

DEPARTMENT COMMANDER'S ANNUAL REPORT

Greetings Legion Family,

It has been an incredible year serving as your Department Commander, and I thank you immensely for the opportunity. I ran on the motto of "Pursue Purpose," and have seen wonderful iterations of that in my travels. I've loved canvassing these country roads, telling stories of small post success and large post victories. There is no shortage of incredible work being done in the name of the South Dakota American Legion every day.

Like every Commander before, I've run ragged across South Dakota, going to banquets, emergency rooms, farm shows, expos, District Meetings, Post meetings, community suppers, fairs, baseball games, and more. I never imagined so many miles in one year! And while the places have been neat, my passion has always been the Veteran themselves, and in this position, I've had the luxury of meeting so many new people with such interesting stories to tell. From why they joined the service to the problems they've had with the VA, from the time in the sandbox to the granddaughter that just joined as the third generation--I will always cherish the seemingly endless connections that the Veteran world provides.

This year has come with its challenges: to those who supported me, thank you. To my kids, thank you for tagging along with my busy schedule—and to all those who gave them extra candy and desserts, know that you are adored by three Legion kids. To my Vice Commanders, Doug & Rod, thank you for filling in for me when the schedule wouldn't allow me to wander too far from home—absolutely necessary this year! To my DEC, especially my District Commanders, thanks for all the hard work. As Commander, I guide—you guys do the heavy lifting when it comes to Department policy and procedure. I love how much you all care. To my Department Officers and Chairmen, thank you for running your respective shows. There was a certain relief knowing that programs flowed without constant supervision—in particular, I want to shout out Lyle Tolsma in Athletics, Warren Aas in VA&R, Mike Melhaff in Legislative and Bill Peters in Membership. The work you have all done is more than appreciated.

A special thank you to Van, Judy and MaryJo. These three have had to deal with a working single mother Commander for the last year, and are probably counting down the days toward a more reliable calendar. All joking aside, they are the absolute bedrock of this organization, the first people I call if I need anything and always a sympathetic shoulder when I've needed it. Truly the best.

Finally, thank you to each South Dakota Legionnaire. You are what makes this organization worth the energy and time. It has truly been an honor crossing the state and even the country representing South Dakota, and I can only hope that in the end, the work I put in helped to amplify your voices too.

Courtney Steffen
Department Commander

2023-2024

DEPARTMENT VICE COMMANDER'S (DISTRICTS 1 AND 2) ANNUAL REPORT

I would like to thank the members of Districts 1 and 2 for the honor of serving as their State Vice Commander for the last two years. It has been a fruitful year for "West River", with two hardworking District Commanders and our Legion Posts doing a lot of great things for their communities. Most notable, District 1 hosted a very successful Midwinter meeting in Deadwood as well as the annual Golf Tournament hosted by Post 303 of Hermosa, here in the Rapid City area. The Fall and Spring District meeting went off without a hitch at some of our smaller communities like Piedmont (Post 311) and Hermosa (Post 303) in the Fall and Lemmon (Post 66) and Martin (Post 240) in the Spring.

One of my first duties for my second year was to represent the Department Commander at the funeral of Past Department Commander Gerald Goetzinger in my hometown of Martin (Post 240) on June 21st. PDC Goetzinger was also very active at the National Level and spent a year as a National Vice Commander. On a happier note, I attended "Blue Hat" day at Youth Trooper Academy in Pierre SD to watch our youth learn from the State's finest Highway Patrol Troopers.

In July I attended the annual Department Executive Committee meeting to finalize the budget in Oacoma SD and Department Commander Steffan's homecoming in Chester, SD. Closer to home, I represented the Department at the annual Tee It Up For The Troops Golf Tournament/fundraiser and the Ellsworth AFB Homefront Backpack giveaway, joining forces with volunteers from Posts 22, 33, 164, and 311.

In August I had the privilege of welcoming the players and coaches to the Central Region National Baseball Tournament in Rapid City, SD. I spoke at their welcoming banquet and took part in the tournament for several days as the person reciting the Code Of Conduct with the players. This month also saw the Grand Opening of the new VA CBOC in Rapid City and I and other members from the area attended the ceremony. I also received an Americanism "call-in" for the National Convention in Charlotte NC and joined the South Dakota Delegation for 6 days.

September found me participating in the State Golf Tournament with members from across the state. It was very nice to have it on this side of the state and as I mentioned earlier, Hermosa Post 303 did an outstanding job of hosting the tournament. I was unable to attend the District 1 and 2 Fall meetings because occasionally a person is called to attend important family events.

October is generally a beautiful weather month in SD and this year was no exception. I was able to make Post visits to Spearfish 164, Piedmont 311, Hot Springs 71, Custer 46, Box Elder 315 and of course Rapid City Post 22.

November saw a little less travel, but I spent time in Sturgis enjoying the annual Northern Hills Veteran's Appreciation event with members from Post 22, 33, 31, 164, 311 and 315, as well as many other Veteran Organizations like the VFW and DAV. Most of the planning is handled by members of Post 164, and they did an exceptional job again this year taking care of our Veterans. Thank you for all your hard work! I followed that visit up with a "tasty" visit to Post 315 in Box Elder to judge a chili contest. Veterans Day was spent attending the parade in Rapid City and speaking at the annual Veterans Day Post 22 Turkey Dinner appreciation event. There were over 200 veterans and their families served at this event and all the Legion Family Members (SAL/ALA/Riders) did their part to make it a resounding success. Post 22 also hosted a Legislative Roundtable on the 18th. The weather remained pleasant this month and I was able to attend a Post meeting in Lead (Post 31).

In December I made Post visits to Sturgis (33) and Hermosa (303). The remainder of the month was spent on planning and holding Post Oratorical contests.

The start of 2024 had me busy with the District 1 and 2 Oratorical Contests and getting very involved in our Americanism programs. District 1 Americanism Chairman Michael Pauling held an outstanding Oratorical contest with 5 competitors (2 of whom were homeschoolers), the best showing in years. I began making school visits (Custer HS) to help with recruiting for our Boys State programs. I also travelled to Pierre for the annual "Governors Day" festivities for the Boys and Girls State Governors.

In February, the school visits became more frequent, with stops at Rapid City Central and Rapid City Stevens. These were followed up by the trip to Midwinter meetings in Deadwood SD, where I attended the Boys State meetings, took part in the Department Executive Committee meeting, and moderated the State Oratorical Contest. The entire event was a resounding success due to the efforts of the District 1 Posts who worked for months to bring it all together. I also travelled to Sturgis to represent the Department at the Four Chaplains ceremony and enjoyed the delicious chili feed hosted by Post 33.

March was of course the Legion Birthday month and I travelled to Custer Post 46, Rapid City Post 22 and Spearfish Post 164 to represent the Department and perform keynote speaker duties. These events seem to get better and are better attended every year.

April is a big Americanism month with the Youth Trooper Academy interviews in Districts 1 and 2. Both District Commanders did an excellent job of setting these up and making sure the candidates were there. It is also the time when the applications start rolling in for Boys and Girls State. I commend both Districts for making that extra effort this year to recruit boys and Girls for these amazing programs. The training committee also held their second annual SD American Legion College in Chamberlain, where I had the honor to teach one of the classes. Several of the other instructors and staff are members of District 1 and 2 and represented West River very well.

As I wrap up this report, it is the middle of May and absolutely everyone is busy getting ready for SD Boys and Girls State. I put together the District 1 and 2 Orientation on the 11th of May at Post 22, with a lot of help from the Americanism Officers from our area Posts. This year we had approximately 100 people attend our Orientation "Pizza Party". I would like to thank the Auxiliary members from both Districts who brought salads and desserts and helped make this event a huge success. I believe that the teamwork I see throughout our Posts has translated to a very successful year in multiple areas of our "4 pillars work".

Thank you all for supporting me for the last 2 years as I've tried to represent Districts 1 and 2 as your SDAL Vice Commander.

Douglas D. Harris

DEPARTMENT VICE COMMANDER'S (DISTRICTS 3-8) ANNUAL REPORT

It has been a pleasure and a great experience serving as Vice Commander for Commander Courtney Steffen and the Department of South Dakota.

