

Montana LEGIONNAIRE

April



 AMERICAN
LEGION

Department Commander

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As April comes to a close, the American Legion of Montana is proud to reflect on a month dedicated to one of our core pillars: supporting the children and youth of our state. Children & Youth Month is more than a tradition — it's a reminder of the enduring promise we've made since our founding: to safeguard the next generation and strengthen the families who raise them.

What We Saw Across Montana This April

Posts across the Department stepped up in powerful ways. Throughout the month, Montana Legionnaires:

- Supported Scouting units, youth sports, school programs, and Junior Shooting Sports teams
- Offered scholarships and academic awards to students preparing for their next chapter
- Worked with local schools on flag etiquette, civic education, and veterans-in-the-classroom events
- Helped families facing hardship, illness, or financial challenges
- Backed Boys State and Girls State participants as they prepare for June
- Recognized outstanding young leaders and youth-serving educators in their communities

These efforts—often quiet, often unseen outside a town's borders—represent the kind of steady, dependable support that changes lives. Why These Programs Matter Now More Than Ever

Montana's young people are growing up in a time of rapid change. Rural

communities continue to feel the strain of limited resources, mental-health challenges are rising nationwide, and families often shoulder more burdens with fewer support systems.

This is exactly why our Children & Youth programs remain essential:

- They create stability. Legion programs offer structure, mentorship, and reliable adults who show up consistently.
- They build citizenship. From Boys and Girls State to school partnerships, our programs instill leadership, fairness, responsibility, and respect.
- They strengthen families. Our "Veterans Helping Children" mission extends directly to assisting parents, caregivers, and guardians in times of need.
- They anchor communities. When Posts invest in kids, the entire town feels the impact—schools, families, first responders, and local leaders all benefit.

What we do for young people is not charity. It's nation-building at the community level.

The Legacy We're Creating Together Every time a Post presents a scholarship, teaches flag etiquette, sponsors a student, or helps a family through difficulty, it reinforces the Legion's belief that strong communities begin with strong children. The ripple effect is real: confident young people become responsible adults, volunteers, public servants, and sometimes veterans

who return home to serve again.

The Montana American Legion's commitment to children and youth is not measured in April alone—it continues throughout the year. But this month reminds us of the deeper truth: our future isn't something we wait for. It's something we raise, encourage, and guide with intention.

Closing Out April, Carrying the Mission Forward As April ends, we extend heartfelt thanks to every Post, Squadron, Unit, and Rider Chapter that devoted time, resources, and compassion to Montana's youth. You made a real difference this month, and your work will continue to shape our state for years to come.

Our young people deserve stability, opportunity, and hope—and because of you, they're getting it. Here's to the future we're raising, one child, one family, and one community at a time.

American Legion Youth Programs: The Deeper Impact Behind the Work

Department Adjutant

Duane Cunningham

In communities across the nation, American Legion Youth Programs are often recognized for their visible outcomes, such as scholarships awarded, championships won, speeches delivered, and leadership skills gained. But beneath those moments is a deeper story, one of sustained effort, intentional investment, and a system that quietly transforms young lives while strengthening the fabric of communities, states, and the nation.

At the local level, these programs often serve as a bridge connecting generations. Veterans and Legionnaires bring lived experiences, discipline, and a commitment to service, while young participants bring curiosity, energy, and potential. Programs like Boys State, the Oratorical Contest, and American Legion Baseball do more than educate or entertain; they create mentorship pipelines. A student who walks into a Legion Hall unsure of themselves may walk out with a sense of purpose and civic duty, having been encouraged by someone who has lived a life of service.

These interactions matter. In many cases, participants don't just learn how government works; they learn why it matters. They don't just practice public speaking; they find their voice. And they don't just play a sport; they learn accountability, resilience, and respect. These are outcomes that don't always show up in statistics, but they are foundational to strong communities.

At the state level, the cumulative effect becomes more strategic. Departments invest in identifying students and counselors, building partnerships with educators and civic leaders, and assisting in connecting funding to the various programs. There is intentionality behind who is reached and how. Expanding access, especially in rural or underserved areas, requires coordination, communication, and persistence.

This is where the often-overlooked administrative side becomes critical. Applications must be processed, eligibility verified, background screenings conducted, transportation arranged, insurance secured, and compliance standards met. These are not small tasks; they are the infrastructure that ensures programs are safe, equitable, and sustainable.

It's easy to view administrative work as a burden, but in reality, it is the framework that turns good intentions

into lasting programs. Ingenuity and a willingness to transform and adapt to the youth we serve are crucial to the success of our programs. "How it is has always been done"; "Historically and traditionally" are antiquated responses to a need for change. Every adaptation to today's youth and how they communicate represents our growth as an organization and sustains our relevance in our schools and communities. Every background check ensures a safe environment. Every report submitted builds credibility with stakeholders, from local donors to national leadership.

And those reports—hours volunteered, dollars raised, youth served; are far more than numbers. They are the language of impact. When a Post reports 500 volunteer hours on a CPR, that tells a story of commitment. When a District reports thousands of dollars raised, that reflects community trust and investment. When participation numbers grow, it signals relevance and reach. These metrics are essential not only for internal tracking but for demonstrating value to potential members, partners, and sponsors.

In a time when organizations across the country are competing for attention and support, the ability to clearly communicate with students and articulate the impact is vital. Accurate reporting directly influences funding opportunities, grant eligibility, and long-term sustainability. Simply put: if we can't communicate effectively with our youth and if that work isn't documented, it becomes harder to defend, expand, or even continue.

Fundraising, too, takes on a deeper meaning when viewed through this lens. It is not just about balancing a budget; it is about removing barriers. Every dollar raised can mean the difference between a student attending Boys State or the Oratorical contest or staying home. And every dollar raised can mean the difference between a student getting to play baseball, simply because they could not without our help. It can fund transportation for a rural participant, materials for a program, or scholarships that open doors to

higher education.

Successful fundraising requires planning, communication, and community engagement. It means telling our story, clearly and consistently, about why these programs matter. It also requires trust. Donors want to know if their contributions are making a difference, and that trust is built through transparency, accountability, and yes, accurate reporting. For the American Legion as an organization, Youth Programs are not just one pillar among many; they are a pathway to the future.

Membership growth and retention are directly tied to relevance. When communities see the American Legion actively investing in youth, they see an organization that is forward-looking, not just reflective. Parents, educators, and community leaders are more likely to engage when they witness real outcomes, students gaining confidence, earning opportunities, and becoming leaders. Moreover, Youth Programs often become the entry point for new members. A parent whose child attends a program may become a supporter. A volunteer may become a Legionnaire. A former participant may return years later, ready to give back. This cycle of engagement is essential for sustaining not only the programs but the organization itself.

