



Montana  
Legionnaire

DECEMBER

AMERICAN  
LEGION

# DEPARTMENT COMMANDER

## KIM KAY C MCCARTY MARTIN



I'm hoping that everyone had a good and peaceful Thanksgiving. As we progress from Thanksgiving to Christmas, I hope everyone remembers all the blessings that have taken place in their lives this year both big and small. We each need to remember that we have passed another year which is a blessing in itself. Most of us have family that we are Thankful for but we need to also remember our veterans whom may be by themselves this Holiday Season. I want to take this time to say Merry Christmas to everyone and Happy New Year too!

Every Adjutant has a list of the members in their post and I'm asking each Post to divide up their membership list among volunteers in the post to do Buddy Checks. A Buddy check is a peaceful phone call saying hello to the veteran, making sure they are doing ok, and letting the veteran know they are not alone. I volunteer with my Post and enjoy talking to members not just during the holidays but all year round. While doing Buddy Checks we need to be aware of Be The One. Be The One to listen, to have empathy, and to understand that not everyone is in a happy state of mind. Talking to someone, who can listen, can help a person, make them understand that they are important and worthy.

Everyone is important! Sometimes hard times makes it difficult to understand and recognize just how important we really are! It takes courage and fortitude to ask for help, and being veterans, we all have courage and fortitude!



## Montana Legion Bourbon: A Tradition of Service in Every Pour

We're proud to share an exciting opportunity to support Montana veterans while offering your patrons — or your own home collection — a bourbon with a story worth raising a glass to.

In partnership with Willie's Distillery, the Montana American Legion has launched a special-edition bourbon dedicated to the memories, service, and camaraderie shared by generations of veterans. A portion of every bottle sold goes directly toward supporting Legion programs across our state.

### How to Order:

For American Legion Posts with bars & all other bars:

Simply contact your local liquor store and request they place an order for the Montana Legion Bourbon through their regular state distribution process. It's that easy — no special steps required.

### For individuals wanting a bottle:

You can preorder a single bottle through your local liquor store as well! Just let them know you'd like to reserve a bottle of the Montana Legion Bourbon.

This bourbon isn't just a drink — it's a way to honor service, support veterans, and share the legacy of the Montana American Legion with your community. We appreciate your support in helping us bring this project statewide.

Thank you for helping us continue our mission — one glass, one story, and one bottle at a time.

## Service Officer

### Eric Beal

-The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) and the Veterans Benefit Administration (VBA) will be closed on Christmas and New Years day. For general VA questions, veterans can call the VA at 1-800-827-1000 or reach out to your local Veteran Service Office.

-Montana Veterans Affairs service offices will be closed on Christmas and New Years day, its encourage to call ahead to make an appointment during this Holiday season.

### Compensation and Pension (C&P) Exam Tips

-Know that the company calling you and the examiner you see are NOT VA employees

-These companies will not call you for exams until the VA has uploaded the veterans records, DD214, personnel file, and medical file. This can take anywhere from 2-10 weeks

-These companies work to send you to a local medical provider that they have a contract with, but it is not unheard of veterans having to travel for more special-

ists visits

-If one of these companies does try to send a veteran a considerable distance for an exam, the veteran does have the right to request to be put on a waiting list for a more local examiner

-The VA is encouraging feedback from these exams, they want to know how it went and if there was something more the examiner could do. Please reach out to your local VSO with this information

-Know that these examiners are watching you from head to toe when you walk into the door, detecting gait, movement, and overall health

-For claims revolving around joints, the VA grants percentages based off range of motion, if during the exam you have pain in a joint movement, let the examiner know and do not try to "bear through it"

-Accredited VSO's have access to view these results with veterans

-For claims revolving around hearing loss, its encouraged for the veteran to not wear their hearing aids at least 2 days before their hearing test

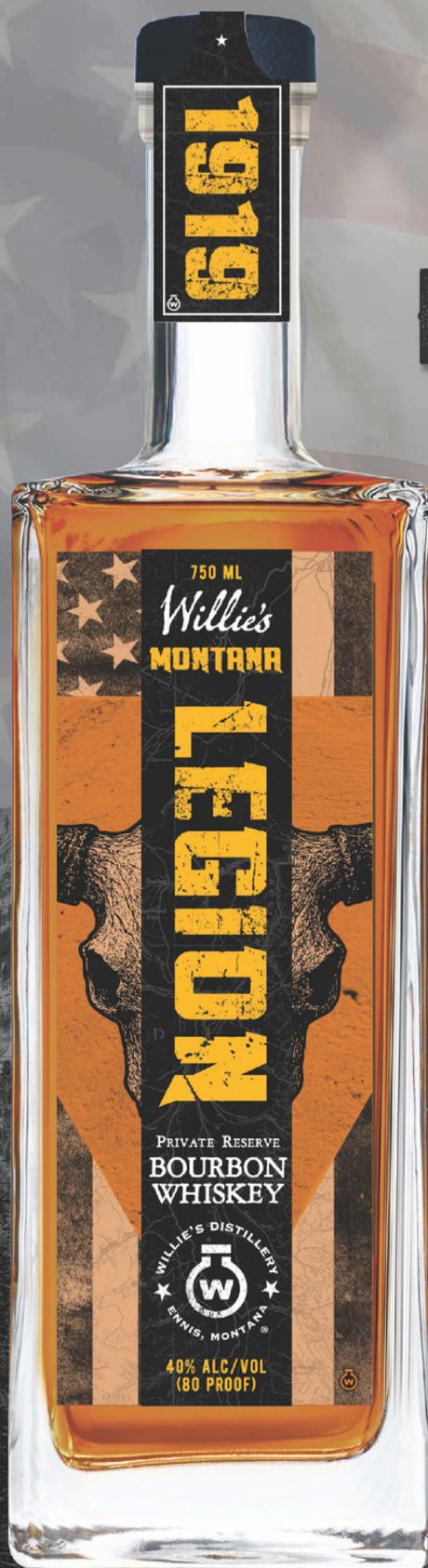


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## Apsáalooke Veterans, Apsáalooke Servants:

### The Thanksgiving Story of Elliot Mountain Sheep, Tina RedStar, and Their Family

In Crow Agency, Montana—on the ancestral homelands of the Apsáalooke people—service is more than a uniform worn in military years. For veterans Elliot Mountain Sheep and Tina RedStar, service is a calling woven into faith, family, and the responsibility to uplift their community. It is a way of life they model for their children, their neighbors, and anyone who crosses their path.

This Thanksgiving, their ministry of kindness took the form of warm meals, heartfelt prayers, and simple moments of human connection that carried more meaning than any traditional holiday gathering could offer.

#### Faith as a Guide, Service as a Mission

For Tina, Thanksgiving is not confined to a single day. It is a posture, a daily practice.

“Thanksgiving is about being thankful, today and always,” she wrote. “I pray blessings over each and every one.”

Her gratitude naturally turns outward—toward those who walk alone, toward those without homes, toward those the world forgets. She prayed that God would provide for their comfort, their safety, and their daily bread. But she and Elliot didn’t stop at prayer. They acted.

Every year, the couple prepares a full Thanksgiving meal to bless a family in need. They describe it as honoring God’s command to serve and as fulfilling their duty as Apsáalooke Veterans—a reminder that their oath to help others did not end when they returned home.

This year, they felt moved to go even further.

Instead of blessing one family, they decided to bless anyone placed in their path.

#### The Road to Hardin: Seeking Those in Need

The family headed to Hardin, warm meals packed and ready. They searched for people who might be struggling, hoping to find those who had nowhere to go that day.

There were not many homeless individuals out, but the few they did find received more than food—they received dignity, compassion, and evidence that someone cared enough to seek them out.

Tina and Elliot described how the faces of the people they served lit up with gratitude. Tears welled in the couple’s eyes as they witnessed prayers being whispered, hands lifted, thanks given not to them, but to God.

“That’s what it’s all about,” Tina said. “Thank You Jesus for loving us and giving us the ability to be a blessing.”

The Stop at Hardin IGA: Blessings for Anyone Who Came Not satisfied with finding only a few people on the streets, the family brought their mission to the public. At Hardin IGA, they offered warm meals to anyone who walked by. No questions, no conditions just kindness.

Some accepted with quiet appreciation. Some prayed aloud, calling upon Creator. Some cried. Others smiled

and offered blessings in return.

It became a powerful reminder: hunger and loneliness do not always appear on the surface. And the simple gift of food can become a reminder to someone that they are seen.