Summer was fairly quiet, with some meetings and then a trip to Charlotte NC for the National Convention. It was educational and meeting friends from around the country is always great. The meetings went well, and the Department Caucus allowed us to hear from all the Delegates about the business that was addressed in their meetings. Some had many resolutions to address, and some had very few.

Fall brought Post visits that just happened to be during sweet corn time. The food and hospitality were great, and I was able to meet many Legion family members and get their views on what was needed and what was going well. It was great to meet veterans from WWII and those who are just getting started. Each generation had some things that are unique to their era, but it is amazing to see and hear how similar we all are.

The Mid-Winter Convention was a little rough to get to the day we left and apparently got worse as the day went on. It was still a good convention and those who set it up and organized it did an amazing job. I helped as an usher for the Oratorical Contest and the students who made it that far are amazing. I hope that those who didn't win to go on to the National Contest will try again.

I have been able to go where Commander Courtney wanted me to go this spring and attend a few more Post meetings. The last one as of this writing was at Estelline for the dedication as a Purple Heart City. It was a very nice program, and the Post meeting was later that evening so I attended that too. They have a lot going for a little town and were planning the Memorial Day schedule with services at three cemeteries and a program too. Just one example of our small town Post doing all they can for the community, State and Nation. Veterans serving veterans.

For the good of the Legion
Rodney Smith
Vice Commander, Districts 3-8

2024 ANNUAL NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEEMAN REPORT

From the NEC:

My term as your National Executive Committeeman will end at the close of the National Convention in New Orleans this year. I would like to thank you for allowing me to serve you in this office. I enjoyed the term and it is time for a new NEC to be elected at our state convention in June.

We have a great National Commander this year. Commander Seehafer's program this year was the Veterans and Children Foundation and his priority was to eliminate veteran suicide. Each Department in the American Legion was given a goal in order to build the endowed fund. Our goal in South Dakota was \$30,500. As of October of 2023, our department reached and surpasses this goal. I would like to thank all the Posts who donated to this fund and the South Dakota American Legion Foundation for stepping up. On the NEC's desk at National Headquarters there are spots for 2 urns. After we achieved over 50 percent one was placed on South Dakota's desk. At the May meeting in Indianapolis, our desk should have 2 urns for completing our goal. You can walk around the NEC room and see where each Department stands. This foundation was started to fund our 3,000 American Legion Service Officers and to offer Temporary Financial Assistance to veterans with children who are in need.

In late February, 9 Legionnaires from South Dakota attended the American Legion's Legislative Conference in Washington, D.C. The National American Legion priorities for 2024 were discussed and the South Dakota delegation went to Capitol Hill and discussed these issues with our congressional delegation. Most of these issues this year are the same as last year but they still are priorities to the American Legion. **The legislative priorities for the upcoming year are Mental Health & Suicide Prevention, VA Healthcare Modernization, Implementation and Oversight of the Pact Act, Protect Veterans from Predatory Actors, Concurrent Receipt, Guard and Reserve GI Bill Parity, GI Bill for Honorable Service, Allowing Alternative Treatments, Improving the TAP program, Access to Health Care for Overseas Military and Families, Military Quality of Life, Pay the Coast Guard and Protect the American Flag.**

Our National Commander urges all Posts to make the "Buddy Check Calls". Make contact especially with those Legionnaires and veterans you haven't seen for a while. Remember all veterans may need someone to talk to and someone who is willing to listen. This being my final report as a State Officer, I would like to thank all Legionnaires and Posts who supported me for all the Department offices I've held. The American Legion is truly a great family.

NEC Denny Brenden

DEPARTMENT ADJUTANT'S ANNUAL REPORT

Department Commander Steffen,

This report is written to satisfy the Constitution and By Laws requirement for the Department Adjutant to write and present to the annual convention, a report covering activities not covered in the annual reports of the Committee and Commission Chairs and other Department officials.

As I wrap up my first year as Adjutant, I am proud to report that since June 12th, 2023, I have visited 34 separate Posts, with over 75 Post visits in total, attended 16 district meetings/conventions, attended eight Department Executive Committee Meetings, attended the Oratorical Contest, Boys State and the Youth Trooper Academy, executed the Mid-Winter Conference (which thanks to District 1 and COL David Booze of Post 311 it was a great success.) Attended more than 80 internal department meetings, 21 meetings with outside organizations, and spent 31 days conducting National Level meetings and activities, in total I have spent 109 nights on the road. It has been a very busy and rewarding year.

Past Department Commander Barns once said, "I think that The Department Adjutant of SD's office is an office that is hard to fill and suit everybody, because you are going to have fault to find with it wherever you are or whatever you do." He said that at the tenth annual Convention of the Department in 1928 and how true he was. I am honored and humbled to be able to work for the department and our members. I have done my best for what I feel is in the best interest of The American Legion.

One of the most significant challenges we have faced this year was Mitchell Baseball. As actions in the court are pending, I can say that this situation has been a black eye on a program that has changed the lives of so many young people in a positive way. Next year we celebrate one hundred years of American Legion Baseball and in that celebration let us all remember how a small program from right here in South Dakota has grown to be the premiere nationwide baseball program and has done so much good for our nation's youth.

With diminishing membership, another significant challenge has been finances. Our raw number of members is down but our market penetration is the highest in the nation. More than 28% of the Veterans in South Dakota are members of The American Legion, this is something for the entire Department to be proud of. With the lower member numbers our revenue is diminishing. At Department Headquarters we have been striving to make as many cuts as possible. We moved as much as feasible away from mailing hard copies, we are in the process of reorganizing the Department vehicles. We negotiated savings on hotel stays for all veterans in the state and we are now looking at our annual meeting schedules to see where we can reduce travel and expenses. Finances will continue to be a significant challenge until we can stop depending on Membership dues as our main source of income. We must secure partnerships, sponsorships and outside donors or we will price ourselves out of membership. I trust the newly approved Fundraising Committee will facilitate the reforming of our revenue model.

This year has not been all challenges; there have been many rewards. Due to the hard work of Membership Chair Bill Peters and the Posts themselves, our department won the Big Twelve Challenge for our category. That means \$2000 for investing in technology, the current plan is to update the website, and email hosting.

We continue to make changes and updates to the Department Headquarters. In the past year we have reorganized, painted and are working to display our 105 years of history. We have partnered with the South Dakota Historical Society to categorize, archive, and digitize our historical

documents, minutes, and proceedings. They will start this process in the next year and when complete they will open the archives to the public for anyone to access. We have upgraded our internet and phone systems allowing for more functionality to conduct video-teleconferences, rearranged the offices to have a more functional meeting space and cleaned out years of clutter. The project is not complete, we will continue to improve our home in the Codington County War Memorial and Courthouse building where we have called home since 1928.

The headquarters staff consists of the Mrs. Judy Greenfield, our Membership and Bookkeeper who has been with the department for 31 years, Mrs. MaryJo Boner Executive Assistant and Programs Coordinator who has been with the department for six years and myself, the Department Adjutant, I have just completed my first year. Judy and MaryJo are truly the backbone of the Department, without their dedication, our organization would come to a grinding halt. I am sincerely grateful to have these wonderful ladies to work alongside, they have made for a very welcoming first year.

Madam Commander, since most of the Committee Chairs and State Officers have filed complete reports, most of the activities of the Department have been covered and reported on. I would like to congratulate you on a very successful year. It has truly been a privilege to have you as my first Commander, you have left some big shoes for your successors to fill.

Respectfully submitted,
C.P. Van Delist, Department Adjutant

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE DEPARTMENT CHAPLAIN

I was honored and humbled by the appointment by Department Commander Courtney Steffen to serve as Department Chaplain for the coming year following the State Convention in June 2023.

During the course of the year, I have had the privilege of attending the newly elected Commander's Homecoming; Fall and Spring District meetings; and a variety of Veteran's events within my own district and neighboring districts. I have participated in a National Chaplain's Teleconference with the National Chaplain and a number of Department Chaplains around the nation.

I've been privileged to publish a variety of faith-based posts on the Department Facebook page at appropriate times of the year for the edification of our members across the Department.

