There is a virus in America that could cause more long-term destruction than COVID-19. Just as the novel coronavirus can quickly devastate a healthy body, this other virus threatens lives, neighborhoods and infrastructures. No person or place is truly safe. It can embed itself inside a peaceful protest and turn it into a nightmare of violent rioting and retribution. It turns Americans against Americans. This virus is called anarchy.

Perhaps no one should be more concerned about this virus than those who justly fight for civil rights and equality. Their cause has been hijacked. George Floyd and Breonna Taylor receive only occasional mentions on the evening news while footage of statue-toppling, tear gas and batons dominates. One network’s description of a live event will usually have the opposite perspective of another network. Division is a symptom of this virus and its cancer has reached a stage unseen since the Civil War. The patient is quickly approaching stage 4.

At our 1962 National Convention, American Legion delegates defined “Americanism” in such an eloquent manner that we still adhere to it. It stated that the essence of Americanism is class, religious and racial tolerance. Written as if it were a vaccine against our current anarchy virus, it further states “law and order are essential to the preservation of Americanism are distinctly un-American.” Peaceful protests against racism are just, admirable and constitutionally protected. It’s ok if protests make people feel uncomfortable. A good protest is supposed to do that. But many people feel unsafe. This is what distinguishes protestors from anarchists and rioters.

Whether generated from the extreme left or the extreme right, the cracked skulls and burning buildings don’t care. They are damaged, sometimes permanently. Instead of fighting this virus like good scientists, public officials are failing us. People are being killed while local, state and federal agencies fight over jurisdiction. Add partisan politics to the growing list of symptoms.

Most police officers are brave and honorable. Some are not and those who abuse their positions should be held accountable. In the fog of a riot, it is sometimes difficult for officers to distinguish between a peaceful protestors and a violent anarchist. Again, police officers who commit crimes should be prosecuted. Same with a brick-throwing anarchist.

Federal agents are charged with enforcing federal law and protecting federal property. State and local law enforcement officers have parallel responsibilities in their respective areas. Mayors, governors and the federal government must work as one when it comes to public safety. Agencies at every level must collaborate. People are dying. The enemy is not each other. It’s the violent anarchist. Unity is the cure.
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**Contributors:** The American Legion Dispatch  
**Design and Layout and Editor:** Darrell Myers
Equality for all

By: James W. "Bill" Oxford, National Commander

The colors red, white and blue are displayed in communities nationwide during the month of July in celebration of Independence Day. Our nation’s flag symbolizes freedom, patriotism and unity. While our communities have been affected and our nation grieves a divide, The American Legion stands firm in a value it has upheld by resolution (still in effect) passed on Oct. 17, 1923, at The American Legion National Convention that expresses firm support of equal rights and opportunities ‘without distinction as to race, color, creed or class.’

Three American Legion members with unique experiences and perspectives related to law enforcement and the debate over race join the Tango Alpha Lima podcast for a special two-part episode. Legionnaires Autrey James, Hugh Crooks and Sean Powers join our podcast co-hosts for a frank, honest and intriguing discussion about racial disparity and more. Listen or watch at legion.org/tangoalphalima.

I too want to remind all of you that a way to show patriotism and voice is by voting.

Since its inception in 1920, The American Legion’s Get Out the Vote (GOTV) program has encouraged Americans to exercise their right to vote and help others understand the importance of the electoral process. The American Legion is a nonpartisan organization but advocates for all U.S. citizens to register and vote in all elections. The American Legion does not show preference for or against any particular candidate or political party.

Help with GOTV efforts by visiting legion.org/vote to access The American Legion’s “Get Out the Vote” brochure and other resources.

Throughout its history, The American Legion has fought to improve racial equality not only for veterans, but for the communities they serve. And we will continue.

Department Commander of the Year Award

Congratulations to Department Commander Dean Noechel

The Department Commander of the Year Award is presented to any department commander who meets or exceeds their assigned 100 percent membership goal by the May target date. Seven American Legion departments met or exceeded the 100 percent membership target date of June 17 (pushed back from May due to COVID-19) for the 2019-2020 membership year.

The following will receive the Department Commander of the Year Award:

- Colorado – Dean M. Noechel
- Mexico – Milo Vukovich
- Montana – Jeffery Nelson
- Philippines – John T. O’Brien
- Utah – Martha A. Bigbie
- Wyoming – Mike Cooke

Dean’s theme of Re-Ignite Patriotism blasted the department to 101.23% of our national goal for a membership of 21,379 members which is 2,034 members ahead of last year. Dean, thanked all who worked so hard on our membership efforts this last year, particularly Membership Chairman and Sr Vice Greg Jackson. Now we just need to repeat our success and do it again for the 2020-2021 year, only better!
Colorado American Legion Family,

We are off and running in our 2021 year and have continued the momentum from 2020 and with your support and dedication, we as TEAM COLORADO will continue to be the best in the WEST!

WOW, all I can say is THANK YOU for coming together and working our programs this last year and for all the great things we have accomplished we have encountered in light of the pandemic. The COVID-19 has not been easy for our Posts and our Veterans. Our Posts have stepped up to conduct “Buddy Checks” worked diligently on “Operation Recall” and made personal contact with members in our communities and it shows.

As we enter into August, I ask that we continue to conduct our “BUDDY CHECKS!” Remember that we must continue to engage our members and make sure that they are doing OK. They need to hear from us. Our members are the most important asset we have in our organization. Membership retention needs to be our biggest focus for 2021. We want to keep the members who have joined for 2020 and get them to renew for 2021. You may ask how you can do that? Make that personal contact with the member through a phone call. From our Posts with 15 members to our Posts with 1100 members each Post can reach out to all our members. Build Post engagement Teams that are willing to contact our members to let them know that we, as The American Legion, are here and we care about them.

I would like to highlight an event that will be hosted this month in Cripple Creek, Co. The 28th Annual Salute to American Veterans Rally will be held August 21-23, 2020. This is a time for Veterans to come together as Patriotic Americans and celebrate AMERICA! We are proud of our Service, America and our brothers and Sisters. This year will be a little different with all the COVID-19 requirements and social distancing, however it is a great weekend in the mountain community of Cripple Creek to meet other Veterans. There is always a great ceremony on Saturday after the ride comes into town from Woodland Park. If you have never attended and are looking for a little event to get away, consider joining the Salute to American Veterans Rally in Cripple Creek, Co August 21-23, 2020.

In closing, TEAM COLORADO, you make me proud every day. Your dedication and hard work with Veterans and our 4 pillars are to be commended. Our Posts continue to do amazing things across this great state, and I could not be prouder of the support you have given and shown to so many. You are the backbone of this great organization. Keep up the great work in your communities and remember our children and youth are the future of this great country. We must mentor them and teach them the ideals and principles of what makes us the greatest country in the world. We are proud Americans and we must stand together!

RE-IGNITE PATRIOTISM - UNITED WE STAND 2020-2021

VA offers debt relief to Veterans through year’s end

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) today announced its commitment to extend debt relief to Veterans adversely impacted by COVID-19 to the end of 2020 by suspending certain debt collection actions.

The department recognizes Veterans and beneficiaries are still being greatly impacted by the coronavirus prompting the extension of financial relief.

“Veterans and their families should be focused on their health and safety during the pandemic,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “VA is taking action to give those with pending debts greater flexibility during these challenging times.”

VA is suspending all actions on Veteran debts under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Treasury Department. This includes the suspension of collection action or extending repayment terms on preexisting VA debts, whichever the Veteran prefers.

For benefit debts, Veterans should contact the VA Debt Management Center at 1-800-827-0648.

