

The American Legion of Iowa

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The American Legion of Iowa Auxiliary

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Sons of The American Legion Detachment

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**Department Commander Mike Etzel**

Recruit - Renew - Retain

It is both a privilege and an honor to address you as Department of Iowa Commander. I look forward to visiting and meeting many of you this year.

To say it has been a whirlwind so far is an understatement. The year began 6 hours after convention with a Vets of Valor golf tournament, continued with the membership workshop in Indianapolis, followed by the Sidney Rodeo. The Iowa State Fair and the National Convention in Reno will complete the month of August.

There will be some changes this year at Department, officers are going to "cut the tie". I am not going to require suit coat and tie for Department meetings at headquarters. Legion casual will become the dress code, Legion cap, Legion Polo and "Dock" type slacks. A military branch of service shirt is great, but lets stay away from tee shirts and shorts, we still need to show pride and professionalism. I may very well show up at your District conference in a Nicole shirt or any of the various Legion Polos. There will be no change at Mid-Winter and Dept Convention. For Dept officers on the podium and commission and committee chairs giving reports and presentations, Legion business attire is expected. For convention and conference attendees, Legion casual is great. This is not meant to dictate to the Posts and Districts your "dress code" by any means. That is your decision, but I will ask you to give it some thought and consideration.

The goal is to change to a less stuffy, a more approachable image. We identify to veterans as former veterans at first glance when your shirt or baseball cap has your branch of service on it. We are taken as sales people or business types in a suit and tie. We want to be able to strike up conversation as comrades, been there & done that goes a long way towards breaking the ice. This has been proven at some Post and District public events with the Legion canopy. Veterans will approach and strike up a conversation with Legionnaires in branch of service garb, not so quickly with those in other apparel.

The Headquarters parking lot remains as the Commanders project. We have had an anonymous donor come forward who will match up to \$10,000 for a 6th month period beginning with the Dept convention. Please consider making a donation to this very needed project, not only as an individual, but also from your Post and District.

Finally, membership.

Our now National Commander Denise Rohan accepted our membership goal of 45,000. That number is approximately what we made last year plus 500, which is a bit less than one new member from each post. Membership chairman Don Swan and the team is developing plans to assist every District and Post with meeting their growth goal. We must stop the slide and we feel this is the year to make it happen. We slowed a bit last year and need to continue the efforts. It has been determined that we are losing about 10% to non-renewals, those members will continue to be our focus as we have the ability to change that.

The Commanders pin this year reflects that commitment:

You will hear and see this at conferences and in our communications. The members joined us for a reason, we must continue to give them that reason.

As I hope everyone noticed, the Legion Magazine is now including a membership application section. Never again dispose of or recycle the magazine, distribute it! This is free, no cost advertising that has potential to reach the veterans we need in our Posts. The magazine tells our story.

Put it in a location in your community you frequent...barber shops, beauty shops, medical and dental offices and clinics, public libraries, coffee shops...anywhere there is a magazine rack or table. If just half of our members did this, we would put over 20,000 magazines out in our communities, think how many veterans and family members we might reach.

The National Commander made very clear at the membership Workshop the need to stop this membership decline. Falling below 2 million members will have consequences...our voice in supporting veterans at the National level will diminish, our programs and service offices will be affected, our communities will be impacted. Look at what your Post and the Department provides to your local community. Now picture that gone. It does not need to occur. Yes, we all know that some communities will lose their Post. It is, for some, a looming reality and not to be taken lightly. We do have many areas that show growth in the veteran population and those areas need to reach out and make contact with the veterans. Membership Chairman Don Swan is dedicated to putting Iowa in the 100% membership column, as am I, and as you also need to be. Together we can succeed.

For God and Country...Mike Etzel, Commander

**Department Adjutant John Derner**

Education; Training Our Legionnaires

Educating our members on the programs and policies of The American Legion is critical to our success. Therefore, training should be a top priority at all levels of our organization. Empowering our members with knowledge of our programs can create energy and excitement.

In a perfect world, all our members would hold extensive knowledge of the programs and positions of The American Legion. They would know the details of the programs, how to run them, how to recruit participants, how to promote our activities, and how to obtain community involvement. Legionnaires would know the legislative positions of our organization and would actively engage local, state, and national elected officials to support those positions.

We do not live in that perfect world. However, we can take steps to educate our members and encourage their involvement. It is done through communication with our members and by conducting training for them.

A significant amount of the time we spent in the military involved training. In basic training, we learned how to march, shoot, wear our uniforms properly, and work as a team. Advanced training honed our specialty skills. Most of us continued to train in various forms throughout our military careers.

Training made us better at what we did. Training will also make Legionnaires better at what we do today. An active training program can increase membership, raise retention, and provide new opportunities for participation in post activities.

There are many resources available for training members of your Post. The resources include videos, manuals, booklets, and pamphlets. Most of the items are free and are available for download from the American Legion website. The National and Department websites are also a good source of information for Post training.

Establishing and implementing a training program at your Post will increase the knowledge of your Post members. The training does not have to be complicated. It can be as simple as spending five to ten minutes at each Post meeting giving an overview of an American Legion program, such as the National Emergency Fund (NEF) or Operation Comfort Warriors (OCW). Other simple efforts could include articles in your Post newsletter or a video from the national website shown at a Post meeting.

Individual members can take the American Legion Extension Institute (ALEI) course. It is a self-paced online course. For more information, visit the national website at www.legion.org/training.

Everyone loves to learn something new. By offering training opportunities, you add interest to your Post meetings, mentor new members, and broaden the horizons of others. Remember, there are opportunities all around you to train our members and the future leaders of our organization.

IPTV Honors Iowa's Vietnam Veterans.

On Sunday, September 10, Iowa Public Television invites all veterans of the Vietnam War – Iowans who served in the U.S. Armed Forces and Iowans who served with the South Vietnamese, Tai Dam or Hmong - to join us for *The Iowa Experience: Vietnam*, a special event in honor of their courage and sacrifice.

The event begins at 1 p.m. with a 30-minute preview of *The Vietnam War*, the new 10-part series by Ken Burns, followed by a panel discussion featuring Iowa's veterans, who will share their diverse experiences of life before, during and after the war. At 2:30 p.m., there will be a reception of light hors d'oeuvres and desserts, and at 2:45 p.m., an advanced screening of the first episode of *The Vietnam War*.

If you, or a veteran you know, would like to attend this free event, please contact the Friends office at 800-728-2828 or visit Iptv.org for tickets. The event is free and open to the public.

Department Convention Sweepstakes Winners

\$5,000 – Russell Cummings – Oran, IA
\$2,500 – Willie Schmidt – Fort Dodge, IA
\$1,000 – Guy Douglas Winegar – Maquoketa, IA
\$500. – Joseph C. Stanley – Gladbrook, IA
\$500. – Linda M. Spratt-Thoren – Chelsea, IA
\$250. – Robert E. Boyce – Sioux City, IA
\$250. – Rodney Schwebach – Alton, IA