

THE TENNESSEE LEGIONNAIRE



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Message from the Department Commander

By Tonya Launsby

Department Commander

The 21st Century Ad-Hoc Committee Report focuses on three areas, and it is to be implemented at all levels of the organization:

- Legacy and Vision;
- Membership and Member Engagement;
- Training

Our continued survival depends on several critical points to remember:

1. We cannot lose focus on what brought us into the game--- know our mission.
2. We must understand the wants, needs and desires of our mem-

bership base.

3. We must engage our members through effective and timely communication.
4. We serve a diversified veteran's demographics, but a veteran is a veteran.
5. We must collectively maintain committed, dedicated and trained leadership.
6. We must strive for each and every post to be the pillar of their respective community in service to each and every veteran and their family.

This year's vision: True North: Guidance-Direction-Purpose; steering OUR way to success!



Make sure you are having fun and remember, I am here if you need me. Grow your business!

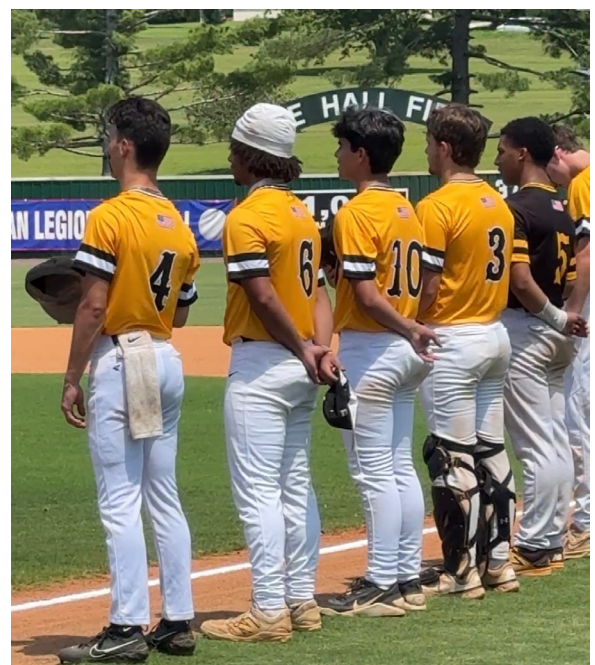
Tennessee hosts two AL Baseball state tournaments

Tennessee American Legion Baseball hosted two tournaments in July: one for 17U and one for 19U. The 17U tournament was held at Lawrenceburg High School and featured six teams from Loretto, Pulaski, Columbia, Gallatin, Clarksburg and Lawrenceburg.

The 19U tournament featured teams from Columbia, Pulaski and Clarksburg and was played at Columbia State Community College.

Commissioner Phil Pillet has coordinated a statewide TALB fund raiser on October 10 that asks posts to set up a table at a local Walmart and hand out Tootsie Pops and collect donations for the Tennessee American Legion Sports Foundation. Proceeds will benefit the foundation, and the fundraiser will build awareness about American Legion Baseball.

Stay tuned for more details.



Protecting the TAL Brand in the Age of AI

By Mike Griffin
Department Adjutant

The American Legion Family has issued clear and uncompromising guidance on the use of generative artificial intelligence in connection with its official brand-marks and emblems. These marks—representing The American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary, Sons of The American Legion, American Legion Riders, American Legion Baseball, Boys State and Boys Nation, Girls State and Girls Nation, Junior Shooting Sports, Be The One, and all related subbrands—are legally protected assets that must remain fully accurate in every application.

The guidance states plainly that “Generative AI tools of any kind MAY NOT be used to create, recreate, upscale, or otherwise alter, stylize or modify the official symbols of The American Legion...” This prohibition exists because AI tools frequently introduce subtle but unacceptable

inaccuracies. As the document notes, “Even a 1% variance in color, proportion, or font weight is a violation of our legal ownership of these marks.”

Examples included in the guidelines demonstrate how AI generated imagery can distort essential elements: incorrect flag details, missing inner ring features, inaccurate brand colors, and failure to maintain required clear-space. These errors, even when minor, compromise the integrity of the organization’s identity and violate trademark standards.

However, the Legion does permit the use of generative AI for general artwork—backgrounds, layouts, textures, and creative elements—provided the AI is not asked to generate or modify any Legion emblem or brandmark.

