LESSONS ON LEADERSHIP

Fifty-five Legionnaires spent a week at National Headquarters acquiring leadership qualities and gaining institutional knowledge.

By The American Legion

The American Legion graduated its 2015 National Legion College Class on Oct. 30 and said farewell to a longtime leader.

The class of 55 Legionnaires spent a week at National Headquarters in Indianapolis gaining institutional knowledge and learning how to be an effective leader within the organization. Leadership traits were taught through empowering videos, the PEOPLE (professionalism, empathy, optimism, partnership, loyalty, empowerment) principle, group discussions and best practices.

Richard Brown, a 2011 Legion College graduate and adjutant of Post 186 in Indianapolis, shared with the students that rising as a leader within the Legion and wanting to make positive changes or implementing new ideas at all levels of the organization sometimes has its setbacks, but “the key is to never give up.” As a young veteran serving in leadership positions at the post and district levels, Brown said he has encountered opposition but found that “common ground can be found over a cup of coffee.”

“There have been years when I was completely shut out, and now I’m the leading candidate for (Indiana) department vice commander,” he said. “A lot of the intergenerational strike is, are you in it for the right reasons. We have to show that we are doing this for the right reason: not to promote ourselves, but because we believe in this organization and what we do for our fellow veterans.”

One of the many leadership videos the students watched was an interview with Capt. Chesley Sullenberger. Sullenberger safely landed U.S. Airways Flight 1549 into the Hudson River on Jan. 15, 2009, after bird strikes caused both jet engines to fail.

The Legion “couldn’t have picked a better example of leadership” with the Sullenberger ...
**COMMANDER’S MESSAGE**

**Take action with membership**

Only six American Legion departments are ahead in membership compared to where they were last year at this time. That’s not the direction I want to go with membership. That’s not the direction we need to go.

I know recruiting is difficult; I know it’s hard. But I know that you want to be on a winning team, and we’ve got to turn membership around. And with the holiday season upon us, we can’t put membership aside if we want to be ahead of where we were last year.

Edgar Johnson, the 2013 and 2015 National Recruiter of the Year and an eight-time Gold Brigader, has recruited 1,900 new members into the Legion in four years. When approaching a prospective new member, Johnson talks about the camaraderie the Legion provides. “If you were to get out of the Army right now and go back home, who would you be able to talk to when you’ve been away for three years,” said Johnson, a member of Post 333 in Columbus, Ga. “It’s hard to talk to a civilian. When you’ve been in the military, you can talk to one another. I don’t care where you go, your nationality, your race, whatever. You’re able to talk with fellow veterans about anything you’ve done in the military. A lot of guys hear that, start to shake their head, and then they start to fill the (membership) application out.

“I tell them, ‘By being a (member), you’re helping other veterans who have served before you and veterans who have served (after) you. A lot of times, it’s easy to sign them up after that.”

You can also increase membership by giving it as a gift this holiday season. Thank a deployed servicemember in your community by purchasing an American Legion membership for him or her. It’s an easy way to show young veterans that they are part of the Legion Family.

We need to shoot for the stars with membership, and I need your help. We need to do it for the organization; we need to do it as we approach our 100th anniversary. We’ve got to stop talking, and we’ve got to start acting.

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**MEMBERSHIP**

**Recruiters to be honored with ‘Duty, Honor, Country’ pin**

During the 2015-2016 membership year, American Legion National Commander Dale Barnett will award his national commander pin to any Legion Family member who obtains three new members into the Legion.

A new member is any eligible person joining for the 2016 membership year who was not a member of The American Legion during the 2015 membership year.

Each member listed must be eligible for membership in The American Legion. Forward names of SAL members or Auxiliary members to your detachment or unit for use in their respective incentive programs.

To maintain the integrity of the national commander’s pin incentive program, only one pin will be awarded per individual.

Upon receipt, national membership staff will confirm the names and mail the pin directly to the person who earned it. Commander Barnett’s pin incentive program will end June 30, 2016, or when supplies are exhausted.