For health care debts, Veterans should contact the Health Resource Center at 1-866-400-1238 or https://www.pay.gov for payments.
A Message From Department Sr. Vice Commander Jackson

The 2021 Membership Year has Started

By: Greg Jackson, Department Sr. Vice Commander

We are almost done with the summer; The Department of Colorado had a very good membership year. Congratulations to everyone and every post for doing a great job. As of July 1st our 2021 membership started and by now most every post should have received their membership cards. Most cards were hand delivered by the Commander, a Jr Vice Commander or myself. This process allowed for 3 things, personal visit with members of each post, to collect any reports if needed and of course to give the post their cards that they would normally received at the annual convention while limited exposure to the Covid-19. If you have not received those cards please get with headquarters.

I would like to see a very aggressive pursuit on this year’s membership in all aspects, Recruitment, Retentions, Direct Mail Solicitation (DMS) Transfers and working our expired lists.

Areas to focus on could be on working more utilizing Public service announcements, being involved with The American Legion Media Association (TALMA) and learning how to use the many media outlets to let our communities know who The American Legion is and what the 4 pillars are and how they benefit the local communities. I will try to address as many different avenues for achieving these objectives throughout the year. Currently the best method is the continual sincere use of buddy checks while the Covid-19 continues to threaten our communities. We also need to work with our community leaders, law enforcement, social workers, and county service officers to identify those in need of assistance and work towards providing that aid. Many of these things are likely easier said than actually done, but I am confident with the help of the membership team members, and you, we can learn how to make our department grow.

Remember to keep working on utilizing digital tools like computers, cell phones, tablets to help get the word out while not forgetting those who only receive mail and regular phones calls. All these tools can help us reach an entire membership quickly and efficiently.

We will be changing our bi-monthly Membership meeting to the ZOOM platform. This allows everyone to engage in it. if you don’t have a computer you will be able to call in by phone. We have also changed the date and time to the 1st and 3rd Thursday of the month. We encourage every district to have an identified membership committee member attend or the District Sr Vice Commander attend. District commanders are also encouraged to participate as well. Post Commanders/Post Membership people are also welcome to participate as well. If you are not already on the email for the invites, please send your email information or text number so we can send you the invite.

Covid has us emerging with new rules everyday and seems to be a roller coaster with openings and closures. I ask that everyone be safe, smart and responsible. I will be contacting districts and posts scheduling Virtual Membership Round-ups. I feel these will be an effective method to discuss membership issues with a focus on your District and Posts. All members of your District and Posts are invited to attend and participate. I encourage everyone to stay the course and keep up the great job.

Keep Rocking the Rockies and Keep Patriotism Ignited

Greg Jackson
Department Sr. Vice Commander

You Too Can Join The World’s Largest War Time Veterans Service Organization And Advocate For Veteran’s Benefits Too!

Call 303-366-5201
A Message From Department Jr. Vice Commander Kossow

2021 Law Enforcement Officer and Firefighter of the Year Program

By: Chip Kossow, Department Jr. Vice Commander

The American Legion stands firmly behind our law enforcement and firefighting professionals. To prove our support, the Department of Colorado is introducing our 2021 Law Enforcement Officer and Firefighter of the Year program. It is fitting to honor those who exemplify courage and selfless service to protect our communities. Please take this opportunity to recognize your local first responders for their outstanding professional achievement and community service.

Each Post is encouraged to meet with their local police and fire departments to find nominees. This is open to city, community, county, state, and federal agencies as long as the nominees are Colorado certified (please see the packet for all requirements). While meeting the chiefs, introduce your Post to them and let them know about the American Legion and how our missions can align. Also, many of these departments will have veterans in their ranks that may be interested in joining our great organization.

The Department of Colorado law enforcement officer and firefighter of the year winner will be awarded at the midyear conference in January 2021. Regardless of the Department winner, each Post and District should recognize their winner at the local level in a public ceremony. Invite local communities and news outlets to report on the achievement. Help the Department to honor our first responders for their hard work and dedication to our communities.

The nomination instructions, eligibility requirements, and nomination packets are located on the Department website in the “About Us” drop down menu – “Annual Reports”. You may also contact me directly for the packet and any questions you may have.

The nomination packet due dates are:
-01 December to Districts.
-15 December to Department.

Help the Department to honor our first responders for their hard work and dedication to our communities.

Respectfully,

A Message From Department Jr. Vice Commander Johnson

Veterans are resilient and will find ways to overcome

By: Annette Johnson, Department Jr. Vice Commander

Hi Everyone,

First, I would like to thank all of you for your support in electing me to represent the Department of Colorado as a Jr. Vice Commander for the 2020/2021 membership year. It has been a long, yet fun filled road and I have learned so much along the way. By taking the time to interact with individuals, ask questions and listening to stories I have learned more about TAL than what I ever could have by only reading about this organization. On the other hand, taking the time to learn as much of the foundational aspects of this organization I have discovered I can speak to any person and quickly discover what their interests are, then apply their interests to our conversation all the while promoting the organization. It is amazing how quickly someone will want to join an organization when you have the ability to tie their interests into our programs. The key: Make it about them.

I often find it interesting how adaptable our organization is too – Veterans are resilient and will always find a way to overcome challenges. This year has shown our organization is not a cookie cutter organization, it is a unique and dynamic organization built upon a foundation of helping our comrades and their families in times of need with some unique out of the box thinking, such as Memorial Day remembrances, bringing the ceremonies to those quarantined in nursing homes and extended Buddy checks. Together we have learned one person’s challenge is not the same as another’s; as we have learned, is ever changing and evolving. When driving through this state we transition from a rural - agricultural farm and fields, to urban, educational, technological, and medical, to assorted downtown metropolitan and mountain communities. We have learned what works in one community may not work well in another, yet collectively, veterans are adaptive and we will always find a way to work the programs and remain focused on ‘the mission’.

My intentions this year is to expand my reach into the Districts assisting with education, training and membership. As we have discovered COVID-19 has created change for many of us - our
traditional ways of doing business has transformed - so has the way we will be conducting some education and training this year. As we enter a new year of membership, I want you to know I am always available to answer questions. Goodness, knows I have asked more than my fair share of questions and I will continue to do so. Most importantly, don’t be anxious or embarrassed to ask questions; this is how we learn together. Your questions, concerns and suggestions about programs, meetings agendas, C&B inquiries, Pillar’s, membership, and yearend reports help both of us become better leaders while building stronger TEAMs and Districts. If you are interested in being on an Education & Training email blast list, please email me at annettephd@comcast.net and I will be happy to add you.

I look forward to learning from you and working with you this year.

A Message From Department Jr. Vice Commander Hasert

A Cautious and Tactical Restart

By: Shane Hasert, Department Jr. Vice Commander

First, I get to introduce myself, I’m Shane Hasert from Post 70 in Johnstown, Colorado and I have recently been appointed as the Jr Vice Commander for the Department of Colorado and I am honored to be given this opportunity to continue serving. I hold several IT security and privacy certifications and am the Director of Operations for a Denver start-up company…I’ll explain why that is important in a minute.

As veterans, our families and our Posts have all been affected by COVID-19 in one way or another. In many parts of our state, we are now getting the ‘yellow light’ to slowly and cautiously re-open our doors, re-engage with our friends and comrades and continue our path of ‘Still Serving America’. Though the state leadership’s guidelines can be confusing and contradictory at times, using a little common sense can go a long way.

Wash your hands, keep your distance, limit gatherings and groups are all good advice; but let’s go a bit further:

The telephone and mail are important tools you should be using to stay engaged with your membership, perform your ‘buddy checks,’ see if there is anything you can do to help your comrades during these times like run to the store, help with the yard or grab a take-out lunch to drop off.

