine, a new nation trying to get started. Ordinary men were asked to stop what they were doing and take up arms to protect America. They had but one choice, to win at all costs. If those that lived had been defeated, they would be tried for treason. We all know the trepidation of entering the service knowing we had agreed to defend our country to the death if necessary. But we did not have to worry that after serving we could be executed.

Let us remember this month what our forefathers started and ensure that we protect the nation that thousands of Americans lived and died for. As we observe the firework celebrations, remember all those that saw the real “bombs bursting in air.” As always pray for our brothers and sisters in need.

My email address is rlh.wings@yahoo.com and my cell phone is 713-569-0959. Do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of any assistance to you or your post.

SERVICE TO GOD AND COUNTRY
Robert L. Harvey
Department Chaplain 2019-2020
www.texaschaplains.org
Do you have an article or news announcement to share with the rest of the Department of Texas? If so, please follow these guidelines for submissions.

• Submit your text in Word format (.doc, .docx) or as a text file (.txt or .rtf) or as a PDF.

• Name your article! Create the headline and save with a proper file name so we can easily recognize it.

• Tell us who the author is, whether it’s you or if you are just forwarding it to us.

• Please attach any photos and/or artwork for articles separately (NOT embedded in your text file) as high resolution JPGs (300 dpi, or better). Please name these files accordingly so we can track them along with your article. Let us know in your e-mail of any corresponding captions, name of the photographer, etc.

• Please spell check everything! Especially people’s names, web addresses, etc. We do our best to catch typos, but sometimes they still slip by. You can help us greatly here by simply running your spell check function in your word processing software.

• E-mail everything directly to times@txlegion.org by the 20th of every month, for it to appear in the following issue. This way we have plenty of time to work with in case we need to clarify anything with you.

We hope you enjoy this issue, and hope you continue to help us grow The Legion Times!
State Commander Jeff Perkins pulls the winning ticket for the “2020 Reignite Patriotism Sweepstakes”. Congratulations to Steven Valdez of Post 178, the first ticket drawn for the Grand Prize of $10,000.00. All winners will be contacted and a list of all winners will be posted on the Department Website and in the Legion Times.

A special “Thanks” goes out to everyone who participated by purchasing a ticket for the raffle, even during these difficult times, we show increase in participation in the raffle this year.

*Note: Due to technical difficulty’s we were unable to get Facebook Live to connect so we could do a live drawing of all the winners.*

Due to the current COVID 19 Pandemic and the cancellation of the 2020 Department Convention the “2020 Reignite Patriotism Sweepstakes” drawing was held on July 2, 2020 at the Department Headquarters in Austin, Texas.

Tickets were drawn by State Commander Jeff Perkins.

Congratulations’ to the following winners:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prize</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Post</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Grand Prize</td>
<td>$10,000.00</td>
<td>Steven Valdez</td>
<td>Carrollton</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Second Prize</td>
<td>$2500.00</td>
<td>Albert Williams</td>
<td>Grapevine</td>
<td>379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Third Prize</td>
<td>$1000.00</td>
<td>John Todd</td>
<td>Frisco</td>
<td>321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Fourth Prize</td>
<td>$500.00</td>
<td>Bobby Davis</td>
<td>Carrollton</td>
<td>597</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Fifth Prize</td>
<td>$500.00</td>
<td>Gerald Blair</td>
<td>La Feria</td>
<td>345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Sixth Prize</td>
<td>$100.00</td>
<td>Gordon Davenport</td>
<td>Humble</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Seventh Prize</td>
<td>$100.00</td>
<td>Keith Thompson</td>
<td>Euless</td>
<td>379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Eighth Prize</td>
<td>$100.00</td>
<td>Stanley Boncek</td>
<td>Castroville</td>
<td>460</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Ninth Prize</td>
<td>$100.00</td>
<td>Bufford Berry</td>
<td>Deweyville</td>
<td>345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Tenth Prize</td>
<td>$100.00</td>
<td>Nelda Cade</td>
<td>San Antonio</td>
<td>612</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Recently, a dedicated Texas Boys State committee pulled off the impossible. And I don’t think many people will ever fully realize the extent of their achievement.

