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# OFFICER'S



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\*\*\*\* **GUIDE** \*\*\*\*

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And  
MANUAL OF CEREMONIES

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# Preamble to the Constitution of The American Legion

FOR GOD AND COUNTRY

WE ASSOCIATE OURSELVES  
TOGETHER FOR THE  
FOLLOWING PURPOSES:

*To uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States of America; To maintain law and order; To foster and perpetuate a one hundred percent Americanism; To preserve the memories and incidents of our associations in the great wars; To inculcate a sense of individual obligation to the community, state and nation; To combat the autocracy of both the classes and the masses; To make right the master of might; To promote peace and good-will on earth; To safeguard and transmit to posterity the principles of justice, freedom and democracy; To consecrate and sanctify our comradeship by our devotion to mutual helpfulness.*

# AMERICAN LEGION OFFICER'S GUIDE



- ◆ **Post Officer's Guide**
- ◆ **District or County Commander's Guide**
- ◆ **Manual of Ceremonies**

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS  
THE AMERICAN LEGION  
INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA 46206

Consult The American Legion on the World Wide Web  
<http://www.legion.org>

Revised February 2000

(Thirty-Eighth Edition)  
Handbook for American Legion Officers

# FOREWORD

The *American Legion Officer's Guide* combines under one cover a handbook on general Post operations and procedures (Section I); a District/County Commander's Guide (Section II); the Manual of Ceremonies, in which all of the ceremonies prescribed by the National Trophies, Awards and Ceremonials Committee are given (Section III); and an appendix, which is a treasury of information on eligibility, parliamentary procedures, a suggested Post constitution and by-laws, and other subjects (Section IV).

Publications are available from your Department Headquarters or from the National Headquarters on all of the major American Legion programs. As these program publications are received or obtained, they should be turned over to the responsible Post officers or committee chairmen. However, the *American Legion Officer's Guide* is intended as the basic handbook issued by the National Headquarters to help American Legion officers fulfill their responsibilities.

The community knows The American Legion by its Posts. In your community, The American Legion is your Post. We hope that this handbook will help you in your many responsibilities and urges that you become familiar with its contents.

As the year proceeds, you will receive through various Department and National publications additional information concerning specific programs and many suggestions for worthwhile activities. Should you have questions on American Legion policies or procedures, your District Officer can usually be of help. In addition, your Department Headquarters is always available for advice and information. When necessary, your Department Headquarters can also call on the National Headquarters for information, clarification, or assistance on any matter.

**Note: This year, we have added some new information and/or updated some topics...check the table of contents for [NEW] or [UPDATED].**

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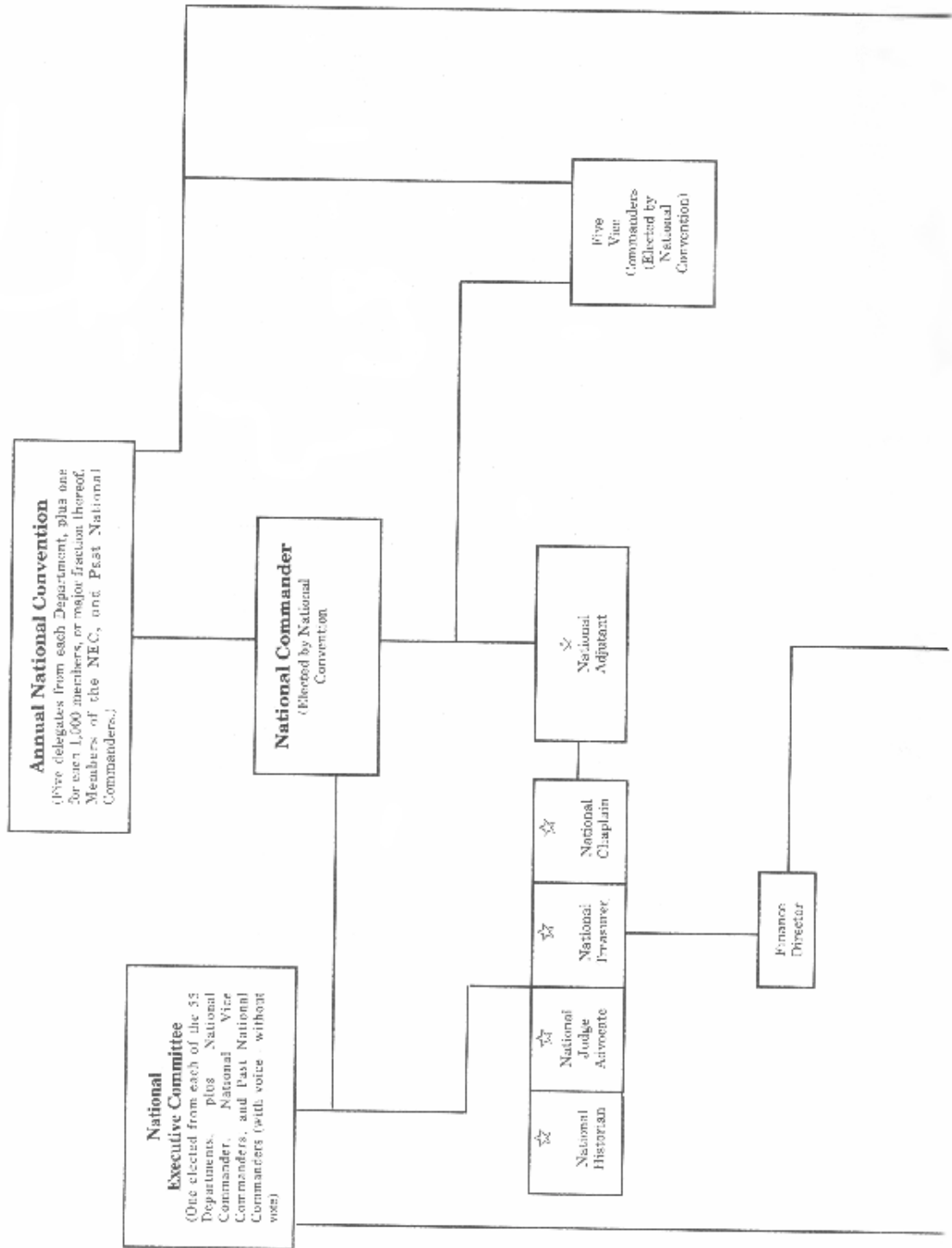
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# The National Organization of The American Legion



## National Headquarters

(Full-Time Staff)

## National Commissions and Committees

(Standing)  
(Appointed by NCC, and functioning on continuing basis)

Americanism Commission  
 Americanism Council  
 Committee on Education  
 Counter-Subversive Activities Committee  
 Council on Children and Youth  
 Convivial Commission  
 Contracts-Supervisory Committee  
 Distinguished Names Committee  
 Economic Commission  
 Employment Committee  
 Veterans' Performance Committee  
 Finance Commission  
 American Legion Child Welfare Foundation, Inc.  
 American Legion Endowment Fund Corporation  
 American Legion Life Insurance and Trust Committee  
 Emblem Committee  
 Overseas Graves Desecration Trust  
 Foreign Relations Commission  
 Foreign Relations Council  
 Internal Affairs Commission  
 Constitution and By-Laws Committee  
 Membership and Post Activities Committee  
 Resolutions Assignment Committee  
 Trophies, Awards, and Memorials Committee  
 Legislative Commission  
 National Security Commission  
 Aerospace Committee  
 Defense Civil Preparedness Committee  
 Law and Order Committee  
 Merchant Marine Committee  
 Military Affairs Committee  
 National Security Council  
 Naval Affairs Committee  
 Public Relations Committee  
 The American Legion Magazine Commission  
 Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Commission  
 National Cemetery Committee

Indianapolis, Ind.  
 Headquarters  
 Administrative Services  
 Finance Division  
 Americanism and  
 Children & Youth Division  
 Emblem Sales Division  
 Internal Affairs Division  
 Membership and Post  
 Activities Section  
 The American Legion Magazine  
 Public Relations Division  
 Management Information  
 Systems Division  
 National Convention Division  
 American Legion Life  
 Insurance Plan

Washington, D.C. Office  
 Administrative Services  
 Legislative Division  
 National Security Foreign  
 Relations Division  
 Media Relations Section  
 Veterans Affairs-Rehabilitation  
 Economic Division

## Various Field Stations of Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Division

Convention Committees  
 (Composed of one delegate from each Department, serving during the life of the Convention only.)

on Americanism  
 on Children and Youth  
 on Conventional Arrangements  
 on Credentials and Internal  
 Affairs-Membership  
 Economic - Employment  
 and Veterans' Preference  
 Other Economic Matters  
 on Finance  
 on Foreign Relations  
 on Legislation and Rules  
 on Veterans Affairs and  
 Rehabilitation  
 on Claims and Rating  
 Hospitals and Medical Services  
 on Security  
 Military  
 Naval  
 Aerospace  
 Merchant Marine  
 Defense Civil Preparedness



# SECTION

# 1

## A “Blueprint” for the 21st Century

**Purpose:** Service to our veterans, their families and their communities is as solid a plan today, a period of high technology and lightning fast changes, as it was in 1919, when the founding fathers of The American Legion met in Paris.

They were true visionaries. Much of The American Legion’s success rests on its understanding that the fight for veterans rights - past, present or future - is never-ending. While our purposes may remain unchanged, our capabilities must not. The environment is changing and we must stay in front of that change to be the nation’s advocate for veterans.

For success we must continue to provide first rate service to our veterans in the next century, The basis for this blueprint is the Preamble to the Constitution of The American Legion, which was finalized at the St. Louis caucus in 1919 and reaffirmed at Minneapolis in 1994. This declaration reaffirmed the principles on which our great organization was developed (*the Preamble Minneapolis Affirmation follows the 21<sup>st</sup> century blueprint information*).

And the method for applying this blueprint for success to American Legion activities has not changed either. Personal contact at every level of leadership within The American Legion is the catalyst that has made us successful in the past and will make us even more successful in the future.

Since our founding fathers gave us a sound, clear focus, we need to build on this direction as we seek every opportunity to excel in growth and membership in the next century.

**21st Century Key Challenges:** The key challenges facing The American Legion in the 21st Century, as outlined by the National Executive Committee in October, 1997, have a common denominator to success -- personal involvement of Legion Officers.

**Vision:** Every American Legion member must focus on service to the veteran, to their families and to the communities as their number one priority. Legion officers at every level should lead the way in reinforcing this vision.