Embrace technology. If your Post allows it, continue to conduct business, or at least schedule and touch base with a video or web conference. One popular misconception is that you need to be computer savvy to participate, if you know how to use a phone, you can participate. There are so many platforms out there, and with my current job, I use several of these tools on a daily basis. If some instruction is needed, reach out to me at shasert.legion@gmail.com and I am happy to help where I can.

Finally, social media, a website and a Post newsletter (that can be uploaded to mylegion.org) are excellent tools to keep people engaged and informed during these times of separation to keep everyone connected. Creating and composing content should not be limited to officers…put out an open request from the membership. You may be surprised where you find tomorrows leaders if they are just given an opportunity.

Watch for details in upcoming issues of the Observer or through other means.
Chaplain's Corner - Understanding God

By: Stanley Hamamoto, Department Chaplain

August is when most of the Districts will start having their Fall District meetings. I hope that I can make as many of them as I can and meet many of you in person. This may be my last time to meet you as your Department Chaplain. Do you know that I have been your Department Chaplain for the past five years? This will be my 6th year and I think that maybe it’s time for a change. Many times change is good. Just allow it to happen and go with the flow, do not fight it. This happens many times in church. Any time someone wants to make a change people would always say, “We have never done it that way in the past.” As we age it does take a little longer to accept changes. It becomes harder to do things differently when you have done it one way for many years. But as time goes by, we all have to make adjustments.

Many times in the past I have spoken about God’s love for us. Many times we take things for granted and assume that because HE created us that it’s ok for us to just do what we want to. God’s love is unchangeable. He knows exactly what we are and loves us anyway. We sin and he forgives us no matter what the sin is. God wanted other creatures in His image upon whom HE could pour out His love and who would love Him in return. He wanted that love to be voluntary, not forced, so He gave us freedom of choice, the ability to say yes or no in our relationship to Him. God does not want mechanized love, the kind that says we must love God, because it’s what our parents demand or our church preaches. Only voluntary love satisfies the Heart of God. Only love that comes from your heart is what He is wanting from us. So, love God with all of your heart, your mind and soul, this is what He wants from us. On the human level, we frequently love the one who loves us. In the spiritual realm, people do not grasp the overwhelming love of a holy God, but we can understand God’s love by getting to know Him through our Lord. No one can grasp the love of God of the universe without knowing the Lord. God loves us and He wants us to love our neighbors as He has loved us. He wants us to pass on the love that He has given us to others that we meet, no matter who they are. I know that this is a very hard thing to do for we all want to love only those who we feel deserve our love. This is totally wrong. We should pass on our love to anyone we meet, not matter who they are. It is like forgiveness. We must forgive others no matter what they have done to us. YES! It’s not an easy thing to do and that is why many of us do not do it. That is totally wrong; this is not what God wants us to do. He created us so that we can pass on the love that HE gives to us to all that we meet. I know it’s a hard thing to do but we all must try harder to do this, this is God’s will for us.

As time goes by, many times we cannot cope with life and all of its stresses. Talk to your post chaplain or your district chaplain. If any of these do not work for you, call me, but do not try to handle it by yourself. It will eat you up inside. I know for I have done this many times and have paid the price for it. God Bless you all and take care of yourself and your family. PLEASE keep safe and follow the rules, I know it’s very hard thing to do, but if we all do our part than maybe this virus will go away faster.

My last three words to all of you are: GO TO CHURCH!!!!!!
A Message From Department Adjutant Smith

“17 INCHES”

By: Pat Smith, Department Adjutant

Editor’s note: As a departure from my monthly article updating you on the activities of the organization, I offer you this motivational article that was sent to me by email from an unknown author. I cannot vouch for the authenticity of the story, but the end message is one we need at this crazy time in our history. As The American Legion we need to stay true to our values as envisioned by our founders. I hope your find this as inspirational and timely as I found it. Pat

Twenty years ago, in Nashville, Tennessee, during the first week of January 1996, more than 4,000 baseball coaches descended upon the Opryland Hotel for the 52nd annual ABCA’s convention.

While I waited in line to register with the hotel staff, I heard other more veteran coaches rumbling about the lineup of speakers scheduled to present during the weekend. One name kept resurfacing, always with the same sentiment — “John Scolinos is here? Oh, man, worth every penny of my airfare.”

Who is John Scolinos, I wondered? No matter, I was just happy to be there.

In 1996, Coach Scolinos was 78 years old and five years retired from a college coaching career that began in 1948. He shuffled to the stage to an impressive standing ovation, wearing dark polyester pants, a light blue shirt, and a string around his neck from which home plate hung — a full-sized, stark-white home plate.

Seriously, I wondered, who is this guy?

After speaking for twenty-five minutes, not once mentioning the prop hanging around his neck, Coach Scolinos appeared to notice the snickering among some of the coaches. Even those who knew Coach Scolinos had to wonder exactly where he was going with this, or if he had simply forgotten about home plate since he’d gotten on stage. Then, finally …

“You’re probably all wondering why I’m wearing home plate around my neck,” he said, his voice growing irascible. I laughed along with the others, acknowledging the possibility. “I may be old, but I’m not crazy. The reason I stand before you today is to share with you baseball people what I’ve learned in my life, what I’ve learned about home plate in my 78 years.”

Several hands went up when Scolinos asked how many Little League coaches were in the room. “Do you know how wide home plate is in Little League?”

After a pause, someone offered, “Seventeen inches?” more of a question than answer.


“You’re right!” Scolinos barked. “And you college coaches, how wide is home plate in college?” “Seventeen inches!” we said, in unison.

“Any Minor League coaches here? How wide is home plate in pro ball? - “Seventeen inches!” “RIGHT! And in the Major Leagues, how wide home plate is in the Major Leagues?

“Seventeen inches!”

“SEV-EN-TEEN INCHES!” he confirmed, his voice bellowing off the walls. “And what do they do with a Big League pitcher who can’t throw the ball over seventeen inches?” Pause. “They send him to Pocatello!” he hollered, drawing raucous laughter. “What they don’t do is this: they don’t say, ‘Ah, that’s okay, Jimmy. If you can’t hit a seventeen-inch target? We’ll make it eight inches or nineteen inches. We’ll make it twenty inches so you have a better chance of hitting it. If you can’t hit that, let us know so we can make it wider still, say twenty-five inches.”

Pause. “Coaches… what do we do when your best player shows up late to practice? or when our team rules forbid facial hair and a guy shows up unshaven? What if he gets caught drinking? Do we hold him accountable? Or do we change the rules to fit him? Do we widen home plate? “

The chuckles gradually faded as four thousand coaches grew quiet, the fog lifting as the old coach’s message began to unfold. He turned the plate toward himself and, using a Sharpie, began to draw something. When he turned it toward the crowd, point up, a house was revealed, complete with a freshly drawn door and two windows. “This is the problem in our homes today. With our marriages, with the way we parent our kids. With our discipline.

We don’t teach accountability to our kids, and there is no consequence for failing to meet standards. We just widen the plate!”

Pause. Then, to the point at the top of the house he added a small American flag. “This is the problem in our schools today. The quality of our education is going downhill fast and teachers have been stripped of the tools they need to be successful, and to educate and discipline our young people. We are allowing others to widen home plate! Where is that getting us?”

Silence! He replaced the flag with a Cross. “And this is the problem in the Church, where powerful people in positions of authority have taken advantage of young children, only to have such an atrocity swept under the rug for years. Our church leaders are widening home plate for themselves! And we allow it.”

And this my friends is what our country has become and what is wrong with it today, and now go out there and fix it!

“Don’t widen the plate.”
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Greetings Comrades.

I hope and pray that you and your loved ones are well and healthy in these uncertain times. How has 2020 been for you so far?

