

Yearbook

of

South Houston Post No. 490

The American Legion

(Houston, Texas)

For 2025 – 2026

By Rene Sanchez

Introduction

The American Legion has long served as one of the nation's most influential veteran-service organizations, advancing benefits, citizenship, youth development, and community support since its congressional charter in 1919.

Nationally, the organization's reach spans more than 12,000 posts and roughly 1.6 million members, reflecting a durable model of advocacy and local service that continues to shape outcomes for veterans, servicemembers, and families.

In Texas, that mission has translated into sustained growth, charitable work, and civic leadership for more than a century, reinforcing the state's role as a major contributor to The American Legion's national impact.

Within that context, South Houston American Legion Post No. 490 stands out for both legacy and momentum: founded by World War II veterans in 1943 and chartered in 1945, the Post has remained focused on veteran support, community partnership, and organizational continuity.

Even after the loss of its facility in a 2021 accidental fire, Post 490 sustained its operations and expanded its reach, demonstrating unusual resilience and disciplined leadership during a period that could have stalled many organizations.

During 2025–2026, Post 490 reported membership of 1,020, placing it among the strongest posts in Texas and underscoring the scale of its current influence.

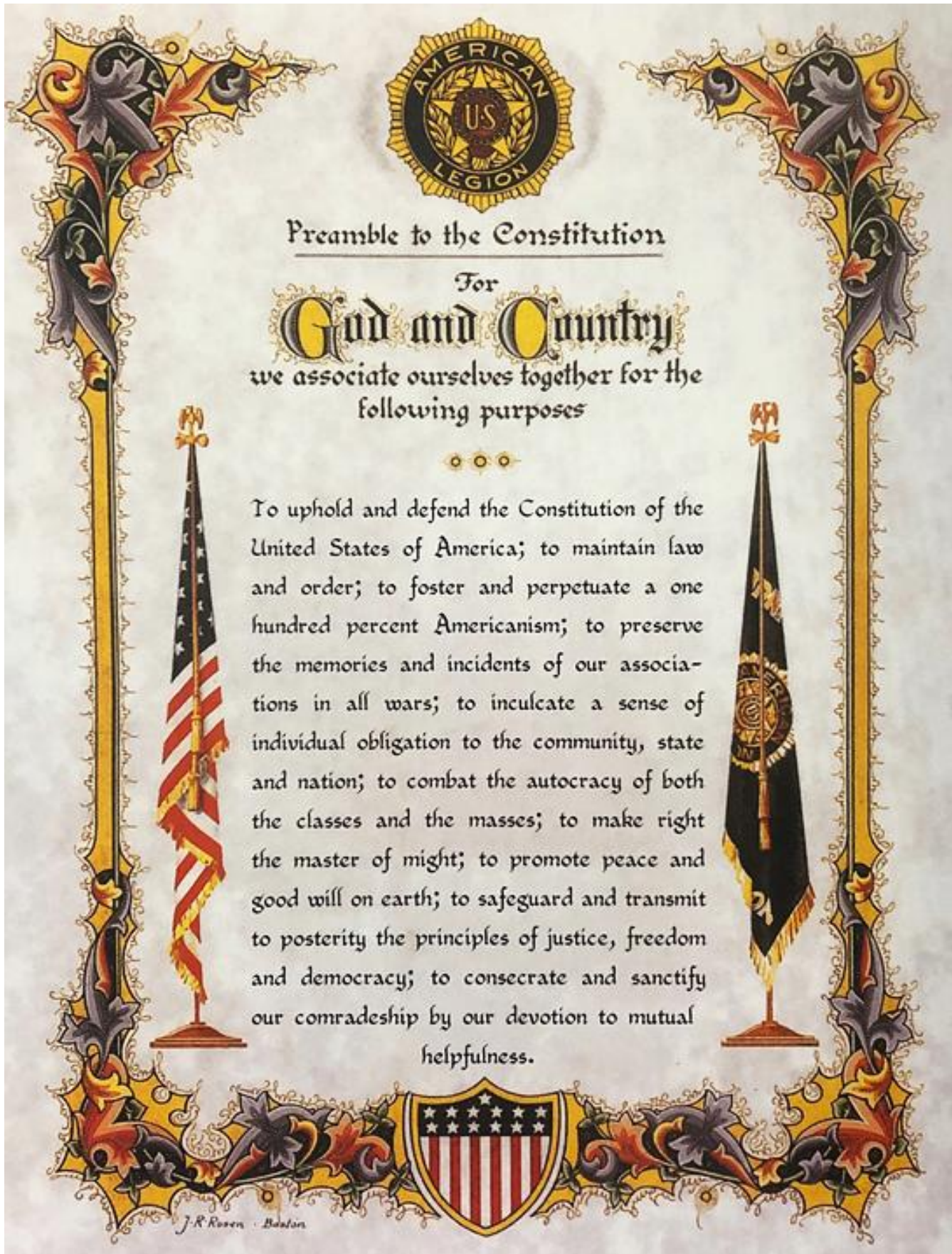
This yearbook documents how Post 490 translated that strength into action through leadership development, membership growth, community engagement, partnerships, and forward progress toward rebuilding its long-term home.