**Goals:** We must have goals to fulfill our vision of service. A mission statement should be in place that includes these goals and spells out a direction of where you and The American Legion at every level should be in one, three, five and seven years.

**Image:** We must be aware at all times of our image and how others perceive us and our work in the community. We must remain the champions of service to our veterans and their communities. Everyone in Legion leadership positions must set the example for all members to follow.

**Partnership:** The American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary, and the Sons of The American Legion need to be partners in providing service to our veterans, their families and their communities.

Legion officers again must set the example for inner-organization dialogue and cooperation. Our work of service to our veterans is a *“family affair.”*

**Public Relations:** We can amplify our commitment of service to the veteran through an aggressive and consistent public relations program. It allows us to maintain visibility in the community. Technology in the media has made it possible for every one to become accessible to print and broadcast media. Likewise, Community Service Committees, the Chamber of Commerce(s), and Business Associations have doubled in number over the past 10 years. These are excellent opportunities to network. Become involved in the community as a good neighbor. Public relations opportunities to tell the Legion story should be pursued.

**Programs:** Our service to veterans and their communities is manifested in our programs and there are many outstanding programs to choose from. Single theme or service posts can be drawing cards for starting new posts. Legion officers at every level should be coaches, motivators and consultants in helping posts develop and maintain programs.

**Training:** Every officer and staff member needs training. Through training we gain knowledge to help better serve our veterans. Whether it is a Department Legion College, a conference, an annual convention, the Extension Institute or National Information Conferences, education of our officers and staffs at every level should be an on-going process. One of the most ideal and effective training methods lies in **mentoring**.

**Mentoring:** Is an “hands-on” approach to training that has proven to be the best investment in nurturing future Legion leaders. Mentoring can be tailored to accommodate any learning needs of your members. It can be in small group or done one-on-one. Through the individualized coaching by a seasoned Legion officer, new officers and members can receive the training and reap the benefits of experience, which may be lost in a classroom setting. Mentoring allows one to learn at their own pace and in their own locality. It allows ample room for positive motivation and stimulates new ideas for improving Legion business.

**Membership:** Service to our veterans begins with our membership base. Without members we would have no voice on Capitol Hill nor could we achieve the entitlements and support to our veterans, their families, their communities, our state and nation. **Membership is everyone’s responsibility -- especially Legion officers.** Post revitalization and new post development should be on every Legion Officer’s mind. Resolution 28, Disenfranchising, reaffirmed that the Department Commander or Department Executive Committee is the final decision maker on establishing posts within the department, not another post or district. The National Executive Committee established, by the same resolution, an objective of one post for each high school in the community. The focus is presence in the community and the objective is growth. Over the next five years the goal is to increase the number of posts to over 16,000. Therefore, every department must focus on post development/ revitalization

**21st Century Outreach Program** - This program encourages Legion officers to aggressively seek support from the Active Duty military, Guard and Reserve organizations in your Department to identify eligible veterans. Since January 1998, several active duty bases and guard units have agreed to allow The American Legion to address veterans separating from the service. The potential for membership is unlimited. Two initiatives to identify veterans in the community are listed below:

**Jobs - Hire Quality**, a pilot program partner that is a professional job search agency, specializes in helping younger veterans (especially those about to separate from active duty) find jobs. Each month, lists of veterans who have contacted Hire Quality are made available to the

Departments for dissemination to the field. This test pilot program is starting to yield invaluable leads of eligible veterans that would otherwise be missed.

**Internet** - Several of our members have shown leadership initiative by thinking outside the box when it comes to finding new sources of eligible veterans. Tapping into webring and getting on veteran service organization chat lines has proven to be highly successful in initiating interest in The American Legion. It is also a new frontier to promote the Legion through new public relation opportunities.

**Communication:** This is a must! Legion officers must set the example in establishing clear and concise lines of communication with members and nonmember alike. Through communication and personal contact, The American Legion can cross all race, gender and age barriers on its way to providing quality service to our veterans and their communities. District and county commanders should visit every post within their jurisdiction. This provides you with an awareness of their needs and growth potential. Communicate, educate and support one another through all mediums available to you whether its newsletters, bulletins, television, radio, newspapers, E-Mail and/or direct contact.

**Conclusion:** The essence of the 21st Century Plan is personal involvement through demonstrated leadership. Our blueprint for success was laid out for each of us by our founding fathers----it is:

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>SERVICE TO OUR VETERANS, THEIR FAMILIES AND TO THEIR COMMUNITIES, STATES AND NATION</b></p>
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*For more information, refer to the full text of the resolutions approved by the National Executive Committee, May 6-7, 1998, Spring Meeting, Indianapolis, Indiana – the “Resolving” clauses of each resolution follows:*

**Resolution #27, Diversity and A Veteran Is a Veteran (21<sup>st</sup> Century)**

RESOLVED,...that The American Legion strongly recommends that any level of The American Legion, Departments, Districts and Posts review its Constitution and By Laws and those of superior bodies within the organization to ensure it is in compliance with the rules that govern this organization; and be it further

RESOLVED, Departments, Districts and Posts dedicated to the programs of The American Legion and should not take unwarranted actions that may lead to barriers that hamper the growth, support of programs and active community involvement, that may adversely affect the growth of The American Legion; and be it finally

RESOLVED, that that we operate with a common focus, derived from cooperation and fraternal relationships developed from working together at all levels of the organization, for the sole intent and purpose of carrying out the duties and responsibilities commonly shared at each level of The American Legion.

**Resolution #28, Disenfranchising (21<sup>st</sup> Century)**

RESOLVED,...that the formation and revitalization of American legion Posts be a priority, which only the Department Commander or the Department Executive Committee controls in accordance with Article IX, Section 1 of the National Constitution; and be it further

RESOLVED, As long as all of the required obligations are met for the establishment of a Post, no individual Post or District should have the authority to deny any individual(s) the opportunity to start or revitalize a Post, without just cause, but the final decision will be made by the Department Commander or Department Executive Committee; and be it finally

RESOLVED, That there should be an American Legion Post for every high school where Department, Districts, and Post leadership will work together to ensure the success of the Post in its support of programs and the local community.

**Resolution #29, Veteran Outreach Program (21<sup>st</sup> Century)**

RESOLVED,...that The American Legion initiate at all levels of the organization a comprehensive plan to educate and provide service to Active, Reserve Component and National Guard eligible military personnel currently in uniform, recently retired and/or separated, about the value and benefits derived from membership in The American Legion; and be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion initiate at all levels of the organization a recruiting campaign targeted at eligible military personnel currently serving on Active Duty, in the Reserve Components and the National Guard.

**Resolution #30, Training and Education (21<sup>st</sup> Century)**

RESOLVED, ...that The American Legion recommend to all levels of the organization, development of a comprehensive plan to educate and train its leadership, preparing them for the present and future challenges to be faced in service to veterans, the community, state, and nation, and be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion recommends a standard for its leadership to include a knowledge about programs, activities, goals and objectives of the organization, in order to do their best and be more proactive towards the needs of those that they serve; and be further

RESOLVED, That it is recommended that Departments, Districts and Posts recommend to all candidates for office that they consider taking and successfully completing The American Legion Extension Institute course: and be it further

RESOLVED, That every Department of The American Legion be encouraged to start and staff a comprehensive training seminar/college (also know as Legion College) for the purpose of training its leaders; and be it further

RESOLVED, That the National Organization of The American Legion develop a training environment, seeking a better-trained cadre of leadership that may include the use of computer technology/communications, written materials, teleconferencing, other electronic media, workshops, conferences, and seminars; and be it finally

RESOLVED, All levels of the organization of The American Legion, be strongly and resolutely encouraged to develop and execute a continuing education program, initiated by an inaugural five-year plan with a goal to implement this concept of practical and useful training and education of our Legion leadership in order to maximize effectiveness in communities, states, and our Nation.

**Resolution #31, The American Legion Post Operations (21<sup>st</sup> Century)**

RESOLVED...that the attention of all Department, District, County and local American Legion leaders be called to the need of mentoring and training all post officials in such areas as:

1. Developing and executing post mission statements.
2. Developing and executing a five-year plan to include description in each of the following areas: post activities, programs, budgets to include financial projections, membership and public relations and communications.
3. Development of a constitution and by-laws to include proper charter filing, incorporation, report filing to include Consolidated Post Report, maintaining a proper check and balance system to include audit, risk management (liability, property and event insurance), and proper writing of resolutions.
4. Formation and training of committees based on the size and mission of the post in the local community.
5. Development of a "Welcome Wagon" Task Force in conjunction with the Auxiliary and the Sons of The American Legion to welcome new veterans into the community.

6. Reaching out to all veterans in the community and listening to their concerns; and be it further  
RESOLVED, It is recommended that Departments, Districts, and Counties develop an integrated coordinated assistance visit plan, sometimes referred to as a Post Responsibility Audit, to ensure every post is visited by one level of leadership at least once a year to review the aforementioned areas with the post leadership; and be it further

RESOLVED, It is recommended that every post have a copy of the official history, **The American Legion**, written by Thomas A. Rumer and/or a reference set of The American Legion Extension Institute; and be it further

RESOLVED, The American Legion believes that each post is a community based wartime veterans organization known for helping all veterans, families and children in the community and where social programs will not supersede the reason The American Legion was founded in 1919 and where the image is associated with "Service First;" and be it finally

RESOLVED, That each The American Legion Post should use the word "Post" where appropriate in all official documents, publications and advertising.

**Resolution #32, Cooperation with the American Legion Auxiliary and Sons of The American Legion (21<sup>st</sup> Century)**

RESOLVED...that the attention of all Department, Districts, County and local American Legion leaders be called to the need for a cooperative relationship with the Auxiliary, and Sons of The American Legion.

