



# Annual reports to the Convention of The American Legion Department of Minn.

## Commander

I have a lot of people to thank. If I listed all of you one by one, it would take up the whole article if not the whole paper. My family, especially my wife, Jody, deserve a very special thanks for all the love and support they have given me — not only this year but through all the years.

I also owe a lot to the past department commanders for the advice and support I received. I am also grateful for the best department staff in the entire American Legion. Mike Maxa, Tim Engstrom, Jennifer Kelley, Misty Padilla, Rachael Hill, Ray Kane and Janet Lorenzo work so hard to make us all look good and make our jobs easier. Thank you so much for all you do.

I got the opportunity to travel around our great state over the year. My favorite part was attending dinners at small posts. Seeing the hard work, and pride of our Legion Family volunteers, is truly amazing. I've gained a few pounds, and my tires are worn down, but it was worth it.

It didn't matter if it was a big occasion, or just a snack, a meeting, or a parade, the hospitality was always spectacular. You should all be very proud of yourselves. Great job.

Thank you everyone who donated to the Minnesota Veterans Assistance Fund (Minnesota American Legion Foundation's Fund 85). I asked for a very lofty goal of \$100,000, and we have surpassed that amount. I am looking forward to announcing the final total at the Department Convention.

Speaking of conventions, I was a bit disappointed in the turnouts at a lot of district conventions. We can do better. If you are a post commander and you are running such a great post that you don't need to at least send a representative to the District Convention, don't you

feel like you should share your success with the rest of us. We really could use the help.

On the other hand, if you are a post commander and need help, or ideas, or anything to help you make your American Legion post better, you should be going, or at least sending a representative from your post.

There is a lot of information, years and wisdom at these events. If your post is going through something, chances are good that someone has already gone through it. I don't see any reason why every post shouldn't be attending, at least the district conventions. I get that the Department Conventions can be far to travel to, but district conventions should be attended by at least one person from every post.

One thing that I really learned this year is the number of unsung heroes we have in the Minnesota American Legion Family. Everywhere I went, there were great people working very hard to make the lives of veterans and their families a little bit better. Our American Legion could not run if it weren't for those who work behind the scenes to help get things done. I knew this but seeing it firsthand day in and day out at every stop was inspiring. We have so many great people in our family.

If I could have done anything different this year, I think I would have spent less time focusing on things that I thought were broken and spent more time focusing on what is working. We have so many good things going on in The American Legion, and we don't talk about

them enough. We need to be telling our story for future generations. We need to be proud of what we have accomplished.

Most of the Legionnaires I meet don't like to brag about what they have done or don't realize the impact they have made on their communities, state or nation, but we need to let people know. The future of our organization depends on it, and the future of our veterans, and their families depends on the future of our organization.

I will cherish this year for the rest of my life, and I can't thank you enough for allowing me the opportunity to serve as your department commander. I hope I didn't let you down.

For Steve (Sully) and Diane Sullivan, thank you for pushing me and inspiring me. You are the best.

I hope to see all of you on "The Road Ahead."

God bless all of you.

**Paul Hassing  
Commander**

## Adjutant

Didn't I just finish last year's annual report? I feel the department had a really good year, and for the good of The American Legion, the Department of Minnesota is fulfilling our four pillars.

Our Minnesota Veterans Assistance Fund (Fund 85) is helping our veterans get back on their feet when life throws them a curveball. To date, from the inception of the program we have assisted veterans with over \$356,000 in direct assistance.

This is not a handout but assistance to our veterans and their families who are having a rough time. We can all relate at some time in our lives when we could have used a little help. I remember when I was a young airman living paycheck to paycheck and would choose diapers and baby food over hot dogs and beans. We ate a lot of buttered noodles and dry pancakes back in those days. We utilized a program from the county that provided dairy products and some canned goods.

The assistant department service officer (ADSO) and department service officer (DSO) review every case submitted to us, and they work with the post investigator validating whether the veteran and their family are needing our assistance.

In a couple of the cases submitted to us, they have found after reviewing bank statements, the applicant has the funds to pay the overdue electric bill, or rent or whatever they're needing. Rest assured the ADSO and DSO are great stewards of how the funds from Fund 85 are paid out.

Huge shoutout to Commander Paul Hassing for raising over \$100,000 for Fund 85 as his Commander's Project for the past year.

Attitude is everything and is a determining factor to our veterans who are not members. I wrote an article for the Legionnaire a couple of years ago talking about disrespectful behavior by some of our members and being disruptive and argumentative in the post.

I did receive a few phone calls telling me I was out of line and this is not happening in our post or The American Legion. At the same time, I received support for the article, members saying I hit the nail on the head.

Well, unfortunately, I probably receive a call at least once a week on average on how so-and-so is causing problems, and you

need to get so-and-so under control and the department needs to take action.

I know we are all getting older and stuck in our ways, but that doesn't give any of us a blank check to be disrespectful to each other. It is OK to disagree with someone or don't like the way it's being done. You state your case and listen to the opposition and take the vote.

If the vote doesn't result in your way, so be it, move on, the decision of the members by vote is the will of the members. Also refer to the constitution and bylaws of the post, district, department or national. This is the governing document of how we conduct our business. Blow the dust off of it, review and bring your constitution and bylaws up to date.

If you don't have one, I highly recommend you develop one. Contact me and I can provide you with a sample of another post's constitution and bylaws.

Finally, your department staff is here to help our members, posts and districts. Do you know 98 percent of the time when you bypass department and go straight to national, the national organization contacts me to resolve the complaint, question, or concern?

You are lucky to have an experienced staff and a very knowledgeable staff, with one having over 32 of committed service to our department. We are trying new ways to communicate to our members through electronic means. Rising postage costs are killing our budgets.

But, with that said, if you call and ask to have something postal-mailed, we have accommodated that request. Thank you, and I respectfully submit my report.

**Mike Maxa  
Adjutant**

## Membership

Wow! What a year! When you feel like you are getting the hang of things, you realize the year has come to an end.

At the beginning of the year, I was really nervous. I thought I wasn't going to be able to do this; some were concerned because I still had a full-time job.

I want to tell anyone that anything is possible if you find the time, the patience, and if those who are looking for help understand that we all have other commitments. But I took this seriously from the start, and I believe I did the best I could, with the support and collaboration from those who supported and helped me along with way.