Let us Refocus. As we begin the 2020-2021 year, let's continue to do what we are best at, taking care of our Veterans, our families, and the communities that we live in. Who knows what the result of this Pandemic will be, one thing is for sure The Detachment of Colorado is here to assist, and we are moving forward!

This past year has been challenging to say the least. Thank you for your efforts continuing to “make a difference”. We are faced with some difficult tasks as we continue down this road. Our membership really suffered. I challenge you to “get back to the basics”, reach out to those Squadrons that need assistance in this area. We are a team let us get back on track. We did have 16 Squadrons achieve over 100% to their goal and 17 over 100% renewals. Way to go!!

Communication is vital, how are your buddy checks going? Are you still reaching out to Veterans and fellow Sons that need some extra help? I know you are, keep it up, your efforts are paying off! It has been my honor and privilege to have served as your Commander this past year, I look forward to being your Detachment Commander again this upcoming year. My theme for this upcoming year will be... “Carry on For God and Country”.

More information on my mission statement coming soon. Please join me in the success of the new year. The Detachment has several officer positions that need to be filled. Please contact me or Adjutant Scott Garrett if interested or have questions. My goal is that each position is filled, this is important to our success.

I plan on participating in the upcoming district fall conferences as circumstances allow. I look forward to seeing you all. Please plan on attending these important meetings, I will have some exciting information to share with you! Please reach out to me and let me know what you are doing in your communities, I would love to attend if possible.

I plan on continuing my monthly conference calls, remember these calls are very informal and I have an open forum, please join us with your thoughts, suggestions, and ideas. Visit our website for up to date information, salcolorado.org.

God Bless, stay well and healthy.

WWII Air Force Veterans turns 100

In May, Air Force veteran, Isidor Sodos, celebrated his 100 birthday, but was unable to have his birthday party, so we had a drive by parade for him.

We had 53 vehicles participate.
Also delivered several hundred Birthday cards to him.

For God and Country
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 25, 2020

Contact: Kristy Bohnet
Sr. Marketing Manager
1155 Eugenia Pl.
Carpinteria, CA 93013
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AGIA is the parent company for LIT, which is our Legion Insurance Trust

AGIA Affinity takes home Best of PIMA at 2020 PIMA Conference

The organization received the top honor for outstanding achievement in marketing with their exemplary customer retention model

Santa Barbara, California – AGIA Affinity won the Best of PIMA marketing award for their customer conservation and retention overhaul at the 2020 PIMA Insights conference. The Best of PIMA award is a best-in-show prize of all gold award winners from their respective categories. After receiving the gold award in the category of Conservation and Retention, the Best of PIMA prize was awarded to AGIA Affinity for their efforts of conserving existing customers through a multi-faceted, Omni-channel retention campaign.

AGIA, which serves as the insurance and member benefits marketing and administration partner to over 100 affinity organizations, clenched the top prize by demonstrating how improved auto renewal penetration, focused on listening to and collecting customer feedback, and continuously improving the customer communications ultimately led to a better customer experience and overall better retention rates. Member communications reinforced the organization’s brand promise with specifically tailored messages throughout all customer touchpoints, speaking to what customers valued most, while reinforcing the overall value of the product.

In addition to winning Best of PIMA, AGIA also received gold awards in the categories of Lead Generation and Cross Sells and Upgrade Marketing, as well as a silver award in Solicitation for Guaranteed Issue.

“I’m so pleased with our wins at this year’s PIMA Marketing Methods competition,” says J. Christopher Burke, President and CEO of AGIA Affinity. “It’s a testament to the skills of our marketing teams here at AGIA and likewise a real win for our clients as we help them grow their member benefits programs.”

For more than 60 years, AGIA Affinity has served as the insurance and member benefits marketing and administration partner to some of the largest and most iconic associations and organizations in the country. Working closely with discipline, science, and creativity, we craft affinity benefit programs that help members protect what they value most. For more information, please visit www.agia.com.

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Legionnaire on Vanessa Guillén - ‘Enough is enough’

The murder of Army Spc. Vanessa Guillén, and the alleged events leading up to it, sparked a national movement of sexual trauma survivors to share their stories publicly, including via social media platforms using the hashtag #IAmVanessaGuillén.

U.S. Army veteran and Legionnaire Jay Gonzales didn’t use social media to share her story. But she nevertheless has made it public. And it’s a story of being fed up with what she says is a problem that has gone on for decades.

Gonzales – vice commander of American Legion Post 213 in Buda, Texas, and the post’s American Legion Riders director – recently joined other Texas American Legion Riders and hundreds of others in an #IAmVanessaGuillén convoy in San Antonio that drew what some estimate to be more than 1,000 vehicles.

There she was interviewed by Spectrum News about why she chose to ride for Guillén and then amplified her thoughts while speaking with The American Legion. Guillén served in the U.S. Army in the late 1970s, where she was sexually assaulted.

Taking part in the ride was an easy decision for Gonzales.

“I think enough is enough, and something needs to be done,” Gonzales said. “Women have gone through this for so many years. The fact that everybody was saying (Guillén) was AWOL and what have you, and then come to find out she was murdered … for people like myself with a lot of terrible memories, it was just the right thing to do to be there to support her family and what they’re going through.”

Guillén went missing April 22 from Fort Hood; her remains were found around 20 miles from Fort Hood and identified over the July 4 weekend. Army Spc. Aaron Robinson allegedly told Cecily Aguilar — a civilian — that he killed Guillén “by striking her in the head with a hammer” while on base April 22, then smuggled her body to a remote site in Bell County, according to a July 2 criminal complaint filed by the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Western District of Texas. Aguilar allegedly helped Robinson mutilate and dispose of Guillén’s body, according to the complaint. Robinson took his own life on June 30 during an attempt by police to apprehend him.

An attorney representing Guillén’s family alleged that Robinson sexually harassed Guillén before he murdered her. Fort Hood and Army Criminal Investigation Command officials maintain that there is no credible evidence that Guillén was the victim of sexual harassment. Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy announced on July 10 that he has ordered an independent review of command climate and culture at Fort Hood.

The assault on Gonzales left her pregnant, and her Catholic faith convinced her to keep the child. “I chose to keep that child because I wasn’t going to take a life,” she said. “For me it was an everyday reminder, but I don’t look at it that way anymore. Once I got past it … I love my child. It’s a gift from God to me.”

Being around other veterans has helped Gonzales continue to heal while giving her a chance to continue to serve. She has filled a large role in Post 213’s efforts during the coronavirus pandemic. As a part of the Buda Veterans Alliance, Post 213 American Legion Family members have helped produce more than 11,000 facemasks for people in 22 states, 58,000 surgical mask ear relief straps for staff at more than 50 medical facilities, and delivered $800 in food vouchers to 16 families.

“For me, it’s finished what I started years ago: serving my country,” Gonzales said. “Being around other veterans and doing what we know is in our heart to do. That’s why I joined The American Legion. It gave me a chance to be around other veterans and do for other veterans.”

Across the nation, American Legion Post 18 in Weehawken, N.J., staged a candlelight vigil to honor Guillén. A victim of both sexual harassment and sexual assault while in the military, Melgar C’De Baca said the Guillén case may actually lead to changes, but those changes have come with a steep price. “I feel horrible that a human being actually has to die for us to make changes,” she said. “At least now … the community, the military are saying it’s not OK. I want to see the military make changes when people make the (sexual harassment and assault) claims. I think that’s still a long road ahead.”

Legionnaire Jay Gonzales (third from right) was among a group of American Legion Riders who took part in a convoy to honor Vanessa Guillén.
As the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic spreads across the globe, one organization currently in talks with VA as a potential partner is providing helpful information and resources to Veterans and the public. The American Lung Association (ALA) is working to save lives. Specifically, it is improving lung health and preventing lung disease through education, advocacy and research.