**SPECIAL RESOLUTION 419  
1919 THE MINNEAPOLIS AFFIRMATION 1994**

WHEREAS, To us, the heirs of a proud tradition, the Founders of The American Legion in the City of Minneapolis in November 1919 bequeathed the four pillars upon which our great brotherhood yet stands, as proclaimed in the Preamble to the Constitution of The American Legion; and

WHEREAS, It is upon these pillars that we have built the programs by which we serve our comrades, our youth, and our nation; and

WHEREAS, By the Throne of Almighty God the Founders surely stand and say of us "Well done, beloved heirs and comrades"; now therefore be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Minneapolis, Minnesota, September 6-8, 1994, that we express our eternal gratitude for the wisdom and foresight of our Founders in this, our 75th Anniversary Year, by affirming anew our commitment to the perpetuation of our principles; and be it further

RESOLVED, That in affirmation of our troth, we pledge our unrelenting vigilance on behalf of our comrades-in-arms, their children, and their widows and orphans; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we affirm the American Flag to be the sole unifying symbol of these United States, a nation born of diversity and nurtured in the shadow of that banner, beneath which the honored remains of countless heroes have been laid to rest, deserving if need be of our protection unto death; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we affirm to the generations as yet unborn their due inheritance, a legacy no less grand than that to which we today are heirs: a nation strong, united and flourishing in peace and prosperity; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we affirm to our nation's defenders, and the citizens they serve, our dedication to national sovereignty and security so inviolable as to render America forever free from aggression and domination by those who would do us harm; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we affirm the principle of citizen soldiery by our support and dedication to those who stand in ready preparedness to answer the call to arms, the Reserve and National Guard forces, and be it further

RESOLVED, That we affirm to all Americans our commitment to the principle of government of the People, by the People, and for the People, a principle best embodied by a Congress unfettered and free from foreign influence and ever alert to the failures of foreign policy by which the constraints on war are loosed; and be it finally

RESOLVED, That by the witness of Man and in the Presence of Almighty God, we do hereby commend this affirmation to all in whom these sentiments ring true.

## Commander

*“To you, my comrade, is entrusted a very important duty, that of teaching and protecting the cardinal principles of The American Legion throughout your entire Post. To you is entrusted supervision of the duties of all other officers of the Post. To you may come the needy and the distressed and it is your duty to see that no worthy comrade is turned away without full justice. It is your duty to see that Freedom is ever the watchword of those with whom you may come in contact. Loyalty to your Post, to its membership, to the state and to the National Organization, are obligations which you now assume. You are more than the presiding officer for meetings. You are guided by the Constitution and by the decisions of the Post as a body, yet the responsibility for the success of the year’s program is largely on your shoulders. You must initiate and carry through programs to completion. You must thoroughly familiarize yourself with the policies and traditions of your Post and of The American Legion. By your sincere acceptance and earnest performance of these duties, may the great trust which your comrades have reposed in you be justified. To you I extend the congratulations of the Department, and I wish you well as you assume the responsibilities of your office. I present to you a copy of the Post Officer’s Guide and Manual of Ceremonies to serve as your guide during the coming year.”*

### **--Charge from Installation Ceremony**

Yes, Commander, the charge you accepted is broad and difficult. How you respond will determine to a large degree the standing of The American Legion among your associates and within the community.

Your own ability, the help you obtain from district and department officers, the information contained in this Guide, and the help you will get from the post officers who form your team, all combine to make the performance of your job possible.

That you have ability is recognized by your election to the office of Post Commander. This ability must have been accompanied by desire or you would not have accepted the office. Everything that follows is provided to assist you to use the ability that you now have and to develop new skills so that your desire to see the post prosper will become a reality.

As you look to the overall operation of the post, you realize that you have stepped to another level. You may feel that the step is too high, but as you proceed, following the guidelines suggested, you will

develop the organization and leadership among others that will make your year as Commander the most rewarding of your life.

### **Planning Post Operations for the Coming Year**

It's a rare group of new post officers who take office without enthusiasm and a desire for a successful year. In the charge you accepted at your installation, you were entrusted with the supervision of the duties of all other officers of the post. This does not mean that you will discourage them from using initiative and developing new ideas. What it does mean is that you will be judge by the effectiveness of your officers.

There are many ways to determine whether a Post Commander and their officers are enjoying a successful year. Judgments of the worth of a post are made by the members, the community, and by The American Legion itself. Like it or not, a gain or loss in membership is the measure most often used.

Actually, the membership record is a pretty reliable barometer of what your post is doing. An active post, where the members enjoy themselves, often creates a "word of mouth" membership campaign that works almost automatically. The members are proud to belong. It's the most natural thing in the world for them to talk "Legion" to their friends, neighbors, relatives, and business associates. Since they like belonging to the Legion, they want their friends to get in on a good thing, too.

However, whether it shows or not, a great deal of planning has probably gone into every successful membership campaign. But, before sales people can sell a product, they have to have a product. If they are going to do a good job, they have to have a good product--something that people want and will value. The programs, social activities, chances for making new friendships, sometimes the post home itself--these are what a Legion salesman has to sell. How we build or get this product is the subject we would like to discuss with you.

### **Executive Committee**

Very early in the game, you will find out that running even a small post is more than a one-man job. If you don't, you may feel as though the weight of the world is on your shoulders. This is the reason the post constitution provides for a full group of post officers, as well as an executive committee. They are elected to do specific jobs. It's up to you to get them to work together for the good of the entire post.

You can get off on the right foot by making it a first order of business to call an early meeting of your officers and executive committee. This can be held even before you are installed. The outgoing post commander and adjutant might also be invited to attend.

Before the meeting is held, you and your adjutant need to find out what post records are on hand, where they are, and how to use them.

### **Records and Material**

Do you have all of your membership records since the post was chartered or at least for recent years? Members are proud of their record of continuous membership. Try to keep that and all of the membership records up-to-date.

Are the complete minutes of all meetings on file or bound? The keeping and reading of minutes may seem a pretty dull job, but minutes can be extremely important. More than one law case has turned on what some long-forgotten secretary or adjutant wrote in the minutes of a meeting years ago.

Does the checkbook balance? Where are the funds, and is all the money accounted for?

Is the post incorporated under the not-for-profit laws of the state? Where is a copy of the articles of incorporation? Have the necessary annual reports been filed and any needed fees paid?

Is every officer who will be handling funds bonded? This is required by the Legion's National Constitution.

Do you have a copy of the post's constitution and by-laws? With the changes in post officers from year to year, it's easy to see how many of these vital records can be lost or misplaced. So, first make sure

that all of the essential records are on hand, that they are where they should be (and not hiding in the desk of some adjutant of ten years ago), and that you know in a general way, at least, what they are.

### **Budget and Fund Raising**

Anyone who asks people to come to a meeting should do them the courtesy of preparing an agenda--and doing it in advance.

One of the first things on the agenda for this first get-together of new post officers should be money--your post's budget. The officers need to know in advance what income can be expected for the year and how it should be spent.

Here are three general principles on post financing that are worth considering. You'll have a good chance of staying out of money troubles if you follow them:

First, make your dues high enough to meet the fixed, administrative costs: Postage, stencils, stationery, department dues, in some cases rent--the administrative costs that every post must meet to stay in business.

Second, if the community is to benefit from an American Legion project, don't hesitate to solicit the community for funds. For example, an American Legion baseball team, a community playground or swimming pool. Actually, the post will add to its public reputation by such projects. But a full public accounting needs to be made of all funds received and of how they are spent.

Third, don't ask the public to give in the name of charity for any project that will be of benefit primarily to members of The American Legion. A merchant will donate to send a youngster to Boys State, but he probably wouldn't care to give money to buy a new cooler for your bar. Sometimes it is necessary to raise funds from outside the membership for something that is strictly for the benefit of the post and its members. When this happens, make sure that the public receives full value.

### **Calendar of Events**

Your budget is a means to an end. The amount of money you have is not as important as what you do with it. So, right along with the budget, you need to set up a calendar of events. These are the things your post is going to be doing during the coming year. (See program reminders in Index.)

### **Committee Assignments**

Elected officers will be responsible for some of the activities and projects. Your appointed chairs will be in charge of others. Decide at the very beginning what is going to happen, when it is going to happen, and who is going to make it happen. Most of the assignments will be to carry on already established programs or activities.

There are handbooks and manuals on all of the important Legion programs--Boys State, baseball, children and youth, veterans affairs and rehabilitation, scholarships, and so on. Probably you and your adjutant will have already received copies of these from department headquarters. These manuals have information and ideas that your committee chairs need. Take these handbooks to the first planning meeting and turn them over to the proper people right then. (See Publication List in Index.)

### **Recreational Activities**

Then there are recreational activities. The strongest posts are those where the members not only carry on humanitarian service programs, but also have a good time. When our pioneer forebears assembled to raise a cabin for a neighbor, they ended their labors with a square dance. So don't neglect recreational and social activities. Find out the activities that different groups of members are interested in and provide the means or the opportunity for them to pursue that interest through your post.

## **Programs**

Just about every post has some service programs and social activities that were started in the past and have become almost traditional. Organizations fall into ruts—perhaps more easily than individuals. Any program carried on exactly the same way year after year is going to grow stale. So, at this first planning meeting, take a look at your past programs and activities. Decide on those that need some change or a new look.

No post can stand still. New programs are needed to maintain interest and, especially, to keep up with the times. Every new activity or program offers the opportunity to interest new people in joining the post. Inactive members can be turned into active members by the same means.

Very little in the world happens without someone to make it happen. So all of the programs and activities need to have a person in charge. Usually, this is a post officer or committee chair. If the selections of chairpersons and officers are good, the programs will move. You should ask and, in fact, demand that each chairperson and officer build a timetable of events that can be fitted into an overall post calendar for your year.

## **First Post Meeting**

Now we come to that very important first post meeting. You know that every member present is going to be judging you in comparison with previous commanders. At the first meeting, the pattern and the tone are probably going to be set for the entire year. If changes are going to be made, this is the time to start them. The new broom is expected to stir up a little dust. Fortunately, you can lean on the experience of thousands of commanders of the past. The basic framework for any post meeting is all spelled out in the *Manual of Ceremonies*. By following the prescribed ritual and order of business, even a person who has never before presided over a meeting can do an adequate job. As a new commander, you might feel a little self-conscious about running a formal meeting, particularly in a post that has gotten away from the *Manual of Ceremonies*. But you shouldn't. The American Legion is an impressive organization, and its meetings should be suitably formal and impressive. No time is saved by omitting parts of the ritual. Meetings, of course, can and should vary. There can, and should, be an outside speaker on appropriate occasion. But by following the prescribed ritual and order of business, you should be able to complete your agenda in no more than one hour.

## **Agenda**

“Agenda” is the magic word. While the Manual of Ceremonies provides the framework or the skeleton for a meeting, the Commander's agenda is what puts meat on the bones. Item “c” under “Order of Business” in the Manual of Ceremonies reads simply: “Committee Reports.” Your personal agenda for the first and each succeeding meeting should list the exact committee scheduled to report. But before a chairperson's name goes on the agenda, the commander—at least the foresighted commander—is going to contact each chair and make sure that person is ready to report. This contact gives you an easy way to check on whether the chair is doing the job. If not, a little encouragement, a few suggestions, or perhaps even some prodding might be in order.