#### Elliot’s Reflection: A Veteran’s Heart

Elliot shared his own reflection later that day, speaking honestly and humbly about what the experience meant to him. His words carried the depth of someone who has seen both hardship and healing:

“Thanksgiving means a lot to people... we have our family, but others don’t have that. They are lost. Whatever they are going through, we will never understand.”

He spoke directly about the people society often dismisses—the ones labeled as “drunks,” “on drugs,” or “street chiefs.”

But he, Tina, and their “mini me”—little baby Sheep—saw them differently. They saw their humanity. They saw their gratitude. They saw their prayers.

“If you would have seen what Tina and my baby witnessed today,” he wrote, “you would understand.”

Elliot insisted he wasn’t the one doing the real work—that his wife and child were the true examples of service. But in truth, his humility is part of his service. His willingness to show up, to stand beside his family, to share openly, and to reflect deeply is its own form of leadership.

He ended with a reminder etched into moral wisdom:

“Show kindness to people. You point at someone and put them down—remember your index finger points at them, but three point back at you.”

#### A Family Living Their Values

Tina, Elliot, and baby Sheep are more than a beautiful family. They are culture bearers. They are veterans continuing the service they once pledged to the nation—now pledged to their own people. They are servants of God, of community, of compassion.

Their Thanksgiving story is not extraordinary because they fed people.

It is extraordinary because they looked for people.

They sought out the forgotten.

They honored the humanity in those society overlooks. Their story reminds us that service doesn’t always wear a uniform. Sometimes it wears warm smiles. Sometimes it carries a pot of food. Sometimes it walks through a grocery store parking lot looking for someone who needs hope.

And sometimes, it looks like a family from Crow Agency—joined by faith, guided by culture, moved by gratitude—choosing to bless others because they believe blessings are meant to be shared.

## Spotlight on Community Partners: Cutting Fences Foundation

Across Montana, where rugged landscapes meet the grit and determination of those who work the land, many farmers, ranchers, and veterans face physical challenges that threaten their independence and livelihood. The Cutting Fences Foundation, based in Laurel, has stepped forward to ensure those individuals are not left behind. Their mission is simple but profound: to restore mobility, dignity, and connection to the land for those living with disability or chronic illness.

Founded by Kendra Lewis, an occupational therapist who saw firsthand the unmet needs of rural Montanans, Cutting Fences Foundation focuses on providing adaptive equipment, mobility solutions, and practical support that keep people doing what they love—whether that's tending cattle, feeding horses, accessing pastures, or simply staying active outdoors.

### Supporting Veterans in Meaningful, Practical Ways

Montana has one of the highest per-capita veteran populations in the nation, and many of those veterans live and work in rural communities. Injuries, service-connected disabilities, and chronic health issues can make daily life on rugged terrain especially challenging.

Cutting Fences Foundation helps bridge that gap by offering:

- All-terrain mobility equipment, such as track-driven wheelchairs and adaptive devices that allow veterans to safely navigate uneven ground.
- Freedom Trax and Terrain Hopper systems that convert traditional wheelchairs into high-mobility, off-road machines.
- Quality of Life Fund assistance, helping veterans access adapted devices long term, not just as temporary support.
- Free consultations to identify what equipment best fits each veteran's needs, lifestyle, and environment.

For many veterans, this support means more than mobility—it means independence, renewed purpose, and the ability to stay connected to the work and land that ground them.

One veteran described using a Trackchair during calving season as “life-changing,” allowing him to continue ranch work he thought he’d lost forever. Stories like these reflect the heart of Cutting Fences: practical solutions that restore dignity and daily functioning.

### Strengthening Rural Montana

Montana’s rural communities depend on the resilience of those who work the land. When illness, injury, or disability hits, the impact is felt not only by one family, but by the entire community. Cutting Fences responds by ensuring that farmers and ranchers can continue contributing to the life and economy of their towns.

Their adaptive equipment loan program—offered at no cost—helps rural Montanans:

- Stay active in agricultural work
- Maintain livestock and property
- Participate in family ranch operations
- Avoid isolation caused by mobility limitations

By keeping one rancher or farmer engaged and mobile, local communities retain labor, leadership, and generational knowledge that is often irreplaceable.

### Building Community Through Compassion and Collaboration

Beyond equipment and services, Cutting Fences Foundation strengthens Montana through its commitment to community partnerships, volunteerism, and neighbor-to-neighbor care. Fundraisers, school projects, local businesses, and agricultural organizations routinely rally behind the foundation’s work, making each piece of equipment a shared investment in community health.

Their approach reflects an essential Montana value: we take care of our own.

Whether assisting a veteran adjusting to life with a disability, helping a rancher stay active on the land their family has worked for generations, or providing outreach that reduces isolation, Cutting Fences enhances the well-being of entire communities.

### A Mission Worth Celebrating

The American Legion is proud to recognize organizations like the Cutting Fences Foundation—groups that uplift our veterans, strengthen rural Montana, and turn compassion into action. Their work restores independence, reconnects individuals with the land they love, and ensures that no neighbor faces challenges alone.



## WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE WAY TO FIND PEACE AND GRATITUDE DURING THE CHRISTMAS SEASON?



My favorite way to show peacefulness for the Christmas Season is by lighting candles. One for family lost and present, one for friends that have made the year joyous, and one for Gods guidance of us all for another year.

-Kim Kay



## WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE WAY TO FIND PEACE AND GRATITUDE DURING THE CHRISTMAS SEASON?



During the Christmas season our Riders chapter takes gift bags containing blankets, socks, chap stick, etc and we give them to veterans at all the nursing homes, care centers, etc. The light that it brings to them is worth ever second.

-Brian Carpenter



# BRIAN CARPENTER

## *For Vice Commander*

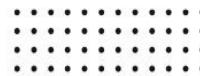
I am honored to announce my candidacy for Department Vice Commander for the 2026-2027 membership year. My years of service within our posts, programs, and communities have deepened my belief in the mission of the American Legion: to serve veterans, strengthen our communities, and protect the legacy of those who wore the uniform.

As Department Vice Commander, I will focus on three core priorities:

- ✓ Strengthening Membership and Engagement  
Supporting posts across Montana with tools, outreach strategies, and personal connections to help them grow and retain members.
- ✓ Championing Communication and Unity  
Ensuring every post, district, Rider chapter, and Legion Family member feels heard, valued, and supported as part of one united department.
- ✓ Supporting Veteran Advocacy and Community Impact  
Backing the programs that matter most—support for veterans in crisis, youth programs, Americanism, and local community projects.

I believe leadership is service, not position. Together, we can continue building a strong, connected, and forward-moving Montana American Legion.

I respectfully ask for your support.



## Vice Commander

### Irene Dickerson

#### Together we can grow: Our post, District, and Department

Why Membership Matters – And Why the Year-End Push Is So Important for The American Legion

As another year draws to a close, American Legion posts across the nation are making a final, determined push to strengthen membership. While this effort often comes with reminders, phone calls, and friendly nudges to renew, it's important to remember that this isn't just a numbers game. Membership in The American Legion is the foundation of the organization's mission, impact, and long-term strength—locally and nationally.

#### The Power Behind Our Purpose

The American Legion exists to serve veterans, their families, and our communities. Every program—whether it's supporting a veteran in crisis, sponsoring youth activities, advocating for more substantial benefits, or honoring our nation's heroes—depends on members. Membership dues help fund operations, but more importantly, every member adds strength to our collective voice. Dues also help our programs: American Legion Boys State, Oratorical program, and Baseball, to name a few.

When membership grows, so does our ability to influence legislation affecting veterans. A strong roster shows lawmakers that veterans and their families stand united, informed, and engaged. Simply put: Membership gives The American Legion the power to protect and improve the lives of those who served.

#### Sustaining Posts and Their Communities

Local posts are the heart of The American Legion. They are where veterans find camaraderie, purpose, and a renewed sense of service. Posts provide scholarships, host holiday events, support local schools, conduct honor guard ceremonies, and assist veterans in need. None of this is possible without a steady, committed membership base. Here in Montana, we see many posts close due to declining membership. We need to reach out to our younger veterans.

Membership renewals and new sign-ups ensure posts can continue offering these services and expand their

reach. It keeps doors open, programs funded, and communities supported.

#### Why the Year-End Membership Push Matters

The final months of the membership year are critical. Here's why:

Department and national standings are set at year's end. Strong numbers reflect well on every post, district, and department.

Retention now means stability for next year. The more members renew on time, the less time and effort posts spend catching up later.