The highlight of the year, thus far, has been the preparation and conduct of the Four Chaplains Memorial service at the Mid-Winter Conference and my own post in North Sioux City. I felt that since the service included members from the Auxiliary, Sons, and Riders, that the Chaplain representative from each should have a role in the service. It was well received, and each branch of our Legion Family was represented.

Regarding Department Services, the Memorial Service at the State Convention will look a little different this year. I am including the names of Past Sons of the American Legion Department Commanders in the Memorial Rolls on the power-point, and the printed list, as well as Legion Past Commanders and Auxiliary Past Presidents. The Department services should be all inclusive of our Legion family.

If I were to give any recommendations to the incoming Department Chaplain, it would be to possibly look at hosting a chaplain's workshop for post and district chaplains and increasing faith-based publications on social media for the Department's edification.

Respectfully Submitted,
Rev. Michael Kumm, Ph.D
Chaplain
American Legion Department of South Dakota

ANNUAL REPORT OF DEPARTMENT SERVICE OFFICER

I would like to thank Commander Courtney Steffen for appointing me to serve as Department Service Officer for 2023-2024.

As Department Service Officer. I have the privilege of directly serving Veterans and their families in helping them obtain and utilize the benefits they earned through their service to our country.

It has been a busy year for VSOs throughout our state helping veterans and their families that now qualify under the PACT Act.

On March 5, 2024, VA announced that all Veterans who were exposed to toxins and other hazards while serving in the military – at home or abroad – are now eligible to enroll directly in VA health care.

This means that all Veterans who served in the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, Iraq, Afghanistan, the Global War on Terror (Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Freedom's Sentinel, Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation New Dawn, Operation Inherent Resolve, and Resolute Support Mission), or any other combat zone after 9/11 are eligible to enroll in VA health care without first applying for VA benefits. Additionally, Veterans who never deployed but were exposed to toxins or hazards while training or on active duty in the United States are eligible to enroll.

Under this expansion of care, any Veteran who participated in a Toxic Exposure Risk Activity (TERA) – at – home or abroad – is eligible for VA health care. VA has determined that Veterans who were exposed to one or more of the following hazards or conditions during active duty, active duty for training, or inactive duty training participated in a TERA: air pollutants (burn pits, sand, dust, particulates, oil well fires, sulfur fires); chemicals (pesticides, herbicides, depleted uranium, with embedded shrapnel, contaminated water); occupational hazards (asbestos, industrial solvents, lead, paints including chemical agent resistant coating, firefighting foams); radiation (nuclear weapons handling, maintenance and detonation, radioactive material, calibration and measurement sources, X-rays, radiation from military occupational exposure); warfare agents (nerve agents, chemical and biological weapons). VA will use all available information to determine if Veterans participated in a TERA, including military records and service connection.

Respectfully submitted,
Brian Havard
Department Service Officer

2024 ANNUAL AMERICANISM REPORT

Commander Steffen:

Thank you for the opportunity to serve as your Department Americanism Chairman. Your support and leadership for the programs of this core American Legion Program has been greatly appreciated. Our American Legion here in South Dakota faced a hard challenge early with the criminal incident involving the Legion Baseball team in Mitchell, SD. Despite the immediate public uproar, our core values and rules were upheld by the dedicated efforts put forth by our entire Executive Leadership Committee and the members of the SDAL Athletic Commission who worked non-stop on the issue. It should be noted that our Department Judge Advocate General Jay Leibel provided steady and forthwith legal counsel. Additionally, our Department Adjutant Chris Van Delist stepped up and became the Legion's public face, addressing our positions on the matter to local and state news agencies.

The great news is that Americanism is alive and well in South Dakota. Stepping into this position of State Americanism Commission Chairman has been a huge learning curve. Having the guidance and support of prior dedicated Americanism Chairmen, Larry Madsen, Doug Harris and Harry Boner was an incredible resource. With their assistance, I was quickly able to get a deeper understanding of the terrific programs that several of our Posts in SD are participating in such as Boys State, Youth Trooper, Scouting and High-School Oratory Contests. It's also no secret that working with the Youth Program Administrator at State HQ, Mary Jo Boner and Secretary Judy Greenfield is a blessing.

Building off the efforts put forth in the past, I believe we moved forward and successfully proved the "Big 3" marketing campaign devised by department staff, various marketing teams and Boy's State Board members. By having a single page document available to our members, it was easier to explain why the American Legion was involved with Oratorical, Boys State, and Youth Trooper programs to High School administration, counselors, teachers, students, parents, and community leaders. It also provides easy copy and paste advertisements on social media platforms such as Facebook and Tik-Tok. Add to that the direct mailing to Post/District Americanism officers and High schools worked to some degree, however there is room for improvement. Mainly trying to reach out to those households that Home School. We need to continue to share ideas that work.

We held our Oratorical program finals at our Mid-Winter Conference, which was held at the Lodge Resort in Deadwood, SD. Unfortunately, we had only three contestants from around the state competing on the last day of the Conference. The winner of the State contest from District #7, Elena Andrews, who represented Post #72 in Beresford, also took home the honors last year. She will now advance to the National Oratory competition to be held in Hillsdale, MI, May 17-19. I would like to once again thank all the volunteers that helped to Judge, escort, keep time, and monitor the contestants. A special thank you to former chairmen, Doug Harris and Larry Madsen for helping us all through the process.

One of the fastest growing opportunities for our American Legion is getting involved with the South Dakota 4-H Shooting Sports program. This program focuses on developing safe shooting habits with the participating youth members. The program in South Dakota is founded upon National 4-H Shooting Sports curriculum. Several counties in South Dakota have in recent years opened 4-H Youth Shooting programs across the State. Several Posts have already stepped forward and have supported these programs. The program has over 3000 youth involved from ages 8-19. There are several platforms available from BB guns, Archery, Pistol, Black Powder, Rifle and Shotgun [skeet] which can provide for positive progression as the participants grow and improve. The program doesn't require the Youth to be gifted athletes. In essence, if you have a

firm grip, steady breath control, good eyesight, and the desire, you can participate. We have our kids move onto and place in National and Olympic Competitions.

American Legion Baseball. South Dakota is the birthplace of Legion Ball, and we are celebrating our 99th year and look forward to our 100th year in 2025. However, Legion Baseball in South Dakota is looking at a serious challenge by the South Dakota High School Activities Association [SDHSAA]. They are looking at getting Baseball to become a sanctioned High School Sport much like football and basketball. One of the proposed/talked about scenario's would move the High School playing season to the end of June with playoffs in July. If this was to happen it would effectively end Legion Baseball in South Dakota as we know it. In April I attended as a guest at the SDHSAA meeting where the topic was brought up and the Board recognized me. I provided information on where this has taken place in 48 other states and how it led to American Legion Baseball programs shutting down or moving into abbreviated seasons. The two schools that sponsored the inquiry indicated that they were only looking to play baseball during the current/spring school year. Other board members did come out in support of Legion Baseball, however the board also voted to accept the proposal and the earliest that any action if it was to proceed would be 1-2 years and they would be involving the American Legion with further discussions. Our position must be that High School baseball continue as it is today and that it ends at the end of School year.

The 2024 Boy's State session is scheduled for May 27th-31st, Aberdeen, SD at Northern State University. Our Highschool Juniors and Seniors from across the state will be traveling to this great event to learn about how Government works from the local level up to the national level. Attendance is a continuing issue and again this year we fell short of goals, but the 206 students that signed up is a positive improvement. There are several possible factors for the decline in the past 10 years. Often the Boy's are involved in sport activities or engaged in summer employment that compete with the Teen's time. How do we change this? We must promote not only to School officials, but also to directly contact the parents and grandparents. Often, we just make a 5-minute presentation to a classroom full of 17-18 years old teens and that doesn't usually work. We need to track down Scout and Church leaders and get them involved. The normal channels of mass media do not reach our target audience. We must contact your last year Boy's Staters and have them use social media to assist us. Then we cannot forget our SAL Squadron's and Auxiliary units. Auxiliary is out recruiting for Girls State, find out if there is a younger brother, who might be a future candidate, and be sure to help them with their recruitment as well. Boy's State "Blue Cap" day, which will be held on Thursday, the 30th, is a day that Legion Posts members can come visit and out and check out the activities the Boy's go through. I encourage all Posts to take time in the coming years make the effort to stop in and check this out.