At the beginning of the year, a membership plan was sent out. The target goals were shared, and all department vice commanders were asked to be in their respective districts. Revitalizations!

District commanders are asked every year to have a revitalization in their districts for at least two posts. It's even required because of a resolution approved at the Department Convention in 2002!

We have seen this over the years, we are asked to hold them, but are we really doing the work? What does a revitalization look like? If you have had a successful one, what did you do? We must start thinking outside the box, and even

though it's "Always been done that way," can we get creative and start something new, create a different/new way of getting it done. Together as a family we can make it happen and if we work together *anything* is possible! *Let's do the work together!*

We have reached some great milestones this year, starting off like we always do up at the top 2 or top 10 for the first part of the year nationally. After the new year, the Minnesota winter has blown us down into the bottom, but we should be proud of hitting the 90 percent target goal this year. Even though we didn't make the 95 or 100 percent target goal, we reached some of those targets!

So, the work does pay off. We just need to try and figure out what we can do after the winter and the "why" and "how" of the annual big drop.

We have it in us, and I know next year we can do it together. As of the day I wrote this report, we have 173 posts in the department who are over 100 percent. Last year at this time we had 106 posts over 100 percent. I still call this year a success.

We are still 2,552 short of our goal, and we have 6,250 members within the department still expired and 5,036 members in the department in Post 1982 (the at-large post) who still do not have a post home. Let's connect and give them a post home.

Armories. Every year we hear: Let's get into the armories! This is a big place for us to be, these members, the spouses, sons, daughters, grandchildren and their grandchildren are going to be the future of The American Legion.

Our Legacy will be passed on to them sooner or later, and we need them, to keep the American Legion strong! Let's bring them into the folds of the American Legion Family. Find the person who is comfortable reaching out, and let them work their magic talking to them. Help them with a family fun day, a group picnic, a deployment, send them off with care packages.

Let them see how much we care about our local veterans and their families, and we are here if they need us, and it shows we want to bring them into the American Legion Family.

*Thank you to all of you who have called this year needing help and assistance, and I am sorry if I missed any of you, but I believe I helped immediately if I could, connected you with someone in a neighboring town willing to come sit with you (thank you, Mom), or drove and held MyLegion.org training in your district!*

Thank you for trusting me to help guide and fix or address your concerns. We have some amazing, seasoned team members out there learning to utilize technology and making things happen in their districts, not just Legion, but our SAL team members as well, we have each other's backs. Technology has its challenges, but together we can overcome these challenges.

The American Legion Family can do anything together if we all put our minds to it and *do the work!*

There were several leaders in my corner, that I would not have been able to do this without them: Jim Lucas, Lloyd Ricker, Pat Logan, Dick Ward, Mary Hansen, Karen O'Bar,  
**Continued on Page 2**



## Continued from Page 1

Tim Haugen, James Hultgren, Misty Padilla, Jennifer Kelley and my Mom! It's been a great year and sad to see it end.

Commander Paul, I still think Elvis is in the building, but "Thank you" for entrusting me to be your membership director; it's been a fun ride.

Good luck to the incoming membership director and team. You will do great things in 2024-2025. We are all a piece of the puzzle; just need to find the right fit!

Thank you, American Legion Family.

**Pam Krill**  
Membership Director

## Vice Cmdr. 1st & 3rd Districts

No report.

## Vice Cmdr. 2nd & 7th Districts

I want to congratulate Commander Paul Hassing on reaching and surpassing his project goals for the Minnesota Veterans Assistance Fund.

I also want to commend Commander Paul Hassing, Membership Director Pam Krill and their entire Membership Team for their hard work and dedication.

I would like to thank all the American Legion members of the 2nd and 7th Districts for their encouragement and support. It has been an exciting and educational opportunity.

The 2nd and 7th Districts worked hard on membership and as of this writing achieved 95 percent. Great effort on their part.

In the 2nd District, Project Zulu house had its groundbreaking.

In the 7th District, the Montevideo Veterans Home celebrated its grand opening. I will, in the future, volunteer for activities with the residents at Montevideo.

My wife, Pam, and myself have assisted with bingo at the Fergus Falls Veterans Home. We have found this to be a very rewarding time. Spending time and interacting with the residents was very rewarding for us. I also volunteered with my wife at the local poppy table. Having a veteran helping not only helps their poppy donations, it did give me an opportunity to recruit a new member that day!

The past year was very busy and went by fast.

Again, thank you all. I will still continue to serve the Department of Minnesota and my district to the best of my abilities.

**Victor Gades**  
Vice Commander

## Vice Cmdr. 4th and 5th Districts

No report.

## Vice Cmdr. 6th and 9th Districts

Thank you to Commander Paul Hassing and Membership Chair Pam Krill for a good year and the privilege of standing beside you as part of the Department of Minnesota leadership team.

I also want to extend a thank you to the 6th and 9th districts for electing me to be their vice commander. While the passing of my brother and the family duties that come with a death in the family kept me from doing some of the things I wanted to do as vice commander, I will count this year as one of the high points of my American Legion career. I will also cherish the new friends I have made in the two districts.

I was asked to teach about mentorship at the 2023 Fall Conference. While teaching might not be one of the normal duties of a vice commander, I do enjoy that work. I was able to attend the Pearl Harbor Rally, the Appreciation Rally, the National Commander's Tour stop at Moorhead Post 21, as well as both the 6th and 9th District Mid-Winter Conferences.

The Thief River Falls Legion and VFW invited me to come and serve as a guest speaker at their Vietnam War Commemoration ceremony. As part of the event, every Vietnam-era veteran was presented with a commemorative certificate and pin. It was a thrill to shake every hand and put the pins on their lapels, and in some small measure perhaps make up for the way that many of our Vietnam-era veterans were treated on their return to the United States.

As I remove the white cap and go back to being a blue-cap Legionnaire, I am not sure what is next, but I am sure it will be another adventure and new challenges.

**Paul Edwards**  
Vice Commander

## Vice Cmdr. 8th & 10th Districts

Where do I start? It has been a most amazing year, one I will long remember and cherish for an exceptionally long time.

It was my honor and privilege to serve you the American Legion Family as the 8th and 10th District Department vice commander for the 2023-2024 year. There are so many members of the American

Legion Family to thank for this opportunity.