None of this happens by accident.

It takes volunteers willing to make phone calls to schools, organize events, review applications, and mentor participants. It takes leaders who understand that the “behind-the-scenes” work, budgets, reports, compliance, and coordination are just as important as the public-facing events. And it takes a collective commitment to follow through, to document the work, and to continuously improve.

The connection between paperwork and real-life impact becomes clear when viewed through the eyes of a participant. A completed application leads to acceptance. A verified background check ensures a safe mentor. A reported donation funds a scholarship. A logged volunteer hour represents time spent guiding a young person toward success.

Each piece, no matter how small it may seem, contributes to a larger outcome: a generation better prepared to lead, serve, and contribute.

American Legion Youth Programs endure because people believe in them enough to do the work, both visible and invisible. As communities look to the future, the challenge is not just to continue these programs, but to strengthen them. That means embracing the administrative responsibilities, supporting fundraising efforts, and committing to accurate, consistent reporting. Because in the end, the true measure of success is not just in the numbers—but in the lives changed behind them.

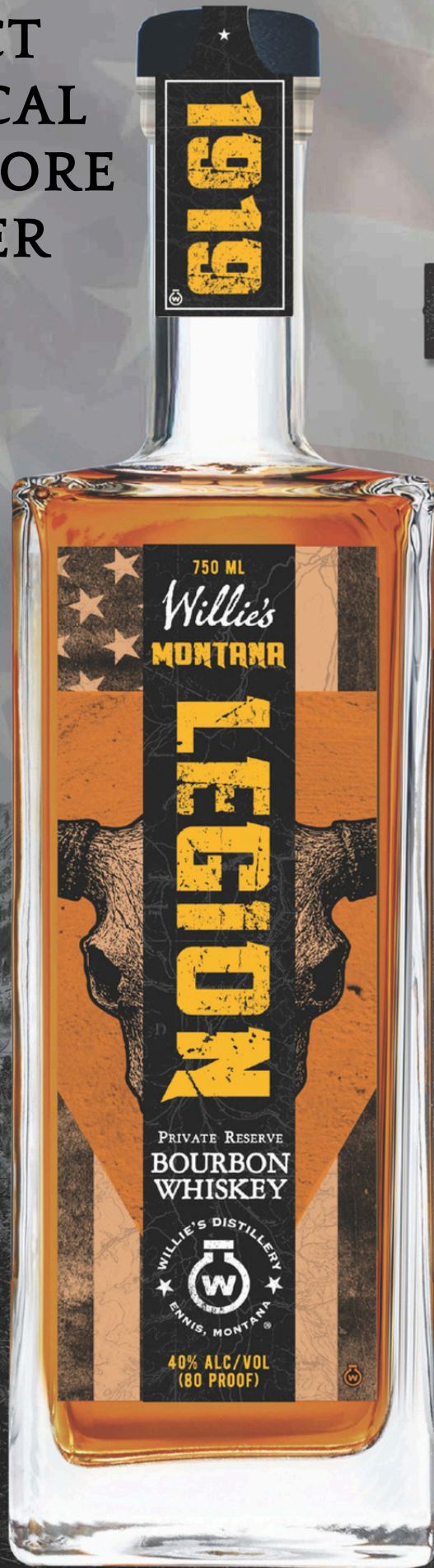
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SPIRITS OF THE
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Three Labels. One Mission. And We're Just Getting Started.

Some ideas stay ideas.

This one didn't.

It turned into a can... then a bottle... and now it's becoming something you can brew at home every single morning. What started as a vision has grown into three Montana-made label campaigns and each one has raised the bar for what's possible when passion meets the right partners. This is more than a project. This is momentum.

It Started with a Can: Big Sky Brewing Pilsner

The first "this is really happening" moment came with beer.

Partnering with Big Sky Brewing Company wasn't just exciting, it was bold.

As Montana's largest brewery, they've been defining the state's craft



beer scene since 1995, building a reputation on consistency, quality, and a deep-rooted love for the West. So, when that Pilsner label became real... it meant something. It meant stepping into a space with a brand that already stood for Montana grit and pride—and being trusted to add to that story. There's something about cracking open a cold can that just hits differently. It's celebration. It's community. It's the kind of simple moment that brings people together. That first label proved one thing loud and clear: This wasn't just an idea anymore.

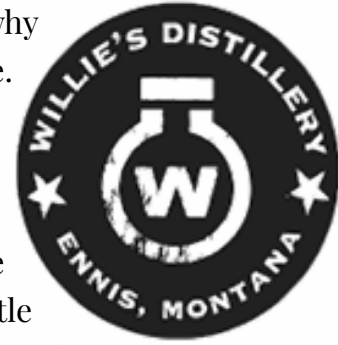
Then Came the Bottle: Willie's Distillery Bourbon

If the beer was the spark, the bourbon was the statement. Teaming up with Willie's Distillery took everything to another level.

Founded in Ennis by Army veteran Willie Blazer, this isn't just a distillery it's a place built on service, craftsmanship, and Montana roots. From locally sourced ingredients to small-batch production, everything they create carries intention. And you can feel it. Their tasting room tells stories before you ever take a sip walls lined with military patches, conversations

that matter, and a deep respect for the people who walk through the door. That's why this bourbon label means more.

It's not just about what's in the glass. It's about honoring where we come from, who we stand for, and the kind of legacy we're building along the way. The bottle didn't just raise the bar... It defined it.



Now We Brew Something Deeper: Heroes Rise Coffee And now... we build on it.

The next chapter is with Heroes Rise Coffee Company, and it might be the most powerful one yet.

Born out of a mission to support first responders, veterans, and the community around them, Heroes Rise isn't just about coffee, it's about connection. Built by a family who understands service firsthand, their growth has been fueled by people who believe in what they stand for. And that matters. Because coffee is where life happens.



It's early mornings before the world wakes up. It's long talks. It's quiet strength. It's the steady rhythm behind everything we do. This label isn't just another product. It's something people will reach for daily and every time they do, they'll be part of something bigger.

This Is What It Looks Like When It Works

Three labels. Three Montana businesses. One shared foundation: purpose, partnership, and pride. From a Pilsner can... to a bourbon bottle... to a bag of coffee still to come this journey has been about building something real with people who believe in the same mission. Not shortcuts. Not surface-level branding. Real relationships. Real stories. Real impact. And here's the truth... This isn't the finish line. It's proof of concept. It's what happens when you take an idea, surround it with the right people, and refuse to let it stay small. So, if you've been watching this unfold... Stay tuned.