The 2024 South Dakota Youth Trooper Academy runs June 24 – 28, 2024 in Pierre at the State Law Enforcement Training Academy. I have seen 1st hand the benefits of the YTA program. For the Cadets, this is an intensive week of living and learning what to expect of a typical cadet attending a law enforcement training school. The course is designed to help recruit tomorrow's new law enforcement and military minded members. Thank you to our Posts who sponsor these young men and women to attend this event. Also don't forget about Blue Cap Day on Thursday June 27th at the shooting range. Come and watch these Cadets participate in demonstrations from the drug dogs, swat team and run through shooting courses. Also, if you want to see something special, attend Graduation ceremonies at the State Capitol. In the conversations with Parents of the Cadets they are always pleasantly surprised at the positive change they see in their child. Once again, let's congratulate the South Dakota Highway Patrol, the dedicated training cadre staff and the "Vision" that Legionnaire Larry Price had years ago into making this happen.

The Boy Scouts started back in 1910 and it was the American Legions first Youth Program dating back to 1919. Boy Scouting has evolved over the years, and it took a positive shift in 2017. At that time, the BSA Board of Directors voted to allow girls to join all of its programs. The core values of Scouting being trustworthy, loyal, helpful, kind, brave and reverent, for example – are important for both young men and women, and it develops character and leadership for young people. Just recently, The Scouts have rebranded, and moving forward the name of the organization is “Scouting America”. Leadership wanted a name going forward that made clear that all children and teens are “very, very welcome” to participate in the organization. Now more than ever, it is important that the American Legion continues to stay involved with our local Scouting Units and assist them with activities, events and even funding. Those Cub Scout troops will grow into Eagle Scouts. The American Legion supports program’s that the top Eagle Scout can earn scholarships for college.

Lastly, It has been a pleasure serving as your Department Americanism Chairman for the last year. I could not have done it without all the Legion family’s support. I hope that the members of the Americanism Commission and I have helped answer questions about all our programs. I also must point out that as we move forward, information and resources at both the National and State level will continue to make our jobs easier. But don’t sit back and expect it to be easy. Think outside the box and always continue to push the envelope and never be satisfied with the “Status Quo”. There is always room for new ideas and improvement.

I will see you all at the Department Convention in Pierre.

Daniel L. Wyatt
Americanism Commission Chairman

2023 – 2024 ANNUAL ATHLETIC REPORT

Commander Steffen,

On behalf of the SD American Legion Athletic Commission, we would like to thank you and your staff for your continued support of SD American Legion Baseball. The recent retirement of some committee members who have spent many valuable years on the Athletic Commission, I want to say thank you to each of them for what they have done for SD American Legion Baseball over the past several years.

With the selection of three new committee members, the Athletic Commission has expanded to a total of eight commissioners who all look forward to working together to keep SD American Legion Baseball a priority for our youth who wish to participate.

The 2024 American Legion Baseball registration is in full swing with a total of 74 teams already registered with two more weeks to go, ending on May 31st.

The state championship host sites and dates for this year (2024) are:

- Class “A” Senior – Brookings, SD (July 30 – August 3)
- Class “B” Senior – Salem, SD (August 2 – 6)
- Class “A” Junior – Pierre, SD (August 1 – 4)
- Class “B” Junior – Groton, SD (August 9 – 11)

On December 10th, 2023, selections were made for the 2025 host sites. This will be the 100th year anniversary for American Legion Baseball which started in Milbank, SD. They are as follows:

- Class “A” Senior – Watertown, SD
- Class “B” Senior – Milbank, SD
- Class “A” Junior – Rapid City, SD, Post 22
- Class “B” Junior - Milbank, SD

This year’s American Legion Golf Tournament will be hosted by Webster Post 40 on September 7th & 8th, 2024. This tournament is open to any American Legion or Son of American Legion member. The host/chairman is Chad Hesla of Webster along with Commissioner’s Elton Blemaster and Gene Gillen.

There continues to be talk about the SDHSAA sanctioning baseball as a High School sport. I’ve spoken with members of the SDHSAA, and they are going to conduct a study which will take a couple of years. As of right now, the earliest this would take place is in the school year 2027.

Commander Steffen, this concludes this year’s annual Athletic Commission Report.

Respectfully submitted,
Lyle W. Tolsma, Chairman
SD American Legion Athletic Commission

ATHLETIC COMMISSION FINANCIAL REPORT (May 2023 to May 2024)

BALANCE, 06/30/2023		<u>\$21,296.35</u>
REGISTRATION FEES	\$6,600.00	
INTEREST	\$17.06	
	<u>\$6,617.06</u>	<u>\$6,617.06</u>
		\$27,913.41
ATHLETIC EXPENSES	(\$5,595.74)	
COMMITTEE EXPENSES	(\$5,872.85)	
	<u>(\$11,468.59)</u>	<u>(\$11,468.59)</u>
BALANCE, 05/15/2024		\$16,444.82

BOYS STATE CHAIRMAN ANNUAL REPORT

Commander,

As of this writing, I can report we are a GO for the 81st Session of South Dakota American Legion Boys State, May 27 – May 31, 2024, at Northern State University. We currently have 195 boys signed up; we are up almost 30 registrations at this time from 2023. Again, this year we decided to include seniors in the session to allow them an opportunity. We will hold our annual meeting for the corporation the Sunday before Boys State, May 26th, at Northern State University. Some agenda items are future incorporation of Seniors, 2024 Session Dates, marketing strategies, creation of a Boys State Alumnus. I would like to thank every Legionnaire for their continued support of this great program. Additionally, I thank all the volunteers who come together to put on such an important event. Without all their dedication, we could not fulfil our mission to help America's youth understand and appreciate the American system of government and way of life including the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, and to give young men a better knowledge of the fundamental principles of South Dakota State government.

Respectfully submitted,
Gene Opbroek, Director
South Dakota American Legion Boys State

EDUCATIONAL SCHOLARSHIP COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN REPORT

Ms. Commander,

Two thousand twenty-three/twenty-four was a fair period for the Educational Scholarship Committee. In 2019, we changed from a loan concept to a scholarship format investing \$120,000.00 with the South Dakota Community Foundation.

Our beginning fund balance (1/1/2023) was \$123,309.68 and ending fund balance (12/31/2023) was \$130,511.91. A gain of \$7,202.8823. In the account at State HQ, we have \$20,239.51.

We received zero donations in the last year.

Ten applications were received for this year's scholarships. Recipients are Megan Linke (Woonsocket), Allison Gross (Brookings), Donovan Knecht (Selby), Julia Larson (Watertown), and Charlene Mohler (White).

Applications and brochures are online at **www.SDlegion.org**.

The 2024 Educator of the Year packets were due May 1, 2024. Because the deadline for this article was May 15, 2024, the committee did not have time to review the packets. The winner will be announced at the state convention and *Up To Now*.

The education scholarships offered by the Department of South Dakota are for children of veterans, grandchildren of veterans, and veterans who meet the requirements as set forth in the Education Scholarship brochure attending post-secondary education, college, or technical schools. Please read the brochure for all the current changes. In all cases, the veteran listed on the application must be a member of the South Dakota The American Legion. The student must attend a higher education school in the state of South Dakota unless their plan of study is not taught in a South Dakota school. The fund is self-sustaining through donations.

Annually, the brochure and application processes are reviewed. No monies were added to the fund from the Department's outside income programs. More specific details can be obtained from State Headquarters, your District Education Loan Chairperson, or a member of the state Education Scholarship Committee. The state committee consists of Michael Pauling, Piedmont, Philip Egeberg, Brookings, Perry Schmidt, Redfield, Eugene Iron Shell, Jr., Rosebud, and Hugh Holmes, Mitchell.

To all, this is my last year as Chairman. Thank you to everyone for your support. It's been an interesting 10-year ride; from a loan program, with many phone calls, to a scholarship program. Good luck to Mike Pauling as the upcoming Chair.

Ms. Commander, thank you for selecting me as chairman of the prestigious Education Scholarship Committee. It is a great honor. Remember Calvin & Hobbs in their cartoon career!