Let me start with St. Michael Post 567. Your support and commitment to me, our fellow veterans and their families is absolutely appreciated more than I can find words to express. Thank you to the 8th and 10th districts for having the faith, belief and courage to elect me as their representative for this past year. Of course, Department Commander Paul Hassing, my fellow vice commanders, our membership director and the rest of the Department of Minnesota officers, staff and committee chairs. You are an outstanding highly dedicated, knowledgeable and professional team. I have learned so much from you this past year.

Department Commander's Paul's Hassing's theme is "The Road Ahead." You have done what we needed to do, to see "The Road Ahead," using the success and failures of the past to forge a new path forward, so that all the veterans who will follow us one day can continue the great work of this organization.

It has been my honor to serve alongside and with each one of you this past year. Our district and post officer teams are the most devoted, hardest-working, creative and tireless individuals. You are the foundation of this great national organization.

Your service to the American Legion Family is the most important of all. You embody the spirit and mission of The American Legion; you are effective in your local communities. The veterans you reach out to every day know you are not going to leave them behind. You give them and their families a hand up when they need it to continue their journey together. Our future generations have you to thank for programs like Boys and Girls State, Oratorical Contest, Baseball, Softball, and Minnesota's very own Legionville Education Center.

There are so many more programs to name, I just don't have the space. I would like to congratulate my post, St. Michael Post 567, for winning the Baseball Division I state championship in 2022 and 2023. Go Mikes!

My first eye-opening adventure this year was our trip to Indianapolis to attend the national membership conference. I felt like I had gone back in time to college at the base education center. Information we received to have a successful year was phenomenal.

I attended the National Convention, Department Fall Conference, two district conventions, an SAL convention, Auxiliary Juniors 10th District Convention, rallies, participated in Veterans on the Hill, many dinners, and lunches along with being able to visit so many post meetings.

I met and shared quality time with some of the most amazing individuals in our American Legion Family at these

gatherings. I hosted a district Past Commander's Dinner, gave several speeches at events such as the Anoka Veterans Council memorial ceremonies, hosted by Anoka DAV Chapter 39. It was humbling to be able to represent our department commander at the St. Cloud Veterans Memorial ceremonies this year.

At one of the dinners, I attended a Legionnaire and friend announced my arrival by saying, "The Kilt has arrived!" and "Is da thrian tionnsnadh?"

Begun is two-thirds done. (This saying in Scottish Gaelic is similar to the English saying "Well begun is half done.") It means that by starting something well, it makes completing the task easier.)

Respectfully submitted.

**Bill Gordon**  
Vice Commander

## Chaplain

The year has come and gone with a flurry. It seems like time has a tendency of getting away from us.

This year has been one of honor to have been chosen to serve as your chaplain, and I have done so with great humility.

During the year, I tried to attend all the rallies, and I know I did not make the rally in Forest Lake due to issues out of my control.

I attended conferences and presented the invocation and benediction when asked to do so, along with a few meal prayers. I prepared the chaplain columns for the Legionnaire.

Otherwise, it has been a rather quiet year. I made myself available if called upon.

The biggest pleasure I got out of the position was that was the response I received from different people who said they had read the articles in the paper. It was through this response that gave me the strength to keep going and give the position the best of my abilities.

I would like to thank the membership of the Legion for instilling in me your confidence for serving in this wonderful position and look forward to serving in any other position that may come along.

**Dean Knutson**  
Chaplain

## Historian

### Department of Minnesota

Over the past year, my role as the department historian has been both eventful and fulfilling. This report details the activities and contributions made to document and promote the efforts of The American Legion Department of Minnesota. Throughout the year, I have actively participated in numerous events alongside the commander, meticulously documenting each occasion to preserve our history and share our mission with the broader community.

### Events Attended

I have had the honor of attending eight significant events with the commander. These events spanned various functions, including community outreach programs, veteran commemorations, and organizational meetings. Each event presented an opportunity to

capture and record the valuable moments and efforts of our members. My presence at these events ensured that the legacy and impact of our activities were documented comprehensively.

### Photographic Documentation

Throughout the year, I have taken a total of 683 photographs. These images serve as a visual archive of our activities and achievements, capturing the essence of our events and the dedication of our members. The photographs have been meticulously organized and stored for easy access, ensuring that they can be used for future publications, presentations, and historical records.

### Video Coverage

In addition to photographs, I have recorded seven hours of video footage. This footage includes speeches, ceremonies, and other significant moments that provide a dynamic and engaging record of our events. The videos not only preserve our history but also serve as valuable resources for promotional and educational purposes. They allow us to share the stories and experiences of our members with a wider audience.

### Social Media Presence

To further enhance our reach and engagement, I have been actively posting on Facebook and YouTube. These platforms have been instrumental in sharing the events I have covered with both the commander and the communication committee. Each post is crafted to highlight the significance of the event and the contributions of our members. By utilizing social media, we have been able to connect with a broader audience, including younger veterans and community members who may not attend events in person.

### Communication Committee

Being a member of the Communications Committee has been a natural extension of my role as historian. The overlap between these responsibilities has allowed me to cover district and department events comprehensively, even when the commander is unavailable. This dual role ensures that all significant activities are documented and shared, maintaining a consistent and comprehensive record of our organization's efforts.

### Conclusion

The past year has been a testament to the dedication and resilience of the American Legion Department of Minnesota. Through active participation in events, extensive photographic and video documentation, and a robust social media presence, we have effectively preserved and promoted our history. As the department historian, I am committed to continuing these efforts, ensuring that the legacy of our organization is captured and celebrated for future generations.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve in this capacity. I look forward to another year of documenting and sharing the impactful work of the American Legion Department of Minnesota.

Respectfully submitted.

**Christopher Anderson**  
Historian

## National Executive Committeeman

The year kicked off in Mid-July, with a young Army veteran elected state commander. It was Paul Hassing of Earl C. Hill Post 550 in Bloomington.

Shortly after that was the National American Legion Convention in Charlotte, N.C., followed by so many rallies and meetings.

Camp-O-Ree and Harvest Rally had a great attendance at Legionville, and then it was on to Fall Conference in St. Cloud. It was the second of a five-year contract for that location.

Thanks, Past National Vice Commander Al Davis, and the entire convention committee, for making it happen. Also of course with the help of department staff: Mike Maxa, Tim Engstrom, Jennifer Kelley, Misty Padilla and Rachael Hill. American Legion National Commander leading candidate James LaCoursiere Jr. was our main speaker. He is from Post 91 in Moosup, Conn.