Chief Paul Adams Named Montana Firefighter of the Year

Chief Paul Adams of the Big Springs Volunteer Fire Department has been selected as the Montana Firefighter of the Year—an honor that reflects not only his exceptional skill, but the heart, steadiness, and servant leadership he brings to his community every single day.

Recommended enthusiastically by American Legion Post 106, Chief Adams stands out as a firefighter who has built trust not through words, but through consistent, measurable action. When he assumed leadership at Big Springs, the department struggled with inconsistent response times—an issue that can mean the difference between life and death in rural Montana. Through sheer determination, disciplined standards, and a commitment to excellence, Chief Adams transformed the department's reliability. Today, residents benefit from faster, predictable, and well-coordinated fire and rescue responses.

But his contributions reach far deeper than metrics.

Chief Adams is known for his relentless work ethic and the quiet, unwavering sense of responsibility that guides him. Whether responding to a structure fire, assisting at a medical emergency, or coordinating search and rescue efforts, he brings calm to chaos and reassurance to those in distress. His service is rooted in compassion and an unwavering dedication to the people around him.

Beyond emergency calls, he remains the backbone of the department's preparedness. He oversees equipment readiness, organizes training schedules, and ensures firetrucks and EMT gear are fully stocked and mission-ready. He is also a mentor—reliable, patient, and generous with his time—giving new volunteers the skills and confidence they need to serve safely and effectively.

What truly distinguishes Chief Adams is his consistency in the face of hardship. When late-night callouts, tough rescues, weather challenges, or equipment failures put intense pressure on the department, he remained steady, calm, and focused. His leadership inspires confidence not only among fellow firefighters, but across the community that depends on him.

Chief Paul Adams represents the very best of Montana's firefighting tradition—service before self, strength without ego, and compassion in moments when it is needed most. His selection as Montana Firefighter of the Year is a fitting tribute to a man who has made his community safer, stronger, and better prepared for whatever challenges may come.

The American Legion is proud to honor him, and Montana is fortunate to have him.





Service Officer

Eric Beal



Benefits beyond the veteran:

There are benefits available to children and spouse of veterans through the VA, eligibility for each benefit might have certain restrictions. For further information on eligibility it is encouraged to reach out to a local Veteran Service Officer for more information. Below are benefits that children and spouse of the veterans should be aware of

- Tricare: offers health insurance plans for active duty, national guard/reserves and their families
- CHAMPVA: A comprehensive healthcare program for dependents of veterans with total and permanent service-connected disabilities and/or if the veteran passes away from a service connected condition
- Education Benefits Transferability: Eligible service members can transfer their Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits to spouses or children
- Dependents Educational Assistance (DEA) Program (Chapter 35): Provides education and training assistance to eligible dependents of veterans who are permanently disabled or died or if the veteran passed away from a service connected condition
- Fry Scholarship: Provides tuition, housing, and training funds for children and spouses of service members who died in the line of duty since Sept. 11, 2001
- VA's Survivors Pension: A income based program for surviving spouses of a deceased veteran, where the veteran had to have at least 1 day of active duty service during war time period
- Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) Benefits: DIC benefits are provided to survivors of Veterans who died as a result of their service-connected disabilities. This compensation is available to surviving children as well
- Scholarships for Military Children: Programs like the Scholarships for Military Children and the American Legion Legacy Scholarship help with college costs
- Spouse Education and Career Opportunities (SECO): Offers free career coaching and education opportunities.



Montana American Legion Boys State & Auxiliary Girls State

Investing in the Leaders of Tomorrow

For generations, the American Legion Boys State and American Legion Auxiliary Girls State programs have played a vital role in shaping Montana's future leaders. These respected, week-long civic leadership programs give high school juniors an opportunity to experience government not just by learning about it — but by living it.

Held annually on the campus of Carroll College in Helena, Montana Boys State and Girls State bring together students from communities across the state for an immersive experience in leadership, citizenship, and public service.

During the week-long session, delegates: form and operate mock city, county, and state governments; campaign for office and participate in elections; draft, debate, and vote on legislation; learn about the judicial system, law enforcement, and public service; develop confidence in public speaking, teamwork, and leadership

Students leave with a deeper understanding of how government works, a stronger sense of civic responsibility, and skills that will benefit them for a lifetime.

Why Boys State & Girls State Matter

These programs are more than a summer activity — they are an investment in Montana's future. Alumni often go on to become community leaders, business owners, educators, service members, and elected officials. Colleges and employers recognize Boys State and Girls State as marks of leadership, initiative, and dedication to service.

Most importantly, these programs teach young people that their voices matter and that active citizenship strengthens our communities.

Cost, Sponsorship & the Need for Support

The cost to send one student to Boys State or Girls State is approximately \$300 per delegate. Thanks to the generosity of American Legion Posts, Auxiliary Units, and community sponsors, students attend at little or no cost to their families.

Who Can Attend

Students who have completed their junior year of high school; young men attend Boys State; young women attend Girls State; delegates are selected based on leadership potential, character, and interest in government and community involvement

How Students Can Apply

Students or parents interested in Boys State or Girls State should: Speak with their high school counselor or principal; contact their local American Legion Post or Auxiliary Unit; reach out to the Department of Montana American Legion or American Legion Auxiliary for program details and deadlines

Building Montana's Future Together

Boys State and Girls State continue the American Legion's proud tradition of service by preparing young people to lead with integrity, responsibility, and respect for democracy. With your help, we can keep these programs thriving and ensure that Montana's next generation is ready to serve.

Your support today shapes Montana's leadership tomorrow.

Sergeant Jeremy Reichert Named Montana Law Enforcement Officer of the Year



Sergeant Jeremy Reichert of the Ravalli County Sheriff's Office has been named the Montana Law Enforcement Officer of the Year, a recognition that reflects nearly two decades of unwavering service, leadership, and compassion.

Nominated by American Legion Post 91, Sgt. Reichert embodies what Montanans expect of their law enforcement professionals: steady judgment, deep integrity, and a heart for the people he serves.

With 17 years of service in Montana—beginning with the Hamilton Police Department and continuing with the Ravalli County Sheriff's Office—Sgt. Reichert has built a reputation as a professional who makes everyone around him better. Now a patrol sergeant, he supervises a shift of four to five deputies, coordinating training, patrol zones, case assignments, civil service responsibilities, and the dozens of unseen tasks that keep a patrol division running smoothly. His peers and supervisors describe him as a leader whose example speaks louder than his words.

One of the most influential roles Sgt. Reichert holds is his work as the Field Training Coordinator. In this vital position, he oversees four Field Training Officers and all new recruits entering the 14-week Field Training and Experience Program. His efforts ensure that every trainee is not only prepared for the Montana Law Enforcement Academy, but equipped to operate safely, confidently, and ethically once they enter service.