To ensure compliance, the Branding Guidelines introduce a simple twostep “Stamp Method”:

1. **Generate the backgr ound or layout first.** Use any AI tool to create the visual foundation, but do not reference Legion marks or names in

the prompt.

2. **Add the official emblem afterward.** Import the AIgenerated artwork into a design program such as Canva or Adobe Express, then place the official, approved brandmarkor emblem on top using the highresolution files provided by National Headquarters.

This method guarantees full accuracy, proper color usage , required outlines, and correct clear space—while still allowing Posts, Districts, and Departments to benefit from modern creative tools.

The message is clear: generative AI can support creativity, but it cannot replace the precision and legal protection of official American Legion brand assets.

By following the guidelines, members ensure that every flyer, poster, social media graphic, and promotional item reflects the professionalism, heritage, and trust associated with the American Legion name.

The Everyday Value of Chaplains

By Shoney Shonebarger
Department Chaplain

The value of Chaplains in the American Legion Department of Tennessee is best understood by looking at the quiet, consistent, and compassionate work they perform every day. At their core, Chaplains embody the Legion’s commitment to service, unity, and care for every veteran and family member who walks through the doors of a Post. Their ministry is not confined to

ceremonies or official gatherings; it is lived out in counseling conversations, bedside visits, grief support, and the sacred duty of remembrance.

Chaplains serve as pastoral counselors, offering veterans and their families a safe place to talk through life’s challenges—whether emotional, spiritual, or relational. Many veterans carry burdens that are not easily shared, and the Chaplain’s presence provides a confidential, trusted space where healing can begin. This coun-

seling role strengthens the fabric of each Post, helping members feel seen, valued, and supported.

Another essential responsibility is visiting the sick and homebound within the Post community. These visits remind veterans that they are never forgotten. Whether in hospitals, nursing homes, or private residences, Chaplains bring encouragement, prayer, companionship, and the

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FINANCIAL STATEMENTS as of JUNE 30, 2026			
ASSETS		INCOME	
UNRESTRICTED FUNDS:		Dues Regular	\$288,891.50
CURRENT ASSETS:		Riders/Veterans & Childrens Fund	\$6,442.00
Cash and Cash Equivalents	\$650,380.27	Interest/General Funds	\$128.03
Investments	\$338,704.34	Charitable Contributions/NEF Donations	\$26,281.00
	-----	Dividends John Deere Stock	\$4,315.68
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS	\$989,084.61	Conferences/Conventions	\$39,485.32
		Insurance/Emblem Sales Commissions	\$41,792.33
		Closed Post Funds	\$351,517.97
		Boys State Income (Expenses)	-\$30,378.14
Property and Equipment	\$1,526,359.19	Labels/Fundraising Programs	\$6,246.50
Accumulated Depreciation	-\$522,737.22		-----
	-----	TOTAL INCOME	\$734,722.19
TOTAL UNRESTRICTED FUNDS	\$1,992,706.58		
		National Dues Current	\$9,752.50
RESTRICTED FUNDS:		National Dues Prior Years	\$0.00
Cash and Cash Equivalents	\$361,239.16	Salaries/Taxes	\$165,109.67
Investments	\$524,561.81	Commander/Adjutant/Asst Adjutant	\$24,948.98
	-----	Vice/District Commanders	\$7,585.91
TOTAL RESTRICTED FUNDS	\$885,800.97	Conventions/Conferences	\$90,621.99
		Office Machines/Equipment/Computers	\$12,093.39
TOTAL ASSETS	\$2,878,507.55	Membership Expenses	\$8,390.68
		TN Legion College/Basic Training	\$3,027.36
LIABILITIES AND EQUITY		Emblem Sales/Flags	\$3,119.17
UNRESTRICTED FUNDS:		Postage	\$7,137.99
CURRENT LIABILITIES:		Printing/Supplies	\$4,291.88
Accounts Payable	\$42,288.00	Telephone/Utilities	\$26,718.43
Funds Held for Others	\$127,941.95	Maintenance/Repairs	\$15,311.87
Surplus Capital	\$286,640.72	VA & R Programs	\$1,000.00
	-----	Insurance	\$19,954.80
TOTAL UNRESTRICTED FUNDS	\$456,870.67	Depreciation	\$41,483.80
		Labels/Fundraising Expenses	\$781.43
RESTRICTED FUNDS:		Youth Programs	\$23,491.38
FUND BALANCES:	\$2,181,989.84	CPA Audit/Legal Fees@Post 95	\$26,163.49
Net Income / (Loss)	\$ 239,647.04	Miscellaneous Expenses	\$4,090.43
	-----		-----
TOTAL RESTRICTED FUNDS	\$2,421,636.88	TOTAL EXPENSES	\$495,075.15
TOTAL LIABILITIES/EQUITY	\$2,878,507.55	NET INCOME	\$ 239,647.04