There were no more membership rallies until the Pearl Harbor Rally, which was held at Paynesville Post 271 in the 6th District. Of course, as true Minnesota winters, a small blizzard accompanied that, but the American Legion Family came out in big numbers.

January as usual was the start of many district mid-winters. They were also well-attended, and we were always reminded to do the very important Buddy Checks. February held the Washington Conference.

I was so very proud of our grandson, Blake Schoolmeester, who spoke at the ANAVICUS breakfast on Monday morning.

Blake is from Willmar and was the winner of the ANAVICUS scholarship. Kristy Janigo did an outstanding job of arranging everyone to meet with senators and representatives. She put in a lot of hours. We are lucky to have her. We need more younger active veterans like her to help keep The American Legion viable in the future.

March of course was The American Legion Birthday month. Thanks to all the posts and units that held an event for the members in their posts.

March 7 changed my life as I knew it. I had open-heart surgery for a quadruple bypass.

Thanks to my wife and home health person, I was able to return home four days following surgery. Also, we have a wonderful neighbor who is still helping with "the boys" (our bulls). Many others offered help and many donations of food, cookies and visits also helped the process. I am still lying low; I attend cardiac rehab three times a week and will do so until the middle of June.

Again, I sincerely thank the American Legion Family for all the cards, phone calls and well wishes I received. Donna and I did attend the National Commander's Tour stop at Fergus Falls Post 30 for a luncheon and Willmar Post 167 for an evening meal, all in the same day.

It took a toll, and I soon realized I was not fully recovered as I was so very tired, and a pain

Continued on Page 3

Continued from Page 2

pill was needed the next day. A lesson learned: I am not there yet. Minnesota is lucky to have such a great alternate NECman in Peggy Moon, as I was not able to attend a few meetings.

She filled in at the Spring Meetings in Indianapolis and did an outstanding job, related back to me from quite a few of those in attendance.

District conventions brought new leadership and new initiatives. We ALL need to turn this membership slide around. I congratulate this year's new officers, and again let's ALL work with them.

As you are aware they all put in lots of hours planning and implementing their year, appreciate them. This year many posts went over 95 percent; congratulations to those.

Thank you ALL for allowing me to be your NEC. Donna and I will be out and about very soon seeing all the great work you are all doing for the veterans, children and communities. We look forward to seeing you all in Willmar at the Department Convention July 11-13.

**Bill Barbknecht**  
NECman

## Judge Advocate

The American Legion Family addresses so many veterans' issues. It has well-written bylaws and constitutions, which strengthen our posts. They address the unexpected.

Murphy's Law being what it is, this happens more often than you might expect. Hence, there is the need for good governance documents.

My most frequent calls concern three subjects: authority of post officials to do certain things, how to deal with a member out of control, and liability if things go wrong.

I spoke at Minnesota Legion College at Camp Ripley regarding the value of becoming a nonprofit corporation and how it protects members from liability. I answered questions regarding the need to report the sale of an American Legion building to the Minnesota Attorney General's Office. I answered questions regarding the use of a post building for a political rally.

**Greg Colby**  
Judge Advocate

## Treasurer

I was elected department treasurer during the Department Executive Committee meeting of the Fall Conference the end of October 2023 in St. Cloud.

I am a member of the following committees by virtue of my position as treasurer: Finance Committee, Legionville Board of Directors, and Board of Publications (Legionnaire).

A Legionville Board of Directors meeting was held in March, and I briefed on budget expenses versus actual expenses. Monthly financials are received and reviewed each month.

**Mark Dvorak**  
Treasurer

## Americanism

I would like to thank Department Commander Paul Hassing for allowing me to be the Americanism Committee chairwoman for the Department of Minnesota. We wish you a successful convention in Wilmar.

I would also like to thank Americanism Committee members Art Tobkin and Paul Orson for their able assistance during the past year.

In would also like to thank the subcommittee chairs (appearing next as Boy Scouts, Boys State, Community Service, Education, Jr. Shooting Sports, Oratorical Contest and Safety-School Patrol.) They do a wonderful job.

My condolences to the family and friends of longtime chairman of the Safety-School Patrol Subcommittee, the late Jim Blakesley of Aitkin Post 86.

**Tess Davis**  
Chairwoman

## Boy Scouts

The Department of Minnesota Scouting Committee met at 10 a.m. March 9, 2024, at Apple Valley American Legion Post 1776 for the purpose of reviewing and selecting our 2024 Eagle Scout of the Year scholarship winner and conducting other Scouting Committee business as needed.

Four District Scout Committee Chairs were in attendance (Districts 2, 4, 7, 9), along with Department HQ representative Jennifer Kelley, Department Americanism Chairwoman Tess Davis and National Americanism Commission Member Al Davis.

Eagle Scout Jackson Kramer of Hutchinson Troop 623 was selected as 2024 Minnesota American Legion Eagle Scout of the Year. There were six great nominations/applications submitted.

After careful review and scoring, the committee members selected an outstanding nominee! Kelley forwarded the required documentation to National American Legion HQ for their nationwide selection process. And we were elated to learn Jackson Kramer was selected as one of the National Eagle Scout runners-up. We tied for second place in the nation!

The committee also held a short administrative meeting to discuss other agenda items:

- The committee reviewed Minnesota American Legion Foundation funds 56 (Boy Scout Scholarship Fund) and 81 (Boy Scout Council Assistance Fund). Discussion was held on the proper procedure to submit donations to these two funds — by writing the check to the Minnesota American Legion Foundation and putting in the Memo line Fund 56 or Fund 81.

- Eagle Scout of the Year (Fund 56) Scholarship is currently set at \$2,000. Fund 56 balance is \$34,956. This fund, to be able to stand on its own, will need a balance of \$40,000 or higher.

- Boys Scout Council Assistance Fund (Fund 81) has received donations from Minnesota posts for many years; however, the Department Scout Committee had not awarded many funds until this

past year. Only one Minnesota Scouting Council submitted a donation request this year. This fund is currently setting at over \$72,000. The Scout Committee voted to make a \$1,000 donation to Twin Valley Council, BSA, Attn: Ray Brauer, 810 Madison Ave, Mankato, MN 56001.

- With the current fund balances, the Scouting Committee passed a motion to limit future Legion Post donations requests only to the Scholarship Fund (and not include the Council Assistance Fund as is done most years).