He monitors evaluations, identifies areas where recruits need to grow, and recognizes excellence when he sees it. Just as importantly, he evaluates the Field Training Officers themselves, ensuring they exemplify the professionalism and character expected of the Ravalli County Sheriff's Office. Even while working nights and weekends, he remains dependable, patient, and committed. It's no surprise he is held in high regard by both his peers and those he leads.

Beyond patrol and training, Sgt. Reichert also serves as a Deputy Coroner—work that demands precision, compassion, and emotional strength. His death investigations are described as thorough, accurate, and respectful. He supports families during some of the worst moments of their lives, offering a calm presence and a caring heart when people desperately need both.

Sgt. Reichert's leadership extends far beyond the badge. A graduate of the National Innovation Academy in Polk County, Florida, he brings cutting-edge leadership training back to Ravalli County, helping shape the future of the Sheriff's Office. He is known for staying current on the evolving laws, policies, and trends that affect modern policing—always striving to help his teammates grow and succeed.

Off-duty, he is equally committed. A devoted husband and father, he remains actively involved in his family's activities and his community. In every interaction—whether guiding a young deputy, supporting a grieving family, or responding to a difficult call—he treats people with dignity and respect. That consistency of character is what sets him apart.

Sheriff Steve Holton summarized the sentiment best: Sgt. Reichert is someone you can depend on—calm, thoughtful, and forward-thinking, a leader who lifts everyone around him.

His selection as Montana Law Enforcement Officer of the Year reflects his extraordinary service to the Ravalli County Sheriff's Office, the communities he protects, and the profession he represents with such honor.

Montana is safer—and better—because of him.

Montana's 2026 Department Eagle Scout of the Year: Chloe Corner



The American Legion Department of Montana is proud to announce Chloe Corner as our 2026 Department Eagle Scout of the Year—a remarkable young leader whose dedication to service reflects the very best of Scouting and the Montana spirit.

Chloe, a senior at Havre High School and a member of Scout Troop 1406, earned her Eagle Scout rank through a project that will leave a lasting legacy in her community. With vision, determination, and a deep respect for those who served, she designed and installed a stunning tri-set flagpole display at the Havre Veterans Park.

Her project honors three local heroes:

- Robert Nieuwenhuys, U.S. Navy – Vietnam Veteran
- Calvin Burr, U.S. Marine Corps – World War II Veteran
- Brider Hold, U.S. Army – Gulf War on Terror Veteran

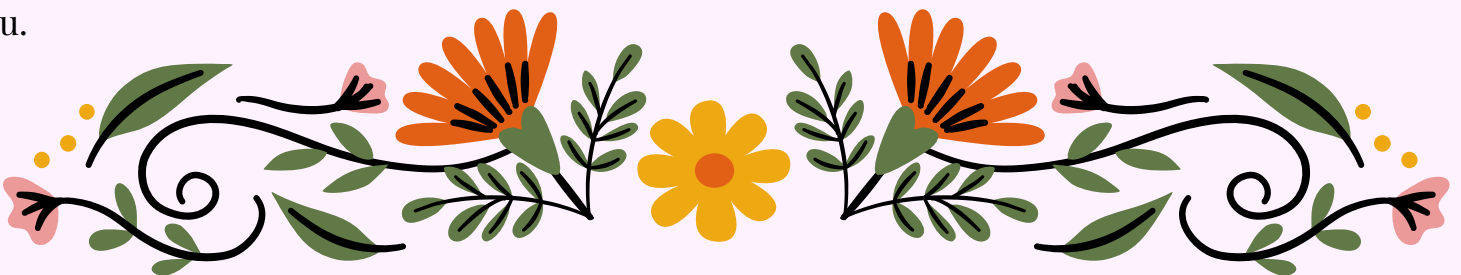
Chloe didn't just build a monument—she built

relationships. She partnered closely with local veterans organizations, city officials, and engineers to bring the project from concept to completion. Her leadership ensured the design was both beautiful and enduring, serving as a powerful tribute to generations of service members from the Hi-Line.

Beyond her achievements in Scouting, Chloe is setting her sights on an ambitious and meaningful future. After graduation, she plans to pursue a degree in mechanical engineering at Montana State University, with the long-term goal of serving her country in the United States Navy.

Chloe's dedication, humility, and drive embody the character and commitment the American Legion seeks to uplift in young people. We are honored to recognize her outstanding accomplishments and excited to see where her journey leads.

Congratulations, Chloe Corner—your community, your state, and your fellow Scouts are proud of you.





Single Rider \$75

With Ride Shirt
and Patch

**DEPARTMENT OF MONTANA
AMERICAN LEGION RIDERS
INAUGURAL LEGACY RUN**



2-Up Riders \$125

With Ride Shirts and
Patch's

AUGUST 14th, 15th, and 16th.

**OVERNIGHT STOPS IN BOZEMAN AND KALISPELL. RESERVE
YOUR ROOMS SOON!**

START AND END AT YOUNG GRIZZLY HARLEY-DAVIDSON IN MISSOULA

**Support Montana's Veterans and Donate to the 2026 Montana Legacy
Run**

The Montana Legacy Run is more than a ride — it's a mission to support veterans and their families. Funds raised go to The American Legion Veterans & Children Foundation to provide emergency financial assistance, keep families in their homes, ensure children's needs are met, and help veterans access the benefits they've earned.

Every donation makes a real difference. Your support means more than charity — it's a commitment to honor and care for those who served and their families.

Give today and help keep the legacy alive.

Please scan for more information



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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.



Energy Share Can Help

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Winter is over, but often those heating bills have piled up by now and it's hard to get ahead of them. If you or someone you know cannot pay their home energy bill, please call Energy Share of Montana at 1-888-779-7589 or visit www.energysharemt.com/how-to-apply.

Energy Share is situationally-based, not income-based. That means you don't have to be under a certain income in order to apply for Energy Share. Our biggest qualifier for receiving assistance is whether the applicant is facing a no-heat situation (about to lose their heat or lights, and there is no money in the bank to pay the bill themselves). It's about Montanans helping Montanans, and we are here to help.

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2026 American Legion Department Convention

The American Legion of Montana will convene in Helena June 25–28, 2026, for its annual Department Convention, bringing together Legionnaires, Auxiliary members, Sons of The American Legion, and American Legion Riders from across the state for four days of training, business, and fellowship.

This year's gathering puts a strong emphasis on leadership preparation as the organization looks ahead to the 2026–27 Legion year.