Respectfully Submitted,
Hugh W. Holmes
Chairman, Education Scholarship Committee

FINANCE COMMISSION ANNUAL REPORT

Commander Steffen,

As Department Finance Officer and Chair of the Finance Commission, it has been an honor to serve the Legionnaires of the Department of South Dakota. It has been a pleasure to serve alongside the other members of the Finance Commission who are PDC Paul Evenson, David Booze, Tim Brooks, and Dave Gutzmer. These individuals continue to be key in monitoring and advising on budget issues, and in helping me in my role as Department Finance Officer.

The Finance Commission met in July 2023 to prepare a budget for the Fiscal Year 2023-2024 which was then presented to the Department Executive Committee for their approval. The DEC approved a 2023-2024 budget of \$319,237.88. This amount was based on known expenditures such as salaries, insurance, office expenditures and program costs. In addition, Commissions, Committees, and programs had additional requests that were used to determine a budget total.

As of April 30, 2024 income for the Department from membership has been \$224,789.62 (70% of budgeted). Anticipated income will be from outside revenue which has not been received as of this report but is anticipated to meet expenditures for the year. Our Sweeps Fund raising has increased over last year. We think this is mainly because we have been conducting the MidWinter and Convention Sweeps within the Department. As of April 30, 2024 Department expenditures total \$234,308.39 (74.4% of projected budget) with a remaining budget of \$84,929.49. The chances are good for not exceeding our income this year. The Cash Balance Report at the beginning of the year had \$988,104.88 and at the end of April 2024 the Cash Balance Report indicated a balance of \$1,099,969.08. It should be noted that that amount includes the Trust Fund Account which has gone from \$647,336.57 to \$818,612.30. The Department has converted one of the two car CDs to the Trust Fund and a \$100,000 CD to the Trust Fund as well. Earnings are stronger in the Trust Fund than CDs currently. A more detailed report will be in the Proceedings from this Convention once the financials have been reviewed by an outside agency.

During the Fiscal year, the Finance Commission met not only at MidWinter but also several times during the year via Zoom to discuss and monitor the budget. In November, the DEC requested that the Finance Commission develop a recommendation for DEC action related to dues based on the National Dues. The Commission met and made a recommendation to the DEC based on this increase and corresponding impact to Department dues and anticipated expenditures.

The Financials of the Department of South Dakota have remained viable and stable over this past Fiscal Year.

Respectfully Submitted,
Krisma D. DeWitt, Finance Officer

REPORT OF THE SOUTH DAKOTA AMERICAN LEGION FOUNDATION

Your South Dakota American Legion Foundation was established in 2010, as a 501 (C)(3) tax exempt organization. The purpose is to attract and distribute charitable funds for the benefit of the South Dakota American Legion programs. The corpus, or principal, is an endowed fund, meaning that this principle is not to be spent. The funds are professionally managed by the South Dakota Community Foundation. The earnings from the invested principal are made available for distribution to the Legion, and any unused portion of the earnings are retained back into principal for further growth. This past year, \$15,000 was granted back to the Legion, to assist with programs as determined by the Executive Committee of the SD American Legion.

Income to the Foundation comes from many sources. Outright gifts from individuals, businesses, Legion Posts and other military organizations. Gifts can be in the form of cash, property or even real estate. Memorials are a great way to honor friends and family with a lasting gift to the Foundation, which will give on forever. The 501(C)(3) designation makes it ideal to name a gift to the SD American Legion Foundation in one's will, and the giving be accomplished after death through their estate. A huge thank you to every individual, Post, and business that have contributed over the years! Your gifts will continue to benefit your SD American Legion for perpetuity. Thank you also for your support of Foundation fund raising activities over the years. These have included several raffles, with the most recent one being the meat raffle that concluded at this year's Mid-Winter. It netted approximately \$10,000 to the Foundation. Each year a Fun Auction is held at the Department Convention, usually netting \$7,000 to \$9,000. Thank you to everyone who has ever contributed to the auction, bid on and purchased items!

If an individual or business contributes \$10,000 or more, you can name the program that you wish to have the earnings support. Because of the generous donation from a Legionnaire and spouse, there is now a sub-fund for Youth Law Enforcement Education (Youth Trooper Academy). Thank you very much! Now it enables you to designate your contribution to go specifically to the Youth Law Enforcement training if you wish. The potential is also there to start funds specifically for programs such as Legion Baseball, SD Boys State, etc. Again, your gifts will continue to pay out for ever and ever!

A year ago, at the time of the Department Convention, the funds within your Foundation totaled \$290,112.19. At the time of this writing (prior to this years' Convention), the total of the funds is \$329,262.71. In the past year, the additions to the Foundation were \$56,813 (contributions, dividends and unrealized capital gains) and subtractions from the Foundation totaled \$17,663.10 (grants back to the Legion of \$15,000, and administrative fees). At the present time, \$17,238.92 is available for distribution.

It is working! A big thank you to all individuals, Posts and businesses who have supported the Foundation over the years! We ask for your continued support.

James N.Kurtz, Bd. President
South Dakota American Legion Foundation

DEPARTMENT HISTORIAN REPORT

Commander Steffen,

It has been a privilege and an honor to serve and continue to serve as your Department Historian. I am working on the Department History for the year so you will have a remembrance of your year as Department Commander. I will also assist those who are working to put their histories together for the State Convention this year.

Post Historians should be working on their Post Histories right now for the History contest at our State Convention in Pierre. Winners in each category (scrapbook and narrative) can be entered into the National contest. These entries should cover the past years' term of your Post Commanders election to the end of his or her term.

All the information on guidance and points sheets used in judging History books entered in the contest can be found in the Officers Guide.

Our History Book contest is patterned after the national contest, using the point system in judging the winners in each category. The rules were put together to make the history books better, ie. page numbers, id pictures, chronological structure, 3x5 card identifying author, table of contents, etc. The rules are available to everyone in the Officers Guide. On the points sheet, it only gives the general topic with details in the written area of the guide before the score sheet. The intent of the score sheet is to make history books look better.

Certificates will be presented to the first, second and third place winners at our State Convention.

I encourage all post historians to put together a post history. Your Post members will appreciate your hard work in the years to come. I thank all Post historians for their hard work and commitment in preparing these reports.

All Post Histories must be turned in by Friday, June 21st by 1 pm at the Registration Desk. If you can get them to me sooner, that would be great.

Respectfully submitted,
Fred Lee
Department Historian

INTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMISSION ANNUAL REPORT

The annual meeting of the Internal Affairs Commission was held on May 3, 2024, with the following present of on virtual presence: Chairman Byron Callies, PDC Mark Weinmann, PDC Terry Hanson, Kevin Hempel, Judge Advocate Jay Leibel, and SAL Vice Commander Wyatt Reis. ALTNEC Nelson was in attendance as Riders Liaison.

The Internal Affairs Commission duties include the review of any resolutions that affect the Constitution of the American Legion, Department of South Dakota, and to recommend distribution of resolutions that do not affect the Constitution.

The following were reviewed and recommendations made: 24-01; Dues recommendation – amended and recommended do pass, 24-03; Credit for Service, no action necessary, sent to Resolutions Convention Committee; 24-04, no action necessary and sent to Resolutions Convention Committee; 24-05, no action necessary and sent to Resolutions Convention Committee, 24-05, no action necessary and sent to Resolutions Convention Committee, 2406, no action necessary and sent to Resolutions Convention Committee.

Reports for the SAL and Legion Riders were given by SAL Vice Commander Wyatt Reice and ALTNEC Fred Nelson respectively.

Finally, Commander Steffen, it was a pleasure to serve as Chairman of the Internal Affairs Commission. As you know, the Commission is an integral part of the Legion, and I am proud that you have confidence in me. Also thank you to those members who willingly serve on the Commission.

Byron Callies
Chairman

2023-2024 AMERICAN LEGION RIDERS REPORT

Commander Steffen and Fellow Legionnaires,

Serving as the Department Commander's Liaison for the American Legion Riders (ALR) this past year has been a privilege. The ALR program is one of the American Legion's most visible and celebrated initiatives. The program's success largely stems from the grassroots efforts of its chapters at the post level, which are managed by their members, including Legionnaires, Auxiliary members, and Sons of the American Legion.