There being no further business, the annual Scouting Committee/Eagle Scout of the Year scholarship selection meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted.

**David "Chip" Manson**  
Chairman

## Boys State

No report.

## Community Service

No report.

## Education

The Education Committee's Scholarship Subcommittee met on Saturday, April 27, 2024, at American Legion Post 225 in Forest Lake. Six \$500 American Legion Memorial Scholarships, three \$500 Minnesota American Legion Foundation Scholarships and five \$1,000 Minnesota American Legion Nurse's Training Scholarships were awarded.

The six Memorial Scholarships were awarded to Brock Dewey of Ashby, Nick Tobkin of Detroit Lakes, Alaura Dahl of Backus, Kendall Dyke of Kasson, Hana Thompson of Mentor and Brooklyn Loew of Askov.

The three Minnesota American Legion Foundation Scholarships were awarded to Beth Powers of Dumont, Ian Barber of Worthington and Jackson Barber of Spicer.

The five Minnesota American Legion Nurse's Training Scholarships were awarded to Kailey Fossell of Hoyt Lakes, Trisha Gebhart of Detroit Lakes, Paige Maurer of Foley, Bryan Froelich of Farmington and Anna Meeker of Green Isle. We congratulate the scholarship recipients and wish them well in their continuing education.

I would like to thank the other members of the selection committee, Tess Davis, Art Tobkin, and Paul Orson. I would also like to thank Department Commander Paul Hassing for this appointment. It's always a pleasure serving the Department of Minnesota.

**Don Skow**  
Chairman

## Jr. Shooting Sports

No report.

## Oratorical Contest

The Department of Minnesota Oratorical Contest was held on Feb. 24, 2024

Semifinals were held at Osseo Post 172 in the morning. Thanks to all that assisted by volunteering your Saturday morning to help with this event.

Finals were held at Anoka Post 102 in the afternoon. The competition was fierce, and it was a tough competition to judge.

There was even a tie-breaker this year during finals.

Thank you to all of our volunteers for making this contest a success. It could not have been done without your support.

The winners are as follows:  
1st place: Elijah Cox, 6th District, Walker Post 134

2nd Place: Abigail Erpelding, 1st District, Kasson Post 333

3rd place: Caleb Robrahn, 3rd District, Le Center Post 108

4th place: Madison Price, 7th District, Eden Valley Post 381

5th place: Katelin Flack, 2nd District, Mankato Post 11

Congratulations to all the contestants.

Elijah represented the Department of Minnesota at the National Competition at The Hillsdale College Campus in Hillsdale, Mich., May 17-19.

**Jamie Woods**  
Chairwoman

## Safety-School Patrol

No report.

## American Legion Riders

This year has gone by so fast! I can't believe that the Department Convention is right around the corner. The Minnesota American Legion Riders will meet in Willmar on Friday July 12 at 4:30 p.m. in Gallery 5-7.

Reminder, we will be voting on the proposed Constitution & Bylaws. If you would like a copy, please contact myself (jodyhassing@gmail.com or our secretary at secretary@mnlr.org), and we will send you a copy for your chapter to review and vote on. All are welcome and encouraged to attend the MNALR Convention. We look forward to hearing and seeing everyone. Please remember all motions must originate from one of the district representatives or MNALR department officers, and only those same individuals are allowed to vote.

I hope by now each of the chapters in the state has sent in the Chapter Consolidated Report to our secretary at secretary@mnlr.org. I am looking forward to sharing all we have done this year with The American Legion.

The Fund 85 Run is in the final stages of planning. The kickoff party will be July 24 at Pipestone American Legion Post 6. The doors will open at 4 p.m., dinner will be at 6 p.m., and the program will start at 7 p.m. A block of rooms has been reserved at Grandstay Hotel & Suites in Pipestone.

Thursday evening, we will stay in Montevideo and a

block of rooms is available at the Grandstay. Friday evening we will stay in Austin; there is a block of rooms at the Days Inn and right next door to the Days Inn is the AmericInn.

Saturday we will end the day in La Crescent and a block of rooms is available at Baymont Inn Onalaska. The ending party will be July 28 at Bayport American Legion Post 491. We usually plan to arrive at the ending location between 1 and 2 p.m., more details to follow.

The Fund 85 Run will be hosted by Slayton American Legion Riders on Aug. 17. The details will be posted on Facebook and on our website: www.mnlr.org.

If you would like assistance setting up a chapter at your post, please let me or your district Riders representative know so we can help you get things going. If you are interested in having me talk to your chapter or district about the proposed Constitution & Bylaws, please contact me.

I will give a complete recap of the year at the Department Convention.

God bless and keep the rubber side down.

**Jody Hassing**  
Director

## Armed Forces Service Center

No meetings of this committee have been formally held. I would like to ask each district to nominate a person for me to contact by mail or email and get the ball rolling so we have all of the districts coming into the Armed Forces Service Center to let us know what they are able to help with in terms of needs at the center.

We, of course, need more volunteers for the center, but it is impractical for many of the districts to ask people to volunteer since the center is at Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport; therefore, I would like those districts to consider helping us with monetary donations.

**Joe Jansen**  
Liaison

## A.L. Auxiliary

My year as American Legion Auxiliary Department of Minnesota president is coming to a close. I have had wonderful opportunities as I attended parades, meetings, memorials, membership rallies, mission training, mid-winters, district conventions and more.

I love meeting our members and learning how units are doing things differently with the common goal of service not self along with seeing our history within Legion posts around the state.

I attended American Legion Auxiliary Minnesota Girls State as a counselor this year. It is always an exhilarating, impactful and exhausting week all at the same time. It is a program that instills civics in its citizens while they are creating their city, county and state government. The citizens had a surprise visit when Gov. Tim Walz and Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan stepped on stage to speak with them and answer questions. Every girl in

my city said that was the best part of that day!

Getting to hear National Commander Dan Seehafer speak at Veterans Day on the Hill and traveling with the National President Lisa Williamson as we highlighted some of our many veterans facilities were also definitely highlights of this past year. Having the opportunity to hear the message "Be The One" has been very impactful.

Thank you, Minnesota, for supporting the American Legion Family "Be the One" initiative. Be the one to save one. Our VA Health Care System is a great resource for the S.A.V.E. suicide-prevention training. Schedule one in your area and invite the public.