## **Protocol**

Although “protocol” is a term used primarily in setting the rules of etiquette which govern diplomatic functions, there is a certain amount of protocol which applies to American Legion meetings and social functions, especially those to which dignitaries have been invited. Protocol for those events is the responsibility of the Post Commander who should be aware of certain guidelines which begin with the planning of the event.

If the Department Commander is to be invited, this matter should be cleared promptly with department headquarters. In preliminary planning, it is advisable to have an alternate date in the event the Department Commander is already committed for the original date.

Accompany the invitation with some basic facts about the engagement: Time, place, whether or not it is a dinner occasion, significance of the event, etc. Will it be a joint Legion-Auxiliary function? Will there be non-Legionnaire dignitaries present?

Remember, this is your “home” and those you’ve invited deserve all the courtesies and considerations to be accorded such distinguished guests.

If the event is a dinner, those who will be seated at the head table should have been notified of this fact before they arrive. They should be escorted to their places to avoid confusion. The main speaker is seated just to the right of the podium. Place cards identifying those at the head table should be used.

Introductions begin after the meal. The presiding officer stands at the center of the head table and makes the introductions, beginning at the extreme left, continuing to the center of the table, and then starting at the extreme right and continuing to the center.

The main speaker, the guest of honor, is the last person introduced.

American Legion officers are introduced in the order by which they were installed into office: Sergeant-at-Arms, Service Officer, Historian, Judge Advocate, Chaplain, Treasurer (Finance Officer), Adjutant, Vice Commanders, and Commander.

As with all rules, there are some exceptions. If it is a function of both The American Legion and the American Legion Auxiliary, the Auxiliary officers, dignitaries, etc., are introduced first. A National Executive Committeeman or Alternate NECman should be introduced immediately before the Department Commander.

### **Welcome Committee**

The first meeting is also a good time to start a welcoming committee—in case there has not been one in the past. Two or three members should be asked to take on the job of welcoming new members, guests, or even older members who are not well acquainted, making them feel at home, and introducing them. The sergeant-at-arms can often help on this assignment. An active welcoming committee is a part of the post’s public relations job.

### **The American Legion Extension Institute**

The EXTENSION INSTITUTE is back! It was developed to provide every member of The American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary and Sons of The American Legion an opportunity to learn and discover the rich history, programs, policies, developments, positions and future goals of our organization.

This concise and comprehensive set of books returns to the original format of the Extension Institute, which was a course of study with chapter review tests and final examination upon the completion of the materials. It consists of a set of four reference/study books, with the fifth book being an introduction to the course, including a list of national officers and the national head-quarters staff.

The primary purpose of this handy reference set, adapted for daily use, is an educated, informed and knowledgeable membership. Men and women who are “in the know” have the understanding that keeps our organization strong and growing. An educated and informed member spells success. If you are interested in knowing more about The American Legion, order your Extension Institute today.

You can order a single set for your own use, or you can order multiple sets at reduced costs to use for study groups, giveaways, fund-raisers, membership incentives, etc. Contact your post adjutant for special order forms.

### **Pageantry**

Every post is a part of the community. It will be successful to the degree to which it fits into that community. Pageantry and patriotic observances are something that the community expects of the Legion. A well-trained color guard, drum and bugle corps—either junior or senior—or even a burial detail will help to keep The American Legion before the public.

## **Community Projects**

Another very valuable way of getting your post knowledgeable—know-how in the right way—is to cooperate with other community organizations in civic projects. A Post Commander who knows his business will encourage active participation in civic affairs on the part of the members. There is personal pride when a local Legionnaire is elected to the school board, heads up the United Way, or even gets a promotion in a job—and will go out of the way to congratulate members on their accomplishments, whether in the Legion or in another field.

## **Awards**

There are many ways to say “Thank you.” Awards and citations may be given at post meetings. A simple “thank-you” note can mean a great deal. Mention during a meeting that Comrade Doe has done an excellent job in arranging the Veterans Day celebration. This is a simple courtesy that should never be forgotten.

So, putting all of these various ideas together they add up to: First, planning; then, assignment of responsibilities; checking back to make sure that the job is being done; and, finally, a THANK YOU VERY MUCH.

## **Resolutions**

If you have an idea which will improve The American Legion at any level, put that idea into words, in the form of a resolution. First have it passed by your local post; then, have it passed by your district at its annual convention. All resolutions passed at a district convention are delivered to the resolutions committee at the following department convention. At the department convention, you should appear before the resolutions committee and plead for their passage of your resolution, and you should also be prepared to speak for its passage when it comes on the floor of the department convention. All resolutions pertaining to National, passed at the department are forwarded to National. (See “How to Write a Resolution,” in Index.)

## **Sources of Assistance**

You have been shown ways to utilize the potential of your members, but there is more help available when you need it.

### ***Past Commanders***

Many posts have an active Past Commanders’ Club. Sometimes its primary purpose is social and the retention of good fellowship among those who have served as Commanders. But here is a wealth of knowledge, know-how and ability just ready to be tapped. Don’t let it go to waste. Whether such a club is formally organized in your post or not, it is helpful to build a Commander’s Advisory Committee from your Past Commanders

### ***District Officers***

The post is a separate and distinct unit which can, and often does, function independently. But the work of the post can be more effective if it is joined by a tight link to the department and national organization. The district and your district officers provide that link.

The District Commander is normally the elected representative of the posts in the district, but an obligation to provide guidance and supervision is also implied. Posts are charged with carrying out the objectives and programs of the Legion and to comply fully with the obligations assumed under the post, department and national constitutions. But, if your post becomes inactive or begins to falter, you can expect your District commander to start giving directions and assuming some control.

The District Commander has a position of respect in our organization. A visit to your post calls for something special. Make it a social event significant enough to draw a crowd. The dignity shown the office can only be reflected back to increase the importance of the office of Post Commander.

### ***Department Officers***

Department officers are our “show” people. A visit from one of them usually provides an opportunity for excellent media coverage, and the type of Legion function that will attract your members and community leaders. These officers are your elected leaders and deserving of every respect. Not every post will receive annual visits from a Department Commander, but if your invitation is accepted, or there is occasion to visit you, make the most of it.

### ***Department Headquarters***

The American Legion is organized in departments for every state, District of Columbia, territorial possessions and several foreign countries. Each department headquarters exercise a general supervision over the local posts within its jurisdiction. It is urged that close communication and cooperation be maintained between the post and its department headquarters.

The department headquarters constitutes the link between the community post of The American Legion and the national organization. The post will deal directly with the department adjutant. Routine business should be transacted through department headquarters. Department headquarters is familiar with the issues and conditions of state affairs. Questions of policy and organization should be referred by the post to department headquarters. Through department headquarters any information may be secured that is desired by the post, or the ways of securing it may be found.

The Commander should keep in close touch with department affairs, know what statewide activities are carried on, and see that his/her post has its full share in them. He/she should study all instructions from department headquarters and see that they are passed on to the proper officer or committee for action. Also, the membership of the post needs to be informed of any new activities that may be initiated by the department.

### ***National Headquarters***

Practically all of your contacts with National Headquarters are rightfully carried through your department headquarters. There is, however, one publication which should be faithfully read and kept, issue by issue. This is *The American Legion DISPATCH* published by National Headquarters. The *DISPATCH* gives you up-to-date information on which to base your programs, the proper timing for programs, and suggested news releases.

### ***Auxiliary Unit***

The Auxiliary Unit is an important adjunct to the post’s scheme of organization. The official contact with the unit is through the Unit President. The unit can help only in proportion to its opportunity. A good Commander will find work for the Auxiliary Unit to do. The Commander, or designated representative, will keep in close touch with the unit and give its members plenty of inspiration and encouragement. Follow the same procedure if there is an Eight and Forty Salon in your area.

### ***Conventions***

While your post could continue to operate if there were no department, district, or national organization, you can be more effective as a part of a team. You may want to take part in a county or statewide promotion. You may have an idea that should be developed and expanded beyond your post. Certainly you want your post to have a voice in deciding the future programs of The American Legion.

District, department, and National Conventions are the places where Legion policy is determined. You will want to make certain that your post is represented by properly elected delegates—particularly on the district and department level.

Each year the district and the department will hold seminars on either general Legion operations or specific Legion programs. You can go a long way toward solving the future leadership problem in your

post by making certain that the post is represented at whatever training session is provided. You will also find that attendance at district and department functions will do much toward building the esprit de corps that makes for a good Legion Post.

## Program Reminders

*Commander, it's up to you! Programs require intelligent planning to be successful. Here are some reminders which should be of assistance.*

### **JULY**

Why not have an "old fashioned" 4th of July celebration? Make it a community project. Be sure new officers are certified to department headquarters. Installation of officers makes an impressive ceremony at a post meeting. Continue efforts in behalf of summer youth programs.

### **AUGUST**

Start planning membership drive for next year. Well planned programs produce best results. You should have received next year's membership cards from department headquarters. Call on past officers for assistance and guidance. September—School starts. Decide how you are going to contact the new veterans. Veterans Day coming up.

### **SEPTEMBER**

The 2nd is VJ Day. The 17th is Constitution Day. Good time for Constitution Day—Citizenship Day program. Present school with adequate copies of "Let's Be Right on Flag Etiquette," and "Need a Lift." Follow through on membership drive planning. Cooperative ad materials available for Veterans Day.

### **OCTOBER**

Launch all-out membership campaign. Planned programs produce. Columbus Day. Remember, dues for next year are payable by Oct. 20. Participate in Halloween Safety Programs.

### **NOVEMBER**

Continue full speed ahead on membership campaign. Nov. 11—Veterans Day. American Education Week. Thanksgiving. Remind members they need next year's card number when paying American Legion Life Insurance premiums. Deadline for payment—Dec. 31.

### **DECEMBER**

Holiday Season. Support activities that bring Christmas cheer to needy families. How about a Christmas party? Work toward all-time high in post membership. Keep plugging for renewals and new members. Why not plan to visit comrades in the hospital?

### **JANUARY**

Initiation ceremonies are good membership stabilizers. Keep working membership campaign, especially by contacting those who became delinquent Jan. 1. Community service survey will reveal areas where additional effort is needed. Good time to present flags and flag codes to schools. Check dates for Oratorical Contests—local, district or county, and state. Plan February program.