The American Legion Riders guide their activities around the American Legion's Four Pillars: Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation, National Security, Americanism, and Children and Youth.

Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation

ALR chapters provided a final salute to fallen veterans through escort services and flag lines at funeral services across various venues, including Black Hills National Cemetery (BHNC). They honored unaccompanied veterans with dignified services quarterly at BHNC. On-site support at VA facilities includes organizing events like Christmas in July and National Salute to Veteran Patients Week. Riders are actively involved in Veterans Day and Memorial Day ceremonies.

National Security

Chapters emphasized accountability for POW/MIAs and enhanced community and youth awareness through various ceremonies and educational events. They actively supported our troops by organizing escorts, flag lines, and sending care packages. One notable initiative this year is the second annual Colonel Mike Kain Memorial Blood Drive hosted by Black Hills Chapter #164.

Americanism

Education aimed at fostering flag protection awareness among youth is a priority. This past year, Flag etiquette programs reached hundreds of young learners across various schools, teaching respect and honor. Riders conducted Veterans Day programs in schools. Rapid City Chapter #22 adopted a classroom and coordinated a monthly activity with the students.

Children and Youth

The Black Hills Chapter #164 took eleven children of deployed soldiers shopping for school supplies, spending \$1,000. The Rolling Plains Chapter #66 provided medical assistance to local families. The Warner Chapter #137 has undertaken a unique initiative called the Teddy Bear Ride to comfort hospitalized children. The Battle Mountain Chapter #71 coordinated a Trunk-n-Treat event for Halloween. The Fort Pierre Chapter #20 helped raise funds to help support the Missouri Shores Domestic Violence Center.

Growth and Community

The ALR's commitment to the community and veterans and shared passion for motorcycles continue to attract new members. Riders' patriotism is made evident each year with several high-profile events. During each Sturgis Rally, the Riders lead the Jacket Ride with flagged motorcycles. This ride raises money for Veterans' Scholarships. Riders also participate in the opening parade of the Sturgis Rally. In the Sioux Falls area, Riders escort Midwest Honor Flight buses.

Statewide Coordination

Statewide Riders' meetings facilitate collaboration during the Midwinter Conference and State Convention. In May, the Riders gather in Pierre for the ALR River Rendezvous, an event that brings Riders from chapters throughout the state to discuss business and plan for the coming summer. At this event, the Riders gather at the Soldiers and Sailors Memorial for a wreath-laying ceremony in honor of Memorial Day.

Looking Forward

The Department of South Dakota currently has 13 ALR chapters, but I encourage all Posts to consider the benefits of adding an ALR chapter to their American Legion Family. Let's discuss the potential for furthering our mission together. I extend my heartfelt appreciation to all South Dakota American Legion Riders for their unwavering commitment and efforts in serving their communities and advocating for veterans. We anticipate another year of impactful service.

Respectfully Submitted,
Fred Nelson, Department ALR Liaison

LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN REPORT

Commander Steffen,

It was my pleasure to serve the American Legion Department of South Dakota as Chairman of the 2023-2024 Legislative Committee. Committee members were Kevin Morello, Nathan Juelfs, Dan Fritz, Kevin Hempel, and Rod Martens. Lobbyists were Commander Courtney Steffen, Adjutant C.P. Van Delist, Kevin Hempel, Nathan Juelfs, and Mike Mehlhaff.

The committee met on January 22nd, 2024, to review bills submitted up to that point and plan our lobbying strategy. Members in attendance were Commander Courtney Steffen, Chairman Mike Mehlhaff, Adjutant Van Delist, Kevin Morello, and Nathan Juelfs (remote.)

Unable to attend were Dan Fritz and Rod Martens. That evening a Legislative dinner was held at the Pierre Post 8 American Legion cabin. Post 8 did a great job hosting the event and the members turned out to man the kitchen and assist with the event. Special recognition should go to Post 8 members Mona and Kyle Weinman for an excellent meal. With over 100 people in attendance, everyone had an opportunity to discuss legislation and its effect on Veterans.

Below are the bills that would impact veterans from the 2024 Legislative Session, what action the committee took, and the final disposition of the bill:

HB 1007 amend the requirement to employ a county veterans' service officer.
Monitored by Committee Signed by the Governor February 27th, 2024

HB 1008 modify the eligibility for admission to the state veterans' home and repeal the residency requirement.
Supported By Committee Signed by the Governor February 27th, 2024

HB 1056 increase the property tax exemption allowed for certain veterans with a disability.
Supported by Committee Signed by the Governor February 27th, 2024

HB 1067 designate Medal of Honor Recognition Day.
Supported by Committee Signed by the Governor February 21st, 2024

HB 1068 allow disabled veterans to obtain a standard issue county motor vehicle or motorcycle license plate.
Monitored by Committee Signed by the Governor February 5th, 2024

HB 1082 change the eligibility requirements, and the exempt value, of a property tax relief program for disabled veterans and surviving spouses.
Supported By Committee Signed by the Governor March 4th, 2024

HB 1101 provide a special motor vehicle license plate for recipients of the Legion of Merit award.
Supported By Committee Signed by the Governor February 12th, 2024

HB 1121 make an appropriation to provide a grant for the construction of a veteran's skilled trade center.
Monitored by Committee Deferred by House Education January 31st, 2024

HB 1138 establish a sales tax exemption for certain disabled veterans.
Monitored by Committee Deferred by House Taxation February 6th, 2024

HB 1191 require an official declaration of war or other Congressional action before the South Dakota National Guard may be deployed by the federal government.
Monitored by Committee Deferred by House Military and Veterans Affairs February 6th, 2024

HCR 6007 Encouraging the United States Department of Veteran Affairs to allow veterans to receive long-term care services at facilities that do not otherwise meet the requirements set by the department.
Supported By Committee Resolved by both chambers February 15th, 2024

SB 29 allow eligible members of the South Dakota National Guard attending an in-state private, nonprofit post-secondary institution to receive the state tuition benefit.
Supported By Committee Signed by the Governor March 13th, 2024

SB 105 provide for the employment of veterans' service officers by the Department of Veterans Affairs.
Monitored by Committee Deferred by Senate Appropriations February 15th, 2024

SB 148 provide permissive authority to a governing body of a municipality or county to deny reissuance of an on-sale license not actively used.
Supported By Committee Signed by the Governor March 6th, 2024

SB 162 make an appropriation for the erection of the South Dakota Sioux Code Talker Memorial and to declare an emergency.
Supported By Committee Tabled by Joint Appropriations February 22nd, 2024

SB 180 modify provisions pertaining to unethical conduct and improper collection of fees relating to assistance or referrals in a veteran's benefits matter.
Supported by Committee Deferred by Senate Military and Veterans Affairs February 13th, 2024

SC 803 Honoring the outstanding military service of Major General Michael L. Place.
Supported By Committee Enrolled by Senate January 26th, 2024

If anyone wants more information on a particular bill listed above, please contact me at 605-988-4488 or mikemehlhaff@aim.com.

Thank you, Commander Steffen, for the opportunity to serve as Chairman for the Legislative Committee and thank you to all the members of the committee who worked to make this a highly successful year in the legislature for Veteran and Military related items.

Respectfully Submitted,
Mike Mehlhaff
Legislative Committee Chairman

2024 ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP REPORT

The membership committee is delighted to report an exceptional year. We met multiple times to establish a goal for South Dakota, initially setting it at 16,100. Following a July meeting with the National, our target was adjusted to 16,261. Our efforts redoubled after returning from Indianapolis. This year's motif, "The Eye of the Tiger," may have overstayed its welcome by the fall meetings, but it highlighted our collective effort. I attended all the Fall District meetings, underscoring that my role was that of a coach and cheerleader; the substantive work rested on your shoulders. By this point, you may be tired of my emails urging you to spare no effort. We've achieved all our goals save for the last two: 95% and 100%. We are currently at 94.8%. Your efforts this year are greatly appreciated; with one final push, we can hit 16,100 by June 30.

We also celebrated a victory in the Big 12 contest. I remember sending an email during the '2-minute warning,' calling for everyone's collaboration to secure the win. Out of the entire organization, only six departments triumphed. We competed with 16 other Departments in our division, and our success is a testament to your hard work.