It sets momentum. Successful year-end campaigns boost morale and help posts start the new year strong. It reconnects veterans. Reaching out to expired members is an opportunity to check in, offer help, and remind them they are valued and needed.

A year-end push is more than administrative house-keeping—it's about strengthening the Montana Legion family and ensuring no veteran feels forgotten.

#### How Everyone Can Help

You don't need a formal position to support the membership drive. Every Legionnaire can play a role:

- Make a personal call to members who haven't renewed yet.
- Invite a fellow veteran to a meeting or event.
- Share your story of why The American Legion matters to you.
- Offer assistance to older members who may need help renewing.
- Be welcoming—a friendly post attracts and retains members.
- Small actions by many members create big results.

#### Membership Matters Because Veterans Matter

At its core, the membership effort is about people—those who served, those still serving, and the families who stand behind them. Every member strengthens the mission, amplifies the voice, and fuels the work of The American Legion.

As we push toward the end of the membership year, let's recommit to growing and supporting the organization that has stood firm for veterans for more than a century. Together, we ensure that The American Legion remains a powerful force for good—today, tomorrow, and for generations to come.



## The Importance of Buddy Checks Through the Holiday Season

As the holiday season approaches, many within our veteran community may feel the weight of loneliness, isolation, or struggle — especially those who live alone, have limited mobility, or face mental, physical, or economic challenges. That's why the practice of Buddy Checks — simply reaching out to fellow veterans to ask if they're "doing okay" — is more than just a courtesy. It's a lifeline.

### Why Buddy Checks Matter

- Combatting Isolation & Loneliness

Holidays often increase feelings of isolation. A simple phone call, text, or visit from a fellow Legionnaire can break through the silence and remind a veteran that they're not forgotten.

- Mental Health Support & Crisis Prevention

The holiday season can intensify mental-health challenges and stressors. Buddy Checks help identify veterans who may be struggling and can prompt early support before problems worsen.

- Connecting Veterans to Needed Resources

Some veterans may need help with transportation, groceries, medication, benefits, or just companionship. Buddy Checks give Posts a way to learn about those needs and help provide support or connect them with services.

- Reaffirming Veteran Brotherhood/Sisterhood

One of the founding values of our organization is that veterans look out for one another — just like during active duty. Buddy Checks reinforce that bond and ensure no veteran feels alone.

Since the program's introduction in 2019, Buddy Checks have helped connect with more than a million veterans nationwide.

**NEW AND IMPROVED  
American Legion App**

THE AMERICAN LEGION HAS RELEASED A NEW APP. THE APP IS LEGION+. IT IS DESIGNED FOR MEMBERS OF THE AMERICAN LEGION TO: MANAGE THEIR MEMBERSHIP, STAY CONNECTED AND ENGAGE WITH RESOURCES. MEMBERS CAN STORE THEIR MEMBERSHIP CARD AND MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION ON THIS APP. THE APP ALSO PROVIDES THE LATEST NEWS AND UPDATES FROM THE AMERICAN LEGION COMMUNITY. ADDITIONALLY, USERS CAN FIND WAYS TO HELP, RECRUIT MEMBERS, AND SUPPORT FELLOW VETERANS. THE APP INCLUDES A QR CODE THAT LETS NON-LEGIONNAIRES JOIN YOUR POST. THE APP ALSO HAS A FEATURE FOR BE THE ONE. USERS CAN CALL 988 VETERAN'S CRISIS LINE. THERE IS ALSO QPR (QUESTION, PERSUADE, AND REFER) SUICIDAL TRAINING.

THE APP CAN BE DOWNLOADED TO YOUR PHONE OR COMPUTER VIA GOOGLE PLAY OR APPLE ITUNES. YOU CAN TYPE LEGION+ IN THE SEARCH BAR TO GET THE APP. ONCE YOU HAVE DOWNLOADED THE APP, YOU WILL NEED YOUR MEMBERSHIP NUMBER TO PERSONALIZE IT FOR YOUR USE.

THE HOME BUTTON SHOWS CURRENT AMERICAN LEGION NEWS AND PODCASTS. THE PODCASTS FEATURE VARIOUS SUBJECTS, FROM SPOTLIGHTING LEGION MEMBERS TO INFORMATION ON PTSD AND MENTAL HEALTH STORIES.

THE NEWS BUTTON FEATURES ARTICLES HIGHLIGHTING THE SUBJECTS THE LEGION IS FOCUSING ON THAT WEEK.

THE RECRUIT BUTTON INCLUDES THE QR CODE AND INSTRUCTIONS FOR SCANNING IT. IT IS A VALUABLE TOOL FOR RECRUITING MEMBERS WHEREVER YOU ARE. YOU DON'T HAVE TO CARRY THE PAPER MEMBERSHIP FORMS AROUND WITH YOU. (EXCEPT YOU SHOULD KEEP A PAPER COPY IN YOUR AUTOMOBILE FOR THE INSURANCE THAT DUANE CUNNINGHAM, THE DEPARTMENT ADJUTANT, DISCUSSES DURING THE FALL CONFERENCES.)

THE MENU BUTTON DISPLAYS YOUR PROFILE AND MEMBERSHIP CARD AS WELL AS ACCOUNT SETTINGS, TERMS & CONDITIONS, AND THE PRIVACY POLICY.

DOWNLOAD THE APP TODAY.

## The Origins of The American Legion and the American Legion of Montana

As America emerged from the trenches of World War I, millions of veterans returned home forever changed by their service. More than 4.7 million American families sent their sons and daughters to the “War to End All Wars,” and over 40,000 Montanans served with honor. Their experiences forged a powerful bond—one rooted in sacrifice, duty, and a shared desire to continue serving the nation they had defended.

More than 40,000 Montanans served bravely and honorably during World War I, 25 percent more than any other state. Of those, 11,709 Montanans volunteered, and 29,638 fellow Montanans were drafted, with 27,567 accepted for service in World War I, the highest per capita ratio for any of the forty-eight states of our Great Nation and its territories at that time. Montana lives lost in World War I were also more than any other state in proportion to population, with the loss rate close to 26 per cent greater than the nearest state. A total of 681 Montanans were Killed in Action (KIA) or died of their wounds, 253 from disease or other causes, for a total of 934. There were an additional 2,469 wounded, and one confirmed MIA, for a total of 3,433 in combat. Additionally, 618 Montana service members who served outside the war zone died of disease and other causes, making for a total of 4,061 World War I casualties from the State of Montana.

Montana citizens did more than their share to support Montana service members through their support of the Liberty Bond Drives during World War I. In the third drive alone, Montanans exceeded their targeted goal by hitting an unprecedented 195.9 percent. Towards the end of the war, with the last “Victory” drive in '1918, Montana exceeded its quota by 111.88 percent, with the state ranking sixth out of the forty-eight states in percentage over quota.

With the cessation of hostilities on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month, November 11th, 1918, the war had ended, and Montana's veterans began returning home. Concerns among our returning heroes over the lack of care and concern for those returning from the battlefields quickly became the new rallying cry. Nothing like a world war had ever occurred, so the aftermath and care for veterans were never a clear consideration. There was no clear plan to ensure that the over 4.7 million men and women who participated would receive adequate support and the necessary care as they were reintegrated back into American society. This extraordinary and massive undertaking would lead to the historic Paris Caucus and the identification of champions like Lt. Col Teddy Roosevelt Jr, who became known as the “Father of the American Legion.”

On February 15, 1918, Lt. Col. Teddy Roosevelt invited 20 National Guard and Reserve Officers who had been directed to report to Paris to study and make suggestions for the improvement of the welfare of the enlisted personnel. At this gathering, Lt. Col. Teddy Roosevelt defined his plans for a veterans' association. The result of this meeting was the agreement to call for a caucus to be held in Paris, at which the entire WWI American Expeditionary Force would be represented by delegates from the ranks of both officers and enlisted men. If this meeting proved successful, it would be followed by a similar meeting in the United States. Lt. Col. Eric Fisher Wood, Pennsylvania, Lt. Col George White, Oregon, and Lt. Col. Ralph D. Cole were appointed as a committee to promulgate the plans for the caucus, while Roosevelt was designated liaison agent with the veterans in the United States.