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Preamble of the Constitution



Chapter 1 – Roster of Post Officers

Commander – Rene Sanchez



Mr. Sanchez's diverse experiences – serving as a United States Army Infantry Platoon Leader, Mathematics teacher, and US Government Accountant – provide him with a comprehensive perspective on leadership.

Mr. Sanchez was drafted in 1972 and served until 1984, completing two tours in Europe during the Cold War era, including in the occupied city of Berlin. He achieved the rank of Staff Sergeant, occupying leadership roles within the infantry for the last seven years of his service. His ambition to excel as a leader led him to compete for and graduate from the distinguished United States Army Infantry Non-Commissioned Officer Academy at Fort Benning, Georgia. During his service, he received numerous awards, including the Army Occupation Medal, two Army Commendation Medals, and the Army Meritorious Service Medal.

Following his military career, Mr. Sanchez earned a bachelor's degree in mathematics from the University of Texas at Pan American. He taught Mathematics for two years at Kenneth White Junior High in Mission, Texas, and subsequently at a high school in Fort Lupton, Colorado. Transitioning careers, he pursued and graduated with a bachelor's degree in accounting, achieving Magna cum Laude honors.

Over a twenty-two-year civil service career, Mr. Sanchez worked as an Accountant for two federal agencies, including the Department of Interior's (DOI) Office of Surface Mining (OSM) in Denver, Colorado, DOI Headquarters in Washington D.C., and at NASA's Johnson Space Center. At DOI, he advanced from entry-level accountant (GS-4) to Executive Assistant (GS-14) for OSM's Chief Financial Officer in Washington D.C., gaining expertise in Financial Management, including Appropriation Law—specific legal opinions and decisions regarding federal funding usage and potential violations.

At NASA, he held the position of Deputy Chief for Travel and Payroll Accounting, where his team ensured compliance with Federal Travel Regulations and U.S. Office of Personnel Management Policies. He earned several awards, including the NASA Silver Achievement Medal and the prestigious NASA Exceptional Service Medal.

In November 2023, he was elected Commander of Post 490. Under his leadership, Post 490 achieved the largest membership in Texas and received Recognition of Post Excellence from the National American Legion Commander. He was subsequently re-elected as Commander in June 2024 and 2025.

1st Vice – David Witucki (*Past Post Commander*)



2nd Vice – Manuel Escobedo



Adjutant – Jesse Martinez



Finance Officer – Wendell F. Denney



Chaplain – Mike Phillips



Judge Advocate – Phillip T. Contella (22nd District Commander)