The virus that causes COVID-19 affects the respiratory system. ALA’s expertise in this area enables the organization to share science-based information to all Americans during this public health crisis.

According to ongoing VA research on respiratory health, Veterans may suffer from respiratory diseases due to exposure to respiratory hazards in combat. Those diseases include lung cancer, asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. They place Veterans at greater risk for additional harm from COVID-19.

ALA is working to do several things in light of the pandemic. All are designed to educate the public, including Veterans, on ways to stay safe. ALA also supports relief efforts and provide a forum for individuals to ask questions of experts directly.

The organization is accomplishing these goals by:

- Hosting 30-minute webinar updates every Monday at 1 p.m. CT, which will provide new information on COVID-19 and address questions from individuals living with chronic lung diseases.
- Creating its COVID-19 Action Initiative, a $25 million investment that will work with public and private entities to increase research collaboration and develop new vaccines, detection tests, and treatment therapies.
- Promoting its Lung HelpLine (1-800-LUNGUSA) and online submission form for people to ask questions about lung diseases and COVID-19, as well as smoking cessation.
- Sharing up-to-date information on topics such as COVID-19 signs and symptoms, stopping the spread, and addressing myths about lung illnesses on its blog, “Each Breath.”

**Working to minimize the risk to all**

ALA’s National President and CEO is Harold P. Wimmer. Wimmer says, “We are working to provide information and support to minimize the risk to all. We’re especially concerned about those with a lung disease like asthma, COPD, or lung cancer. After all, those individuals are at higher risk for more severe symptoms or complications from COVID-19.”

Dr. Tracy L. Weistreich is the acting director of the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Office of Community Engagement (OCE). OCE supports partnerships throughout VA and VHA. Weistreich spoke to the importance of ALA’s work right now. “Many Veterans already suffer from respiratory illness and would find ALA’s resources beneficial even outside the context of a global pandemic. During COVID-19, though, these resources are especially valuable. As is the case with partnerships between VA and other nonprofit organizations, ALA can contribute to helping Veterans by adding to the services VA is already providing.”

For more information on ALA’s work, visit www.lung.org.

Randolph C. Moler is a licensed clinical social worker with the Office of Community Engagement.
Blind Rehabilitation Services provides for Veterans

Providing access to care in alternative formats

Blind Rehabilitation Services (BRS) continues to provide access to care in alternative formats. That includes VA Video Connect and third-party alternatives, such as FaceTime, Skype and Facebook Messenger video chat.

The collective goal is ensuring Veterans are safe and have continued access to BRS in alternative formats (virtual treatment modalities, telephone). Aimed at limiting COVID-19 exposure risk, VA implemented various safeguards to protect Veterans and employees.

As a precautionary measure, putting safety first, Blind Rehabilitation Center Service chiefs work with their teams to discharge patients at home.

Wellness Check for safety

The BRS Wellness Check Initiative addresses Veterans’ immediate safety concerns.

The staff addresses Veterans’ top emergency needs such as access to food and medication and self-care items, as well as travel issues.

BRS staff continues to provide blind rehabilitation training at home and replacement prosthetics. After addressing critical and basic needs, the BRS staff identifies VA Video Connect (VVC) and technology needs. The staff also implements innovative care practices that include Healthy at Home sessions for Veterans.

These checks help Veterans reconnect and reinforces healthy habits, recreation, and stress management.

BY THE NUMBERS:

- **5,610** Veterans served by Blind Rehabilitation Centers (BRC) and Visual Impairment Service Outpatient Rehabilitation (VISOR)
- **4,741** completed wellness calls (85%)
- **162** wellness calls identifying emergent needs
- **870** wellness calls resulting in BRS training needs
- **420** wellness calls resulting in identification of VA Video Connect (VVC) training needs

Niki Sandlan is a certified low vision therapist and the director of Blind Rehabilitation Services.

"Truth is confirmed by inspection and delay; falsehood by haste and uncertainty."

TACITUS

Taken from Epoch Times Morning Brief
Post Commander of the Year

Department Commander Dean Noechel announced that the 2019-2020 Post Commander of the Year Award will go to Bill Hartless of Canon City Post 13. Commander Hartless will receive a Plaque with the following inscription. Congratulations Commander Hartless!!

Commander Bill Hartless
Canon City Post 13

In recognition of your outstanding leadership as Post Commander of Wray McKinstry Post 13, Canon City, Colorado. Your dedication to the aims and purposes of The American Legion, your community and our Veterans is unwavering. Commander Hartless is a very active member of his Post and the community, ensuring that everyone knows about The American Legion and what we do for Veterans Assistance, Americanism, Children & Youth and Strong National Defense. Commander Hartless led the charge of refurbishing the Post home inside and out, participated in and executed the Post’s 100th Centennial Celebration and participated in numerous Honor Flights for our WWII and Korean War Hero’s. Commander Hartless also spearheaded the adoption of the Abbey cemetery to ensure that no Veteran is ever forgotten. Commander Bill Hartless is leading the way in Re-Igniting Patriotism.

Thank You for “Re-Igniting Patriotism” in Canon City, Colorado

Presented by:
The American Legion Department of Colorado
This 20th Day of June 2020
Dean Noechel
Department Commander

Legion history contests postponed until May 2021

One traditional event during The American Legion’s Fall Meetings in Indianapolis in October is the annual meeting of the National Association of Department Historians of The American Legion (NADHAL), before which the gathering of past and present national and department historians reviews entries in the post and department history-book contests.

With the 2020 Fall Meetings schedule revised due to the COVID-19 pandemic, American Legion National Historian James “Jim” Mariner has announced that the 2019-2020 national history contests will now be judged during the May 2021 Spring Meetings. The guidelines will be those of the 2019 Officer’s Guide. Since many department contests are held during mid-winter conferences or conventions, the postponement will allow time for the contests to take place. The new historian workshop also set for the Fall Meetings has been canceled.

NADHAL intends to meet virtually sometime this fall; plans are in development. The pandemic has bumped up in priority an issue that was already under discussion: the possibility of electronic entries and judging. But this contest will remain in the traditional format.
From a Legacy Run participant to Legacy Scholarship recipient

The American Legion

Last August, Deanna Woodburn rode on the back of her father’s motorcycle for over a week. The trip was one she had been waiting for – a promise made by her father that would happen when she turned 18.

Deanna and her father, American Legion Department of Illinois Membership Director Chad Woodburn, rode together in the 2019 American Legion Legacy Run.

“It was so much fun,” said Deanna of Normal, Ill. “I always wanted to go on the ride because I thought about my dad and grandpa going on the ride.”

Deanna’s grandfather is the late Terry Woodburn, who was the longtime Department of Illinois adjutant and former chairman of the National American Legion Riders Advisory Committee. He passed away in June 2015. “There were points along the ride where I was like, ‘I wish he was here so the three of us could ride together,’” Deanna said. “But on the same hand, I knew he was.”

It was brought to the attention of Deanna and Chad during the Legacy Run that she was a third generation Woodburn to be on the ride. “I don’t think either of us had ever thought of it that way,” Chad said. “It was a pretty neat and emotional moment in time. I knew it was going to be a special week with her riding with me.”

Deanna and her father rode from Department of Illinois headquarters in Bloomington to Post 347 in Lady Lake, Fla., where the Legacy Run departed from on Aug. 18, traveling through six states before arriving in Indianapolis for the 101st national convention. Chad was the end flight leader, which meant he and Deanna rode in the back of the more than 240 motorcycles who participated in last year’s Run.