In the face of difficulties, paygrade domination, and simply the fear of the unknown, the Caucus was duly convened on March 15, in the drawing room of an old French residence at No. 4 Ave. Gabriel, Paris, France. The residence had recently been transformed into the American Club of Paris, and the resulting caucus convened with over 1,000 delegates present. Lt. Col Wood was the host of the meeting, and during its course, Lt. Col Bennett C. Clark from Missouri was appointed temporary chair and Wood the temporary secretary. During the initial deliberations, the decision was made to abolish all ranks during the sessions, ensuring everyone had an equal voice. Committees on permanent organization, a constitution, a name for the organization, and a place of next meeting were established. In subsequent sessions, the declaration of basic tenets for the practical expression of the ideals and aspirations of a veteran of the World War should hold for his country to be identified and enacted. These founding tenets laid the foundation for the Preamble of the American Legion, which is still recited at the beginning of every meeting of the American Legion. *continued on pg. 12*

## Department Adjutant

Duane Cunningham

December rings in the holiday season, from snowball fights to Santa Claus versus the Grinch, traditional rivalries and family get together's highlight the time of the year. To veterans, December also means that the biggest rivalry happens, the annual Army-Navy game.

The Army-Navy Football Game is more than just a annual clash on the gridiron; it is a symbol of tradition, honor, and brotherhood that transcends the sport itself. Each year, the service academies—West Point and Annapolis—battle fiercely, fighting for every yard, every point, and every ounce of pride. The rivalry is intense, with cadets and midshipmen leaving everything they have on the field, demonstrating their unwavering commitment to their respective academy and to the country.

This contest exemplifies the spirit of perseverance, discipline, and unity—values that are deeply ingrained in military tradition. The game itself is only part of the tradition and the pageantry, from the intricate marching formations, the traditional singing of fight songs to both the winning and losing sides and the overall shared camaraderie, the game reflects the unique bond shared by those who serve. After the final whistle, however, the lines drawn by rivalry fade away. The players, representing their respective academies, become brothers in arms. They share the same goals: to serve, protect, and uphold the values of the United States. From wanting to destroy each other on the field of play to

be willing to sacrifice their life for one another regardless of the branch of service, this mutual respect and camaraderie underscore a vital truth: despite differences and competitive spirit, service members are united by a common purpose and sense of duty. The traditions of the military—such as honoring the fallen, saluting the flag, and celebrating Pass in Review—embody this unity, emphasizing that real strength lies in coming together as one.

In contrast, contemporary political discourse has often devolved into name-calling, division, and hostility. The current political landscape has become a battleground of opposing ideologies, with Americans frequently fighting each other instead of working together for the nation's greater good. Regardless of your political leanings, this ugliness is antithetical to the core principles of our constitution and what it means to be Americans. Social media and artificial intelligence (AI) play a part in planting the seeds of discourse. A 2025 study suggested that globally, bots account for approximately 37% of chatter on social media regarding global events, meaning that about 4 out of 10 posts are non-human. Let that sink in, 40% of the information on social media can be driven by artificial intelligence and foreign countries that may not have America's best interests in mind. What better way to destroy our democratic foundations is there than to get us to do it ourselves?

We, as the American Legion Family have a unique opportunity to lead in this time of mislead-

ing communication and blatant attempts to cause division. Our founding fathers recognized that while we don't all think the same and have varying opinions and ideas, we do all believe in the principles of democracy. We as Legionnaires can lead by simply asking questions and doing a little due diligence before reposting or responding to something that seems a little farfetched or controversial. We can simply avoid the bait and the sting of the hook by instead focusing on the great things that the American Legion Family does.

Compromise has always been how we as a nation come together, the American Legion thrives when we as a group respect everyone's ideas and beliefs. Our military academies, where respect, discipline, and service take precedence over personal or partisan interests reflects compromise at its finest. The traditions of the military serve as a poignant reminder of what can be achieved when people come together for a common purpose. The Army-Navy Game — with its rituals, pageantry, and sense of brotherhood — exemplifies how discipline, respect, and unity can transcend rivalry and foster a spirit of cooperation. If our American Legion is to grow stronger, we must follow the example set by these service academies: prioritize unity over division, respect over hostility, and service over self-interest. Only then can we truly leave everything on the field—working together for the betterment of our country and the future generations of veterans in the American Legion.

**Historian***continued from pg 10*

The organization and vision of its purpose needed a name, so a contest for naming the idea was held and was subsequently won by Major Maurice K. Gordon from Texas, who would forever be known as the soubriquet "Namer of the American Legion". According to all available records, the only Montanan present at the Paris Caucus was Walter I. Verge of Chouteau, Montana. This March 1919, a gathering in Paris established an organization dedicated to supporting returning servicemembers and preserving the camaraderie forged overseas. From that meeting, the American Legion was born. With its four pillars—Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation, National Security, Americanism, and Children & Youth—the Legion would quickly become a national force for veteran advocacy and community service. Congress granted the organization its federal charter on September 16, 1919, solidifying its role as a voice for America's veterans.

On January 10, 1919, the Army and Navy Association was formed in Butte, Montana, followed soon after by the Soldiers and Sailors Club of Helena and similar organizations throughout the State. The Butte Association called for a state-wide organizational caucus. This caucus referred to the Helena Caucus because of its location, convened in the Capital City, March 4-5, 1919. Delegates from the cities of Butte, Helena, Great Falls, Malta, Kalispell, Anaconda, Missoula, Billings, Lewistown, Dillon, and Bozeman attended.

During the caucus, a tentative constitution and by-laws were adopted along with the establishment by the Governor of Montana, Sam V. Stewart of a Veterans Welfare Commission. The Montana Veterans Welfare Commission was established and was composed of William Cuts of Butte, C.E Pew of Helena, and Herbert M. Peet, Harlowton. The commission's early role was to administer the Veterans' Welfare Fund and provide state-level services, as veterans faced difficulties accessing federal programs. This commission would eventually become what is now known as the Montana Board of Veteran Affairs and is a part of the Montana Veteran Affairs Division (MVAD), which continues to provide services, assistance, and advocacy for Montana's veterans and their families. Other actions taken included choosing Helena as the State Headquarters of the organization and selecting Malta as the City for holding the first state-wide convention.

In subsequent meetings, an Executive Committee, composed of eleven members, was established. M.S. Cohen, Butte; C.E. Pew, Helena; H.S. Bloomquist, Great Falls; M.E. Brolin, Anaconda; Fred E. Featherly, Dillon; G.C. Cowie, Malta. Maj. Charles Sheridan, Bozeman, President; William Cuts, Butte; Robert S. Baker, Lewistown, and Park Smith, Helena. Charles Sheridan was chosen as the first President, and Ben W. Barnett, Helena, as the Secretary of

the Executive Board. Representation to the upcoming National St. Louis Caucus was also identified and approved. The first annual State Convention was held in Malta, Montana, from June 30-July 1, 1919, with Vice-President William Cutts presiding in the absence of Maj. Charles Sheridan, Bozeman, due to his unexpected recall to active duty to serve the Secretary of War on matters concerning the military. Interestingly, because of his distinguished military service, Sheridan had also been asked to take over the American Legion's War Risk Insurance Bureau at the national level.

The Malta Convention's first order of business was to receive a report on organizational interest. This report revealed that twenty-two soldiers' associations from across the state had been organized and subsequently applied for charters from the state Headquarters. Eighteen county delegations were entitled to seats in the Malta Convention with a total delegate count of fifty-nine. Procedures were established for voting, and various committees were appointed. On July 1, 1919, Governor Sam V. Stewart delivered an address to the Convention, his address included a request from the World War Veterans of Phillips County and the citizens of Malta to present and establish to the State Organization a silver cup to be known as the 'Malta Trophy'. The Malta Trophy recognized annually the most distinguished drill team of that year. Throughout the Convention, dances and other entertainment were held for the purpose of raising funds for administrative purposes. Baseball teams, drill teams, and other auxiliaries were organized and established by some of the local veteran organizations.

One thing was certain: Montana's veterans wasted no time joining the movement. With one of the highest per-capita participation rates in the entire nation, Montana's World War I servicemembers returned home eager to build strong communities and support one another. Throughout 1919, posts began forming across the state in large and small towns, from mining hubs and railroad stops to quiet agricultural communities. By the end of the year 1919, a total of 22 American Legion Posts had been chartered in addition to the establishment of the American Legion Department of Montana, giving Montana veterans a unified statewide organization dedicated to service, advocacy, and remembrance.

In December of 1919, it was determined that the organization was large enough that it needed some form of communication to ensure that veterans across the state could be served. Department responded with the creation of a department publication that would reach out to all the American Legion Family, and created the Montana Legionnaire. In 1920, the first Department Commander was recognized as Charles W. Pew of Helena, a member of Post 2 assumed the office. *continued on pg. 18*



# AMERICAN LEGION RIDERS



## ALR Director

### Brian “Carp” Carpenter

#### Season of Gratitude

As we close out another year on the road together, I find myself reflecting on what this season truly represented commitment, service, brotherhood, and gratitude. December gives us a moment to slow down, look back, and appreciate every Rider, volunteer, and supporter who made 2025 a safe, successful, and meaningful year for the American Legion Riders of Montana.