Thursday, June 25: Training & Kickoff Events

Convention events begin Thursday with a slate of training sessions aimed at strengthening posts and districts for the year ahead. Training locations will be announced closer to the event, with many sessions expected to take place on Fort Harrison.

The afternoon will feature guest speakers, including candidates for various political offices, giving attendees the chance to hear directly from those seeking to serve. The Department Executive Committee will hold its pre-executive meeting to wrap up end-of-year business, and the Sons of The American Legion will meet at 12:45 p.m.

Thursday will conclude with a barbecue at the Devils Brigade Community Center, with all proceeds supporting the 2027 Women Veterans Symposium.

Friday, June 26: Convention Opens

The day begins with the Past Department Commanders Breakfast—open to all this year. Chairman Ken Simon will serve as MC, welcoming Department Commander Kim Kay to reflect on her term and inviting declared candidates for office to share their vision for the future.

At 9 a.m., the official opening of convention will take place at the Helena Civic Center, where both the American Legion and Sons of The American Legion will hold their primary meetings. The morning will include guest speakers and departmental awards. A luncheon will follow, centered on the “Be The One” initiative to promote veteran suicide prevention and community outreach. In the afternoon, delegates will break into committee meetings to address resolutions and develop the department's priorities for the year ahead.

The American Legion Riders will meet at the Devils

Brigade Community Center, led by the department ALR Director. The evening concludes with a barbecue featuring Willie Blazer of Willie's Distillery, who will sign bottles of the Montana Legion Bourbon.

Saturday, June 27: Membership & Service

Saturday opens with a Membership Breakfast focused on recruiting and retention strategies. All incoming leaders at both the post and district level are strongly encouraged to attend. Business sessions for the American Legion and Sons of The American Legion will continue at the Helena Civic Center, while the American Legion Auxiliary meets at the Best Western.

Following a lunch recess, attendees will participate in a community service project with Habitat for Humanity, with details to be announced.

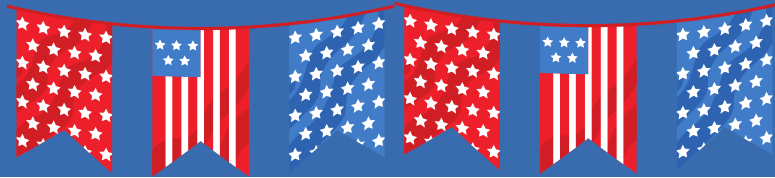
The evening will conclude with the annual convention banquet, emceed by Irene Dickerson.

Sunday, June 28: Closing Business & Elections

The final day begins with a God and Country service. Attendees will then move into the last business sessions of the weekend, culminating in the election and installation of department officers. A post-executive board meeting will immediately follow, formally beginning the new Legion year.

The 2026 Department Convention promises four full days of connection, leadership development, and planning, ensuring the American Legion continues its mission of service to veterans, families, and communities across Montana.





Children & Youth: Strengthening Our Legion Family

Supporting the next generation has always been at the heart of The American Legion's mission. Our Children & Youth programs don't just serve young people—they strengthen our Posts, energize our membership, and connect us with veterans who are looking for a community that supports their families as much as their service.

Why Participation Matters

Every time a Post hosts a Children & Youth activity, it sends a powerful message: Veterans and their families belong here. These programs build trust, visibility, and a sense of purpose that resonates with younger veterans who want to stay connected to something meaningful.

Programs Every Post Can Support

Here are a few cornerstone initiatives that make a real difference:

- Child Welfare Foundation (CWF)
- Temporary Financial Assistance (TFA)
- Youth Scholarships & Contests
- Community Youth Outreach

Even small efforts, like hosting a family movie night or supporting a local youth team, can spark big community engagement.

How to Attract More Veteran Members With Children

Many younger veterans are searching for a place where their families feel welcome. Posts that embrace family-friendly culture often see the strongest membership growth. Here are some practical ideas:

1. Make Your Post a Family Space

- Create a kids' corner with books, games, or coloring pages.
- Offer family-friendly hours or events where children are encouraged to attend.
- Highlight your Post's safe, welcoming environment in all outreach.

2. Host Events That Bring Families In

- Back-to-school supply drives
- Trunk-or-treat or holiday parties
- STEM or craft days
- Family cookouts or pancake breakfasts

- Youth sports clinics or tournaments

These events naturally draw in veterans who might not otherwise visit the Post.

3. Partner With Local Schools and Youth Organizations

- Attend school resource fairs
- Offer to speak at Veterans Day programs
- Sponsor a classroom or club
- Support JROTC or Scouting units

Visibility builds credibility—and credibility builds membership.

4. Promote What You're Already Doing

Many Posts do incredible work but don't always share it widely.

Use:

- Facebook and Instagram
- Local newspapers
- Community bulletin boards
- School newsletters

Show families that your Post is active, supportive, and fun.

5. Invite Younger Veterans to Lead

Veterans with children often want to contribute but need flexibility.

Offer:

- Short-term volunteer roles
- Event-specific committees
- Opportunities to bring their kids along

When they feel ownership, they stay engaged.

The Mission Continues

Children & Youth programs are more than events—they're a bridge to the future of The American Legion. By investing in young people, we invest in our Posts, our communities, and the next generation of Legionnaires.

If your Post hasn't explored these programs recently, now is the perfect time to jump in. And if you're already active, consider expanding or trying something new. Every effort, big or small, strengthens our Legion Family.



AMERICAN LEGION RIDERS



The Montana Legacy Ride: More Than Miles

Brian "Carp" Carpenter

If you want to understand what the American Legion Riders are about, don't look at a meeting room. Look at the road.

Engines rolling. Flags pulling hard in the wind. A line of bikes stretching out ahead of you.

We're not riding for where we're going. We're riding for why.

That's where the Montana Legacy Ride starts.

Where It Started

The American Legion Legacy Run began in 2006 with a simple mission: take care of the children of those who served and sacrificed.

After 9/11, too many families were left carrying the weight of loss, parents who didn't come home, or who came home changed forever.

The Riders did what we do best. We showed up. Together. Since then, more than \$16 million has been raised for the Legacy Scholarship Fund. That money helps children of fallen service members and those of the severely disabled get a college education without carrying that burden alone.

As the fund grew stronger, the mission expanded. Today, it also supports the Veterans & Children Foundation providing emergency financial help to veteran families and making sure accredited service officers are there to help veterans access the benefits they've earned.

This ride doesn't just honor sacrifice it stands behind the families living with it.

Bringing It Home to Montana

In Montana, service isn't an idea. It's personal.

It's the people we know. The people we ride with. The people we've lost.

The Montana Legacy Ride brings that mission home.

Yes, we'll cover miles across some of the best country

you'll ever see. But this isn't about the view.