“From the front my grandpa always said you look back in your rearview mirror and you see nothing but headlights. But from the back it’s a whole different thing because you see tailights and you see the stream of bikes ahead of you and it’s the most amazing thing in the world,” Deanna said. “I swear I took about a million pictures.”

The annual Legacy Run raises money for The American Legion Legacy Scholarship Fund, which provides scholarships for children whose parents lost their lives while honorably serving on active duty on or after 9/11, as well as for children of post-9/11 veterans with a combined 50 percent or higher VA disability rating. During the 2019 Run, the Riders brought in more than $1 million in donations.

“I physically helped raise that money,” Deanna said. “With the Legacy Run you get that … to see where the money is coming from firsthand. You’re in the moment, you’re in the experience, and you feel the atmosphere.”

To her surprise, Deanna became a recipient of the scholarship she rode thousands of miles in support of and helped fundraise for.

Deanna received a voicemail on her cell phone from National Headquarters saying she was a 2020 American Legion Legacy Scholarship recipient. She dropped her cell phone in shock. “I was so happy. I never thought I would actually get it,” said Deanna, who is starting her sophomore year at Johnson & Wales University in Providence, R.I. “I started to cry so hard because, I still get emotional thinking about it, I not only got a big hug from my mom but I felt this huge hug and it wasn’t someone physically there … it was someone spiritually there. Just gave me this huge hug and it was my grandpa. I could hear him talking to me and he said, ‘I am so proud of you.’ It’s like he’s still trying to take care of us.”

Deanna then called her father at work, the one who made her eligible for the scholarship.

“She is thankful for being a recipient of the scholarship, Deanna came from a long line of military service, and “was born into the Legion Family.” Terry signed her up for Auxiliary Unit 635 in Normal. “Helping veterans is my whole life. And I love it.”

She is thankful for being a recipient of the Legacy Scholarship, and of her father’s sacrifices.

“I love him because of his service. But I also love him because he’s my dad,” Deanna said. “Because of my dad’s service I can help others. Because of my dad’s service I can help other families get through whatever hard time it is. I have the ability because of my dad’s service to do these things that I love. Because I’ve been through it. We serve too.”
Legionnaire - Veterans can be catalyst in racial reform

The American Legion

At a time when racial unrest is likely at its highest level since the civil rights movement, Legionnaire India Williams Green believes that with the right training and focus, veteran service organizations can be a catalyst in changing race relations in the United States.

Williams Green, a 51-year-old U.S. Navy veteran and the outgoing adjutant of Dennis T. Williams Post 310 in San Diego, said racism was an ongoing issue during her nearly 18 years in the military. And though she’s seen examples of it in the veteran community, she feels those who once served the nation can now serve as examples of how to improve the racial climate of that same nation – with focused efforts toward understanding diversity and inclusion.

“What I believe that needs to happen is training. I call it melting pot training,” she said. “It may sound a little odd, but the U.S. is referred to as the melting pot. I believe that it’s a must that type of training is implemented, maybe three times a year, just like we did in the military – you train, you train, you train until it’s in your head. I believe that within the veteran community, that training … even if it’s monthly … every post needs to do this training, sign off on it and then submit it. That’s a must.

“But I do believe it can happen. Veteran organizations can be the one to make that happen effectively and aggressively because there are so many veterans that want to do the good cause.”

But while she believes diversity training on a widespread level is critical, Williams Green also wants to implement change on an individual level. She said she’s been involved in conversations that have abruptly taken a racist tone. “While I know it’s not intended for me, when I think about it – ‘hey, when I’m black and you’re talking about it, that includes me. If I was Asian and you were talking about it, then that would include me,’” she said.

Williams Green said she’s also warned friends against posting what can be considered racist thoughts or images on social media while identifying as a member of The American Legion. “I’m a part of an organization,” she said. “Even Facebook, yes, it’s my page. I can say what I want. I had Facebook before I joined the Legion. I’ve still got to wear this, though. If I say I’m a veteran and I’m part of this organization, I represent an entity.”

That entity and other veteran service organizations, WilliamsGreen said, ask a higher standard of its members. “Our bar is supposed to be set higher, because we did serve,” he said. “We know what active duty is like. We know what being a veteran is like. I learned that The American Legion is bigger than any post level. That is why I fell in love with The American Legion.”

Williams Green also has taken notice of the movement surrounding the murder of Army Spc. Vanessa Guillén, and the alleged events leading up to it. She herself is a victim of sexual assault and a witness and victim to sexual harassment while serving in the Navy.

But when it came to being harassed in the Navy, Williams Green said she may have handled things a bit differently than other women. She joined the military in 1995 to escape the gang life she’d become involved with living in South Central Los Angeles. “I grew up in the hood,” she said. “I’m from the streets.”

Coming from that background, WilliamsGreen said she wasn’t going to be intimidated by sexual harassment. “I’ve always had a strong backbone, and I’m very blunt. I voiced out these things,” she said. “There were repercussions at times. And then I just got to a point where I told myself one or two things is going to happen: Either I’m going to be leaving this particular command, or they’re going to be leaving.

“Or I would do something to put me in a situation, like I volunteered for base security, which was working gate guard to give me some month away from that particular situation. So I became very crafty, too, because I wanted to be in the military.”

Williams Green said she found other ways to deal with harassment. “I learned that if I make rank, I have a better stand for myself,” she said. “I was able to start engaging and speaking up to where people will listen. And I also realized that if I made friends with higher-ranking men that didn’t tolerate (harassment) and bring them on my side of the playing field, when someone did bother, I made a phone call to them and they would handle it.”

The sexual assault remains with Williams Green to this day. “I have just learned to live with knowing the assault has happened,” she said. “I don’t think I’m ever going to heal from it because it still haunts me.”

While she sees the Guillén movement raising awareness about how women are sometimes treated in the military, she doesn’t see an immediate change coming because of the recent publicity the situation has received.
“I believe that it is institutional, and I don’t think there’s going to be change,” Williams Green said. “(The military) is its own secret society. Somebody always knows somebody. Privacy is not upheld to the point where it should be, so somebody tells this person or their friend, and the next thing you know it’s out, it’s around. That’s why a lot of women don’t say anything at all. No. 1, they’re embarrassed that it gets out, and No. 2, that nothing’s going to happen.”

But Williams Green believes change can happen if “the military can come up with a way that when (sexual assault) is reported, that No. 1, it’s taken seriously. Because all reports ought to be taken seriously until proven otherwise. And No. 2, there has to be some sort of action, meaning investigation.

“I had females coming to me because they realized I was going to say something. I turned in reports … and I stood by that female. I saw stuff fall at the wayside. I had to go around, just do other things and put my career on the line to get something for this female. Which is sad.”

At the end of the day, Williams Green said all Americans – regardless of sex, race, religion or any other differences – have one important similarity. “If you cut each and every one of us, we all are going to bleed the same color,” she said. “So how is discrimination so prevalent like that? It’s all red blood, no matter what.”

Operation Mail Call connects isolated Veterans with the world

VA nurse’s Navy service inspired letter-writing campaign

By: Andre Bowser,

Veterans in the community living center (CLC) at VA Central Western Massachusetts Healthcare System, like CLC residents throughout the VA health care system, are isolated due to COVID-19 safety precautions and unable to receive visitors.

But thanks to the hundreds of letters they have received through Operation Mail Call, they know they haven’t been forgotten.

Call to action

Operation Mail Call began when Navy Veteran Tim Moran posted a call to action on Facebook. Moran is a VA Central Western Massachusetts registered nurse.

“I asked people to write to our Veterans in the CLC on the main campus since they can’t leave or receive visitors for their own safety,” says Moran. “We received between 115 to 120 pieces of mail in response to that first Facebook post. Every Veteran received at least three or four letters during the first mail all.”