First and foremost, thank you to every Rider for another outstanding riding season. Your dedication to riding smart, staying disciplined, and watching out for one another is the reason we can look back with pride. We logged many miles this year, and every one of them went smoother because you showed up prepared, focused, and ready to serve. A special thank-you goes to our road captains, tail gunners, and ride leaders. Your commitment to safety from pre-ride briefings to split-second decisions on the road kept our formations tight and our riders protected. You carry a responsibility most people never see, and you handle it with professionalism every single time.

To our volunteers, I cannot say enough. Those who scouted and mapped routes, drove support vehicles, organized events, managed registration tables, or quietly worked behind the scenes made every mission possible. Your efforts matter, and we are deeply grateful for every hour you invested.

This year, our Riders made a tremendous impact across the state standing flag lines, escorting veterans to their final rest, supporting local fundraisers, lifting up communities after loss, and showing up whenever our presence was needed. It was never

about the miles; it was always about the meaning, and you delivered.

We are also grateful for the unwavering support of our Posts, Sons of The American Legion, and the Auxiliary. Your partnership strengthens our mission and ensures we can continue representing the Legion Family with unity and purpose. Nothing we do happens in isolation we ride because you stand with us.

As we gather with loved ones this holiday season, we also pause to remember our fallen Riders and the families who feel their absence more deeply at this time of year. May they find comfort in knowing their Rider family holds them close in spirit. And even in winter, our mission doesn't stop. I encourage each of you to stay connected—reach out, check in, and be there for one another, especially for those facing challenges. Brotherhood does not take time off.

As we turn toward 2026, I am grateful for the unity, strength, and spirit that define the American Legion Riders of Montana. I am proud to serve alongside each of you. Thank you for everything you've done and everything you continue to be.

I have high hopes and excitement as I look forward to the 2nd annual R.O.M.P hosted in Lewistown out of Post 16 this year, as well as the First annual Department Legacy Run Fundraiser Ride hosted out of Corvallis Post 91. Additionally, be on the lookout for updates on the annual Dept. ALR meeting May 2nd and ALR College May 3. Post 16 will also host this event.

Ride safe. Stay connected. And enjoy a season filled with gratitude.

Happy Holidays,  
Brian “Carp” Carpenter

# Kid's Art Corner

# JANUARY

## edition

We're inviting Montana's kids to help brighten the next edition of The Montana Legionnaire!

Young creators are encouraged to send in artwork, poems, short stories, or even coloring pages that celebrate winter traditions, holiday cheer, or appreciation for our veterans.

Please email a photo or scan of your child's creation to [lmtprpub@gmail.com](mailto:lmtprpub@gmail.com) by January 10, 2026.

Be sure to include the artist's first name, age, and hometown.

We can't wait to showcase the imagination and talent of our young Montana artists and storytellers!



### SNOWFLAKES IN MY MITTENS

Submitted by: anonymous

Snowflakes land in my mittens,

Winter whispers, "Come and play!"

I smile at all the twinkly lights-

They make the dark feel bright as day.

Hot cocoa warms my chilly hands,

The world feels happy, calm, and near.

I think the best of wintertime,

Is sharing it with folks right here..





**Leona Somerfeld  
Department President**

Season's Greetings from my house to yours, the hustle and bustle with many detours. Hanging the stockings and trimming the tree, reminds me of sacrifices it takes to be free. It's never too late to send out a card, you never know what it means when life can get hard. Our Auxiliary needs to keep growing too, a reminder to send your dues in real soon. The Veteran's Gifts shops are all in high gear, to spread Holiday and Christmas cheer. The Americanism Essay Contest is at the top of the list, hope everyone helps make this a big hit. Not to sound like a Grinch but there is no other way, the Impact reports should be updated right away. The holiday baking is well under way, you can send to our servicemen so far away. Drop off some food at the pantry nearest you, to make someone's day less fortunate than you. Make the most of your time with family and friends, we never know what waits around the bend. Caring Tree Tags to be filled, Marines and Toys for Tots, Salvation Army with their bells and black pots. Shop bells, Church bells, sleigh bells ringing, all around you hear the Christmas Carolers singing. Tis the season we remember our loved ones and friends, spreading good cheer it is the trend. Our Poppy Elves are working hard making poppies, you should send your orders in promptly. Buddy Checks on seniors, military and veterans, makes what we do all the more important. Merry Christmas American Legion Auxiliary, may your spirit shine, with faith, courage and freedom divine.

**Kari Hould  
Department Chaplain**

We have enjoyed the festivities around Thanksgiving and I hope the time was spent with family...giving thanks for so many wonderful things we are blessed with. And now, with the darker days and colder nights, it is a good time to do the "Buddy Check" and make sure that, not only the elderly and handicapped are doing ok, be sure to check on our veterans as well. The darkness can affect most anyone, those with PTSD are also vulnerable. Yes, it takes time, but if we don't have the time, who is going to? How could one live with themselves if something had happened to someone we "thought" about checking on, or should have checked in on?

The coming month is a very blessed time of the year. Even with that being said, there are so many who are facing the holidays alone for the first time, or once again. It doesn't get easier over time. The ones we lost left a portion of them in our lives and our hearts and that is okay. We have the choice to mourn their loss or to rejoice in the fact that we were able to share in their lives for a while. Often one can exchange the teardrop falling with a memory attached for a smile attached to that same memory.

Take time to listen to the silence of the night as the days continue to grow shorter, until Dec. 23rd when we start counting the minutes and awaiting more sunlight and smiles.

Hanging onto crystal sparkles in the dark, yet grasping for a bright guiding glimmer of hope, we need to make the best of this holy season. It is the perfect time to do for others...to share with others...and to pray for others. Maybe you've done away with sending cards out for Christmas, but there might just be one or two people who need to know you care and have not forgotten them. Time well spent will never be held against you! Share stories about your growing up years, maybe even record the

conversations, and make it ritual to do each year. Talk to your grandparents and great grandparents ~ let them know you care. There is no tomorrow promised for any of us.

Visit a nursing home, take some friends along, play games with the residents, enjoy some hot cider or cocoa. The fact that you came to visit means more than you will ever know.

This is my last submission as Department Chaplain. Thank you for the kind words and encouragement over the last five years. Make the year head into the next one with thanks, blessings and warm memories! God's blessings on all of you!



## Americanism Stacy Bear

We have so much to celebrate this season! First, I am proud to announce that the Department of Montana had two National Americanism Essay winners in 2025! The winners were Class I Rosalyn Freeman from Helena District 6 and Class III Olivia Gray from Havre District 2! Congratulations to these 2 students and to the Units who sponsored them!

Speaking of celebrations... we have the 250th USA birthday coming up. What is your Unit planning? Join in with other clubs and get a committee to make it something special in your corner of the Big Sky! Some ideas that are being talked about on top of parades are sponsoring murals to be put up on local Legion and VFW Halls in tandem with the local schools and artists. How about a jump rope contest, beard contest or painting 250 rocks to hide around the community? Prizes always make it fun for the kids.

Of course, this year's essay contest has the 250th year theme. The theme this year is: "Celebrating America's 250th Birthday and the Veterans Who Fought for Our Freedoms." It is time to shine the light on your students by your Unit sponsoring the essay contest. It is a great way to spread the word about our organizations and also help children understand and think about our history, the sacrifices made and so much more.

Speaking of which, Americanism is so much more than the essay contest! It covers a wide array of programs and has an overlap with many of them. Girl State, veterans, education etc... Remember to go on the National website and download several coloring books that are meant to be copied for your schools. There is also the Star Spangled Kids program.

Let's celebrate Americanism this 250th year!!!! Questions: Contact me at sjbear@hotmail.com.  
For God and Country!

The background is a solid teal color. At the top, there is a decorative border of black lines with small red and gold stars hanging from them. In the bottom left corner, there is a cartoon-style snowman with a red Santa hat, a red scarf, and arms raised. In the bottom right corner, there is a chimney made of brown bricks with two black Santa hats peeking out from the top. The text is centered between these illustrations.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE WAY TO FIND PEACE AND GRATITUDE DURING THE CHRISTMAS SEASON?

My favorite ways to find peace and gratitude during the Christmas season is watch my grandkids joy and surprise, and to fully immerse myself in the Christmas story at church and at home.