It's about purpose.

Every mile matters. Every dollar raised matters. It helps

secure a future for a kid who's already given enough. It helps steady a family when things get hard. It helps a veteran find their footing again.

That's what this ride does.

What These Miles Carry

You can say it raises money. That's true.

But it does more than that.

It helps a kid get to college after losing a parent.

It helps a veteran family stay on their feet when it counts.

It makes sure that when a veteran reaches out, someone's there to answer.

That's what these miles carry.

More Than a Ride

Anyone who's been part of a Legacy Run will tell you it becomes something bigger than you expect.

It's the handshake at a small-town post.

It's people standing along the road.

It's knowing you're part of something that matters.

This isn't just a ride.

It's a commitment.

The Invitation

This isn't just for the Riders. It belongs to the entire Legion Family and every community we pass through.

You don't have to ride to stand with us.

Support it. Show up. Spread the word.

Because in Montana, we take care of our own.

And this is one way we prove it.

Recruiting Will Keep Your Post Relevant

Irene Dickerson

The American Legion Department of Montana needs to recruit new members because our ability to serve Montana veterans depends on a growing, engaged membership base. New members bring fresh energy, leadership, and resources that keep posts vibrant and capable of fulfilling the Legion's mission. The Department of Montana emphasizes service to veterans, families, and communities as its core mission. Recruiting ensures there are enough members to:

- Supporting veterans in needs**
- Run youth programs and scholarships**
- Promote patriotism and national security**

Recruiting new members is essential. It keeps the American Legion Department relevant and capable of serving veterans and communities across the state for generations to come.

The information below provides some ideas on recruitment.

- Recruit new members**
 - o Set up professional membership/drive booths**
- § Creating strong first impressions and capturing leads**
 - Retain current members**
 - o Layered renewal outreach (Email—text—mail)**
 - § Proven to increase renewals**
 - Increase visibility**
 - o Build partnerships & boost social media**
 - § Expands awareness of Legion programs**
 - Strengthen engagement**
 - o Give new members roles & responsibilities**
 - § Keeps them invested and active**
 - Improve communication**
 - o Create a PR/media team**
 - § Ensure consistent messaging to members & the public**

Your post can always start small. Hosting a coffee with veterans is an event that the Forsyth post recently organized. About twenty veterans attended to share stories and spend time with each other. The post gained two new members during the event. The key is to take action.

CALL TO CONVENTION

TO: Officers and members of the American Legion Posts in Montana

GREETINGS

The 107TH Annual Convention of The American Legion, Department of Montana is hereby called to meet and assemble at Helena, Montana June 26, 27, 28 2026 to transact and consider such matters as are included in this call and any other business which may properly come before it.

PURPOSE

The Convention is called for the purpose of electing officers to the ensuing year, electing delegates to the National Convention, amending the Department Constitution, presentation of annual reports, and the transactions of such other business as may be brought before it in conformity with the provisions of the National and Department Constitution.

BASIS OF REPRESENTATION

Representation in the Convention will be by Posts. Each Post in good standing shall be entitled to two delegates and two alternates and in addition shall be entitled to one delegate and one alternate for each one hundred members, or major fraction thereof, whose dues have been received by the Department thirty days prior to the date of the Convention, or May 27, 2026. A Post, to be in good standing must have a minimum of ten paid members and no indebtedness to the Department.

CREDENTIALS

Posts shall submit to Department Headquarters in Helena prior to June 15, the names of delegates and alternates. Cards for voting delegates will be in the Convention office. Each Post delegation should select a Chairman prior to departure of delegates for the Convention.

DEPARTMENT EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

A regular meeting of the committee will be held on Thursday, June 25, 2026 at 4:30 P.M. The first stated meeting of the Department Executive Committee following the Department Convention will be held immediately upon adjournment of the Convention. The term of office of the newly elected members will commence immediately with the adjournment of the Convention.

INSTALLATION OF OFFICERS

All Department Officers and District Commanders will be sworn into office at the conclusion of the session on Sunday morning, June 28, 2026 and will automatically become members of the Department Executive Committees.

Any inquiries for information with reference to the Convention will be answered from Department Headquarters.

Duane Cunningham: Department Adjutant

Kim Kay McCarty Martin: Department Commander

2026 Montana Department American Legion Riders 2nd Annual R.O.M.P. (Ride on Military Pride)

The second annual Montana Department American Legion Riders R.O.M.P. will take place June 12-14, 2026. ALR Chapter 16, sponsored by Fergus Post 16 in Lewistown, MT will serve as host for this year's event.

Day rides will be based out of Lewistown, MT with each day beginning and ending at Fergus Post 16 American Legion Club. Because Lewistown is based in the geographical center of MT, this will prove to be a desirable function for all MT ALR members. There are many lodging and camping options available for those who wish to participate in all three days.

Lewistown is also located directly in the transition between the Montana mountains and plains. Ride scenery will include mountain passes with evergreen forests, river bottoms with sandstone cliffs, and views of the WW II B-17 training facilities that were active in 1942 & 1943. Each day will be tailored to maximize meaningful camaraderie, rural Montana hospitality, and plenty of time in the wind to Ride on Military Pride.

Sunday, June 14, which is Flag Day, will consist of a morning ride, which will allow MT ALR members to take part in the American Legion Fergus Post 16 Annual Flag Retirement Ceremony.

Details for the 2026 MT ALR R.O.M.P. will be released in the March newsletter, but it's not too early to mark your calendars and begin making plans to come to Lewistown June 12-14, 2026.



Twin Bridges American Legion High School Constitutional Essay and Government Survey Contests Winners Were Announced

On 14 April 2026 the American Legion High School Constitutional Essay and Government Survey Contests came to a close. The High School essay topic was "Express your opinion on the importance of the First Amendment's guarantee of freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for redress of grievances." (Amendment I of the Constitution of The United States). After the judging was completed, Lilly Stockett came in first, Kinsey Johnson was second and Kristen Nelson came in third. The High School Government Survey winners were Brayden Pettigrew in first, Faith Huss in second and Kinsey Johnson in third. Each winner received a certificate of appreciation, medal and a cash prize. All the Veterans in Twin Bridges want to thank these students for taking the time to express their opinions in these wonderful essays and completing the surveys. Great Job!!



Why Accidental Death Insurance Matters for Our Members in 2026 and Beyond

Life moves fast, and none of us expect an accident to change everything in a single moment—but it happens. Across all ages, accidental deaths remain one of the leading causes of loss in the United States, with car crashes consistently among the top contributors. When the unexpected happens, families are often left juggling urgent financial needs like daily living expenses, funeral costs, and the challenges of suddenly losing income.