They successfully conducted this year’s Texas Boys State via virtual conferencing due to restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. 659 young men got to participate in a historical event, while most other states wound up cancelling theirs.

As a quality professional whose travels have been replaced by video-supported computer sessions, I work with different companies each week. From Cisco Webex, to LogMeIn’s GoToMeeting, Skype, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, and even company-proprietary software, I have experienced the challenges of organizing and conducting even small meetings that have to have a detailed, organized schedule in order to meet your designated objectives. Just undertaking this virtual Boys State challenge was a monumental endeavor; pulling it off successfully was extraordinary.

Howard Gardner Post 85, in Palestine, TX, was honored to have been able to sponsor one young man from our area. Thanks to Miss Mamie at Department HQ and the Boys State staff, we were able to do this even after we missed the initial registration deadline. That was accomplished through direct phone calls and emails with real people on an individual basis. Kudos to all that helped get our young man into the program.

Sadly, most of the rest of the Department of Texas is not prepared to take advantage of the technology that is available today. We lag behind in many areas and need to address these if we are going to continue to grow in the future. Here are a few of my thoughts.

Information Technology Support: Although our Department HQs is located in the Information Technology Capital of the South (Austin, TX), I am not sure we are taking advantage of the resources this location may offer. While we have a webmaster and Legion Times editor listed on the website, I do not see an IT person. Do we have one? Are the services contracted? Do we have a strategic plan for moving to embrace changing technology to support our basic mission? If IT support is being maintained internally, are we taking advantage of resources such as internships through local colleges?

Email distribution network: All key leadership positions should have an official email address, at least through District level. It used to be that way, but budget cuts apparently did away with that. As it stands now, non-department leaders use their personal emails. There are benefits from having organizationally managed email systems based upon position. When officers change, the address is reassigned to the new officer, maintaining continuity, and eliminating problems with sending emails through Yahoo, G-mail, local ISPs, and yes, even AOL. Officials need not be assigned individual computers since they could access these through web clients or smart phones. The ideal system would include at least one official email down to individual post level for information distribution purposes. However, that is around 480 posts, and sadly we still have some officers out there that do not even use email.

Technology Support Processes: How can posts set up web sites? Facebook pages? Twitter accounts? YouTube presentations? Currently, posts are left to figure it out on their own. Those posts in larger communities may have resources not available to smaller, struggling posts. Could we put together process and procedure packets to help these posts that DO want to move into the 21st Century?

Innovation for the Future: We have shown that we have some really smart and skilled people associated with this organization. How can we recruit more, and utilize their skills to plan for the future? Could 2021 see us holding virtual planning sessions, where members can provide input and ideas for future innovations? Could we see Oratorical Competitions broadcast online for communities to watch in pride? Could we routinely be including home-bound members in our meetings through technology?

Realistically, our current organization is hindered with an aging membership. We are not attracting the younger veterans like we should be, and I think some of that is because we are not reaching them through available technology. We need their skills. We need their leadership. And we need their visions of the future because they ARE the future.

Johnnie R. Vaughn
Commander & Hubmaster
Howard Gardner Post 85
https://www.facebook.com/HowardGardnerPost85/
The service officer and the veteran/claimant relationship is an important one. As your Department Service Officer for over 22 years in the Houston VA Regional Office, I could probably write a book about this. Probably the best way to illustrate this is by going through a VA initial claim process. Before we go too far, let’s discuss the different kinds of service officers, you may encounter for your claim process. The most common service officer is the Post Service Officer (PSO), which can normally be found at the Post level at almost each American Legion post. This service officer can have many different duties at the post level and may not have much experiences in working VA claims. If they do not, then they can refer the claim to the County Service Officer (CSO). The CSO is usually very well trained to work VA claim for their county. Usually, there is one CSO for about every county in the state of Texas. Finally, there are the American Legion Department Service Officer (DSO), which are located at the Houston Regional Office and the Waco Regional Office. Currently there are two DSOs to each Regional Office. They are highly trained in the laws, regulations, and rules the VA has for adjudication of VA claims. The most important skills to have to be a service officer is usually empathy and compassion to service your veteran and dependents seeking your aid. Remember, we are here to help those seeking our aid. The post service officer should have the American Legion Post Service Officer Guide and the Service Officer Code of Procedure in their possession, which can be obtained by their post adjutant or down loaded from the American Legion National website.