-Tim Fox

**Historian***continued from pg. 12*

Pew presided over the second Department Convention in Livingston, Montana, June 28-29, 1920. Some accomplishments of the second convention included increasing the financial support of the Welfare Commission, the creation of a trade school for veterans, and opening the buildings at Fort Harrison as a Public Health Service Hospital. This action, in particular, and the continued American Legion support and demand for veteran care, led to the transfer of the hospital from the U.S. Army to the Veterans Bureau in 1922. This would lead to the establishment of what is now known as the Fort Harrison VA Hospital in 1930. In 1921, Congress approved the U.S. Veterans Bureau Act. The act established a single, comprehensive system for medical care, vocational training, and financial compensation for veterans, and also made provisions for free hospitalization, including transportation, for eligible veterans. This agency was a precursor to the modern Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), which was established in 1930. The Montana Veterans Welfare Commission conducted the resulting Clean-up campaign in 1921. The Clean-up Campaign was the resolving of any unsettled disability claims for Montana veterans and veterans across the country. Over eight hundred Montana veterans were assisted with service connection and pensions.

The 1921 National Convention was held in Kansas City, Missouri, where Legionnaires from Montana played a primary role. Included with the Montana delegation was a mascot, which was in keeping with the delegates' costumes of chaps and sombreros. Donated by one of the Eastern Montana Posts was a young bobcat, designated as the Mascot of the Montana Department. The Mascot, who would be known as 'Foch's Bobcat', was flown to Kansas City on a plane by A.W. Stephenson, some 1,500 miles. During the Convention, both General Foch, the World War I commander of French forces, and peer to General "Blackjack"

Pershing of Montana fame were introduced. As the cheers subsided, the Montana delegation brought the Bobcat on stage.

The National Commander, John G. Emory of Michigan, in rising to the occasion, stated, "Marshall Foch! I have a very distinct and unique presentation to make to you." "I am going to present you with a baby wildcat. Goodness knows what you are going to do with it. I do not." Marshall Foch rose from his chair, smiling when the 'baby wildcat' was held out for his inspection. The intrepid leader of the French Army did not stretch forth eager hands to accept the pet; however, in fact, he said through his interpreter that "the damn cat could do more than the German Army could to make him retreat".

Early Montana Legionnaires helped shape the identity of the department that still thrives today. They championed veterans' healthcare long before the modern VA existed, provided relief to struggling families, and supported programs for youth and civic education. Their efforts ensured that even the most rural veterans—who have always represented a large portion of Montana's population—had access to support, fellowship, and a voice in national veteran policy. As we move towards our nation's 250th birthday and the 107th anniversary of the American Legion, let us reflect on how our status as veterans and as members of a truly unique and difference-making organization has truly made an impact on our nation's history and has impacted veterans of both the past and the present.

More than a century later, the American Legion of Montana continues to honor the mission set forth in 1919. Through community events, legislative advocacy, youth programs, and everyday acts of service, Montana Legionnaires keep alive the spirit of unity and dedication that defined their founding generation. The legacy of the American Legion—nationally and in Montana—remains rooted in one powerful belief: service does not end when the uniform comes off.

**Andy Rice; Department Vice Commander**

I am running for Department Vice Commander once again this year. I am 40 years old and served for 8 years in the US Army and Army National Guard. During that time I was deployed to Iraq for Operation Iraqi Freedom 5-7 and have been a member for the American Legion for 22 years. During

my time in the American Legion, I have served in many different positions, including but not limited to; District 8 Commander, Zone Commander, Detachment Commander for the SAL and Squadron 102 Commander.

My reasoning behind wanting to run for Department Vice Commander, is that there have been many talks about the need to infuse more youth into the organization, and I find myself in a unique position that I can relate to our existing membership in many ways but also understand the mentality of the younger veterans across the state.



## Post & Community Spotlight: Richard A. Klose

### A Servant Leader in Action

When people in Laurel or across Montana think of quiet, steadfast leadership, one name comes up again and again: Richard Klose. An 18-year member of The American Legion, a past Department Commander, and a respected community servant, Richard has built a reputation not through self-promotion, but through consistent, humble service. His leadership philosophy isn't spoken — it's lived. And it embodies what modern servant leadership truly looks like.

### A Foundation of Service

Richard's lifelong commitment to service began long before he wore the Legion cap. His military service shaped his belief in responsibility, teamwork, and the importance of caring for others. Those values remained with him long after he returned home — and they became the foundation of how he leads today.

### Revitalization as a Calling

One of the strongest through-lines in Richard's work is revitalization. He doesn't look at aging posts, declining programs, or fading traditions with frustration — he sees potential.

As a member of the National Membership & Post Activities (M&PA) Committee, Richard advocates for revitalizing posts and renewing the strength of local communities. He brings energy and solutions wherever he goes, encouraging posts to reconnect with their towns and with the veterans they serve.

Closer to home, he helped renovate and restore his own American Legion Post in Laurel, turning it back into a functional and meaningful space — a place that once

again welcomes veterans, families, and community events. This work doesn't bring recognition or headlines; instead, it reflects the heart of servant leadership: improving things not for oneself, but for the next generation.

### Honoring Service Through Ceremony

Each year in Laurel, one of the most meaningful events held is the Four Chaplains Ceremony, honoring the heroic sacrifice of four WWII Army chaplains who gave their lives so others could survive. Richard has long been a lead organizer and guide for this solemn ceremony.

But this past year, his leadership created a ripple effect.

By inspiring others to participate and learn the tradition, he ensured that the ceremony will be carried on for years to come. And in 2025, Richard will help plan a second Four Chaplains ceremony in Billings, expanding the impact of this important story of courage and faith.

His leadership doesn't just preserve history — it brings people together around shared values.

### A Trusted Advisor

While not everyone knows every position he's held, everyone knows one thing:

when they need advice, they call Richard.

His calm presence, experience, and sound judgment have made him a reliable mentor for Legionnaires at every level. He is the person people turn to when they need guidance, perspective, or simply someone who will listen.

Servant leaders create more leaders

— and Richard has quietly done that for years.

### A Man of Many Hats — All With One Purpose

Richard's leadership extends beyond the American Legion. He has served his community in multiple ways, including through senior-citizen support programs, civic roles, and local initiatives. What makes him exceptional is how he brings everything together — Legion programs, community needs, service opportunities, and local resources — to strengthen the fabric of Laurel and the surrounding region.

He is not just dedicated to one organization; he is dedicated to making them all work together to create a stronger, more connected community.

### A Legacy of Family & Service

His family is deeply proud of him — not for the titles he has carried, but for the values he demonstrates daily. Integrity. Commitment.

Humility. Service. These are the qualities that define him and the legacy he continues to build.

**The Heart of Servant Leadership**  
If leadership is influence, servant leadership is influence through service — building others up, strengthening organizations, and creating positive change without seeking credit.

Richard Klose embodies that ideal. He leads through action.

He inspires through example.

He strengthens others by lifting them up.

In a world that often celebrates the loudest voices, Richard remains one of the quiet heroes — a man whose influence comes from living the values that The American Legion stands for.

## Post Adjutant Spotlight: Shawn Brooks- Yellowstone Post 4

For Shawn Brooks, service didn't end when he hung up his uniform. It simply took on a new form. Today, as the Adjutant of Yellowstone Post 4, Shawn brings energy, purpose, and a deep sense of responsibility to his role—rooted in a lifetime of family service and his own commitment to carrying forward the values of The American Legion.

### A Legacy of Service

Shawn's connection to The American Legion began long before he ever entered a Post. As a delegate to Tennessee Boys State, he experienced firsthand the mentorship, patriotism, and civic education that would later shape both his military path and his desire to serve his community. Coming from a family whose military service stretches all the way to the Revolutionary War, Shawn grew up surrounded by examples of leadership and sacrifice. His grandfather once served as a Post Commander in Greeneville, Tennessee, and his wife's grandfather also held a leadership role in the Salt Lake City Post.

That family legacy left a permanent mark.

"Being a member of The American Legion is a continuation of service," Shawn says. "It's keeping the promise that no one is left behind and no one is forgotten. I'm proud to be involved in our youth programs—helping the next generation understand our nation and the price of the freedoms we enjoy."

### Answering the Call at Yellowstone Post 4

Shawn first joined his grandfather's post in 1991, but it wasn't until three years ago that he became active—thanks to a chance conversation with Legionnaires raffling a pistol at a local gun show. Since then, he has become one of the post's most dedicated leaders. His roles have included Post Chaplain, Judge Advocate, Americanism Committee Chairman, House Operations Committee member, Riders Chaplain, and now both Post and Riders Adjutant.