Historian – Rene Sanchez

Sergeant at Arms – Nickolas Hughes



Assistant Sergeant at Arms – Casey Coyne



Executive Committee Man # 2 – Earl McLearen



Service Officer – Nicholas Hughes

Chapter 2 – Roster of Chairpersons

Chairperson Board of Trustees – Earl McLearen

Trustees

Phillip T. Contella
Rene Sanchez

Chairperson Baseball – Jesse Martinez/Owen Thornhill

Chairperson Finance Committee – Wendell Denney

Members

Eliu Rojas
Terry Contella
Owen Thornhill
Rene Sanchez



2023-2024 Riders Officers

Position	Name
“Acting” Chairman	Phillip T. Contella
Vice Chairman	Phillip T. Contella
Secretary	Vie Denney
Treasurer	Wendell F. Denney
Chaplain	Susie Tristan
Sergeant at Arms	VACANT
Historian	Sheri Contella
Road Captain	Earl McLearen

Chapter 3 – One-Year Post History

May 14, 2025: South Houston American Legion Post 490 Installation of Officers Ceremony

District 22nd Vice Commander Jim McGuire, serving as Installing Officer, administers the oath for newly elected members, asking them to formally pledge to "faithfully and impartially perform the duties of the office" and support The American Legion's goals and principles.



Commander Jim McGuire installs the 2025-2026 Post 490 Officers



Evan Mathieu Wiltz – Shadow Creek High School

Nick Seigle – Energy Institute High School

Gavin Cipriano Gomez – Shadow Creek High School

AUSTIN, Tex. – The American Legion, Department of Texas, announced today that the three individuals named above have successfully graduated from the American Legion Texas Boys State program. American Legion Post 490 was privileged to sponsor these young men.

Begun in 1935, Boys State is a unique program that educates future leaders about government, civics, and patriotism in a “learn by doing” environment. Each delegate has just finished his junior year of high school and was hand-picked by teachers, counselors, and local American Legion posts throughout Texas to attend this one-week seminar.

During the week, the delegates were evenly split into fictional parties of the Nationalist and Federalists. Each party drafted party platforms, elected party officials, nominated candidates via primary elections, and contested a general election against the rival party and its candidates. The delegates ran for many kinds of offices including state, district, county, and city offices. Those elected to the House of Representatives and Senate spent the week drafting, debating, and passing bills on a wide range of social and economic issues.

This year the delegates heard from dozens of distinguished guest speakers, including Texas Railroad Commissioner Christi Craddick, retired U.S. Navy Vice Admiral Joe Maguire, retired U.S. Army Major General Tony Cucolo, and several members of the Texas House of Representatives and Texas Senate speaking on topics of leadership and public service.

On Wednesday, June 11, Texas Boys State enjoyed a parade from the University of Texas at Austin campus to the Texas State Capitol, where they toured the building and dropped in on their hometown representatives’ offices.

For more information on American Legion Texas Boys State, visit www.TexasBoysState.com.

July 14, 2025: South Houston Legionnaire Honored as Recruiter of the Year

David Witucki Sets New Standard for Membership Recruitment

In a heartfelt display of dedication to community and country, David Witucki of South Houston Post 490 has been named the 2025 American Legion Recruiter of the Year for the Department of Texas. This prestigious recognition was presented at the Department of Texas American Legion Annual Convention on July 12, 2026. This was his ninth consecutive recruiter of the year award.

Witucki's efforts have set a remarkable benchmark: in 2025 alone, he recruited an astounding 162 new members to the organization. His outstanding work was formally acknowledged by the Department of Texas Commander and the National Commander—underscoring the far-reaching impact of his service.



David Witucki displaying his three awards



Distinguished Membership in the Gold Brigade

Legionnaires who bring in 50 or more members in a year are inducted into the **elite** Gold Brigade, a mark of extraordinary achievement. Witucki has achieved this honor an impressive **nine** consecutive times. He earned the title of **Master Recruiter**—a distinction he wears proudly on his Legion cap.



David Witucki Master Recruiter Colors

In 2018, David achieved a remarkable milestone by being honored with the National Recruiter of the Year award, following his unprecedented recruitment of 578 new members—a feat that set a new standard in excellence. He replicated this extraordinary accomplishment in 2020, once again earning national distinction after enlisting over 200 new members, further solidifying his legacy as a transformative leader in recruitment.