Inspired by Navy service

Moran says Operation Mail Call was inspired by his time as a sailor in the Navy. “I worked on a fast frigate homeported in San Diego. My high school sweetheart used to write me letters scented with perfume. I used to read those letters over and over again.”

As Moran prepared to deploy to a VA CLC in Bedford, Massachusetts, to help care for coronavirus patients, he handed the project over to VA Recreation Therapist Meaghan Breed.

“We’re happy to spread the love to other Veterans who live on our main campus. And to those who are unable to receive visitors at this time as well,” Breed says.

Andre Bowser is a public affairs officer for VA Central Western Massachusetts.
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ID RESOLVE
A New Program to Help Legionnaires Fight Back Against Identity Theft

Identity theft is the fastest growing crime in America and has affected more than 16.7 million victims, with veterans being especially vulnerable targets. Data breaches are becoming more frequent and, when an identity thief strikes, most victims are left to clean up the mess themselves, unsure of where to turn to first. We’ve heard Legionnaires’ concerns around the growing threats of identity theft and are proud to provide a new service to address this concern.

ID Resolve focuses solely on the aftermath of identity theft and resolving the issue. With call centers located in the U.S., Legionnaires can activate an important set of services to fix the situation and restore their name. ID Resolve’s Identity Resolution Specialists are certified in identifying and repairing any type of identity theft such as medical fraud, Social Security identity theft, and financial theft.

ID Resolve is available to Legionnaires at a special member only rate and provides resolution services for a full year. Plus, Legionnaires can take up to 30 days to review ID Resolve and decide if it’s right for them; if not, a full refund is available as long as the services have not been used.

There are two annual memberships available:

Member: $79/year
Couple: $99/year

To learn more or enroll in ID Resolve, visit www.thelit.com/IDResolve

ID Theft by the numbers

Claims a new victim every 2 seconds
16+ million victims targeted in the U.S.
$16 billion in losses
Veterans are 50% more likely to be the victim of identity theft
There were 1,579 data breaches last year
40+ hours spent resolving an identity theft case
VA Prescription Refills and COVID-19

Taking your prescriptions, and making sure you have enough, is an important step to staying healthy during the spread of COVID-19. You can ensure that your VA-issued prescriptions are refilled, shipped, and delivered directly to you on time — all without leaving the house.

Here’s how to refill your VA prescriptions remotely.

**Online with My HealtheVet**
Through My HealtheVet, VA’s online patient portal, you can request refills of your refillable VA prescriptions, track VA prescription deliveries, and view VA prescription history online. Get started at [myhealth.va.gov](http://myhealth.va.gov).

**Using the Rx Refill App**
You can request refills of your refillable VA prescriptions, track VA prescription deliveries, and view VA prescription history from the convenience of your mobile device with the Rx Refill app. Learn more at [mobile.va.gov/app/rx-refill](http://mobile.va.gov/app/rx-refill).

**Via Phone Call**
Most VA pharmacies have automated phone lines for prescription refills, accessible through a phone number on your VA prescription bottle’s label. When you call, you will need the prescription number from the label and your Social Security number. For many prescriptions that are no longer refillable, you can use the automated system to request more of that medication. However, for some prescriptions, your VA care team will need to contact you first.

**Through the Mail**
A refill request form comes with every VA prescription filled. To refill your prescription by mail, complete the request form and mail it to your VA pharmacy at the address listed on the paperwork that arrived with your prescription.

**Additional Options**
Look up your local VA facility online to see if it has other options for refilling your prescription, such as drive-through pharmacy services. As a last resort, you may visit your VA pharmacy in person to request a refill. However, you may be subject to screening prior to entering the facility, your wait time may be increased, and visiting in person can unnecessarily put you and others at risk of infection.

If you forget to refill your prescription on time, or if your prescription is no longer refillable, please contact your local VA pharmacy through the phone number on the prescription’s label or use My HealtheVet’s Secure Messaging to contact your VA care team.

Remember to verify that your mailing address on file with VA is accurate. If you need to make a change, please visit [va.gov/change-address](http://va.gov/change-address).

Protect yourself from COVID-19 with the latest information and guidelines.

[cdc.gov/coronavirus](http://cdc.gov/coronavirus) | [va.gov/coronavirus](http://va.gov/coronavirus)

VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
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mobile.va.gov/app/rx-refill
Senate passes bill to cover more Agent Orange conditions

The American Legion

On July 22, the U.S. Senate voted 94-6 to pass a measure to be included in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) to expand the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) list of conditions presumptive of Agent Orange exposure.

The addition to the NDAA, introduced by Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee Ranking Member Jon Tester, adds bladder cancer, hypothyroidism and Parkinson's to the 14 illnesses already covered by VA for their links to the toxic herbicide. While not yet signed into law, the passage of this bill brings many veterans who’ve been impacted from exposure to the chemical defoliant a step closer to having their conditions covered by VA.

“This is a historic win for thousands of Vietnam veterans who have been suffering from illnesses after being exposed to Agent Orange, but who have been unjustly denied benefits for decades,” said Tester. “With the inclusion of my amendment in this must-pass defense bill, we are now one step closer to providing our Vietnam War heroes with the treatment and benefits they deserve from VA.”

Protecting Veterans returning for in-person care

Physical distancing and face coverings key safety measures

By: Rick Fox

More than 100 VA health facilities across the U.S. have started to offer in-person care again for many non-urgent needs and appointments. At the same time, COVID-19 cases continue to rise in many parts of the country.

As more Veterans begin to return for in-person care, safety is our top priority. That’s why we continue to monitor and adjust our in-person services, as needed, for each facility. It’s also why it’s more important than ever for everyone to follow the safety measures we’ve put in place. These include practicing physical distancing and wearing face coverings.

The American Legion previously joined with 16 other veteran service organizations in issuing a joint letter to VA Secretary Robert Wilkie that urged VA to add these three additional conditions — as well as hypertension — to those covered by VA for exposure to Agent Orange.

“For too long, our Vietnam veterans have had to fight for and have been denied the critical health care they need to treat medical conditions resulting from exposure to Agent Orange,” American Legion National Commander James W. “Bill” Oxford said. “We have made significant strides in ensuring that these veterans are given the care they deserve for their service and sacrifice to our nation. However, there is still more work to be done and these veterans continue to suffer the detrimental effects of their exposure each day. This amendment would provide a presumption of service-connection for Bladder Cancer, Hypothyroidism, and Parkinsonism for veterans exposed to certain herbicide agents while serving in Vietnam.

"The American Legion is proud to support this amendment and believes the evidence overwhelmingly supports adding these diseases to the presumptive list.”

Photo courtesy of The American Legion

Photo courtesy of the VA.
can travel through the air and into the mouths, noses or lungs of people nearby. Even people who are infected but show no symptoms of COVID-19 can likely still spread the virus.

Because of this, physical distancing and cloth face coverings are two of the best ways we can protect ourselves and others.

**Physical distancing**

We’ve made changes to our spaces and processes to help Veterans, caregivers and employees stay at least six feet (about two arms’ lengths) apart in our facilities, when possible. The farther apart you are from someone who’s infected, the less likely you are to have contact with their droplets that can carry the virus.

Changes include using remote check-in options by text or phone and creating more space in waiting rooms.

**Face coverings**

We now require everyone who enters a VA facility to wear a cloth face covering. This helps to keep the virus from spreading when a person coughs, sneezes or talks.

We encourage you to follow these tips for wearing a face covering:

- Make sure your face covering fits snugly over your mouth and nose. You should be able to breathe without restriction.
- When you take your face covering off, don’t touch your eyes, nose or mouth. And don’t touch the outside of the face covering.
- As soon as you remove your face covering, wash your hands or use hand sanitizer.
- Wash or replace your face covering each day.