Moreover, our float has been increasingly visible, participating in events such as the Castlewood Days Parade and the Elkton Harvest Day Parade. It also made an appearance at the Department Convention in Chamberlain. The float's durability was tested when it journeyed to Deadwood for the Mid-Winter meeting amidst a February snowstorm.

I want to express my profound gratitude to the leadership team, from Courtney to the post leaders, for their unwavering support this year. Although I've received numerous accolades, the real acknowledgment belongs to you, who have backed me in this endeavor. I concede that there have been challenging moments, especially now as we strive to support the budget with 16,100 members.

Thank you once more.

May God bless you and your families.

May God bless the United States of America.

May God bless the American Legion.

Bill Peters

2023-2024 SDAL PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT

The South Dakota Public Safety Committee enjoyed another great year. After the State Legion Convention, Dianne Johnson, Doug Feltman and I had the privilege to attend the South Dakota Youth Trooper Academy. Our committee met again on January 17th to select the winners of the “Law Enforcement Officer” of the Year; the “Firefighter of The Year”; and the “EMT” of the Year award winners.

South Dakota Youth Trooper Academy:

Again this year, we selected 24 outstanding young men and women, from South Dakota High Schools, to attend the 11th SDYTA. Unfortunately, we had one individual who was not able to attend so we graduated 23. Yet again, the SDHP did an outstanding job of hosting the Academy at the Law Enforcement Training Center in Pierre. Ten State Troopers from across the State volunteer to be away from their Duty Stations, family and friends, to come serve as instructors and as Mentors. The logistic duties are taken care of by SGT Schoenefeld and SGT Brandon Akron. These Troopers, somehow, squeeze these duties into their already very busy schedules.

This year we had multiple Mentors working at the Academy who are former graduates of this outstanding program. It is very rewarding to see these young Troopers engaged in a very professional manner, as they all do.

Recruits experience a very rigorous week of activities. From learning how to march, engaging in vigorous Physical activities, to learning the basics of the duties of Law Enforcement Officers. They also spend many hours with hands on activities such as stopping vehicles, drug interdiction, crash scene investigations, negotiating cars through the obstacle course on the Emergency Vehicle Operations Course and firing weapons on the pistol and rifle range.

On “Blue Cap” Day we had several Legion members and guests come to the Rifle Range to see the Recruits in action and to witness several demonstrations. Later in the evening the American Legion hosted another BBQ which is always a lot of fun for everyone.

The week is capped off by a very inspirational Graduation Ceremony at the Visitor Center near the reflection pond and the Memorials.

This year the American Legion \$500 “Outstanding Graduate Scholarship” winner was Sarah Poncelow from Wessington Springs. Congratulations Sarah!! Your Public Safety Committee would like to thank everyone for your support for this outstanding program. Because of our efforts, many of our graduates have become Law Enforcement Officers and or members of the Military. Others will gain a much better appreciation for Law Enforcement and what the American Legion is all about.

A special “Thank You” goes out to the District Commanders, or their designees, who work hard with Posts, applicants, scheduling and conducting interviews. Good work!!

The 2024 YTA will be held June 24th -28th. Announcement: “BLUE CAP DAY” 27 June. Please join us!

OF THE YEAR AWARDS:

Your SDALPSC met in January to select the LEO, FF, and EMT of the year recipients. Again, we did not receive many applications for these awards. These recognitions are very important to those “First Responders” who work to keep our communities safe. The L.E.O. and the FF of the year are designated, officially, by the National American Legion.

As a Public Safety Committee, we encourage each post to consider recognizing these public servants. There are some small communities who may not have many living in your community to select from. However, first responders can come from anywhere in your area. Also, there are numerous Law Enforcement agencies as well as rural or city fire departments to consider. EMT's also include Paramedics.

One issue we have had is the difficulty finding the proper documentation to support these applications. The instructions for filling out these applications are on the State website. We will be adding to the (sdlegion.org) website, a list of documentation required to accompany your applications. A reminder, it is not the responsibility of the supervisor of the nominee to fill out the application. Once you have submitted an application, it will be much easier the next time. Feel free to call any member of our committee and we would be happy to assist you.

This year's recipients of these awards are: "Law Enforcement Officer of the Year" Neville Smith, Neville was sponsored by the Hartford Post. "Firefighter of the Year" Richard Gruenwald, sponsored by the Redfield Post and Brian Hambek, sponsored by the Spearfish post.

Just as a Note, when a member of our committee has an applicant for one of these awards, we do not vote. The State Awards will be presented during the State convention this June in Pierre.

We look forward to an even better year in 2024-25.

Thank you,
Larry Price
Chairman
SDAL Public Safety Committee

2024 ANNUAL DEPARTMENT SCOUTING REPORT

Commander:

As a Boy Scouts of America Assistant Council Commissioner for the Black Hills Area Council and a Legionnaire, it has been an honor to serve as the chairman of the Department Scouting Committee this past year. Our committee includes Matt Lagerstrom, Fred Nelson, Richard MacDonald, and myself. The mission of the Boy Scouts of America is to prepare young people to make ethical and moral choices over their lifetimes by instilling in them the values of the Scout Oath and Scout Law. Scouting units in South Dakota and their local American Legion posts that sponsor them have impacted each other as well as the communities where they live. Scouts from the Sioux Council in the east and the Black Hills Area Council in the west produced a combined total of 56 Eagle Scouts this year. Their projects impacted local churches, state and national parks, local veteran cemeteries, VA hospitals, and various community centers. Unfortunately, this year we did not have an eligible candidate for American Legion Scout of the Year for South Dakota. The application specifies that any registered scout who is a member of a unit sponsored by the American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary unit, or Sons of The American Legion or who has parents or grandparents possessing an active membership in the American Legion family may apply.

On its 115th anniversary, Boys Scouts of America will undergo a name change to Scouting America. Although the new name should be used immediately, the official change will occur in February 2025. This name change will reflect the organization's commitment to welcoming every youth and family in America to experience the benefits of Scouting. Another change in scouting will be the membership and unit renewal process. For those American Legion posts that sponsor a scouting unit, you will now have an active process for those adult members applying to sponsor units. The change will allow charter organizations to know what adult members are participating in the units in addition to the assigned leadership. Also, the change will give another layer of protection to the youth participating in the program.

The values and commitment of the scouting organization are still intact and remain the same as it was back in 1919 when the American Legion began sponsoring scouting. The goal of this partnership is to strengthen our young people to become good, strong, Americans who support their country and take care of their families and themselves.

Chris Rendon
Scouting Committee Chairman

2023-2024 SONS OF THE AMERICAN LEGION ANNUAL REPORT

This 2023-2024 year has been a fun filled year. Right after the 2023 state convention our Detachment went to work. We chartered Gary SD right away then ended up with five more squadrons chartered. They are Egan, DeSmet, Box Elder, Winner, and Alcester. I attended all eight of the Fall District meetings along with all of the 8 Spring meetings. I was able to attend over half of our squadron meetings and drove over four thousand miles.

We are leading the Midwest region along with leading the nation in membership. WE have grown by 251 members this year and currently sit with 1862 members. We are at 115.58% membership and a renewal rate of 91.22%. Our detachment officers have put in a lot of work, and I could not be prouder of all their dedication and efforts that they have all devoted to growing our organization.

Wyatt, Detachment Vice Commander, and I were able to attend the wreath laying ceremony in Washington DC. We got to visit the WWII memorial, Korean memorial, Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Arlington Cemetery, and the Vietnam memorial. We laid our SD wreath at the Vietnam memorial in honor of Wyatt's cousin that lost his life during the war but also to honor all Vietnam Veterans.

We had a Pre-DEC meeting for our State Convention in Mitchell and went over all our awards that we will be handing out at our 2024 convention. We will be having a My Legion and membership workshop at the convention to get our members familiarized with each of them. We wrote a resolution to put District Commanders in place for each District. We feel that this will help with communication and getting information to all our squadrons.

What a momentous year this has been, and we are looking forward to having a great State Convention and hope for a record-breaking attendance. We hope to finish this year strong and on top of the nation. If we end up being on top of the nation, we are planning to have a celebration in Chamberlain where we hope all squadrons can attend and celebrate our victory.