When the Post Executive Board asked him to step into the adjutant position, Shawn didn't hesitate.

"I saw it as another opportunity to help the Post—using my military and civilian training to provide support and guidance," he explains.

The learning curve, he says, is constant.

"There is no end time for an adjutant. Calls come in all day from veterans and Post staff who need help. We're often the first contact point, so we have to know the programs or know where to find the answers."

### Finding Purpose After the Navy

After retiring from the Navy, Shawn struggled with the same feeling many veterans experience—a sense of lost purpose. It was his wife who noticed the transformation once he became active in the Legion.

"She told me she saw the light come back," he recalls. "The Post gave me a purpose outside of work and home."

Professionally, Shawn serves in a leadership role in his civilian career, and he credits the Legion for strengthening his networking and leadership skills—connections he says he may never have made otherwise.

### Engaging a New Generation of Veterans

Shawn believes younger Legionnaires bring valuable qualities to today's Posts: energy, drive, and a willingness to question how and why things are done. That curiosity, he says, is an asset.

"They still want the camaraderie the military gave us all, and they want to improve the process. That's refreshing."

But he also recognizes the challenges Posts face in attracting younger members.

"Too many think the Legion is just a bar for old veterans swapping war stories," he says. "They don't realize how much we do—baseball, shooting sports, scouting, Gold Star family support, honor details, and remembering our fallen every day, not just on Memorial Day."

To reach new faces, Yellowstone Post 4 has leaned into social media, hosted live-streamed recognitions, brought historic post photos out of storage to emphasize heritage, and even started a bike night that brought in veterans who didn't know a Post existed in Billings.

### Making a Visible Difference

Of the many projects he's supported, Shawn is especially proud of the exterior improvements to the Post: repainting the building, refreshing the patio, and creating the POW/MIA wall—all intended to help the community recognize the Post not as a bar, but as a place of remembrance and service.

He hopes to continue expanding community engagement, including returning scouting programs to the Post, offering virtual meeting options for homebound veterans, and organizing regular visits to local veterans in assisted living—with participation from the Legion Family across the Post, Auxiliary, SAL, and Riders.

*continued on pg. 21*

## Post Adjutant Spotlight

*continued from pg. 20*

### Honoring Tradition While Moving Forward

“The Navy taught me that tradition is why we do things—not necessarily how we do them,” Shawn says. “We can’t operate exactly like in 1919, but we can still honor the mission while moving forward.”

His vision for the future of The American Legion is bold: an organization younger veterans want to be part of, one that continues to hold leaders accountable to their promises—and a future where America celebrates a month with zero veteran suicides.

### Advice for New Leaders

Shawn encourages younger veterans to step up and get involved.

“You can’t make a difference from the sidelines,” he says. “If you’re unhappy, stop complaining—get involved and make it better. It won’t be easy, and not everyone will agree with you. That’s okay. Find common ground and use our diversity to get the job done.”

### A Message Between Generations

Shawn’s greatest mentor was his grandfather, a quiet WWII anti-tank Technical Sergeant who taught him the importance of giving back and taking care of fellow veterans. That lesson guides him still—and shapes the message he hopes older Legionnaires hear from his generation.

“We respect you. We thank you for giving us the opportunity to grow up free. We’re here and ready to continue the great work you’ve done. Just like we followed you into service, we will follow you in maintaining and growing the Legion—for the next generation to follow after us.”

Officer or the Department Service Office. Programs evolve each year, and assistance you didn’t qualify for in the past may now be available. Whether you need help with disability claims, healthcare enrollment, caregiver support applications, or accessing community resources, please reach out. That’s what we are here for.

### A Winter Reminder for Families

If you have older veterans in your family or neighborhood, take a moment to check in this month. A quick visit or phone call can ensure they have: Reliable heat and appropriate winter clothing; Safe transportation to appointments; Up-to-date VA health care enrollment; Current contact information on file with the VA; Support for any pending claims or benefit questions. Sometimes the smallest gesture makes the biggest difference.

### Year-End Veteran Checklist

Before the year ends, consider taking care of the following: Review any outstanding claims or documents to ensure nothing is delayed during the holiday season. Update your contact information with the VA so appointment reminders and benefit updates reach you. Confirm caregiver eligibility or enrollment if your household depends on caregiver support. Schedule annual check-ups or wellness visits, especially if winter weather makes travel difficult later on. Share information with fellow veterans. Many don’t know what benefits exist until another veteran tells them.

Serving Montana’s veterans is a privilege I am grateful for every single day. This season reminds us that gratitude isn’t just expressed—it’s lived out through service, compassion, and showing up for one another. If you, your spouse, or a caregiver in your life needs help, guidance, or someone to walk through the benefits process with you, please reach out. You never have to navigate this alone.

## A Season of Gratitude and Service

As we enter this season of gratitude, I want to take a moment—on behalf of all our Service Officers—to thank every veteran who allowed us the privilege of assisting you this past year. Helping you navigate benefits and resources isn’t just our duty; it’s an honor we are genuinely thankful for.

### A Season of Gratitude and Service

Montana winters can be long, cold, and difficult, especially for our older veterans and those managing illness or service-connected injuries. This is the time of year when community matters most. If you or someone you know is struggling—physically, financially, or emotionally—please reach out. No veteran in this state should feel like they have to handle it alone.

### VA Programs That Reflect “Gratitude for Service”

The VA continues to strengthen programs designed to support veterans and the families who care for them. Two key programs deserve special attention this season:

- The Program of General Caregiver Support Services (PGCSS): Offers skills training, coaching, peer support, telephone support, and referrals. This program helps caregivers navigate the day-to-day challenges of caring for a veteran while also helping the veteran maintain dignity and independence.
- The Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC):

Provides enhanced support for caregivers of veterans with serious injuries or disabilities. This includes potential monthly stipends, access to health insurance through CHAMPVA (when eligible), mental health counseling, respite care, and assistance with travel for VA-authorized medical appointments.

Recently, the VA extended PCAFC eligibility for legacy participants and their caregivers through September 30, 2028. This extension brings needed stability and peace of mind to many Montana families who rely on this support.

Across our state, the Montana VA Health Care System continues to emphasize caregiver outreach, recognizing the critical role families play in the long-term wellbeing of our veterans.

### You Don’t Have to Navigate Benefits Alone

If you’re unsure which benefits apply to your situation—or if you tried before and felt overwhelmed—contact your local Post Service

# American Legion of Montana Launches 2026 Rifle Raffle

The American Legion of Montana is proud to announce the kickoff of the 2026 Rifle Raffle, an exciting opportunity for Montanans to support veterans' programs while entering to win a premier firearm.

This year's grand prize is a Ruger American Gen 2 chambered in 6.5 Creedmoor—a rifle known for its precision, reliability, and quality craftsmanship. Whether you're a hunter, sports shooter, or collector, this firearm is sure to be a prized addition.

## Raffle Details:

- Tickets: \$20 each or 6 for \$100
- Limited Availability: Only 1,500 tickets will be sold
- Drawing Date: June 28, 2026
- Eligibility: Must be 18 years or older to purchase
- Winner: Need not be present to win
- Prize Pickup: The winner must claim the prize at Mitchell Supply in Great Falls

The American Legion extends its gratitude to Mitchell Supply for generously donating the prize and for their continued support of veterans and their families.

## Why It Matters

Every ticket purchased goes beyond the excitement of winning—it fuels the American Legion's mission to support Montana veterans, their families, and local communities. From youth programs to veteran services, raffle proceeds help strengthen the foundation of service that defines the American Legion. Don't miss your chance to win a top-quality rifle while giving back to those who served. Tickets are going fast, and with only 1,500 available, they won't last long!

For ticket information, contact your local American Legion Post or visit the Department of Montana office.





# ★ GUN RAFFLE ★

DRAWING HELD:

**JULY 4, 2026**

1PM @ YELLOWSTONE AMERICAN  
LEGION POST 4

1540 BROADWATER AVE BILLINGS, MT

**TICKETS: \$25 EACH OR 5 FOR \$100**

## RIFLE SYSTEM

- \* Bear Creek Arsenal AR-10 Bolt Action System
- \* Luth-AR Precision buttstock & grip
- \* 3 AR 10 Bolt Action Uppers
- \* .358 Win Barrel custom built by Deadshot Barrels
- \* ATN ThIR LTV Thermal Riflescope 3-9X25mm
- \* 3 10 round magazines
- \* 20 rounds each of 22-250, .308 Win and .358 Win in custom ammo cases
- \* All packaged in a hard case for safe transport via land, sea, or air.