Download the form online: [www.legion.org/commander/pin](http://www.legion.org/commander/pin)

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**MEMBERSHIP**

**National Commander Honor Ribbon**

During the 2015-2016 membership year, American Legion National Commander Dale Barnett will award his National Commander Honor Ribbon to any American Legion Family that achieves 100 percent membership by May 30, 2016.

For this award, the Legion Family is defined as a post and any combination of an Auxiliary unit, Sons squadron or Legion Riders chapter. Each branch must achieve 100 percent membership to qualify for the award.

The National Commander Honor Ribbon incentive program will end May 30, 2016, or when supplies are exhausted.

Download the form online: [www.legion.org/commander/ribbon](http://www.legion.org/commander/ribbon)
The American flag is the most powerful symbol in our nation – it’s a symbol of freedom, pride and hope. When the men and women of this country who’ve made the decision to put on a uniform and serve their country through the armed forces make the ultimate sacrifice, that same flag drapes their caskets before they’re laid to rest. The American flag waves in the air during the singing of the national anthem before professional sporting events; it soars above local, state and government buildings; and it’s saluted when reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

In honor of our organization’s upcoming 100th anniversary, The American Legion created “Indivisible: The Story of Our Flag” – a richly illustrated 112-page tribute to our nation’s colors from the Revolutionary War to the 21st century.

The bookazine explores the flag’s history, meaning, rules and place in society. Included are dozens of colorful photos, illustrations, quotations, lyrics, poems, fun facts and mysteries, as well as an illustrated guide to U.S. Flag Code, which was the product of a 1923 American Legion conference in Washington, D.C.

“Indivisible” is available for $9.95 on newsstands nationwide at Barnes & Noble, Books-A-Million, Book World, Hastings and Sam’s Club, as well as at selected post exchanges and commissaries at U.S. military installations. Copies are also available for order online through American Legion Emblem Sales at www.legion.org/flag with a discounted price for purchases of 25 or more. Orders can also be placed by calling toll-free: (888) 453-4466.

“Indivisible” presents a 100th Anniversary fundraising opportunity for posts. Posts can buy the bookazine in bulk and resell them to members or the public. Bulk orders of 25 or more cuts the price to $7.95 each. Posts, districts and departments are also encouraged to buy the bookazine in bulk and distribute to schools or libraries, or use as a fundraiser or membership incentive.

Legion Family members can help raise awareness and excitement about the flag bookazine by coordinating events with their local bookstores where the bookazine will be sold. For example, Legion Family members can show customers how to properly fold a flag; collect unserviceable flags; or share the overall story of what the bookazine is about.
video, said Matthew Wrobel of Post 113 in Meridian, Idaho. “Sully didn’t overreact; he took control and moved forward, and that’s what you have to do at Legion meetings.”

In addition to watching leadership videos, the students rated themselves on how professional they are as a leader in five areas – character, competence, composure, commitment and communication. The questionnaire revealed to Sally Nay of Post 130 in Indian Orchard, Mass., that “you can show leadership without being the leader. You can lead by example but you don’t have to have in charge.” And Ernest Martin of Post 88 in Lexington, Okla., learned that “it’s communication that makes professionalism work.”

The students also learned how to run a post meeting, establish a post-level Legion College and write a resolution. The students were divided into five groups and each group wrote a resolution and presented it during a mock department convention. Out of the five resolutions delivered only one passed, which called for posts to work with their local cemeteries to allow for a designated area to spread the ashes from unserviceable U.S. flags. “It’s giving the flags an honorable place of rest with the (men and women) who fought and died for it,” Wrobel said.

The conclusion of Legion College signified graduation, as well as a farewell to Legion College chancellor and Past National Commander Butch Miller. The program’s chancellor since its inception in 1999, Miller is stepping down. “I will always look back on having something to do with Legion College with pride,” he said. “Especially when I see the leadership that’s coming from it and will continue to come from it.”

Graduation was also a time to remind students to share the wealth of knowledge that they received from the program when returning home, but also to “return not trying to make changes but being the change that your department needs,” said Lowry Finley-Jackson, Legion College facilitator and Department of Missouri adjutant.