Detachment Commander Shane Lamer

2024 TRAINING COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT

Commander,

It has been a privilege to serve as the Training Committee Chair with the following members: PDC Fred Nelson, Kevin Morello, Krisma DeWitt, Kevin Hemple, and Bill Peters.

The Training Committee is a Standing Committee of the Department of South Dakota American Legion as approved by resolution at the 2021 Department Convention in Huron, SD.

The Training Committee met several times through zoom this year and has completed the following goals:

Provided the following classes at the 2024 Mid-winter conference: MyLegion: Kevin Morello and Bill Peters, American Legion Reports & Awards- Kevin Hempel, Be the One & S.A.V.E.Training – David Nilsen, SCAMS – Fred Nelson, and American 250– Ben Jones

The committee held the second annual SDALC in Chamberlian, SD on April 27-28, 2024. The following classes were taught; Mentorship – Fred Nelson, Running A Meeting – Krisma DeWitt, Resolution Writing – Kevin Hempel, Train-The-Trainer – Doug Harris, American Legion Organizational Structure – Kevin Morello, and Capstone Project – Jack French. SDALC was a success and had five graduates; Linda Hessaa, Post 266; Patrick Branco, Post 15; Gregg Burrer, Post 189; Arlo Jurrens, Post 88; Marv Tisdall, Post 315.

The 3rd Annual SDALC is being planned for 2025.

The Training Committee encourages all Legionnaires to provide input, suggestions, and ideas for classes, instructional methods, and instructors.

Respectfully submitted,
Jack French
Training Committee Chair

2024 ANNUAL TRUST FUND REPORT

Commander,

This past year has been one of change and so far it has been very good for the American Legion trust fund. The transferred balance was \$636,622 and the present balance is \$804,854. On 3/27/2024, \$103,063 was added to the account from other Legion investments. The net account balance is \$701,791 for a growth of \$65,169 for the year. The current asset allocation is considered conservative/growth with cash at 2%, income at 48%, large cap at 47% and small and midcap at 3%. The overall growth this past year has been around 10%.

The committee met this past year and agreed that these funds can be used for whatever needs the American Legion has for them. The market has been good this past year and we hope it will continue.

Working with Travis and Taylor has been outstanding, and we look forward to working with them in the future.

Respectfully submitted,
Randy Rakness, Chairman, Trust Committee

2024 ANNUAL VA&R REPORT

Commander,

On behalf of the Department Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation (VA&R) Commission, which members are Chairman Warren Aas of Watertown, Vice Chairman PDC Tim Jurgens of Milbank, Noel Cummins of Milbank, Jim Childers of Spearfish, Brian Havard of Salem, Carole Gregg of Rosebud, Gary Schumacher of De Smet, and Matthew Pillar of Lake Preston, it gives me great pleasure to present the following Department VA&R Commission report.

The Department VA&R Commission meets virtually once per year via Microsoft Teams with additional meetings called at the discretion of the commission chairman.

There are numerous awards every post in our department can win throughout the year and be recognized for their achievement either at our MidWinter Conference or on stage at our annual department convention. Is your post aware that it can submit for the Department Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation (VA&R) Award for Excellence? This award is open to every post in our department regardless of goal size. The award will recognize one post in our department each year for their outstanding work and accomplishments in VA&R. All posts can apply for the award and we encourage all posts to submit for the award. The criteria for the award is posted on our department website or you may contact State Headquarters for assistance. The deadline for all post applications to State Headquarters for this award is May 1st of each year. The winning post will be recognized on stage at the state convention with a beautiful plaque and group photo to commemorate their accomplishments. Please ask your post leadership to apply for the award.

As a member of the National VA&R Commission, I had the privilege of attending the Washington Conference in February 2024 in Washington D.C. to listen and participate in the national VA&R agenda. PDC Tim Jurgens and Noel Cummins, both of Milbank, and members of the department VA&R Commission, were also in attendance. We listen to many speakers and take action on several resolutions dealing with veterans' benefits, veterans' health as well as the National Cemeteries. We make a point to provide all the information we can get my hands on from our meetings and make it available to all VA&R Commission members in our department.

Temporary Financial Assistance (TFA) is available for any veteran in your community that may have fallen on hard times and needs some financial assistance to get back on their feet. TFA is generally one-time grant money and other requirements apply. Your post commander has more details about TFA.

If you are a veteran and would like to check into getting enrolled in the VA for healthcare, we encourage you to stop in and see your local Tribal or County Veterans Service Officer in your county for assistance or contact our American Legion Department Service Officer.

Thank you, Commander Steffen, for allowing me the privilege to serve as the Chairman of the Department Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Commission during your year.

Respectfully submitted,
Warren L. Aas,
Chairman, VA&R Commission

2024 ANNUAL VAVS REPORT

I would like to thank Commander Courtney Steffen for the appointment to Chairman of the Veterans Affairs Volunteer Services (VAVS) Committee this year.

I would also like to thank our VA Hospital Representatives: Sioux Falls VA Hospital VAVS Representative Chris Fischer; Hot Springs VA Medical Center and State Veterans Home VAVS Representative Angela Koch; and our Ft. Meade VA Medical Center VAVS Representative Buck DeWeese. The VA Hospital Representatives are the ones who make sure our veterans get additional help from the South Dakota American Legion. I would also like to thank the additional following members of the committee: Dan Wyatt, Dupree Chavez, Joe Sande.

In the past we had asked for donations for the popcorn fund, but these funds are used for many more necessary items than just popcorn. Therefore, we decided to rename the fund “VAVS Recreational Activities Fund” to more accurately indicate what the funds are used for. They are used to purchase toiletries, clothing, stamps, envelopes, backpacks, tumblers, etc.

I would like to give a big THANK YOU to all Legion Posts, Auxiliaries, Sons of American Legion Squadrons and the American Legion Rider Chapters for your very generous donation of time and monies that go for a great cause, the Veterans!

Respectfully submitted,
Charemon Dunham
VAVS Committee Chairman

2024 ANNUAL SOUTH DAKOTA VETERANS COUNCIL

To the Commander, South Dakota American Legion

Executive Summary

The South Dakota Veterans Council (SDVC) has continuously advocated for and supported the veteran community across South Dakota throughout the past year. This report details the council's dedicated efforts in legislative advocacy, veteran support programs, and community engagement, reflecting their commitment to enhancing the lives of veterans and their families.

Council Composition and Meetings

The SDVC, representing multiple veteran organizations, including The American Legion, Disabled American Veterans, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Vietnam Veterans of America, and the Military Order of the Purple Heart, held regular meetings throughout the year to discuss and strategize on various veteran-related issues.

Key Activities and Accomplishments

Veteran Advocacy and Legislative Efforts: The council participated in several legislative roundtables, an annual reception, and supported significant legislative initiatives to improve veteran benefits and services.

- **Veterans Programs:** Enhanced programs such as Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E) services, support for disabled veterans, and the administration of community and healthcare programs were highlighted throughout the year.
- **Meetings outside Sioux Falls:** The SDVC has primarily met in Sioux Falls. This past year, meetings were held at various locations across the state.

Challenges and Resolutions

- **State Veterans Home:** Updates were received explaining the collaborative efforts with educational institutions and local agencies to improve recruitment and retention and addressed challenges in staffing at the state veterans' homes.
- **Legislative Hurdles:** The council faced challenges in legislative advocacy, particularly regarding veteran benefits and healthcare provisions, which were tackled through strategic advocacy and public engagement.
- **Connecting with Rural Veterans:** The SDVC needs to improve its communications with the veterans service organizations it represents and through other avenues.

Future Outlook

- **Expanding Veteran Services:** Plans to expand veteran services into new areas, including mental health and long-term care.
- **Legislative Priorities:** Continued focus on veteran-friendly legislation.

Conclusion

The SDVC remains committed to advocating for and supporting South Dakota's Veterans through comprehensive service programs, legislative efforts, and community engagement. The collaboration of veteran service organizations is pivotal to our achievements and ongoing projects.

Respectfully submitted,
Fred Nelson, SDVC TAL Representative