NEED NOT BE PRESENT TO WIN - MUST BE 21+ YEARS OLD & ABLE TO PASS A  
BACKGROUND CHECK - ONLY 2,000 TICKETS SOLD - RESIDENTS OF ALL  
STATES ELIGIBLE

**Order Form American Legion Department of  
Montana**  
**Red Shirt Friday TShirt or Hoodie**

Uni-sex Size	Qty	Hoodie	TShirt
S		\$45	\$25
M		\$45	\$25
L		\$45	\$25
XL		\$45	\$25
2X		\$48	\$28
3X		\$50	\$30
<b>TOTAL</b>			



Deliver  
To:

Name:		
Address:		
City:	State:	Zip:
Phone:		

You will not be charged until the shirts have shipped:

Check one:

	Visa
	MasterCard
	Discover
	Amex

Account #																			
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Expires: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_

CVV#				
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**Send Form To:**

American Legion of Montana  
PO Box 155  
Fort Harrison, MT 59636  
amlegmtsec@gmail.com



## Big K Cash Raffle: Supporting Montana Veterans in 2026

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The American Legion of Montana is excited to announce the launch of the 2026 Big K Cash Raffle, a long-standing tradition that not only brings excitement to our members and supporters but also provides vital funding for the programs that serve Montana's veterans, their families, and our communities.

As the name suggests, only 1,000 tickets are available, making this a limited and highly sought-after opportunity. Each ticket—known as a “Big K”—is just \$25.00, and with that purchase, participants are entered into nine drawings throughout the year.

The raffle kicks off in January with a \$100 New Year Drawing, followed by six \$400 monthly drawings held from January through June. In March, in honor of the American Legion's Birthday, there will be an additional \$500 drawing. The excitement culminates at the Department Convention with the final drawing of \$1,800, a grand prize that brings the year of fundraising to a close.

Beyond the thrill of winning, every ticket purchased helps fund essential Legion programs that support Montana veterans and their families, from advocacy and assistance to community engagement and youth programs. This is more than just a raffle—it's a chance to give back while enjoying the fun and camaraderie that comes with being part of the Legion Family.

Tickets are available on a first-come, first-served basis, and they sell out quickly each year. Those wishing to participate are encouraged to send in the entry form along with payment as soon as possible to secure their spot in the drawings.

By purchasing a Big K, you're not only entering to win cash prizes—you're making a direct investment in the strength of our programs and the well-being of veterans across Montana.

For more information or to get your ticket, contact the American Legion of Montana today.

**Order Form American Legion Department of  
Montana  
Glassware Sets**

Support the American Legion by purchasing a set of custom glasses featuring our Family Logos!

## Product Details

- Beer Pint Glass Set (4 glasses) - \$40 (ONLY 7 SET REMAINING 1ST COME FIRST SERVED)
- Whiskey Glass Set (4 glasses) - \$40

Each set features the official American Legion Family Logos, making them perfect for gifts or personal use!

### Customer Information:

- Name: \_\_\_\_\_
- Address: \_\_\_\_\_
- Phone: \_\_\_\_\_
- Email: \_\_\_\_\_

### Order Details:

Item	Quantity	Price per Set	Total Price
Beer Pint Glass Set	_____	\$40	_____
Whiskey Glass Set	_____	\$40	_____

**Subtotal:** \$

Total: \$

### Payment Methods:

- Check (Payable to American Legion of Montana)
- Credit/Debit add 4% processing fee

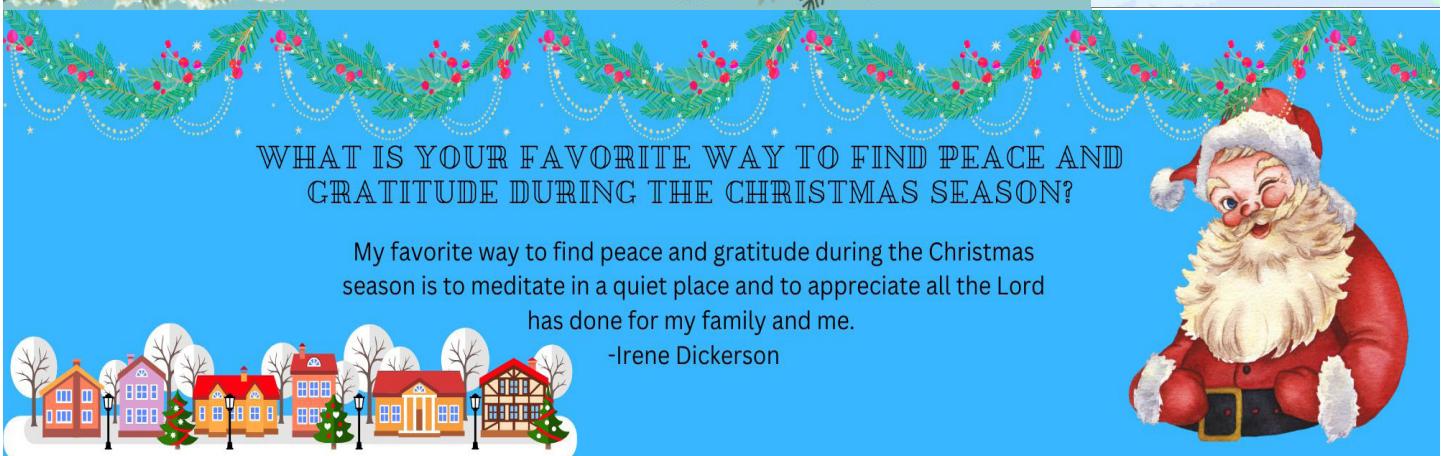
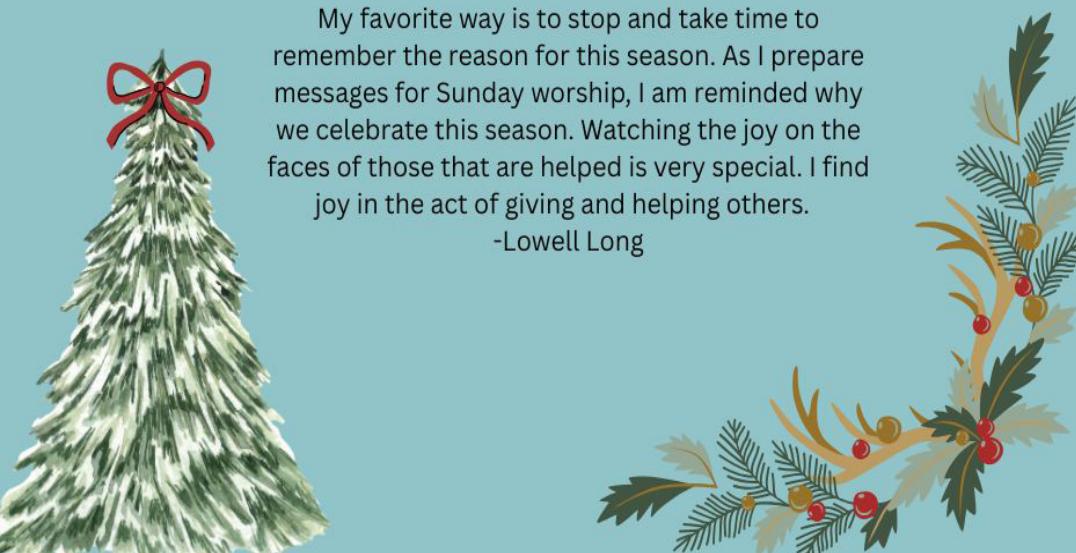
	Visa
	MasterCard
	Discover
	Amex



WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE WAY TO FIND PEACE AND GRATITUDE DURING THE CHRISTMAS SEASON?

My favorite way is to stop and take time to remember the reason for this season. As I prepare messages for Sunday worship, I am reminded why we celebrate this season. Watching the joy on the faces of those that are helped is very special. I find joy in the act of giving and helping others.

-Lowell Long



WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE WAY TO FIND PEACE AND GRATITUDE DURING THE CHRISTMAS SEASON?

My favorite way to find peace and gratitude during the Christmas season is to meditate in a quiet place and to appreciate all the Lord has done for my family and me.

-Irene Dickerson



WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE WAY TO FIND PEACE AND GRATITUDE DURING THE CHRISTMAS SEASON?

My way to find peace of gratitude is helping plan, cook, and serve a Christmas meal for Local Veterans and their families.

-Doug Byron