Also make plans for **March is the official Community Service Month**—(Resolution 31, May 5-6, 1999). Early in the year is the time to plan and implement so your post is ready.

All levels of leadership should constantly focus on projecting the proper image of The American Legion in their community, not only in the programs sponsored and service provided, but also on the appearance of their Post Home and surrounding grounds.

Post Home appearance can be perceived as a reflection of the attitude, the initiative and the civic awareness of the post membership. The local post reflects the outward image of the whole organization of The American Legion to the citizens in their community. The Post Home should be a pillar of the community. One that would invite prospective members and guests based on appearance alone. This is not intended to be a capital improvement project but one of attention to detail and routine “fix-ups.”

Between January and March, the post leadership is encouraged to form a committee to host a "Open House" in March, which is officially **Community Service Month**. One major area of interest to prepare for March is a Self-Help Program to fix up needed areas in the post home from signage to outside appearance to inside appearance that may have gone unattended do to other priorities. In addition, this item should be included on your annual Post Responsibility Audit (PRA) that is outlined elsewhere in this Officer's Guide.

## **FEBURARY**

Plan school awards with school officials. Sponsor Religious Emphasis activities. Start plans for American Legion Baseball program. The Veterans Employment Representative will make a good speaker for a post meeting. Remember observances of Abraham Lincoln and George Washington birthdays. Americanism Month. Plan big birthday program for March.

## **MARCH**

March 15-17 is anniversary of founding of The American Legion. Close out Membership Campaign and mail dues and cards to department before Birthday Party. Have your “Open House.” Boys State selection should be given priority. See **Community Service Month** above.

## **APRIL**

Children & Youth Month. Be sure to coordinate this with the Auxiliary. Secure Children and Youth Guide from department headquarters. Plan summer scouting activities. Boys State should be given priority. December 7, 1941, U.S. entry into World War II. How about an “Old Timers” night? Community service will elevate your post’s standing in the community. Plans should be made for election of new officers. American Legion Child Welfare Foundation week.

## **MAY**

May 8-10 is the anniversary of the St. Louis Caucus, which completed original organization of Legion back in 1919. Armed Forces Day, Mother’s Day and Memorial Day form the basis for good post programs. Do you have a uniformed group in the post? Do you decorate veterans’ graves? Present school awards at the end of school. Implement American Legion Baseball and summer athletic programs. Contact school officials now—to get Legion activities approved and on the calendar for next year—oratorical contest, Boys State, school awards, American Education Week, etc.

## **JUNE**

June 14th is Flag Day. Does your community fly flags on patriotic holidays? Good time to make a survey. History of “Old Glory” would make an excellent program for post meeting. Summer youth programs need your support and attendance. Community service will make your town a better place in which to live. Get ready for the 4th of July.

# Adjutant

*“My comrade, you have been chosen to assist your Commander in the wise and effective administration of the office and to serve not only your fellow Legionnaires, but also those whose relationship to our organization has led them to look to us for guidance and relief. You will find the duties many, varied, and at times taxing of your crowded hours and resources. The successful accomplishment of our program depends, to a great extent, upon you and your performance of the duties of your office.”*

—Charge from Installation Ceremony

The Adjutant holds the same relative position in the post as the secretary of any other organized body—and a little more—the office serves as the “first sergeant” of the company. Post activities revolve around the adjutant. Most posts find it wise to retain a good Adjutant in office over a period of years. The Adjutant may well be regarded as the “continuity person” in the post. While the Commander’s duties are largely inspirational and executive, an Adjutant’s duties are administrative. The Commander navigates the ship, but the Adjutant is the engineer who runs the ship’s machinery.

The Adjutant is the personnel officer, the intimate contact with the individual post member, maintains the membership records, minutes of meetings, checks up and assists the work of the other officers and committees, and publishes official orders, announcements and instructions.

All post records should be in the Adjutant’s custody; for ready access to all sources of information, and it is to his/her interest to develop a comprehensive filing system.

The Adjutant is primarily concerned with ways and means and, by virtue of a key position, can add effectiveness to all post activities. The office involves a great deal of work, and it is urgently recommended that some degree of compensation be paid the Adjutant, particularly in large posts.

## Suggestions for New Adjutant

The only indispensable qualifications are honesty and willingness. The Adjutant should get a set of post account books from the Emblem Sales Division, National Headquarters. They require no special knowledge of bookkeeping.

He/She should go through all the post records at the first opportunity. The constitution, minutes of meetings, and reports of officers and committees will give an insight into the post’s policies and traditions. Communications from department headquarters will put the Adjutant up to date on instructions.

A special *Post Adjutant’s Manual* is available with full information on the handling and processing of the automated membership card system plus other matters related to the duties of a Post Adjutant. Every Adjutant should have a copy of the *Post Adjutant’s Manual*.

## First Vice Commander

*“To you is given the responsibility of an active cooperation between yourself and the Commander. Particularly should you interest yourself in the membership of the Post. You should be assisted by the most active and devoted members. No single factor has so important an influence on the Post’s success as membership. You will be the exponent of means of safeguarding the honor of the Flag of our Country. To you are committed these endeavors with the expectation that you shall fulfill each and every one of them. You are the teacher of ‘Democracy’.”*

—Charge from Installation Ceremony

In the majority of posts, a First and Second Vice Commander are elected, with membership the primary concern of the First Vice Commander.

Frequently the success or failure of the membership record during his/her year determines the chances of advancing to the commandship the following year. In a few of our posts, one or two “tigers” (membership go-getters) will secure the big majority of the dues, but the possibility of death, illness, or a change of residence makes for a weak foundation on which a Vice Commander and the post are staking the post’s future. While each post is different, any membership campaign should cover certain fundamentals. Look at the methods used in the past. Were they successful? Do they need updating? Have new procedures been developed that would improve the plans now being used?

In a successful Post, a new Post Commander is going to contact the post officers and committee chairs right after being elected, either individually or at a special meeting, to lay out a general plan of operation for the entire year. This is the time when the membership plan should also be made.

## **Planning**

Any plan should answer the four W’s.

**WHERE?** Where do you want to go? What’s the objective? (Or, for a membership campaign, how many members do you want?)

**WHAT?** What steps have to be taken to reach the objective?

**WHO?** Who’s going to do all the things that have to be done in each of the steps that have to be taken to reach the goal?

**WHEN?** When is the work going to be done?

Only you and the members of your post know where you want to go, or how many members you want. But the steps you have to take to get there are very much the same in every post. If you can answer the following questions for your post and for your membership campaign, you have your job analyzed and know what steps have to be taken to reach your goal:

1. Mailed dues notices will bring in about 85 percent of your current members’ renewals. Who is going to contact those few who do not respond to mailed dues notices?
2. How are dropouts to be reinstated?
3. How are you going to get usable information on prospective members; how are they to be contacted; by whom; and how are those selected to be taken into your post?
4. What publicity will be needed?
5. Who can be counted on to work at membership?
6. What awards or special recognition will be given?
7. What special events will be tied in with membership, such as Veterans Day, team competition, contests with other posts, Legion Birthday observance, etc.?

*This can be the agenda for the first membership committee meeting. (See Duties of Membership Committee.)*

## **Other Duties**

Membership may be the primary assignment of a Vice Commander, but during a normal Legion year, the Vice Commander will have many other duties. He/She should become familiar with the ceremonial protocol for regular meetings. The chances are excellent that he /she will have to conduct one or more meetings during the year. Knowing how to prepare a meaningful and fruitful agenda is very important, as well as good experience. The Vice Commander must be ready to fill in for the Commander upon a moment’s notice.

## Second Vice Commander

*“Into your helpful hands are placed the important responsibilities of assisting the Commander with all duties. Particularly you should be interested in patriotic observances of all kinds, in developing Post activities, and in the entertainment features which mark all meetings. Help to observe strict tolerance among your members on all political, religious and civic matters. The applications of Justice will be your particular concern.”*

—Charge from Installation Ceremony

Is yours an average post? If so, many of the members joined The American Legion because of the social and recreational benefits they expected to receive. What is more, many of the members-to-come will also join for the same reason.

Yes, the Second Vice Commander does have a job—an important job. The responsibility is to build the “I-like-my-post-because . . .” atmosphere that finds a lot of Legionnaires having fun while still doing the work of the Legion.

The Commander will depend on the Second Vice Commander to provide the programs that spice up the meetings and attract attendance. The social calendar must always be filled several months in advance with activities that will bring out the active members, as well as those who are just card-carrying Legionnaires.

One of the first duties should be to contact other veteran and civic groups so that each patriotic holiday and observance receives the attention it deserves. He/She will be concerned with the pageantry so closely associated with the Legion.

The Second Vice Commander may not be in charge of the color guard or firing squad, but must promote it. He/She might not have a part on the initiation team, but should make sure one is functioning. In the pursuit of “Justice,” the Second Vice Commander will be concerned with the welfare of all fellow veterans, and will be interested in the work of the veterans affairs and rehabilitation committee. The Second Vice will need to know if the economic committee is functioning. The Second Vice Commander plays a dual role of fun and serious, which so typifies The American Legion.

## Finance Officer

*“You are the keeper of the moneys and in you is reposed the financial policy of the Post. To you is given charge of the year’s budget and to you is given the duty of the payment of all obligations when proper authorization has been given for such payment. Your position is an important one, demanding integrity and honesty. Your election to this office signifies that your comrades have implicit trust in you. Guard well that trust.”*

—Charge from Installation Ceremony

The Finance Officer must be a person of proven integrity and experience in handling financial affairs. The post is dependent on finance, just as any other organization, and will do well to accept expert advice in formulating and administering its financial policy.

The Finance Officer usually serves as the chair of the finance committee and is in charge of all receiving and disbursing of post funds. The Post Adjutant, in all matters relating to finance, should carry on the work in close correlation with the Finance Officer. Both officers must be covered by adequate bond. Department headquarters should be consulted on this for blanket bond arrangement.

Post accounting forms have been designed to meet the requirements of Legion posts in maintaining a correct and permanent membership and finance record. Because of their simplicity, they require no special knowledge of bookkeeping or accounting. Every Post Adjutant and Finance Officer should insist upon being provided with a set of forms. They will save time, reduce expenses, save money for the post.

Refer to the current Emblem Catalog for prices and detailed descriptions, or write to the National Emblem Sales Division.