Usually, the first form to be filled out for VA claims, is “Appointment of Veterans Service Organization as Claimant’ Representative”, VA form 21-22. The form is usually the shortest and easiest to fill out. It is usually refer to as the Power of Attorney (POA). It is the form that allows the American Legion to assist you with YOUR VA claim. The form will ask you what veteran service organization you want to represent you in your case with the VA, in this instance you should elect the American Legion. Without this election, the American Legion cannot assist you in any manner with YOUR VA claim. A common misconception is that if you’re a member of the American Legion you do not need to fill out the form to gain help with your claim. This is not correct, if you’re a member of the American Legion that is great. But the VA is a Federal Agency that has specific rules and laws that requires us to follow their rules and laws. It requires us to have the VA form 21-22 loaded into their system and the American Legion must be elected to be able to have access to the veterans/claimant records to be able to help you.

The second form is “Application for Disability Compensation and Related Compensation Benefits”, VA form 21-526EZ. This form requires some work by the veteran to fill out. This form ask for general types of information the veteran should know. To help you fill out this information you should have a copy of your discharge(s) form - the DD214, your banking information, copies of your service medical records (if you have it), a copy of your current medical records that you are claiming disabilities for, along with the name, address of the doctor/medical center you are getting your care from, and a list of the disabilities you are claiming.

The third form is the “Application to Add and/or Remove Dependents”, VA form 21-686C. Like the military, the VA will pay an additional amount for each dependent you have to support. This benefit will kick in once you have a single or combined rating from the VA at 30% or higher. We will need to have a copy of the marriage certificate, along with the spouse’s date of birth and social security number. For the dependent children, we will need a copy of birth certificate and social security number for each child.

The fourth and fifth forms are “Authorization To Disclose Information To The Department of Veteran Affairs (VA)”, VA form 21-4142 and “General Release for Medical Provider Information To The Department of Veteran Affairs (VA)”, VA form 21-4142a. These forms are used by the veteran to have the VA obtain the medical records from the medical provider(s). If using these forms, the VA will ask for these records from the providers, at no charge to you the veteran. This is a benefit to the veteran as some providers will charge you a fee (if you ask for the medical records), that can in some instances really amount to a sizeable charge. The veteran will need to provide the information, normally found on the providers business cards. As a start, we will need to know when you first started to see this provider and if applicable, when you stopped seeing this provider.

It should be noted that the above information in a subtle way shows that the burden of proof/evidence for the claim rest with the veteran/claimant. Should the VA give the veteran a deadline for submission of information/evidence, it is the veteran/claimant’s responsibility to keep track of such deadlines, not the service officer. It is the responsibility of the veteran/claimant to fill out the VA forms required, not the service officer. If the service officer helps you to fill out the forms, consider yourself lucky. The veteran/claimant can always change their Power of Attorney via VA form 21-22, at any time to another veteran service organization, for any reason. The service officer can revoke (fire) the Power of Attorney of the veteran/claimant, for almost any reason. For instance, reasons for revocation could include, if the veteran refuses to cooperate or establish a satisfactory and effective working relationship with the representative, the claim has no basis in law or fact in which it can be granted, providing false information of evidence and threats or acts of violence toward the representative, co-workers or VA personnel to name a few of the reasons. If the veteran/claimant follows the advice of the service officer it could lead to the grant of service connection for disabilities, resulting in compensation being paid, healthcare be granted for the service connected disabilities, and other benefits being granted. If you have any questions feel free to contact your service officer.