Leading with Integrity and Passion

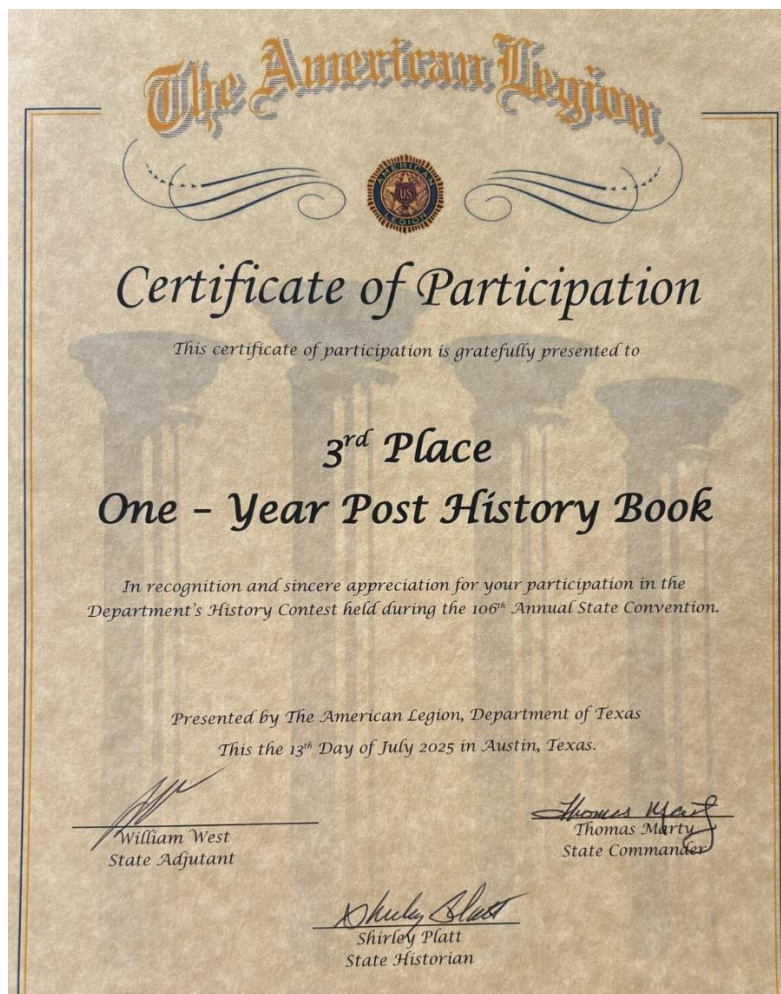
Witucki's approach is rooted in confidence, knowledge, and a genuine sense of service. He is always prepared to guide potential members, addressing questions and dispelling any misinformation, while exemplifying professionalism and patriotism. Above all, he never fails to thank veterans for their service, embodying the core values of "Veterans Strengthening America."

Strength in Numbers Benefits the Community

Witucki's tireless recruiting has tangible results for South Houston Post 490 and the broader veteran community. Every new member strengthens the Legion's ability to advocate for veterans' healthcare, support troops, and promote educational opportunities for children.