Be prompt in remitting National and Department dues, along with the Department Record Card, to Department Headquarters. Note all payments and other transactions on your Post Membership Register.

## Service Officer

*“You have been singly honored by this Post by your election to perform fundamental, unselfish work, not only for the benefit of the members of this Post, but for those War veterans particularly in need of your service. Yours is the choice responsibility of looking out for the welfare of all concerned. The duties of a Service Officer are highly important and exacting, and while your accomplishments will be deeply appreciated by those immediately concerned, the work itself will not be sufficiently conspicuous to catch the headlines in the newspapers. Depending upon satisfactory performance of duty, there will come to you the heartfelt gratitude of each and every member of this post. I congratulate you upon the opportunity to serve so constructively and so unselfishly.”*

—Charge from Installation Ceremony

In naming the Service Officer, each post creates the most vital link in a nationwide network of American Legion service to America’s veterans. Through the Service Officer, the post can provide your community with a unique service.

The duties of the Post Service Officer call for a competent and dedicated person, preferably one who can serve indefinitely, and should have a deep interest in fellow veterans, the post, and community. If the Service Officer is readily available to those needing assistance, it will be helpful. Electing someone that works and lives close by will likely improve effectiveness.

A good Service Officer should be retained. The value of a Post Service Officer increases with length of service. As the Service Officer’s reputation grows, so will the prestige of the organization in your community.

Beyond the post, The American Legion maintains a full staff of appeals representatives in Washington, D.C., and at VA Insurance Centers. A small mobile staff of field representatives provides a constant flow of information concerning conditions in VA hospitals, domiciliaries, and regional offices throughout the country.

A team of Legion representatives also provides assistance and oral representation on behalf of former service members of the Armed Forces who petition Department of Defense Boards for review of less than fully honorable discharge or dismissal from the military services. The unit helps veterans in obtaining decorations and medals through the various Armed Forces and Decoration units.

Every Department has trained Service Officers in the various VA regional offices and hospitals in many counties.

The *Service Officer’s Manual* prepared by the National Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Division provides the Service Officer with basic information. Necessary claims forms can be secured from the Department Service Officer. Information will come through department publications, *National Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Bulletins*, Memorandums, and VA pamphlets. Training schools for Post Service Officers are held periodically in many departments to increase their knowledge and contacts.

The Post Service Officer is responsible for bringing to the attention of all veterans and their dependents the rights and benefits granted them by law—law for which the American Legion can accept a major share of credit.

The Service Officer must know how to utilize the expert services available through Legion channels, as well as those of other agencies in his community. It takes a dedicated person to get the information to the full-time professionals to make certain that every veteran and dependents are adequately represented.

With a large segment of today’s veteran population made up those who served during the Vietnam and the Persian Gulf Wars, the work of the Service Officer takes on increasing importance. Even more than the older veterans, these young men and women are apt to be not too well informed on veterans programs.

The older veterans will also continue to need advice on how to integrate possible veterans' benefits with their overall retirement plans. Dependents should be visited as soon as feasible after a veteran's death.

These and many other duties are routine to a good Service Officer, but there is more, such as serving as chair of the veterans affairs and rehabilitation or service committee and working closely with the children and youth committee, post employment officer, and the hospital visitation committee. The Auxiliary Unit frequently needs help. The Service Officer's report should be a standard part of every meeting.

Every Congress considers legislative matters of importance to veterans and to The American Legion. Working in cooperation with the post legislative committee, the Post Service Officer can aid in coordinating the support of the post with the national effort.

## Chaplain

*"To you is given the spiritual leadership of this Post. You will, I know, lend dignity and respect to your office. You should be in close confidence with the commander and the other officers of this Post, and should attend all meetings of the Post. You should be ready upon occasion to take your part in the initiation of new members, the dedication of halls, monuments of colors, and the funeral services for a comrade. All such ceremonies are made more commemorative by the use of our ritual. Into your keeping we place the spirit of comradeship of this Post. May harmony and unity prevail."*

—Charge from Installation Ceremony

The Chaplain need not necessarily be a clergyman, but must be a person capable of moral and intellectual leadership and one who gives dignity and respect to the office. The Chaplain should be in close touch with the Commander and other officers of the post and should attend all meetings of the post and Executive Committee. The leadership in many of the post's activities belongs of right to the Chaplain, and when this office is filled by the right kind of person, the usefulness of the post to the community will be greatly increased.

The *Manual of Ceremonies* gives an important place to the Chaplain in the conduct of meetings, in the observance of patriotic occasions, funeral services and dedication ceremonies. On these occasions, the Chaplain is the moral leader.

The Chaplain should cooperate with the Post Historian on graves registration work and inspire the post to its full duty in seeing that graves are decorated on Memorial Day. Besides officiating when requested at funerals of members, the Chaplain can be of service to bereaved families of post members.

The Chaplain may serve as chair of the post's Veterans Administration Voluntary Services (VAVS) Committee which coordinates the volunteer endeavors of the membership of nearby VA hospital facilities. The sick should be visited at hospital or home. For more information on VAVS, write the National Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Division, The American Legion, Washington Office.

The American Legion *Service to God and Country* handbook, available through department headquarters, gives a history of this program and offers working aids for the Post Chaplain and religious emphasis committee.

## Sergeant-At-Arms

*"You are the sentinel or tiler, the outer guard of this Post. You will guard especially against the loss of one of The American Legion's greater possessions—our deep and abiding spirit of comradeship. You will learn the identity of and introduce to the Commander all visiting comrades and guests of the Post. You are responsible that no one shall remain a stranger in our midst. Be ready at all times to assist your Commander. Into your hands is given charge of the stand of colors which you will properly display at all Post meetings and on ceremonial occasions."*

—Charge from Installation Ceremony

The Sergeant-at-Arms should know how to arrange the meeting hall and should assist the Post Commander and Adjutant in the preliminary arrangements for the meeting, including custodian of the colors and should be in charge of the color detail during the presentation and retirement ceremonies of the colors. The Sergeant-at-Arms is the flag etiquette person and should be well informed on proper flag display and procedures used in operating a meeting and should play a leading part in the post color guard, burial detail, and the other pageantry that is a part of The American Legion.

There is another duty—one that has a tremendous impact on the post's image, its membership, and its relationship with the members. Every Legionnaire wants to be part of the group. This is particularly important for that new Legionnaire attending his first few meetings. The Sergeant-at-Arms must make certain new members are welcomed, introduced, and made to feel they are important to the post.

A welcome committee should be standard for every post. The Sergeant-at-Arms is the logical person to chair such a committee. The members of this committee must welcome new members and guests, make sure they are introduced, and keep the Commander advised as to who should be acknowledged. This committee can also be used to encourage present members to attend meetings.

## Historian

*“Your Office is an important one. To you is given the responsibility of preserving and compiling the records of this Post. The future can only be judged by the past. Be mindful that the lamp of recorded experience may do much in guiding the footsteps of those who follow. Ever remember that without the recorded history of this Post, its policies and accomplishments will be a blank to the ones who come after we are gone.”*

**-Charge from Installation Ceremony**

The office of Historian is of growing importance. It is a suitable position in which a past Post Commander may serve.

There should be close and effective cooperation between the Adjutant and the Historian. The former works with the records on matters of current interest, and the latter on matters of historical interest.

The work of Post Historian is cumulative. It is well to leave it in the hands of one person as long as it's being handled well.

The Post Historian should keep in touch with the Department Historian and should be prompt in answering inquiries. *An annual report should be made to the Department Historian just before the department convention.*

Copies of whatever is printed concerning the post should be deposited in the local and state libraries, as well as in the post files. This is important and will prevent complete loss of valuable records through fire or other calamity, as well as provide material for those who are looking for information about The American Legion. Also, copies should be deposited in department archives.

The Post Historian should make a point of knowing what Historians of neighboring posts are doing. The Historian should attend department conventions and keep in touch with other Post Historians.

The Department Historian can advise Post Historians on department and national post history contests, historians' associations, and material available from the Department Historian that will assist in doing a better job.

An outline for a one-year Post narrative history and yearbook is graphically illustrated in the Appendix of this Officer's Manual, listed under “Histories Are Important.” The information recommended will be beneficial in assisting Post Historians in compiling these books.

# Judge Advocate

*“To you, my comrade, is assigned a most important duty for which your legal training and/or past Legion experience so aptly prepare you. You are the interpreter of the Constitution and By-Laws of your Post, and may at any time be called upon by the Commander and other officers and members of the Post to rule on the legality of their actions and decisions insofar as they affect the good of The American Legion. You are also charged with protecting the integrity of our organization and keeping alight the torch of truth and fidelity that symbolizes the high and ennobling ideals under which our great American Legion was founded. Protect wisely that heritage.”*

**—Charge from Installation Ceremony**

The primary duty of the Judge Advocate is to supply professional advice in the conduct of the post business or to procure proper counsel and is the guardian of constitutional form of post government.

Your Judge Advocate can supply valuable assistance to other post committees and officers. That officer should be available to the Service Officer for legal advice and to the Americanism committee on matters relating to education and naturalization laws. Any post committee can benefit from the Judge Advocate’s contacts with the office holders of local government.

The Judge Advocate and legal committee are charged by the suggested post constitution with the duty of auditing post financial accounts. This should be done annually just before the election of officers or more frequently at their discretion.

# Executive Committee

*“The administrative affairs of this post of The American Legion shall, except as may be otherwise provided by the By-Laws, be under the supervision of an Executive Committee which shall consist of . . . . members in addition to the officers of the post.”*

**Suggested Form for Post Constitution  
Article V—Officers—Section 1**

*“The government and management of the post is entrusted to an Executive Committee of . . . . members, to be known as the ‘Executive Committee’.”*

**Suggested Form of Post By-Laws  
Article II—Management—Section 1**

In the model post constitution and by-laws appearing elsewhere in this book, the government and management of the post is entrusted to the Executive Committee. Meetings of the Executive Committee are set for regular intervals upon the call of the Commander or as often as the Commander may deem necessary.

The Post Executive committee is further charged with hiring such employees as may be necessary; authorizing and approving all expenditures; requiring adequate bonds from all persons having the custody of post funds; hearing reports of post committee chairmen; and generally having charge of and being responsible for the management of the affairs of the post.

Delegation of these functions to the Executive Committee is in no way intended to usurp the powers of the membership through regular post meetings. Rather, this allows the dull, routine, operational affairs of the post to be resolved without distracting from post meetings. Committee reports of general interest to members should still be given at post meetings.