Focusing on your safety and comfort while providing the highest quality care

VA employees across the country are wearing their face coverings and other protective attire to help protect Veterans, caregivers and coworkers. And they’re coming up with creative ways to help Veterans feel comfortable in this new reality.

For example, employees at the North Las Vegas VA Medical Center found it harder to make a connection with some Veterans with their faces covered. To help, the team decided to get photo badges. This gives Veterans a face to put with the name of the caregiver behind the face covering.

“It’s hard to see a smile behind the mask and shield, but at least this way they can identify with us on a more personal level,” explained Courtney Hala. Hala is a supervisory physical therapist at the medical center.

We stand firm in our belief that all Veterans have the right to expect safe care when they come to VA. To learn more about our efforts to provide safe care, go to our VA.gov coronavirus FAQs.

To learn more about how to protect yourself and others, go to the CDC website.

*Marine Corps Veteran Rick Fox is the field content lead for VA’s COVID-19 Joint Communications Task Force.*

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**The American Legion mourns loss of ‘brave warrior’ John Lewis**

American Legion National Commander James W. “Bill” Oxford issued the following statement today concerning the death of U.S. Rep. John Lewis:

“Rep. John Lewis exemplified the best of citizen service. He was an icon for civil rights. If Purple Hearts were awarded for wounds inflicted by fighting for equality, John Lewis would surely have one. Even the cruel blows that he suffered on the Edmund Pettus Bridge could not stop him. Congress lost a distinguished statesman. The American Legion mourns the loss of a brave warrior.”
Pony Express Cancelled

By: Steven "Lunch Box" Butner, Colorado State Committee Chairman, American Legion Riders

Fellow Legion Members

It is with great sadness that I am announcing that this year's Pony Express has been cancelled. After talking with Department about it, we feel that this is the best course of action. The reasons for this action are:

1. COVID-19. All Posts are closed and currently do not have any income, but they still have to pay their bills. It is still up in the air when they can re-open and in what capacity. Asking for the Le- gions to donate money during this time would not be a great idea. We feel that during this time, the American Legion family should focus their support to local veterans and the community during this time of need.

2. All the events that were planned to promote the "Project 101" idea were cancelled so we are limited to the ways of promoting the Pony Express and making it hard to get the word out.

To the organizations who have already donated money this year will be given the option of leaving the donation and it will be included in next year's Run or having their donation returned to them. Any organizations who would like their donation returned to them please send me an email and I will ensure the money is returned.

Please take the time to pass this email along to your prospective Presidents and Commanders.

Thank you,

Women veterans advocates, lawmakers call for change in wake of Fort Hood murder

By: Mackenzie Wolf

In the wake of Army Spec. Vanessa Guillén’s murder, women veterans advocates mobilized in Washington, D.C., to call for systemic change in how sexual assault and harassment are handled in the U.S. military.

Guillén allegedly had told her family she was being sexually har-rassed, but she was afraid to report it to her chain of command. She was murdered on April 22 in the armory where she worked on Fort Hood. The 20-year-old soldier was missing for over two months before her body was discovered, dismembered and covered in cement, in a shallow grave.

“For those who want to make the military a career, reporting is a career-ending act,” U.S. Rep. Jackie Speier said during the July 21 Justicia for Vanessa, DC Day of Action. “For years we have thrown millions of dollars at the problem. The results haven’t changed. They’re only getting worse.”

U.S. Rep. Sylvia Garcia also spoke during the event and said that for Guillén “The Army was her dream. That dream was shattered because the Army failed to keep her safe. They failed to meet the very basic bargain between the armed services and our young men and women who enlist.“We have to make sure this never happens again.”

In the weeks following her disappearance and murder, the #IAm-VanessaGuillén movement exploded online, with hundreds of women veterans and servicemembers beginning to share their own stories of military sexual trauma (MST) for the first time.

Women veterans advocates and allies gathered for the event on Capitol Hill and across from the White House to share their stories of MST. One of those was MST survivor and U.S. Navy veteran Violet Williams, a member of American Legion Post 96 in Bruns-wick, Md.

“The military reporting process is broken,” Williams said. “It leaves many survivors without justice.”

But, said Williams, “If things don’t change, women will never be safe in our military. Time and time again, women survivors are ignored by their commands. It is time for that to change.”

The reporting process for sexual harassment and sexual assault should no longer rest within a servicemember’s chain of com- mand, Williams said. “Inside commands, you see favoritism,” she said. “You see senior service-members who protect their friends, protect people they’ve had a beer with. Holding these investigations inside the command does not give the female servicemember and sexual assault survivor justice.”

It is long past time to make these changes, said Williams.

“We need to come together as veterans to ask for change – demand change,” Williams said. “It is past time, and we all need to come together in support of Vanessa Guillén and all of the other military sexual assault survivors to change this process.”
Study shows VA surgical care better than or equal to non-VA hospitals

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) today announced VA hospitals outperform or match neighboring non-VA hospitals in surgical quality and overall patient safety satisfaction.

The finding comes from a study conducted by VA and university researchers that was published June 26, in the Journal of Surgical Research.

“The prospect of having surgery can be stressful,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “For Veterans, who often have choices in where they receive care, it is in their best interest to make fully informed health care decisions. This study provides valuable information when faced with such an important choice.”

Researchers at the White River Junction VA Medical Center in Vermont and the Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center in New Hampshire completed the study. They identified VA medical centers with at least one non-VA hospital within 25 miles in three U.S. regions: West-Southwest, New England and Deep South.

With a sample of 34 VA facilities and 319 neighboring non-VA hospitals, the researchers used benchmarks created by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. They also used scores from the Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems. The results showed VA facilities performed better or as good as non-VA hospitals in overall patient safety indicators (PSIs), which measure potential hospital complications and adverse events following surgeries and other procedures. VA hospitals performed much better in surgery specific PSIs.

The researchers also found VA and non-VA hospitals were about equal in patient satisfaction with overall hospital experience.

The data was collected from Hospital Compare, a publicly available database that helps consumers decide where to seek health care. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services runs the database.

We believe in equal rights for all and law and order!

By: James W. "Bill" Oxford, National Commander

Dear American Legion Family Members and Friends,

We are here to assert in the strongest terms possible that The American Legion stands for equal rights for everyone, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender or any other characteristic. There is no qualifier to that statement.

It’s a belief The American Legion has held since our founding just after the end of World War I. At that time in 1919, African-American veterans were among our organization’s founders who adopted a mission statement — the Preamble to The American Legion Constitution — that rings as true today as it did more than a century ago.

At every official American Legion meeting, we pledge among other things “to maintain law and order,” as well as “safeguard and transmit to posterity the principles of justice, freedom and democracy.”

We grieve for African-American citizens George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and far too many others. Their senseless deaths have brought the topic of race relations to the forefront of our hearts and minds.

Just as we believe in equal rights for all, we believe in law and order. Those sentiments were thoughtfully shared in a recent special two-part episode of The American Legion’s Tango Alpha Lima podcast. We encourage everyone to listen and reflect on the messages brought forth by the guests, all of whom are Legionnaires with unique stories to share regarding their experiences in law enforcement.

At this time, we have seen tensions rise. Rioters have taken advantage of peaceful protests to burn and loot buildings. White supremacists have targeted black Americans going about their daily lives. Angry citizens have recklessly hurled objects and insults at law enforcement officers.

It has to stop. America is better than this. We are better than this. Together, let’s find common ground to stand on so that every American can enjoy the freedoms we vowed to protect with our lives.

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