That's exactly why accidental death insurance continues to be such an important—and practical—option for our Legion Family in 2026 and beyond.

Reliable Protection When Families Need It Most

Accidental death insurance through The Legionnaire Insurance Trust (LIT) provides cash benefits directly to your beneficiaries, regardless of any other insurance you may have. These benefits are designed to help families stay steady during a truly difficult time.

Better yet, this coverage is built with accessibility in mind:

- Guaranteed acceptance for all Legion Family members
- No medical exams or health questions
- 24/7 protection—at home, at work, in your car, or on vacation
- Cash benefits paid directly to your beneficiary

It's a simple way to add an important layer of financial security without jumping through hoops.

Your Coverage Helps Support Veterans, Too

Every time a member enrolls in an LIT program, it does more than protect their family—it strengthens ours. LIT generates valuable non-dues revenue that helps fund critical Department programs and services for veterans. In other words, choosing LIT coverage isn't just a smart personal decision; it directly supports the mission we all care about.

April Spotlight: Accidental Death Insurance

As we highlight this program in April, it's worth taking a moment to review what makes it so impactful:

What It Covers

- Cash benefits paid if a covered accident results in your death
- Guaranteed acceptance for all Legion Family members
- No medical underwriting
- Benefits paid even if you have other insurance

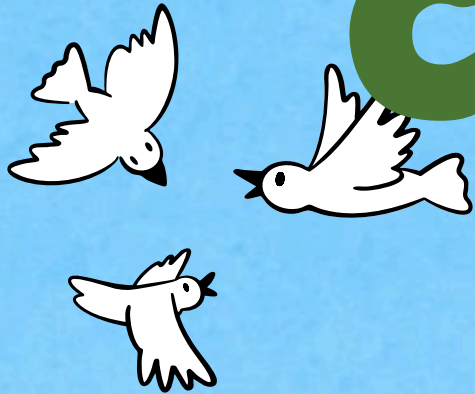
Why It Matters

This is one of the simplest, most flexible ways to strengthen your family's financial safety net. No exams. No complicated applications. Just straightforward, needed protection.

How to Enroll

1. Choose the amount of coverage that fits your family's needs.
2. Enroll easily—no medical questions required.
3. Enjoy quick activation: coverage begins the first day of the month after enrollment and first premium payment.
4. Risk-free review: if you decide within 30 days that the coverage isn't right for you, you can cancel for a full refund (as long as no claims have been made).

KIDS ART CORNER MAY



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 lmtpub@gmail.com by May 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!



SPRING





THE AUXILIARY SERVICE STAR



Department of MT President

Leona Somerfeld

As we are continuing the Spring District meetings a lot of new information has been shared. We continue evolving as an organization. One of the changes is with our membership applications. It is now up to the Auxiliary to verify the member's eligibility by reviewing the documentation such as the DD214, then promptly returning the document to the individual, no copies are to be made. This became effective February 4, 2026.

Please review your Constitution and Bylaws for your District and Units, don't forget to make a copy for the bank, and turn them into Karen Susag, Dept. Constitution & Bylaws chairman.

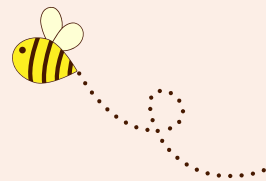
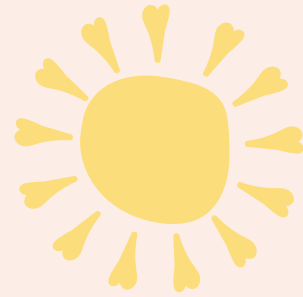
Hopefully, you have ordered your Poppies, get the orders in soon to the Dept. Secretary

My year has been going pretty fast. Soon the Impact Reports will be due and the program reports will be due to the chairman by May 1-15th, check the dates.

Send the Impact Report to Trisha McKinney, Community Service chairman at ala.triciamc@yahoo.com This report is compiled into a main report and submitted to the National Chairman her report is given to the National President to send to the Congress which helps us with funding our programs.

Girls State is coming together, there are many dedicated people working for it's success. we need more delegates to apply. It is a great program for our girls to learn about government. An Auxiliary Unit is working on a great trip for a raffle, all proceeds will go to the program, we hope to have everything finalized soon and are

counting on all of you to sell tickets. This will be a fast and furious raffle and drawing will be held at the Convention. Our Convention will be held in Helena on June 25th-28th, at the Best Western Capital, formerly Jorgenson's. The Auxiliary, Junior Activities are working on a project at Convention. The project is called, Fill the Purse, this aligns with our outreach to female veterans. We have makeup bags donated. Our Juniors Activities chairman is hoping for several juniors to help the Auxiliary fill the bags and purses. We are counting on the Auxiliary to bring purses, you can find them in your closet or the thrift stores, and items to fill the purses and makeup bags. I have been online and typed in "bulk toiletry items" and have found some good deals. Our members have never let our mission of helping our veterans down. We will be filling the purses and makeup bags on Saturday after lunch. I love a worthwhile project! For God and Country, Montana Treasures-Copper, Silver, Gold and Veterans





THE AUXILIARY SERVICE STAR



**Department Chaplain
Kathy Long**

“But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” Matt 5:44



“With God all things are possible.” Matt. 19:26c



I have been looking at these two verses for a while now. Why? Because Leona chose the one and when I started to look at the second I started thinking: How do I love my enemies? All I can think of is how angry and frustrated I am in the situation or dealing with the person in the situation. For some reason that brings me to the second half of Matt. 5:44. Pray for the person who is causing me to be angry. Yes, I have to agree that they are not persecuting me. But when thoughts go around and around in my head about the situation and keeping me up at night are they not causing you persecution in the fact that you can not sleep. Therefore, pray for the person and the situation release it to God and you should be able to sleep.

You can say, “But I know this already.”, yes; but if one or two people do not know this it has now been said to them and they can take action or not. Their choice.



2026 Montana American Legion Oratory Contest

Some of Montana's top high school speakers took the stage March 28 in East Helena for the 2026 Montana American Legion Oratory Contest, an annual competition that challenges students to demonstrate their knowledge of the U.S. Constitution and the duties of American citizenship. Hosted by the Montana American Legion, the contest brought together winners from district-level competitions across the state. Each participant delivered a prepared oration focused on constitutional principles, followed by an assigned-topic speech drawn at random, testing their ability to think critically and speak effectively on key aspects of the Constitution.

Taking top honors this year was Carmen Katzenberger, a senior at Harlowton High School representing District 9. Katzenberger earned a \$5,000 scholarship and will advance to represent Montana at the National American Legion Oratorical Contest. Her winning speech, "Jury Duty: A Civilian's Privilege," highlighted the essential role citizens play in the judicial system and emphasized jury service as both a right and a responsibility.