The key to interesting post meetings is using the Executive Committee effectively. The post meeting that becomes bogged down in arguments on petty details is interesting only to those doing the talking. The meeting is dead and a waste of time to everyone else.

# Standing Committees

*“. . . This post, by its By-Laws, may provide for such other standing committees as the business of the organization may require.”*

## **Suggested Form for Post Constitution Article V—Officers—Section 1**

*“The post commander, immediately upon taking office each year, shall appoint the following standing committees: Americanism, Ceremonials, Children and Youth, Economic, Finance, Foreign Relations, Graves Registration and Memorial, House and Entertainment, Legislative, Membership, Public Relations, Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation, National Security, Sons of The American Legion and Visiting or VAVS. Such standing committees shall consist of such members, and the chair thereof, as shall be designated by the post commander.”*

## **Suggested Form of Post By-Laws Article VI—Appointments—Section 1**

People, time, effort, and organization are required to carry out the programs of The American Legion. Whether those programs are continuing services for disabled veterans or a dance, most of your work will be accomplished through committees. There are listed here committees which posts normally have, together with a brief statement on the usual duties of these committees. Your post constitution and/or your department constitution may require additional committees or may have other names for some of the committees, and the following list is not intended to be mandatory or complete for every American Legion Post.

No post can stand still. New programs are needed from time to time, old programs needed to be changed, revitalized, and in some cases, dropped. Early in your term of office, you and your post officers should take time to review the programs and activities which have been carried on in the past and to decide on desirable changes or additions. The activities that are to be carried on determine the committees that are needed. The next task is to review the membership of the post and even nonmember eligibles. From this review, a list can be set up of potential committee heads and members. Frequently a nonmember eligible will want to become a member of your post if the post has an activity or is planning an activity in which the person is personally interested. Whoever makes a contact with such a nonmember eligible must be able to point out the need for the program and the reason why this particular person is desired to assist in it.

Each committee chair needs to know how the work of the committee fits into the overall program of the post and he needs to know what is expected, and when.

Here’s the list of what might be called standard post committees and their usual duties:

### **Americanism**

Purpose: To inspire patriotism and good citizenship through patriotic observances, patriotic and civic instruction in schools, Americanization of aliens, information on anti-American propaganda, youth activities such as Boys State, Scouts, Oratorical Contest, School Award Medals, baseball, flag etiquette, and other similar community services, as well as provide a listing of available scholarships through the “Need A Lift?” booklet.

### **Children and Youth**

Purpose: To insure that any child of a veteran in need of care and protection shall receive proper and timely service and aid; to strengthen the family unit; extend support to sound organizations and facilities that provide services for children and youth; and to maintain a well-rounded program that meets the needs of the young people in their respective community.

## **Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation**

Purpose: To assist veterans in obtaining needed hospitalization, in the pursuance of claims and in obtaining other veteran's rights and benefits; to visit comrades who are sick or disabled; to visit and comfort members of their families when sick or bereaved. (The head of the Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Committee may be the post service officer of the post veterans affairs and rehabilitation chair. In addition, the post chaplain may serve as chair of the Visiting Committee.)

## **National Security**

Purpose: To organize the post membership in support of national or civilian defense projects in the community; to organize the post and to assist in organizing the community for readiness to meet any emergency.

## **Membership and Post Activities**

Purpose: To obtain, retain and increase the membership of the post with specific responsibilities for renewals, enrollment of new members, transfers and reinstatements. (The first vice commander frequently serves as chair of the Membership Committee.)

## **Public Relations**

Purpose: To promote public awareness and support of the Legion's programs and presence in the community through publicity on Post activities using local media such as newspapers, radio, TV, cable TV, and neighborhood newsletters; sponsoring and/or participating in community events; conducting a speakers' bureau; advising and assisting the Post Commander and program committee chairs in the planning of such activities for optimum public exposure and media interest; and keeping the membership informed of Legion programs and policies. Public Relations is a membership multiplier.

## **Legislative**

Purpose: To promote the official legislative mandates of The American Legion; disseminate monthly legislative updates; establish, maintain and promote proactive grassroots lobbying activities; and establish and maintain liaison with elected officials and their staff. All activities must be in compliance with Section 2, Article II of the Constitution of The American Legion: *"The American Legion shall be absolutely non-political and shall not be used for the dissemination of partisan principles nor for the promotion of the candidacy of any person seeking public office or preferment."*

However, voter education is a critical element of the electoral process. This does not prohibit your post from holding town hall meetings, "Meet the Candidate Nights," or allowing candidates to address post meetings, district conferences, or state conventions. Candidates may be allowed to participate, as long as an invitation is extended to all candidates affording them an equal opportunity to participate. The American Legion cannot endorse or oppose any candidate, even if the candidate is a Legionnaire and Post member. A Post home should be free of any political materials that would appear to be an endorsement of a particular candidate. If the position of one candidate is posted, the position of all candidates must be posted. Every effort must be made to remain nonpartisan.

**Note: IF IN DOUBT, CONTACT THE NATIONAL JUDGE ADVOCATE FOR CLARIFICATION, BEFORE PROCEEDING.**

## **Finance**

Purpose: To supervise the receiving, disbursement, and accounting of all post funds; to prepare annual budget recommendations for the post; to advise the post on all financial policies. (The post finance officer is normally the chair of the Finance Committee.)

## **Economic**

Purpose: To serve and assist veterans in meeting and overcoming economic problems such as employment, veterans preference, housing, civil service appeals, employment of handicapped and older workers.

## **House**

Purpose: To supervise the operation of physical facilities of a post such as a club room, American Legion Center, meeting room, etc. Supervision includes administration, responsibility for equipment, hiring and direction of employees, as authorized by Post Executive Committee, and general rules applicable to the conduct of members while on the premises of the post.

## **Service**

The Service Committee is a key component of every successful post. Its duties and operations are especially important during the period immediately following the termination of hostilities. The Service Officer may be the chair; however, the responsibilities of the committee go beyond the day-to-day functions of a good Service Officer in filing claims, securing hospitalization, etc. The Service Committee also is concerned with jobs, with veteran contact, with visits to ailing comrades, with on-the-job training, and with pensions. This committee should also be responsible for maintaining contact with any members of the armed forces from the community served by the post. With the nation's defenses depending upon all-volunteer armed services, it becomes absolutely essential that the man or woman in uniform be assured of the community's respect and support.

## **Other Committees**

In addition to the above, your post may have need for other committees, depending on the specific programs and activities being sponsored. Some of the other committees that you might need include:

### **Graves Registration and Memorial Committee**

Purpose: To record, mark and decorate graves of deceased veterans; to render service and comfort to bereaved families; to provide American Legion funeral services when requested.

### **Sons of The American Legion**

Purpose: To act as a supervisory committee for the Sons of The American Legion Squadron in connection with its organization, activities, recreational and educational programs.

### **Uniformed Groups**

Purpose: To organize, train, promote and supervise a uniform group, such as a drum and bugle corps, color guard, chorus, firing squad, etc.

### **Visiting or VAVS**

The purpose of the visiting committee is to give comfort and assistance to members and their families when sick or bereaved, and to visit hospitalized veterans. It is recommended the Post Chaplain be chair and all post members share in this vital function by taking their turn as committee members.

## **The Post**

The American Legion is incorporated by act of Congress and is organized into local posts, which, for purposes of coordination and administration, are grouped into departments. The post is the combat unit of The American Legion. Depending upon its ability to absorb American Legion policies and properly

interpret them to the local people, and to successfully carry out unselfish activities for the community, the state and the nation, our organization will stand or fall.

The responsibility given to the individual post has proved the source of our strength and growth. The post is to a large degree autonomous, restricted only by broad general guidelines carried in the National or Department Constitution and By-Laws. The post must never forget, however, the implied responsibility it has to the veterans and the children of its community and to the community itself.

The post is The American Legion. Its duties are beautifully spelled out in the Preamble to the Constitution of The American Legion.

Membership is by posts only. Programs are effective to the degree the post adopts and puts them into operation. Mutual helpfulness becomes a reality through the comradeship, social activities, pride of achievement, and the service programs of the post.

### **Image of The American Legion**

The word “image” is merely a shortcut way of referring to the spontaneous and more-or-less subconscious feelings and reactions of people for an institution, other people, products, or ideas.

The “image” of The American Legion is the reaction—mental and emotional—which anyone has to the organization. Each individual may have a different mental image of the Legion, and each post creates its own local image to a great degree. The local image is colored to some extent by a department and national image.

The image which the individual Legionnaire—particularly the post officer—has of The American Legion will determine in large measure what the post is. If the person’s image of The American Legion is as a bar, the post will be a bar and that is all. If the person thinks the post is doing a good job but it still isn’t attracting new members, then the image of what The American Legion should be, or is, does not agree with what the majority of veterans in the area want in an organization. There is room in The American Legion for many different personal images of The American Legion.

All posts do not have to be cast in the same mold, although there is a tendency to think they are. We get into membership difficulty in a community when a group with a narrow image of The American Legion becomes dominant and suppresses any other group with a different image. The image which the individual Legionnaire has can prevent the development of new activities which would produce new leaders and new membership, or it can result in the expansion of programs, leadership and, eventually membership.

It can also either help or hinder the establishment of needed new posts, which might attract and serve an entirely new group of veterans.

### **Kinds of Posts**

Yes, each individual Legionnaire sees The American Legion through personal experiences or desires. The organization is big enough and broad enough to accommodate him (or her), but the post will reflect the composite personality of its members. There are country club-type posts and community posts. There are ethnic groups and all-women posts. There are business and professional posts, company posts, and posts from a fraternal group. There are many different kinds of Posts and all doing the work of The American Legion.

### **Goals or Standards**

Some posts have several thousand members—others are successful with less than a hundred. What the post wants to do and needs to do, it can do. But only if the membership, and the post officers in particular, carefully spell out its goals or standards in terms of service to the community and then translate these goals into action, will the post be successful. Service takes many forms. It’s getting the manpower or membership to do a job. It’s having fun while doing it. And it’s doing something that needs to be

done, whether for the members or the community. This means that the post officers must be aware of the likes and dislikes of its members, and equally aware of the needs of the community.

### **Developing Leaders**

All of this implies that there are active devoted Legionnaires. There are, but The American Legion goes through a terrific amount of manpower. Nearly 15,000 new Post Commanders are needed each year. This goes over the 100,000 mark when other post officers are elected. Some members hold the same office year after year, but there is always a need for replacements.