The Legion College alumni pin “doesn’t mean anything if you don’t go back to your departments, humbly, pushing to serve,” Brown added. “It’s not what you know; it’s how much you care. You have to go back willing to serve, to further the interest of the organization, to serve your fellow veterans, and to not get discouraged.”

For Joshua Clement of Post 2 in Helena, Mont., attending Legion College was an opportunity for him to learn how “we as an organization can continue to grow and move forward. It goes back to our foundation, our four pillars, that makes us a strong organization.”

**ASK A SERVICE OFFICER**

**VA health-care qualifications**

**Q. Do I qualify for VA health-care benefits?**

**A.** If you served in the active military service and were separated under any condition other than dishonorable, you may qualify for VA health-care benefits. Current and former members of the reserves or National Guard who were called to active duty by a federal order and completed the full period for which they were called or ordered to active duty may also be eligible for VA health benefits.

Most veterans who enlisted after Sept. 7, 1980, or entered active duty after Oct. 16, 1981, must have served 24 continuous months or the full period for which they were called to active duty in order to be eligible. This minimum duty requirement may not apply to veterans who were discharged for a disability incurred or aggravated in the line of duty, for a hardship or “early out,” or those who served prior to Sept. 7, 1980. Since there are a number of other exceptions to the minimum duty requirements, VA encourages all veterans to apply to determine enrollment eligibility.

Certain veterans may be afforded enhanced eligibility status when applying and enrolling in the VA health-care system. Those are veterans who:

- Are former prisoners of war.
- Were awarded the Purple Heart.
- Were awarded the Medal of Honor.
- Have a service-connected disability of 10 percent or more.
- Have a VA pension.
- Were discharged from the military because of a disability (not pre-existing), early out or hardship.
- Served in a theater of operations for five years post discharge.
- Served on a U.S. Navy and Coast Guard ship associated with military service in Vietnam.
- Were stationed or resided at Camp Lejeune for 30 days or more between Aug. 1, 1953 and Dec. 31, 1987.
- Are found by VA to be catastrophically disabled.

Contact a Legion service officer to assist with a VA claim or benefits:

[www.legion.org/serviceofficers](http://www.legion.org/serviceofficers)

**CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION SPOTLIGHT**

**Post 359 in Saint Joseph, Mo.**

On Nov. 12, 1975, a Bennington Bicentennial flag was presented to the Saint Joseph (Mo.) Museum by members of the local American Legion Pony Express Post 359.

**SHARE YOUR POST’S LEGACY**

Upload photos, print materials and videos of your post’s history on the Legion’s Centennial Celebration website:

[www.legion.org/centennial](http://www.legion.org/centennial)
A letter from Charles Aughenbaugh Jr., a member of Post 1000 in Belleville, N.J.

As a longtime life member of The American Legion, I am aware how little various communities in our state are aware of The American Legion. Let me give you a personal experience of what I have done to correct this.

After a long while, and much pushing from a fellow veteran, I purchased an American Legion cap, along with the decorations and indication that I was a Korean vet. My intention was to finally attend a Memorial Day service wearing my new Legion cap. Unfortunately, due to a family emergency, I could not attend.

But I did wear my American Legion cap as I went shopping at Home Depot and Shop Rite (a supermarket) later that day. I was surprised at the number of people who asked me what does the emblem on my cap stand for, and the number of veterans who approached me saying they never got around to joining the Legion but asked if they would still be eligible.

I gave them the address of the Trenton (N.J.) office and told them to call as I wasn’t sure of the eligibility dates. I continued to wear my Legion cap on several holidays, like the Fourth of July, Labor Day and several local celebrations. I experienced essentially the same questions from veterans I met in Home Depot, Sears and Shop Rite if they would still be eligible to join the American Legion since many years have passed since their separation from the armed forces. While I gave them the phone number and the address of the Legion office in Trenton, I realized I was a poor salesman in the sense that I was not verifying that those veterans who asked me questions actually joined the Legion. To correct this situation, I called Post 1000 and asked for two dozen membership applications to be sent to me. Now I carry them with me when I wear my Legion cap, and my intention is to fill out the application for American Legion membership.