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assurance that the American Legion stands with them. These moments of connection often become lifelines for veterans facing illness, loneliness, or hardship.

Chaplains also play a central role in Memorial Services, honoring the lives and legacies of departed comrades. These services are more than ceremonies—they are acts of gratitude, ensuring that every veteran’s story is remembered with dignity. Likewise,

Chaplains officiate holiday memorials such as Veterans Day, Memorial Day, and other patriotic observances. Their leadership helps communities reflect on sacrifice, freedom, and the enduring values that define our nation.

As the Department Chaplain, I am committed not only to serving veterans directly but also to strengthening the ministry of Chaplains across Tennessee. I am available to train Post Chaplains, equipping them with

practical tools, pastoral skills, and spiritual support so they can serve their Posts with confidence and compassion.

In addition, I provide pastoral care to Chaplains themselves, ensuring they have encouragement, guidance, and a listening ear as they carry out their vital work.

Feel free to reach out to me at jt-shonebarger@gmail.com or 601.446.CHAP (2427).

Message from the Senior Vice Commander

By Ron Hessil

Senior Vice Commander

Hello Tennessee Legionnaires. I don't take lightly your voting for me at State Convention to serve for you as the Senior Vice Commander for the great State of Tennessee. I just returned home today from attending all the Commander Tour Stops across the 10 districts.

One of the items I spoke about is the Awards Guide that was passed out to each Post in attendance at our tour stops. I do have a few extras that I will carry with me in my travels.

The first of the awards to start working on are the Service awards for Police, Fireman and EMT responders. These are due to Department Headquarters right after the first of

the year.

I am available a would like to attend our Post Meetings and Functions your Posts are hosting as long I am not booked already. I look forward to meeting as many of you as I can during this year.

I am here to serve you and help in way I can. If I don't know the answer, I will search for it.

I did attend the 17U Opening Day State Baseball Tournament. What a joy it was to watch these boys compete in the Game that all love.

This week I will be in Indianapolis for Membership training. I will be home for a week for leaving to National Convention in Louisville, Ky.

As Commander has said at all the stops, "Let's have fun."

Dept of TN Legionnaire of the Year

Since joining the American Legion in 2023, Ryan Mitchell of Scotts Hill Post 243 has become one of the most active, dedicated, and influential members of his post. He immediately stepped into service—joining the Honor Guard, attending district meetings, and completing all available training, including Department Legion College, at the earliest opportunity. His drive to learn and lead has been unmatched.

Deeply committed to Americanism, he has recruited for Boys State, the Oratorical Program, and even founded the first-ever American Legion Baseball team in his post's history. He actively involves local Scouts and builds strong relationships with schools and community leaders.

As Honor Guard Captain, he has transformed the team's presence, securing participation in six parades, creating new ceremonies, and ensuring the Guard never misses a military funeral honor. His outreach has expanded requests for service across multiple counties, and he even assists other posts in developing their own Honor Guards.

He has organized major community events, including a new Flag Day tractor show and flag retirement ceremony, and he regularly works with area schools to train student color guards



who now perform the 13 Folds Ceremony. He has led safety events, recognized first responders, and brought city and county leaders into post activities.

He recruits new members, personally contacts lapsed members, and now serves as Post Vice Commander and Squadron Commander for the Sons of The American Legion. His energy, vision, and leadership have elevated the post in every way.

Put simply, he is a driving force for the future of his post—a true leader, a tireless servant, and a deserving honoree for this award.

Message from the Middle Tennessee Commander

By Shaun Brunelle

Middle Tennessee Vice Commander

As the newly elected Middle Tennessee Vice Commander, I will focus on helping every Post prepare the next generation of leaders and recognize the outstanding members who make our organization successful.