Where do these replacements come from? First, the veteran becomes a member. Then, experience, education, and exposure through serving on committees, attending leadership schools, conventions and conferences make that person ready for other positions of responsibility.

Over the years The American Legion has played a part in developing a tremendous number of Legionnaires who have gone on to make a mark in other fields, but leadership training, formal or informal, is a never-ending task. Anytime a post has a search for a new Commander, the danger signals are flying.

## **The Post and Its Community**

What the community thinks of The American Legion is just as basic as what a Legion Post thinks of itself. The American Legion exists only with the approval of our society, or at least a large segment of it. This is true whether it's the national organization or a post. Each post is judged by the community. Its success or failure reflects this judgment. A good post will encourage active participation by its members with other civic-minded committees and organizations within the community. It will seek to participate whether or not the activity is initiated by The American Legion.

The good post will know the needs of the community. It will know them by the simple process of planned contacts by representative post members with city officials, educators, welfare workers, community leaders and with other civic and fraternal groups. A Legionnaire who does a good job for the community deserves recognition and thanks from the post, whether it was a post-sponsored project or not.

Veterans activities alone will not establish The American Legion as an asset in the eyes of the community. These are, however, of particular importance to an organization composed exclusively of veterans.

### **Establishing Political Grassroots**

As Legionnaires, **we** are soldiers on the front lines of the battle for veterans' benefits. Veterans and their families earned these benefits at a high price: in battles around the world safeguarding the principles of justice, freedom and democracy for **all** Americans! The American Legion must continue to establish, nurture and maintain personal relationships with all elected officials and their staff at the local, state and national levels. Legionnaires can teach elected officials what this battle is all about: Sign them up as members of The American Legion family, if they are eligible for the Legion, Auxiliary and/or the Sons. Extend them an invitation to participate in local and state activities: to judge an oratorical contest; to speak at Boys and Girls State; to throw our the first pitch at a Legion baseball game; to address post, district or department meetings; to participate as the keynote speaker in a flag disposal ceremony; to officiate at a memorial service for fallen comrades on patriotic holidays; or any other significant event. Give members of their staff the same consideration, because they are a part of the elected official's inner circle of political advisors.

During an election year, consider having a "Meet the Candidate's Night" meeting. To comply with Section 2, Article II of the Constitution of The American Legion, invite **all** candidates and let them explain what they plan to do for veterans and their families if elected. Many congressional members started their careers as local elected officials. What better way to introduce these legislators to The

American Legion family and establish a positive relationship than from the beginning of their political lives?

Consider having a town hall meeting focused on veterans' issues. Invite elected officials to address and answer questions from their constituents from the veterans community. This is an opportunity for framing the discussion solely on critical veterans' issues. This is not the appropriate setting to discuss specific individual VA disability claims or other benefits problems, but rather general concerns.

When an elected official participates in local Legion activities, be sure to discuss critical Legion legislative issues and widely publicize the event. Tangible and intangible rewards help establish a strong desire by the elected official for a return appearance. The American Legion's lobbying efforts improve tremendously when Legionnaires *back home* address the same issues echoed by Legion members on Capitol Hill. It is critical that Legionnaires establish, develop and cultivate strong relationships with congressional offices in the states. This is permissible without violating Section 2, Article II of the Constitution of The American Legion. Keep in mind that The American Legion deals with issues, not personalities. The American Legion seeks elected officials to support its legislative mandates, not the other way around. The American Legion cannot endorse any incumbent or candidate for elected or appointed offices in the government. Offer to serve on an elected official's advisory council or on a military academy candidate screening committee. If your Member of Congress does not have such an advisory council or screening committee, offer to establish one. Good relations with Members and their district offices will pay big dividends in dealing with Members in Washington, DC.

One of the most effective strategies and another valuable part of the Legion's legislative effort is letter writing. Letter writing is an excellent way to begin building a relationship with elected officials. Written communication puts both the Legion and your elected officials "on record" concerning critical issues. When communicating by mail, personal letters have a tremendous impact in Congress and will usually generate a response. To be effective, letters must be brief, informative and factually correct. Limit each letter to only one topic to get the best response. Multiple topics make the letter more difficult to respond to quickly and puts it in the "answer when I get time" file. **The American Legion Dispatch** is an excellent reference source on critical issues pending in Congress. "Dateline: Capitol Hill" by the National Legislative Commission Chairman appears regularly.

Letters should briefly describe the issue, present significant facts and, most importantly, tell the elected official what action to take. Use a personal example to demonstrate the impact of the legislative issue on local veterans. Equally important, specifically ask the elected official for a written response. Please forward responses from any congressional correspondence to the Legislative Division in Washington, DC. The Legislative staff uses such congressional correspondence to help develop legislative strategy. Informed constituents have the greatest impacts on determining the way a Member of Congress votes.

If your Post does not have a copy of [How to Make a Difference Through Effective Grassroots Lobbying](#), contact the National Legislative Commission for a complementary copy for your Post's Legislative Committee Chairperson.

## Social Activities

Someone once described The American Legion as an organization that came to play but stayed to work. The same description pretty well fits a Legionnaire. In fact, two-thirds of our members joined because of the real or expected comradeship, fun, or social activities. A good post will recognize this. It will give as much attention to a social event as it does to planning a more serious project. The Legion Post can and should provide many of the outside social contacts for the Legionnaire and family. All events should be scheduled well in advance and publicized. Each post must determine the type of social

activities that will appeal to the greatest number of its members. But more important, each activity should be evaluated as to its acceptance by the community and the eligible veterans.

### **American Legion Buildings**

All of the foregoing presumes that something will take place somewhere. Frequently this is an American Legion activity center or post home, a familiar but varied sight across America. Some are country clubs, others are community centers. Some are primarily bars; others simply meeting halls. Some are current models representing an up-to-date post; others haven't been renovated or changed since before World War II. Some appeal to a particular type of veteran; others have a general appeal. Some are landscaped and painted. Most are just a non-descript building.

To assist an American Legion Post in its plans to build a new post facility or improve its existing building, a publication—*Post Operations Manual*—has been prepared. This booklet contains basic information which is pertinent to a building program—Standards, Planning Criteria, Financing and Related Administration Suggestions, etc.—plus some success stories of actual post-building programs. Sketches of floor plans are also included in the publication. The *Post Operations Manual* may be obtained by writing to the Membership and Post Activities Section, The American Legion, Indianapolis Office.

### ***Post Club Room—It's Your Decision***

It's up to the individual post also to decide whether it is to have club room facilities. If your post decides it wants a club room and/or bar, then it calls for the best possible operation. To assist those post officers charged with the supervision of the post club room facilities, the *Post Operations Manual* has been prepared. This manual covers such topics as the duties of a club manager, labor costs, beverage control, food service, etc. It also contains a guide on how to use proven principles of financial accounting. The *Post Operations Manual* is available from the Membership and Post Activities Section.

## **Elections**

If the work of the post has gone well and the present officers have been effective, there should be no lack of competition for the elective post offices. But there may come a time when someone must be approached and urged to run for Post Commander or the other elective offices. This is particularly true in some smaller posts where many of the members have already served. This situation should be anticipated and long-range plans made to cope with it.

The present post officers and the active Legionnaires must always be on the alert toward developing future officer material. A Legionnaire showing ability and interest should be encouraged to seek a higher office.

The post constitution and by-laws will spell out the dates for nomination and election of officers. If these dates do not agree with the department constitution and by-laws, the post dates should be changed. To maintain necessary communications between the post and the department, it is desirable all posts hold elections near the same date, and the results of these elections be promptly reported to the department.

## **Installation**

The installation of a new group of officers provides the first occasion of the new Legion year for an impressive ceremony and reason for one of the top social events in the post's calendar. If new officers are casually installed, their attitude toward their obligation will be casual. If the installation is accompanied by a banquet, visits from the department and district officers, and the type of social entertainment that

draws a crowd, the new officers are going to be fully aware of the responsibilities they have assumed.

In many departments, regulations are in effect as to who the installing officers should be. It is well to check with your district commander for such details.

## Initiations and Other Rituals

Impressive installation ceremonies can provide the framework around which other rituals can develop. Your *Manual of Ceremonies* covers the initiation of new members, dedication of halls, funeral services, and other rituals standard throughout The American Legion. Frequently department or national headquarters can provide additional tools to make these ceremonies more effective. A contact with department headquarters will provide this information.

The primary objective in all rituals is to provide for the full impressiveness that has been built into the actual ritual.

## Inter-Post Meetings

Post officers can learn from their counterparts in another post, but more important, inter-post meetings provide an opportunity for social and fraternal gatherings that do much toward building the solidarity of our posts and our individual Legionnaires.

Check with the posts nearby; you usually find them more receptive to such a program. Frequently the home Post Commander opens the meeting and conducts the program; the visiting Post Commander closes the meeting. Color guards can also be interchanged.

Just as important is the fact that the increased attendance caused by joint meetings will allow you to secure more outstanding speakers and better entertainment.

## National Headquarters

The top legislative body of The American Legion is the National Convention. The National Executive Committee is vested with administrative authority between National Conventions.

Through its national organization, the unity of the Legion is effected as a national force. Through National Headquarters, the policies of the Legion are clarified and its activities are centered and directed. Thus, the influence of nearly 15,000 posts is coordinated and directed along the lines of Legion policy. Your national headquarters has offices in Indianapolis and Washington, D.C.

## Department

It has previously been mentioned The American Legion is organized into departments and, these in turn, into posts. There is one department in each state, the District of Columbia, and there may be one in each territory and insular possession of the United States (Puerto Rico). Each department may prescribe the constitution of its posts, and the department has supervision of the posts within its boundaries and the posts assigned to it by the National Executive Committee. There are also foreign departments in the Philippines, France, and Mexico. In all, there are 55 departments.

# District Organization

Departments have the authority to create intermediate bodies between the post and department to assist as a liaison between such organizations, and for the purpose of promoting the programs of The American Legion. The department executive committee or constitution defines the powers of such intermediate groups. In no event shall such powers invade the prerogatives now vested in either the post, or department, or the national organization.

The most common division that has been established is the partition of the department into districts. However, many of our departments do provide for county organizations, inter-county councils, and other subdivisions below the district level. In one department, county organizations substitute for districts.

Depending upon the powers delegated, the district does have some supervisory powers over the posts comprising the district; but the primary purpose is to promote, stimulate, and coordinate the programs so the work of the posts becomes more effective.