I hope in a small way that I can increase our state’s membership and do my share of the work to make The American Legion more visible to the public in New Jersey.
The Bureau of Labor Statistics announced on Oct. 15 that the Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers (CPI-W), which is the measure of increases or decreases in the cost of living, was lower than last year. This means there will be no COLA increases in 2016 for those receiving military retired pay, VA payments, Social Security benefits and federal government civilian pensions. The drop in the CPI was largely attributed to a 23 percent drop in gas prices. There was no COLA in 2010 or 2011 because of an insufficient increase in CPI, and some market analysts believe that 2016 may also yield no increase.

Border Jobs for Veterans Act signed into law

On Oct. 16, President Barack Obama signed Public Law (P.L.) 114-68, the Border Jobs for Veterans Act. The bill requires the Department of Homeland Security’s (DHS) Customs and Border Protection (CBP) division to “actively recruit” military veterans who are separating from service. The legislation is needed, according to the bill, because an “estimated 250,000 to 300,000 members of the armed forces separate from military service every year.” At the same time, CBP is seeking officers to help perform its mission, including meeting the congressionally-funded staffing target of 23,775 officers for fiscal year 2015.

Department of Homeland Sec. Jeh Johnson said the hiring shortfall is associated with applicant background investigations, low polygraph clearance rates, and a shortage of federal polygraph examiners, and is combined with CBP officers leaving the agency.

The Border Jobs for Veterans Act of 2015 will:

- Direct DHS to identify with the Department of Defense (DoD) Military Occupational Specialty Codes, Air Force Specialty Codes, Naval Enlisted Classifications and Officer Designators, and Coast Guard Competencies, that are transferable to the requirements and duties assigned to CBP officers, and to consider hiring qualified candidates who are eligible for veterans recruitment appointment.
- Direct DHS and DoD to establish a program to actively recruit servicemembers who are separating from service to serve as CBP officers. This program will include provision of CBP officer opportunities in relevant job assistance efforts under the Transition Assistance Program; place CBP officials, or other relevant DHS officials, at recruiting events and jobs fairs involving separating servicemembers; provide opportunities for local CBP field offices to partner with military bases; conduct educational outreach to qualified servicemembers to CBP officer requirements; work cooperatively to identify shared activities and opportunities for reciprocity related to steps in hiring CBP officers with the goal of minimizing the time required to hire qualified applicants; work cooperatively to ensure the streamlined interagency transfer of relevant background investigations and security clearances; and ensure separating servicemembers are aware of opportunities to fill CBP officer vacancies.

DATELINE: CAPITOL HILL

No COLA increase for 2016

Brett P. Reistad, Chairman, National Legislative Commission

The 2015 National Legion College class of 55 Legionnaires donated $1,600 out of their personal pockets to support the National Emergency Fund – National Commander Dale Barnett’s fundraiser.

The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation awarded $640,395 in grants to 24 nonprofit organizations. The grant recipients were selected by CWF’s Board of Directors on Oct. 11 during their annual fall meeting in Indianapolis. See the list of grant recipients online: www.legion.org/youth

The American Legion Department of Indiana’s Walk for Veterans event last month raised $30,913 for Operation Comfort Warriors. Nearly 300 veterans, their families and community members participated alongside National Commander Dale Barnett in the 5k walk/run. www.legion.org/walkforveterans

National Guard and reserve members are now eligible for The American Legion’s Spirit of Service Award thanks to the passing of Resolution No. 6 last month during Fall Meetings in Indianapolis. The Legion gives the Spirit of Service Awards annually to representatives from the five armed services in recognition of their exemplary efforts in volunteering in their local communities.

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MEMBERSHIP INCENTIVES AND AWARDS

BIG TWELVE COMPETITION

The Big Twelve Competition recognizes departments that meet or exceed their pledged membership goal percentage by the March target date. The percentage does not include members gained through DMS.