Edward R. Reyes
The American Legion
Department Service Officer: Houston
The Direct Membership Solicitation (DMS) program is administered centrally by National Headquarters. It has been, and continues to be, the reason for thousands of veterans in Texas to join The American Legion. The veterans who join under the DMS program are placed as members in a virtual Post, which is fondly referred to as the “Ghost Post”. The official name is Post 345. Although it is chartered, it doesn’t function as a typical Post. It is a Post that exists in name only. The DMS members are held in Post 345 until they are transferred into a real Post.

The DMS program was developed and implemented by the National Organization as a result of Resolution 29 which was approved by the National Executive Committee October 14-15, 1981. It resolved that “prompt appropriate and timely action be taken to assist those members so processed to transfer into an American Legion Post near their residence”.

On August 4, 2012, several days before James Koutz was elected as the 2012-2013 National Commander, he laid out his membership plans including his strategy to have a DMS chairman in every department.

The Department of Texas emphasized the need to execute Commander Koutz’s strategy when Resolution 25-18 was approved at the Department Convention assembled in San Antonio, Texas, July 13-15, 2018. It resolved that “the American Legion, Department of Texas assign these DMS and TX-345 Members to a Local Post or District Commander by the zip code provided within the State of Texas and within their respective areas.”

Justification

There were compelling reasons why several virtually identical resolutions were submitted to address this issue during the 2018 Department Convention. The primary reason was because people felt that the process to transfer DMS members from Post 345 into a local Post needed to be improved. The Final Membership Report for the Department of Texas dated June 12, 2017, showed that only 1,081 DMS members were transferred into local Posts during the membership year, an average of 47 per District, while 6,329 DMS members remained in Department Headquarters Post 345.

It is time consuming to train people in each Post and then for the Posts to spend the burdensome effort to acquire the DMS member data, contact the DMS members, complete the Member Data Forms and mail the forms to Department. Likewise, it is time consuming and costly for National Headquarters personnel to visit Districts to conduct revitalizations for the sole purpose of transferring DMS members.

The time and effort to transfer DMS members distracts the Post members from instead devoting their time and effort toward recruiting new members and retaining existing members. Moreover, it distracts the Post members from fulfilling their purposes as Legionnaires for which we associate ourselves together.

The past practice authorized numerous individuals to contact DMS members. This practice risked the possibility of the DMS member receiving redundant communications and inconsistent messages from different individuals. On the other hand, many of the DMS members have never been contacted by a Post member or by anyone else in the Department. A National Headquarters study determined that lack of personal contact is one of the main reasons DMS members fail to renew their membership.

It is exponentially more efficient and more productive for one person to accurately transfer DMS members into local Posts. This was proven by the 3rd Division Commander who conducted a test of the process in 2017 to determine the effectiveness of transferring DMS members from one central location. The Commander, who had access to adequate office resources, was somewhat experienced working with databases. The test was conducted during 16 consecutive days in his spare time. During that short timeframe, 101 DMS members were transferred into local Posts, far more than the annual average of 47 DMS transfers per District. As intended by National, each of the 101 DMS members were contacted either by e-mail or by personal phone call, and each granted their permission to be transferred. Essential to the success of the test was a concise message that resonated with the DMS members.

The Angel is in the Details

Many applaud the approval of Resolution 25-18 and see it as a way to compel our Department to better comply with the intent of National’s DMS program. However, the angel is in the details. The resolution doesn’t prescribe a process. There are important implications depending upon how a process should be drawn up. The spotlight is focused on the MO&PA Commission to develop the process and procedures in order to optimize the benefits of this resolution.