Second place went to Miles Meinders of Gallatin High School, representing District 7, who received a \$1,500 scholarship. Madison Clement, a student at Capital High School representing District 6, placed third and was awarded \$500.

The American Legion Oratory Contest has been a cornerstone youth program for decades, aimed at instilling a deeper understanding of the Constitution among high school students. Contestants are required to deliver an 8-

to 10-minute prepared speech on a constitutional topic of their choosing, with emphasis on the responsibilities of citizens. They must also complete a 3- to 5-minute assigned-topic speech on a specific constitutional amendment, which they draw shortly before presenting.

All participants at the state level received recognition for their efforts, underscoring the dedication required to compete in the program. Katzenberger will now move on to the national stage, where she will compete against top students from across the country for additional scholarship awards and the title of national champion.

The Montana American Legion Oratory Contest continues to highlight the importance of civic education while giving students a platform to develop confidence, leadership skills and a deeper appreciation for the Constitution.



Join Us in Louisville for the 107th American Legion National Convention

The American Legion Family will once again gather for our largest annual event — the 107th American Legion National Convention, taking place **August 28 – September 3, 2026**, in Louisville, Kentucky. This week-long gathering brings together thousands of Legionnaires, Auxiliary members, Sons of The American Legion, and American Legion Riders from across the nation to conduct the business of the organization, celebrate our shared mission, and strengthen connections with fellow veterans and supporters.

At the National Convention, delegates will approve updates to the Legion's constitution and bylaws, set membership dues, and elect the National Commander and Vice Commanders who will lead the organization for the coming year. Beyond the official sessions, attendees enjoy workshops, committee meetings, award presentations, and special events that highlight the best of what The American Legion has to offer. In addition to the business agenda, the convention is also an opportunity to reconnect with old friends, forge new partnerships, and engage in the broader mission of service to veterans, military families, and communities. Whether this is your first convention or your fiftieth, Louisville offers a welcoming backdrop filled with Southern hospitality and plenty to explore between sessions.

Complete your registration today and make plans to be part of this meaningful and memorable event in Louisville, Kentucky. We look forward to seeing you there!

AMERICAN LEGION OF MONTANA

107TH DEPARTMENT CONVENTION

HELENA, MONTANA

JUNE 25-28, 2026 REGISTRATION

NAME OF REGISTRANT(S):

CIRCLE ONE:

LEGION ALA SAL

LEGION ALA SAL

ADDRESS

CITY

STATE

ZIP CODE

EMAIL

CELL PHONE

PLEASE NOTE ANY SPECIAL DIETARY RESTRICTIONS!

ACTIVITY	COST PER PERSON	TOTAL
REGISTRATION FEE	___ X \$40.00	
LEGION FAMILY NIGHT 6/25/26	___ X \$20.00	
PAST DEPT COMMANDER, INCOMING PRESIDENT & PAST PRESIDENT BREAKFAST 6/26/26	___ X \$25.00	
AMERICANISM LUNCH 6/26/26	___ X \$35.00	
LEGION FAMILY BBQ 6/26/26	___ X \$20.00	
MEMBERSHIP BREAKFAST 6/27/26	___ X \$25.00	
JOINT BANQUET 6/27/26	___ X \$45.00	

CONVENTION HOTELS

DOUBLETREE BY HILTON HELENA DOWNTOWN

22 N LAST CHANCE GULCH, HELENA, MT 59601

EMAIL: John.Lytle@Hilton.com

406-443-2200

BEST WESTERN CAPITAL \$132+tax

1714 11TH AVE

CALL: 406-442-1770

CONTACTS

AMERICAN LEGION DEPARTMENT OF MONTANA

DUANE CUNNINGHAM deptmtadjutant@gmail.com 406-465-1451

ERIN CARPENTER amlegmtsec@gmail.com 406-324-3990

COMPLETED REGISTRATION FORMS

MAIL PAYMENTS AND FORMS TO:

AMERICAN LEGION DEPARTMENT OF MONTANA

PO BOX 155

FORT HARRISON, MT 59636



Montana

Boys and Girls State

Support democracy in action.

Support better citizens and leaders.

Invest in educated youth.



**For more than 80 years,
American Legion Boys and
Auxiliary Girls State has
been a premier civics
program, immersing high
school juniors in a week-
long, hand-on experience of
democratic government.**



Sponsored by The American Legion Department of Montana

Dear Posts, Units, and Squadrons,

Each year, Montana American Legion Boys State and American Legion Auxiliary Girls State provide young leaders from every corner of our state the opportunity to experience hands-on government, develop leadership skills, and build lifelong confidence in civic engagement. These programs continue to stand among the most impactful youth leadership experiences offered in Montana—but they are only possible because of the unwavering support of our Posts, Units, and Squadrons.

As we look ahead to the 2026 sessions, we have set an ambitious and important goal: to host at a minimum, 100 Boys State delegates and 100 Girls State delegates. Achieving this benchmark will strengthen our programs, broaden statewide participation, and ensure we continue shaping the next generation of Montana leaders. To make this possible, we remain committed to keeping the program fee as low as \$300 per delegate and, most importantly, ensuring that no family is ever asked to pay out of pocket.

Your sponsorship is what allows us to uphold this mission. Every \$300 sponsorship directly covers housing, meals, materials, campus services, and instructional programming that would otherwise place a far greater financial burden on the students and their families. By stepping up to sponsor a delegate (or several), your Post, Unit, or Squadron helps guarantee that a student's opportunity to attend is never determined by their family's financial situation only by their willingness to learn and lead.

Enclosed is the 2026 Boys State & Girls State Sponsorship Form for your Post, Unit, or Squadron. We respectfully ask that you review it, determine how many delegates you can sponsor this year, and return the form with payment no later than May 1, 2026.

Your continued support ensures that Montana youth, whether from our largest cities or our most rural communities, have access to this life-changing experience. Thank you for helping us reach 100 and 100, and for investing in the future of our state through the power of leadership, service, and civic education.

MONTANA AMERICAN LEGION
Boys State & Auxiliary Girls State Sponsorship Form
For Posts, Units, and Squadrons Only

Post / Unit / Squadron Number: _____

Name of Post/Unit/Squadron Commander or Adjutant: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Number of Delegates Being Sponsored:

Delegates: _____ × \$300 = \$ _____

Total Sponsorship Amount Enclosed: \$ _____

Payment Information

Please remit payment with this form.

Checks payable to:

The American Legion of Montana

PO Box 155

Fort Harrison, MT 59636

Deadline: May 1, 2026

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.