Leadership does not happen by chance. Every Post should actively identify members with the desire and ability to serve in leadership positions and provide them with opportunities to gain knowledge from experienced officers.

Mentorship is essential to maintain strong posts, preserve our traditions, and ensure continuity of service to veterans, their families, and our com-

munities.

I encourage every commander and officer to take an active role in mentoring future post officers. Invite newer members to participate in meetings, committee work, community events, and district functions. Share your knowledge of American Legion programs, parliamentary procedure, membership development, and veteran advocacy. Investing in future leaders today will strengthen our organization for years to come.

In addition to developing leaders, it is equally important that we recognize those whose dedication goes above and beyond. This year, I am encouraging every post in our department to establish or continue a Post Legionnaire of the Year recognition pro-

gram. Selecting a deserving member is an excellent way to acknowledge exceptional service while inspiring others to get involved.

Outstanding service deserves recognition beyond the Post, and Department awards highlight the remarkable contributions being made across Tennessee. By participating in the nomination process, we ensure that deserving members receive the appreciation they have earned while highlighting the strength of our Posts.

I look forward to working alongside each of you as we continue to strengthen the department. Thank you for your dedication, your service, and your commitment to ensuring that our organization remains strong for generations to come.

2025 - 2026 Department Leadership

DEPARTMENT COMMANDER

Tonya Launsby, 731-636-9600, tonyalaunsby@gmail.com

DEPARTMENT SENIOR VICE COMMANDER

Ron Hessil, 262-515-1746, rhessil@sbcglobal.net

NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBER

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EAST TN VICE COMMANDER Dwight Woodcock, 423-223-7966, dwoodcock2399@gmail.com

MIDDLE TN VICE COMMANDER Shaun Brunelle, 931-200-4869, sjbusnpa@gmail.com

WEST TN VICE COMMANDER: Jean Launsby, 731-487-2825, launsby55@gmail.com

DEPARTMENT CHAPLAIN Shoney Shonebarger, 601-446-2427 jtshonebarger@gmail.com

DISTRICT COMMANDERS

First: Jean Michele Perry, 423-300-8737 grimsey-perryhold@gmail.com

Second: Michael Testerman, 865-742-6170, michael.testerman1@gmail.com

Third: William Barker, Jr, 423-580-7819, whb2519@gmail.com

Fourth: Billy Blankenship, 615-637-7369, bjblank1322@yahoo.com

Fifth: David Hickman, 847-418-7214, dave.hickman@gmail.com

Sixth: Glen Baggett, 615-319-5692, baggett.glen@gmail.com

Seventh: Vince Cuevas, 931-212-0257, vcuevas.alpost39@gmail.com

Eighth: Gary Wallace, 731-589-1107 gpwalljac@gmail.com

Ninth: David Brewster, 731-535-1256, 1littlefarm@proton.me

Tenth: Luis Santos, 813-278-9317, baconater24.l@gmail.com

DEPARTMENT ADJUTANT

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Message from the 1st District Commander

By Michele Perry

1st District Commander

Every veteran shares a fundamental bond: they signed a blank check to the nation, risking everything up to their lives. While our individual missions varied—from frontline trenches and deep-sea patrols to silent missile silos and urban combat—the core commitment remained identical. Some generations endured months of isolation waiting for mail, while modern service members connected instantly with home via video calls and email. Returns varied as well, ranging from quiet homecomings and public indifference to grand parades. For many, the mission was entirely about deterrence and readiness—holding the line to prevent conflict rather than fighting one. Ultimately, the exact theater of operation matters far less than this shared sacrifice. That is why The American Legion focuses on the entire military population, dedicating its service to every individual who stepped forward.

Tennessee Military Profile Overview

Focusing on 14 counties of American Legion District 1, including Claiborne, the veteran landscape changes significantly compared to the state's macro-profile. This Appalachian region holds a high concentration of the older wartime (Vietnam and prior) and unique geographic clusters. (ctas.tennessee.edu/en.wikipedia.org) According to data compiled from Census Bureau County Profiles and the Tennessee Department of Veterans Services County Metrics (tn.gov/veteran/tnvetmap.html), these 14 counties collectively house over 45,000 veterans.