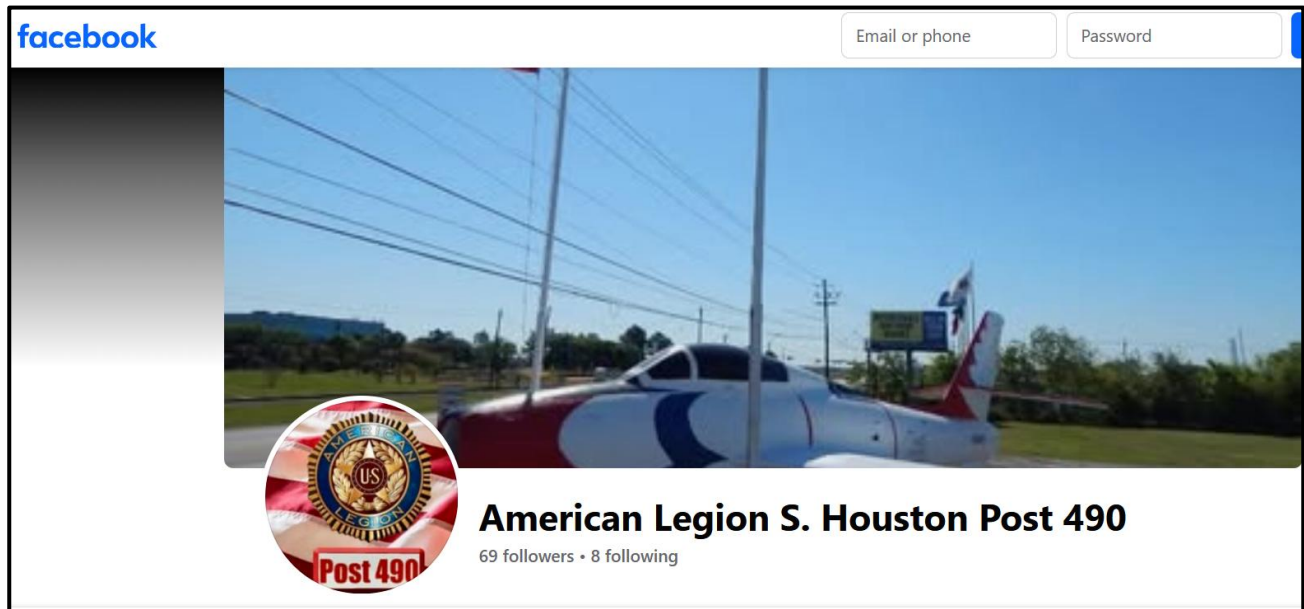
South Houston takes great pride in David Witucki's accomplishments, which serve as a shining example of the positive impact one person's service can have on the lives of many.

July 14, 2025: Post 490 Yearbook Awarded Third Place at Department Convention



3rd Place Certificate of Participation

August 15, 2025: South Houston American Legion Post 490 Facebook Page



We are thrilled to announce the launch of the official South Houston American Legion Post 490 Facebook page—a dynamic online home where Legionnaires, veterans, and supporters can come together as a true family. Here, you’ll find the latest news, uplifting stories, and details about upcoming events that celebrate service, camaraderie, and community spirit. Join us and be part of something truly meaningful!

We owe special thanks to Richard Hughes, whose dedication and vision brought this Facebook page to life. Richard’s creativity, hard work, and commitment to strengthening connections within Post 490 have paved the way for a vibrant, welcoming digital community. His contributions will be felt by every member who finds inspiration and fellowship here—thank you, Richard, for making this dream a reality!

To continue Richard’s legacy of excellence, Casey Coyne and Earl McLearen have been entrusted as Post 490’s Facebook Managers. They will ensure that our online community remains a warm, respectful, and engaging space for all.

August 19, 2025: South Houston Post 490 Announces Membership in the South Belt-Ellington Chamber of Commerce



Lisa Holbrook, Casey Coyne, David Witucki, Wendell Denney, Rene Sanchez, Nicholas Hughes, David Boriack, Owen Thornhill, Earl McLearen

South Belt-Ellington Chamber of Commerce Director Lisa Holbrook hosts ribbon cutting ceremony for its newest member

South Houston American Legion Post 490 extends its gratitude to the South Belt-Ellington Chamber of Commerce for welcoming the post as its newest member.

The collaboration between the South Belt-Ellington Chamber of Commerce and the American Legion presents an excellent opportunity to make meaningful contributions to our communities. Through support for Post 490, the Chamber of Commerce will not only further the tradition of service but also enhance goodwill and strengthen its brand reputation among both residents and veterans. As partners, the Chamber's presence will be highlighted in our weekly publications, reaching over one-thousand Legionnaires and their families—each representing stories of commitment and resilience.

The Four Pillars of the American Legion—Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation, National Security, Americanism, and Children & Youth—closely align with the South Belt-Ellington Chamber of Commerce's dedication to advancing business and community advocacy.

Together, we are poised to turn challenges into opportunities and continue improving the lives of veterans and the broader community. The South Belt-Ellington Chamber of Commerce's engagement will create a lasting positive impact and demonstrate our shared commitment to excellence and service.