Plan to attend the Department Convention at the Willmar Conference Center on July 11, 12 and 13. It starts at 8 a.m. on Thursday and Friday and we plan to end by noon on Saturday. Food and entertainment at Willmar American Legion Post 167 on Thursday evening. A joint American Legion Family gathering at the Convention Center on Friday evening with the 9th District Band followed by karaoke. Will Commander Paul Hassing be in his "Elvis" costume to sing karaoke?

To my American Legion Family, thank you does not seem enough for all you have accomplished this past year as you "Danced Into the Hearts of Veterans," volunteered in your community and at our veteran homes and hospitals.

The Montevideo Veterans Home was dedicated on May 31. The Preston Veterans Home dedication is June 27 from 1:30 to 4 p.m. and Bemidji Veterans Home dedication is at 1 p.m. July 1. My project, the baby grand digital player piano has been delivered and set up in time for the dedication ceremony at the new Bemidji Veterans Home. I am so excited! Thank you for all your donations. All excess funds will go toward the recreation and activities funds for Preston and Montevideo.

It is you who have made the difference. Who will you plan to mentor? What are your ideas to grow your organization so that we may continue in service not self. How will you continue to make that difference? Thank you all from the bottom of my heart.

**Sharon Cross**  
President

## Blood

Donating blood symbolizes a helpful and responsible gesture not only to the person in need, but also toward society at large.

Advantageous for the Body: Blood donation is not at all harmful for the body; rather the four or five pints of blood that can be donated every year by both men and women ensures that you remain fit and fine.

Firstly, the cell depletion that occurs due to blood donation, forces the body to produce new cells. Plasma, the fluid portion of blood is replenished within 24 hours. Red cells need about four to six weeks for complete replacement.

Secondly, the body is armed against a host of diseases ranging from liver and heart problems to even cancer. This benefit

Continued on Page 4



Continued from Page 4

not functioning well enough to deliver the benefits our veterans deserve.

We tried several new tactics this year. We had a social mixer the week before the start of the legislative session at Mancini's in St. Paul where we invited every state lawmaker to come down to talk with us about our issues over appetizers.

We used tried-and-true political practices to invite them to the event, including in-person canvassing of the State Office Building and the Senate Building to deliver printed invitations, a voicemail to every lawmaker's office and an email. Legislators from opposite sides of the aisle took selfies with one another in front of our Legion logo VIP backdrop and showed an element of collegiality that unfortunately deteriorated later in the session. We know helping veterans is an area of agreement for most.

We also got down into the trenches more than we have in the past. We wrote out bill language for every issue on our legislative platform, contacted lawmakers we thought would make good chief authors, and wherever possible, aligned bipartisan slates of co-authors to maximize support.

Then, we called and emailed committee chairs to request hearings and contacted lawmakers to request their support whenever a vote was imminent. We purchased a new grassroots advocacy tool called Voter Voice. It is the same tool used by National HQ. We used this tool to generate 2,000 emails to lawmakers in May about the tax cuts we were supporting for charitable gambling.

My vision for next year is to have a Voter Voice campaign aligned to each platform priority and each related bill.

We knew going into this year that it was not a budget year, and anything related to spending likely would not move. We were able to get three of our issues across the line this year: free unlimited admission to the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum for service-connected veterans, free release of vital statistics documents from county recorders across Minnesota to county veterans service officers in support of VA benefits claims, and the removal of funding limits for counties to pay veterans service organizations to hold Memorial Day and Veterans Day observances.

I'd like to thank everyone who traveled to Washington, D.C., for the Washington Conference. Each year, I bond with those who travel as we work together to navigate meaningful conversations with our members of Congress. I'd like to personally thank the former Sen. Mike Parry for his contribution on this committee and the year and a half that he mentored me in this role and gave me confidence in the work.

**Kristy Janigo**  
Chairwoman

## Media & Communications

The American Legion Department of Minnesota Media & Communication Committee is pleased to present its



end-of-year report for the membership year 2023-2024. Over the past year, our committee has worked to enhancing the media presence and communication efforts of The American Legion. This report outlines our key activities, achievements and contributions to the organization.

The Media & Communication Committee recognized the importance of visual storytelling in capturing and conveying the spirit of The American Legion. Our team collaborated with various committees to capture high-quality photographs at Legion events, including parades, ceremonies and community outreach programs. These images were shared on social media platforms and utilized for promotional materials, thus showcasing the impactful work done by the organization.

Our committee worked to expand The American Legion's presence on social media platforms, recognizing their ability to reach a wide and diverse audience. We managed and maintained active accounts on platforms such as TikTok, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. By regularly posting engaging content, including news updates, event highlights and veteran stories, we aimed to foster a sense of community and patriotism among followers while attracting new members to the Legion.

Recognizing the importance of collaboration and teamwork within The American Legion, the Media & Communication Committee actively supported other committees throughout the year upon request. We have been willing to provide media coverage and promotion for events organized by various committees, ensuring their efforts received the attention they deserved.

**Maintained social media engagement:** Our social media platforms experienced a growth in followers and engagement rates.

**Strengthened collaboration:** Our committee actively collaborated with other committees within The American Legion, fostering a sense of unity and shared purpose. By supporting their initiatives through media coverage and promotion, we helped build stronger connections between committees and encouraged increased participation from members.

The American Legion Media & Communication Committee has worked to amplify the organization's voice, promoting its initiatives, and supporting the commander's vision. Through our work in photography, social media management and collaboration with other committees, we have effectively communicated The American Legion's mission and showcased its impactful contributions to the community.

As we move forward, we remain committed to expanding our media presence and fostering effective communication

channels to inspire patriotism, honor veterans and encourage broader engagement within the American Legion Family.

**Teresa Ash**  
Chairwoman

## National Security/ Foreign Relations

Hello, Minnesota American Legion Family.

I am happy to report that our committee had another successful year with your help. We had a full roster of applicants for Outstanding Enlisted Personnel. Five branches of the service were represented, to include both National Guard and Reserves. Thanks for your help. Our year had a special kickoff this past September. Along with our regular meeting of district commanders and orientation and tour of Camp Ripley, it was an open-house year. With the help of committee members and volunteers, we were able to entertain over 100 children of Guardsmen with games and prizes.