Regional Divergences and Characteristics

1. The Tri-Cities Anchors: Sullivan County's population relies heavily on Vietnam-era veterans (who outnumber any other conflict group here by more than 2 to 1). (datausa.io). Washington County: The highest percentage of female veterans (~9.8%) and younger post-9/11 veterans in the region, driven by a major state-designated "VETS Campus" (ETSU) that draws transitioning service members using GI Bill benefits. (dc.etsu.edu)

2. The High-Density Rural Ridge (Hawkins, Grainger, Johnson): Veterans make up a higher percentage of their local populations (up to 8.6%) than the Tennessee state average (7.5%). (veteransdata.info/wkrn.com). Many enlistments from these counties occurred during non-con-

flict intervals between Vietnam and Desert Storm.

3. Female Veteran Distribution Gap: The share of female veterans in these 14 counties is noticeably lower than the statewide average of 11.4%. Rural counties like Hancock (3.5%) and Johnson (3.8%) have fewer female-specific veteran support networks. Female veterans in District 1 tend to cluster heavily near Washington and Sullivan counties to retain proximity to the James H. Quillen VA Medical Center (Mountain Home VA) in Johnson City, which houses the region's specialized women's health clinics.

Steps to investigate:

- Shift administrative meetings to direct-impact projects.
 - Implement "Micro-Volunteering": Break large committee responsibilities down into short-term, bite-sized tasks. Instead of asking a new member to join the building committee for a year, ask them to manage a single Saturday morning facility repair.
 - Streamline the Post Meeting: Reduce administrative and protocol time during monthly meetings to a maximum of 30 minutes. Dedicate the remaining time to open networking, guest speakers, or project planning.
 - Launch Skills-Based Service Projects: Form a tactical team of younger veterans to lead high-impact community events, such as organizing a disaster relief drive or hosting a resume-building workshop for service members.
 - Create Hybrid Access: Streamline attendance by offering a reliable Zoom or Google Meet link for all official monthly business meetings, allowing working parents to participate remotely.
- Make immediate, visible upgrades to the environment and communication infrastructure without disrupting core legacy traditions.
 - Establish a Tech Baseline: Install public Wi-Fi throughout the post. Upgrade the post's payment processing to accept digital payments for dues and events.
 - Modernize Digital Communication: Create an active Facebook Group workspace to supplement traditional email chains and paper newsletters.
 - Launch "Family-First" Zones: Establish a designated area within the post that is strictly smoke-free, bright, and child-friendly to welcome younger veterans with families.
 - Introduce Reverse Mentoring: Pair a tech-fluent millen-

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nial or Gen Z veteran with a senior post officer to help manage digital tools and social media channels.

3. Broaden the post's calendar to blend traditional military honors with active, lifestyle-focused events that appeal to younger demographics.

- Host Active Fitness Events: Organize community rucks, 5K runs, or yoga sessions. These replace bar-centric socializing with health-conscious, peer-to-peer bonding.
- Involve Professional Networking: Partner with local businesses or corporate veteran employee resource groups (ERGs) to hold evening networking mixers, connecting younger veterans with job opportunities.
- Upgrade the Physical Aesthetic: Refresh the interior spaces. Group historic memorabilia into a dedicated, museum-quality display wall to honor the past while clearing space for clean, collaborative workspaces.

4. Incorporate the post's new dual-generational leadership pipeline.

- Formalize Co-Leadership Roles: Ensure that at least one

executive committee position (e.g., Vice Commander or Adjutant) is held by a modern-era veteran to guarantee their voice in major budget decisions.

- Audit Success Metrics: Review member demographics, event attendance data, and digital engagement rates to identify which new programs yielded the highest return on investment.
- Establish the "Modern Post" Blueprint: Document the new onboarding pipelines, digital passwords, and vendor relationships so the modernized system seamlessly survives future leadership transitions.

Know your Post, understand what motivates them, and know your population. There is not a one solution fits all. There is a requirement in forward, creative, and flexible thinking. Many Posts are focused on maintaining status quo, rather what will be good when the next generation that takes over. The goal is to retain older, loyal members while lowering barriers to entry for tech-fluent, busy Millennials and Gen Z veterans.

Department Commander wears multiple hats during Commander's Tour



Tonya Launsby jumped behind the bar at Post 82 to help out when the bartender was delayed for a shift the night of the Commander's Tour.

2026 Department Convention Photos Available for Members to View



Use the link bit.ly/4wh3nof to view more photos.