Post 490 expresses sincere appreciation for the opportunity to become part of this esteemed organization.

August 20, 2025: Honoring Service: The Presentation of a Burial Flag to Private John Martinez's Family



Figure 1 Wendell Denney, Owen Thornhill, Rene Sanchez, Terry Contella, John Martinez Family Members, Eliu Rojas, Jesse Martinez

The American Legion, as a recognized Veterans Service Organization, collaborates with the Department of Veterans Affairs to facilitate access to benefits for veterans and their families, including burial flags. After verifying Pvt. John Martinez's eligibility, Post 490 was able to provide a burial flag directly to his family.

"Private John Anthony Martinez II enlisted in the United States Army in July of 2016. He attended Basic Combat Training and Advance Individual Training at Fort Benning, GA, and was awarded the Primary Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) of 19D (Cavalry Scout) ..."



Eliu Rojas conducts the presentation

A ceremony took place at the 136th Expeditionary Signal Battalion area at Ellington Field Joint Reserve Base, during which officers from South Houston American Legion Post 490 presented a flag to the parents of Private John Martinez. Legionnaire Eliu Rojas conducted the presentation and delivered the corresponding address. The event was attended by an official representing the Department of Veterans Affairs.

September 1, 2025: South Houston American Legion Post 490 Labor Day Party

Post 490's Labor Day Party functioned as both a community celebration and a practical membership-strengthening event, bringing together families, supporters, and Legion affiliates in a highly visible local gathering. Hosted by Cheers Pub in Friendswood, the event combined hospitality, entertainment, and member engagement in a way that reinforced fellowship while supporting fundraising and renewals.



Jesse Martinez (center) with Legionnaires, Auxiliary and friends



David Witucki recruiting/renewing members



Auxiliary members: Sheri Contella and Siomara Sanchez

This was not just any end-of-summer bash—it was a vibrant gathering where neighbors became friends, families laughed together, and the spirit of community shone. The American Legion honored the hard work and dedication of Legionnaires, Auxiliary, Son of American Legion, and the Riders, making this party a meaningful way to mark Labor Day.



Children at Play



Family Members and Friends

Labor Day was marked by a meaningful celebration of our community's spirit and resilience. Post 490's event featured activities suitable for children, effective fundraising initiatives, and recognition gifts for lifetime members and those who renewed their memberships through 2026.



Wendell Denney and company selling tickets



Carter Gresset drawing with Wendell and Jesse observing



Children at play



Family Members and Friends

We would like to extend our sincere appreciation to our DJ, AROD, for his contributions.



Legionnaires Rene Munoz and Arnold Rodriguez (DJ)

We also wish to extend our heartfelt gratitude to Cheers Pub, whose extraordinary graciousness made this celebration possible. Their warm hospitality and generous support elevated the entire event, providing not just excellent food but an atmosphere of genuine welcome and camaraderie.



Cheers Pub patio in Friendswood Tx

Overall, the event demonstrated Post 490's ability to convert a holiday gathering into tangible organizational value through visibility, volunteer coordination, fundraising activity, and stronger community ties.



Children at play



Earl McLearn and Casey Coyne



Family Members and Friends

September 18, 2025: United in Flavor and Fellowship: American Legion Post 490 at the Night of Cuisine

The South Belt-Ellington Chamber of Commerce's annual Night of Cuisine gave Post 490 a strong visibility opportunity in a high-traffic civic setting at the Lone Star Flight Museum. The spotlight table positioned the Post alongside local businesses and community leaders, supporting outreach, relationship-building, and broader recognition of its veteran-service mission.



Robin Lott, Vie Denney, Sheri Contella and Siomara Sanchez



Nick Hughes, Rene Sanchez, Wendell Denney and Casey Coyne at spotlight table

Twenty-eight distinguished restaurants showcased their signature dishes, inviting guests to savor an array of flavors and experiences. The event buzzed with excitement as attendees mingled, sampled exceptional foods and beverages, and shared in the spirit of fellowship. Door prizes added a spark of joy throughout the gathering, while every moment contributed toward a greater cause—proceeds from the event will fund scholarships for graduating seniors, helping nurture future leaders.