The competition is broken down into six categories. The winner in each category will be reimbursed for computer equipment purchases of up to $2,000, while the runners-up in each category will be reimbursed for computer equipment purchases of up to $1,000.

The six categories in the Big Twelve Competition are:
- Category I – departments of 100,000 or more members
- Category II – departments of 70,000-99,999 members
- Category III – departments of 40,000-69,999 members
- Category IV – departments of 25,000-39,999 members
- Category V – departments of 10,000-24,999 members
- Category VI – departments of 9,999 or fewer members

Read more about the Big Twelve Competition by downloading the online National Membership Points Award Manual publication located under Internal Affairs.

www.legion.org/publications

GOLD AND SILVER BRIGADE

Legionnaires who recruit 50 or more new members (transfers do not count as new members) into The American Legion by the May target date qualify for The American Legion’s Gold Brigade award.

First-time Gold Brigade members will receive a Gold Brigade patch, a special Gold Brigade cap pin, a Gold Brigade certificate, and a designer jacket or polo shirt or sweater with a Gold Brigade logo. Second time/repeat Gold Brigaders will receive a Gold Brigade patch and certificate, a hash mark for a jacket sleeve, and a designer jacket or polo shirt or sweater with a Gold Brigade logo. A Gold Brigader who has won the award for five consecutive years is eligible for a distinctive Gold Brigade blazer. And a Gold Brigader who has earned the award for at least six consecutive years or more is eligible for a $150 check and a Legion cap with the inscription “Master Recruiter.”

A Legionnaire who recruits 25-49 new members (transfers do not count as new members) into The American Legion by the May target date qualify for the Silver Brigade award.

Download the National Membership Points Award Manual: www.legion.org/publications

POST EXCELLENCE AWARD CONTINUES

The Post Excellence Award program honors posts that show excellence in membership participation, youth activities, community service, and support to veterans and U.S. troops.

Criteria
- Membership. Post membership must be at least one member more than the previous year. A post officer must attend district meetings.
- Youth activities. The post must sponsor and actively participate in at least one primary youth program: Boys State, Legion Baseball, Oratorical Contest, Boy Scouts of America or Junior Shooting Sports.
- Community service. The post must organize a community service project that involves members of the Legion, Auxiliary or Sons of The American Legion. A monetary donation may only be one part of a project.
- Service to troops or veterans. The post must organize a project supporting troops or veterans (for example, Family Support Network or Operation Comfort Warriors) that involves members of the Legion, Auxiliary or SAL outside the post. A monetary donation may only be one part of a project.

Certification. District commanders must certify posts as having fulfilled the four specified criteria, and submit a list of the post’s name, number, address and commander’s name to department headquarters. If possible, accompany with copies of press releases submitted to local media that raise awareness for the projects and enhance the Legion’s public image.

Awards. Each qualifying post, as well as district commanders whose districts have at least 50 percent of posts reach certification, will receive a certificate of recognition.

www.legion.org/commander/postexcellence
Mobile service company offers discount to Legionnaires

The American Legion formed an alliance with Defense Mobile to offer Legion members a discounted rate on their cell phone service. The Connecticut-based company is delivering superior wireless coverage on the nation’s largest networks at discounted savings to military veterans and current servicemembers.

As the only mobile service built exclusively for veterans, military servicemembers and their families, Defense Mobile is offering Legion members a 10 percent discount on mobile service for life when a member verifies his or her military affiliation using his or her Legion member ID number. This offer is available to current members, as well as to those who join the Legion in the future.

Defense Mobile offers individual and family plans at low cost with no-contract plans and no-activation fees, as well as a 30-day money-back guarantee. For unlimited talk/text, individual plans start at $35 a month, and family plans start at $95 for two lines.

When mobile users switch to Defense Mobile, their network and coverage remains the same, but their monthly bill and service support come from Defense Mobile. Customers can also keep their phone and Defense Mobile will send a new SIM card, or new smartphones can be purchased through them.

Start receiving discounted cell service by visiting www.defensemobile.com/legion.