At the end of the Camp Ripley Open House, a dedication and groundbreaking for the new Minnesota Military & Veterans Museum was held. Construction began this spring. We look forward to the grand opening.

Each year we ask all district commanders and their NSFR chairs to submit a report of their activities and at least one application for Outstanding Enlisted Person. The applications are due at Department Convention if possible. If any of you know of someone to apply, please contact your district commander, district NSFR chair or Department HQ. It is not just their job; we can all help.

We did host a booth at Department Fall Conference to help better inform attendees of our programs that we support.

Three of our department committee members were able to attend the Washington Conference this past winter. We met with our federal legislators and discussed our priorities. We find this to be a very productive way to inform them of who we are and why we are promotion specific legislation.

Thanks to your generous financial support we were able to continue our scholarship program this past year. We award the college ROTC the Junior ROTC at the sponsoring high schools and the Civil Air Patrol cadets.

With your continued support, we will be able to carry on our mission. Thanks for all you have done and continue to do.

I am looking forward to seeing many of you at Department Convention.

Till then, God bless.

**Jim Kellogg**  
Chairman

## Pheasant Feed

Thanks for the donations this past year. As most of you know, we now have three more homes to support.

We presented approximately 500 birds for Veterans Day dinners. We're growing more each year.

The pheasants come from Oakwood Farms out of Zimmerman. We were featured in a story in The Minnesota Legionnaire in the January 2024 issue. The story captured what happens at a pheasant dinner and how our committee donated a \$14,000 gait trainer to the Minneapolis Veterans Home.

We also made some donations to the department honorary president of the Junior Auxiliary (Believet dog training for veterans) and to the department president of the Auxiliary (baby grand piano for a new veterans home).

We donated seed money for a new veterans memorial at the Luverne Veterans Home.

Pheasant pins will be available for those who donated to us. Thanks for allowing me to be committee chairman; it's been an honor to serve.

**Glenn Mueller**  
Chairman

## Rehabilitation

In a remarkable testament to dedication and teamwork, the Minnesota Veterans Assistance Fund has seen unprecedented growth and success over the past year.

Spearheaded by Assistant Department Service Officer Janet Lorenzo, whose relentless commitment to veterans is nothing short of inspiring, the MVAFF has significantly expanded its resources and reach, providing crucial support to veterans across the state. Connections to other programs have been established, ensuring that veterans who reach out can move forward in their independence.

Since Jan. 1, 2024, the MVAFF has assisted an average of 20-23 veterans per week, totaling approximately 582 veterans, with indirect funds providing \$96,774.08 in support. Janet's meticulous follow-ups and structured support system have been pivotal in ensuring veterans receive comprehensive assistance.

Both Lorenzo and Department Service Officer Ray Kane are accredited through The American Legion, building robust relationships with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs and county veterans service officers.

Additional training sessions are planned to enhance veteran support.

The VA&R staff is about halfway through coordinating with the VA staff on providing at least one S.A.V.E. suicide-prevention training in each Legion district in 2024.

Diligent efforts with the federal VA and regional teams on resolutions aim to address critical veteran issues. Active visits to Minnesota Veterans Homes, including three new additions, highlight ongoing support

efforts. Lorenzo and Kane's roles in suicide prevention initiatives and extensive communication outreach further reinforce their commitment.

Looking ahead, the team remains dedicated to supporting veterans and their families, ensuring continued impact and success in their mission.

**Garylee Davenport**  
Chairman

**Ray Kane**  
Service Officer

## Resolutions Assignment

The Resolutions Assignment Committee comprises three members: Chairman Al Davis, Cliff Newman of Anoka and Jim Munson of Richfield.

Responsibilities of the committee include the review of all resolutions submitted to the Department Convention for consideration. After reviewing all resolutions, the committee assigns them to a convention committee for action of approval, rejection or amend and approve.

During the convention, each committee assigned resolutions reports its actions to the delegates, who have the final authority on all resolutions.

The Resolutions Assignment Committee monitors all reports and prepares a final report on the actions taken by delegates to the convention.

Thank you, Commander Hassing, for appointing us to this committee.

Also, thank you to the department staff that assists us greatly in getting all the resolutions properly completed prior to the presentation to the delegates at convention and preparing a final report.

**Al Davis**  
Chairman

## Sons of The American Legion

As SAL advisor, I have a short report. First of all, I would like to thank Commander Paul Hassing for this appointment.

Now I would like to thank the detachment officers for making my job fairly easy.

To all of the SAL members, keep up the good work in maintaining Minnesota as a premier detachment in the national organization.

Remember: If you want something done, ask a Son.

**Gary Weaver**  
Advisor

## Sports: Baseball

It was another banner year for American Legion baseball in 2023, and we are looking forward to a similar year for 2024. We flirted with having nearly 400 teams registered for 2023 but ending up at 383. We ended up slightly below that figure in 2024, at 367 teams.

The biggest change for 2024 is an additional division for metro area teams, Districts 3, 4, 5 and 10. with a school enrollment of 400-1000 in the

top three grades. This division, called Division I-A, will be on a trial basis for 2024 only.

If the state committee deems it a success, we will likely expand it statewide for 2025. This inaugural state tournament will be held at Alimagnet Park in Burnsville the last week in July.

The 2024 season will have our four champions from 2023 hoping to repeat. St. Michael will be looking for its third consecutive title in Div. I Senior. Stillwater in Div. I Junior, Sleepy Eye in Div. II Senior and Morris in Division II Junior look to repeat.

State tournament hosts for 2024 are: Osseo-Maple Grove for Div. I Senior, Bloomington for Div. I Junior, Bird Island for Div. II Senior and St. Charles for Div. II Junior.

Our Baseball Board of Directors does have some changes for 2023-24. Seth Pugh replaced the late Luther Dorr as 10th District baseball director. Mike Rothstein replaced Kyle Nutting in the 5th District. In addition, Jack Strong of Buffalo is the new Division I Junior tournament director, replacing Mike Perry, and Brady Sweitzer of Rosemount will direct Division I-A.

Scheels of St. Cloud continues to be our major sponsor for Minnesota American Legion Baseball, which greatly helps us finance our postseason in time of rising costs. We appreciate their financial support of our youth baseball program.

Be sure to visit minnesotaligionbaseball.com to discover more about Minnesota American Legion Baseball, such as substate groupings, and you can download the mobile app by searching "Minnesota Legion Baseball" in Google Play or the App Store. There, you can find scores, weekly rankings, rules and other cool stuff.