(continued next page)
Making Perfect Business Sense

In whatever operating procedure is established, it is imperative that each DMS member be personally contacted, either by e-mail or by phone, to receive permission to execute the transfer. Not only does this meet the instructions from National, but there are other important reasons to contact the DMS member:

- Some DMS members would feel disenfranchised if they were transferred without their permission.
- Rather than transferring into the closest Post, some DMS members prefer to transfer into a different Post.
- Some members don’t want to transfer but instead desire to remain in Post 345.
- This is a good opportunity to conduct a brief “climate survey” to determine the level of their satisfaction with the organization and to answer any questions they may have.
- Simply making the effort to personally communicate with a DMS member gives him or her a sense of inclusion, which reduces attrition.
- Unreported deceased members are identified and the membership database is corrected.

Part of the Department’s process should include overseeing the Posts’ responsibility to vote the transferred DMS member into the Post.

Because there is currently no vetting process for The American Legion to validate the veteran status of DMS members when they join, the Department process should include a strong reminder to the Posts to check the transferee’s DD-214.

District Commanders are encouraged to start new Posts. High concentrations of DMS members in localized areas are typically prime locations for starting a new Post. These DMS members are the source of members for the new Posts. Therefore, the Department should avoid transferring any DMS members who are targeted for a new Post.

Staffing

This wouldn’t be a full-time job. There is no doubt, however, that this new Department responsibility would impose an additional burden on an already lean Department staff, a burden most likely too large to absorb. However, instead of hiring additional permanent staff, a consideration would be to initially pilot the program with temporary, part-time or contracted staff for a trial period, say two or three years, to determine the amount of time demanded of the task.

Any cost associated with centralizing the function of transferring DMS members at the Department should be considered and budgeted accordingly to coincide with the beginning of the membership year.

The success of the National DMS program is measured by its Return on Investment (ROI) which depends upon the success of renewing DMS members beyond the year of acquisition. The MO&PA Commission should consider establishing performance measures for the DMS program in the Department of Texas similar to the “Return on Investment” measures established by National. At the conclusion of the pilot period, if the ROI justifies hiring a permanent staff person, there are other business practices that could be beneficially centralized at the Department for the individual to undertake in order to justify full-time employment.

Measures of Success

In addition to measuring ROI, other DMS program measures should be considered. Perhaps the measures could be summarized similar to the following illustration:

Most importantly, as a result of lessening the administrative burden on the Posts, it should be determined if there is any tangible improvement in the performance of the Posts as measured by increased participation in our programs.

It is expected that the measured performance of the Department DMS program would be reported annually at the appropriate statewide convention(s). Upon completion of the pilot period, it should be determined whether or not to change the process depending upon the success or failure of the pilot.

Opportunity for Excellence

This endeavor could be a perfect example of leadership excellence. It has the potential to help make the Department of Texas the best Department in the country.

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JEROME ILTIS is a 27-year member of The American Legion. He is a 2015 graduate of the National American Legion College. In addition to twice receiving Top District Commander honors, he earned the 2017 Top Division Commander Award.
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Texas Lone Star Recruiter Pin

Have you earned yours??

Awarded to Legionnaires for recruiting “NEW” members into The American Legion. This award is based upon the total accumulative number of New Members the Recruiter has signed up into The American Legion from the inception of this award through their Legion career. The pin will be awarded starting with the #1 for the first new member and then increase in increments of 5 (5, 10, 15, 20, etc.) based upon the accumulative total of new members recruited. Once the recruiter is awarded a pin level, he/she will work for the next higher pin level and once a pin level has been achieved a duplicate pin level will not be awarded.

Contact your Post Adjutant to get yours!

Renew your membership online

Please continue to support your fellow veterans, troops, their families, youth and our nation.

Your annual dues help support programs in your community and across the nation. American Legion programs and services include: Troop Support, Child Welfare Foundation, Heroes to Homelowns, American Legion Baseball, Department Service Officers, Family Support Network, Flag Advocacy & Etiquette, Junior ROTC & ROTC, Operation Comfort Warriors, Scholarships, Veterans Job Fairs, and many others.

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