

**The
American
Legion**



For God and Country

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The American Legion 99th Birthday 2018

The American Legion
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A simple publicity statement in the Stars & Stripes was a harbinger for the century of success that would follow.

“The A.E.F. as a whole – doughboy, colonel and general working together organized the American Legion this month as its postwar association,” said the article that graced the front page of the legendary newspaper’s March 28, 1919 edition.

“To continue with success the work already launched will require the personal cooperation of every soldier in every organization now in France,” the article further stated.

“When we return to the States, it will be equally important to have a nucleus of men in every community who will take the lead in their particular local organizations.”

It was the first known published article which would name “The American Legion,” as an organization of wartime veterans.

An amazing string of accomplishments would follow over the next 99 years. Equally amazing was how quickly the organization took root as a powerful national and community force.

By the end of its first year, The American Legion had more than 843,000 dues-paying members. This was an era when messages were delivered by telegram, there was no interstate highway system and car ownership was still not widespread.

Yet people went through great lengths to become part of this special organization. And while the language of the time certainly reflected a male-dominated culture, women veterans could vote for national commander before they could legally vote for president of the United States in most areas.

Nearly a century later, Denise H. Rohan (ROW en) would become the first female national commander. Through her Family First agenda, Commander Rohan reminds us to serve relatives of veterans, who also have unique needs that were caused by military service.

Service is nothing new to The American Legion.

The American Legion's founders served in World War I and they were "still serving" when their successors fought the second world war— just as every generation of Legionnaires has served its comrades from all wars since.

But serving fellow veterans is just one of the many ways that The American Legion assists in communities throughout the land.

The American Legion serves the youth of America with outstanding programs such as American Legion Baseball, Junior Shooting Sports, Boys State and Boys Nation.

The American Legion has supported the Boy Scouts of America since 1919 and today charters 2,400 Scouting units comprising more than 61,000 young men and women.

The American Legion High School Oratorical Contest awards scholarships to young men and women who can most effectively communicate the ideals of the U.S. Constitution.

Moreover, the Legion feels a special obligation to the children of those who died or were severely disabled while on active-duty since 9/11. Military parents can take comfort in knowing that The American Legion's Legacy Scholarship Fund will help pay for their children's college educations if tragedy should occur while they serve.

The American Legion does these things not because it can, but because it's who we are.

The author of America's greatest legislation, Past National Commander Harry Colmery, knew that it was right for America to remember returning war veterans by making it possible for them to obtain college educations and purchase homes.

While others scoffed that such a benefit would 'break the treasury,' The American Legion held firm and ensured the passage of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, also known as the GI Bill of Rights.

As the years passed, the GI Bill diminished in value. Once again, The American Legion fought hard for a new GI Bill that would allow veterans of the post 9/11 generation to transfer their benefits to family members. The benefit increased even further when the new "Forever GI Bill" was passed and usage deadlines were eliminated. It was officially named the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017.

The American Legion has wielded considerable influence in Washington since our founding, when there was not yet a Veterans Bureau, Veterans Administration and certainly not a Department of Veterans Affairs.

The American Legion believed from the beginning that veterans earned quality health care from a grateful nation. A nation that sends its military to war had a special obligation to make its heroes whole upon their return.

After decades of American Legion efforts, a cabinet-level position was created to serve those who served us – the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. Today, The American Legion is the greatest supporter of the Department of Veterans Affairs. But when VA falls short, The American Legion is also its biggest critic.

Another founding pillar of The American Legion is Americanism. As the lead organization responsible for the U.S. Flag code, Legionnaires can often be found teaching flag etiquette in classrooms across the country.

Along with the proper folding and display of the flag, Legionnaires understand the importance of respecting Old Glory.

Since an ill-fated Supreme Court ruling, the Legion has been working to make sure that the flag of the United States is constitutionally protected from desecration.

The greatest tragedy in flag desecration is the disrespect it symbolizes. This disrespect not only sends a harmful message to children, it is a slap to those who have sacrificed for the values that the flag represents. Disrespect is the genesis of hate.

Our organization stood boldly against hate in 1923 when delegates at our National Convention in San Francisco passed Resolution 407, which condemned groups that fostered religious, racial and class strife as “un-American” and “inconsistent with the ideals and purposes of The American Legion.”

Although historians have questioned the true source of the classic quote, “American is great because America is good,” there is no doubt that America’s goodness is on display at nearly 13,000 American Legion posts throughout the world.

America’s goodness is on display every time an American Legion post hosts a fundraiser to assist a disabled veteran. It’s on display when a Legionnaire volunteers at the local VA hospital. It is on display when The American Legion feeds the homeless, provides an honor guard, conducts a blood drive or supports a job fair.

Some may view the 1919 Stars and Stripes article as Legion prophecy. In other ways, it was an understatement of what the world’s most influential veterans organization would become.

Ninety-nine years ago this month, members of the American Expeditionary Force were asked to “determine the scope of the work and carry forth the objects of this association.” The association was The American Legion.

They surpassed all expectations. Legionnaires continue to do so today, with a vision for tomorrow.

Thank you, God Bless America and God Bless our American Legion.

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