Minnesota continues to lead the nation in registered American Legion baseball teams by a wide margin. That is something that all Minnesota American Legion members can be extremely proud of!

**Randy Schaub**  
Director

## Sports: Bowling

The Bowling Committee organized the 78th annual Minnesota American Legion Family Bowling Tournament. Post 172 of Osseo-Maple Grove once again hosted the tournament. The tournament this year was from April 6 to April 28 (Saturdays and Sundays) at the Sundance Lanes in Dayton.

The tournament for 2025 may be there again if we do not receive any bids from other posts. Please contact me, David Wendt, at 262-227-7621 if you are interested.

Winners this year are as follows; the total results will be printed in the July Minnesota Legionnaire.

Men's Team: Mahtomedi Post 507 team #2

Auxiliary Team: Cold Springs Unit 455 team #2

Men's Doubles: Nate Dircks/Steve Mann

Auxiliary Doubles: Delores Schroeder/Doris Torberg

Men's Singles: Matt Lange

Auxiliary Singles: Sue Beek

Continued on Page 6

Continued from Page 5

Men's All-Events: Steve Mann

Auxiliary All-Events: Anita Heydt

We had 70 men's and five Auxiliary teams bowling this year, so the total number of bowlers was up this year, but we still have room for more.

I believe we had a first at this year's tournament. A department team was on hand April 6 to not only throw the ceremonial first ball but they also bowled three games in the Team event. Commander Paul Hassing, President Sharon Cross, Riders Directory Jody Hassing and 10th District SAL Command Jason Voss all did a remarkable job.

Form your teams and look for the entry forms this fall for the 2025 tournament to be starting March 29 and 30, 2025.

David Wendt  
Chairman

### Sports: Fastpitch Softball

Minnesota American Legion softball has broken the 30-team mark. We actually have 32 teams with one league of 14 teams that is playing an all-Legion schedule rather than independently.

Our website took a step back

this year as what SportsEngine considers an upgrade is a downgrade for large organizations like ourselves.

However, we are working through the kinks and doing things old-school.

Coaches are on top of things and the majority of players have already registered before our June 15 deadline. You can still find rankings and scores on our website: minnesotalegionsoftball.com. Hopefully I will get schedules put on there if I receive them and time allows me.

The registered teams are divided into seven geographical substates, and the champions will advance to the state tournament in Bemidji July 26-28.

Our Fastpitch Softball Committee is small but slowly growing. It really needs more people with a passion for softball and connection to the Legion to help grow this program in the future. We need district commanders to appoint softball directors, just like they appoint baseball directors, so they sit on our committee.

Our committee has one director and two vice directors, all appointed by the department commander to three-year terms. We have Vice Director Luann McMahon, Vice Director David Thompson and me.

Then, we are supposed to have one softball director from each district. Presently, we have

Tom Fernlund (6th District), Hal Meyer (7th District) and Steve Fosness (2nd District). We need district commanders in the 1st, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 8th, 9th and 10th to appoint softball directors.

Our committee has done a lot to promote the values of the Legion and the game of softball. I believe we could see a bigger influx of teams next year as the word continues to spread. We had a lot of late spring interest from teams and leagues around the state.

However, a few more people on board in areas of our state where we don't have teams could really help.

We would like to thank all those who have donated and supported this program to get it off its feet and continue running. I believe we are about halfway to the mark needed to make this a national program from talking to other state directors.

God bless our Minnesota American Legion veterans for making this program available to the girls of Minnesota, and thank you for your service.

Michael Arvidson  
Director

### Strategic Planning

First, thank you to Commander Paul Hassing for asking me to continue to be a part of this committee. I would like to say thank you to the team members and advisors who made this year so productive — Carla Tappainer, Sylvan "Sy" Fix, Mike Costello, Barrett Kirchenwitz, Sarah Sturmer, Pam Krill and Dan Ludwig.

Due to the geographical separation of the committee members, we conducted our meetings via Zoom videoconferencing and maintained communication through email.

This year, the committee focused on creating a mission statement with objectives and priorities. Our main objective is to promote "brand awareness."

That vision includes *veterans empowering veterans*. We want to increase membership by creating a culture of growth to attract younger veterans. We started by creating a five-year plan that will keep the Legion on the right track.

With the help of other committees, this will be attainable. We are working on several priorities and tactics to lay a foundation for the next few years.

Roxanne Zoet  
Chairwoman

### Training Committee

The role of the Training Committee is to train our fellow Legionnaires on a variety of topics dealing with The American Legion. The committee is made up of Mike Ash, Paul Edwards, Kelley Adelsman, Joe Tappainer, Gary Richardson and me.

We had a very ambitious goal this year having two Legion College classes — one in October and one in April. Our October class was the largest class to date with 24 students, including SAL and Auxiliary members, the April class had 17 students, which included an Auxiliary member. One of the things we teach is resolutions, and this past year we had seven resolutions written by the students, and all seven were approved to move forward, which included one resolution for the Auxiliary and one for the SAL and five for the Legion. We also trained on several topics at Fall Conference

We have made it known that we are available to travel to any post/district that needs our help in training members. We have had very few requests for training at the post or district level. Fall Conference and District Fall/Winter meetings are a great time to request the team (one or all) come to your meeting to train on a variety of Legion specific topics,

all you have to do is ask.

At each of our Legion College classes we ask for feedback, here are some of the comments: "Cost effective for the knowledge gained." "Each phase and topic was well-done." "It was great to see the instructors are very knowledgeable on each topic." "Communication down to the post level about this class can gain interest about attending class." "Set up a separate time to discuss all of those." "My Legion does this ...."

I would be remiss if I didn't mention the podcasts that Kelley Adelsman is working on. Not only has she started a Spotlight on Spirit podcast, but she has done podcasts of the role of the commander, vice commander and she is currently working on the finance officer.

What's up for next year? We will be holding our last Basic Legion College class (for now) in October, and we are working on a Mid-Level Legion College class starting in April. This class will be a more in-depth study of The American Legion.

I want to thank the Training Committee for their hard work this past year and for their trust in me as their chairwoman. I think we have a great group of people, and I am excited to see what the future holds for this committee!

Linda Dvorak  
Chairwoman

# SEE YOU AT THE CONVENTION

Here are a few candid images of Commander Paul Hassing.