Lone Star Museum exhibits



2Guests sampling foods and mingling



Vietnam Veteran enjoying the evening



Guests networking and mingling

For American Legion Post 490—including Legionnaires, Riders, SAL, and Auxiliary—this evening was more than just outreach; it was an opportunity to inspire, connect, and demonstrate the vital role we play in uplifting our community. Through meaningful conversations and new partnerships with local businesses, Post 490 can continue to grow, thrive, and extend its positive impact.



Rene and Siomara Sanchez, Sheri and Terry Contella, Vie and Wendell Denney, Robing Lott, Casey Coyne, Earl McLearen, Nicholas Hughes

We are deeply grateful to the South Belt-Ellington Chamber of Commerce and all their sponsors for their steadfast support. Let this event remind us that together, we can accomplish extraordinary things—and as we look ahead, may Post 490 be motivated to embrace each new opportunity to serve, engage, and lead with unwavering dedication.

September 20, 2025: South Houston American Legion Post 490 participates in Texian Navy Day Event

The Texas Navy Association's event at Pier 21 in Galveston gave Post 490 a meaningful platform to participate in a historic civic commemoration while increasing its visibility among veterans, families, and regional partners. The event connected heritage, public engagement, and organizational presence in a way that aligned well with the Post's broader community strategy.



US Navy Warship



US Navy Presentation of Colors

Admiral Scott, President of the Texas Navy Association, extended a heartfelt invitation—through Eliu Rojas of the Children of Fallen Soldiers Relief Fund and Post 490—to veterans across our community. Thanks to Eliu Rojas, the invitation reached South Houston American Legion Post 490, encouraging their active participation in this historic commemoration.



American Legion Post 490 colors on display during parade



Nicholas Hughes and Family

The program was a stirring celebration: a solemn wreath-laying ceremony at the First Navy of Texas Monument, an exhilarating boat parade, a powerful military flyover, and a wealth of maritime exhibits that educated and inspired all in attendance. The spirit of camaraderie filled the air as Legionnaires, Auxiliary members, Sons of the American Legion, Riders, and their families came together, enjoying the festivities as the ship, the Observer,

sailed proudly across Galveston Bay. Our Post 490 was honored to showcase both the Department of Texas American Legion 22nd District and Post 490 flags for all to see—a true testament to our pride and unity.



Parade Spectators



Parade Participants



Parade Participants

We extend our deepest gratitude to the Ship’s Captain, his exceptional crew, and Loadmaster Don Nicolson for their outstanding hospitality. Their generous provision of delicious food and beverages made everyone feel welcome and valued.



Eliu Rojas, Loadmaster Don Nicolson, Wendell Denney and crewmember



Terry Contella, Eliu Rojas and Rene Sanchez

The event’s value extended beyond attendance: it reinforced partnerships, showcased Post 490’s public-facing presence, and demonstrated how ceremonial participation can strengthen both reputation and member engagement.



Tyler Trahan, Carter Gresset, Rene, Ilana and Siomara Sanchez and Stephanie Hollis



Legionnaires, Auxiliary and family

October 14, 2025: Community Kindness: South Houston American Legion Post 490 and Partners Uplift Local Families

Pamela Cavazo, a Soldiers and Family Readiness Center specialist (SFRS) at Ellington Field Joint Reserve Base exemplified the true spirit of service by coordinating a donation of much-needed school supplies to David Witucki, First Vice Commander of South Houston American Legion Post 490.

This act was far more than the provision of resources—it was a powerful symbol of two organizations bound by a steadfast commitment to supporting and uplifting others. By embracing a shared mission, SFRS and the American Legion not only offer outreach but also weave a fabric of mutual support that extends across service members, their families, and the entire community.



SFRS Brochure



Vie Denney, Sarah's House Director and Sheri Contella

The ripple effects of their generosity reached even further as **Auxiliary Unit 490** distributed these supplies during their annual school supply drive, amplifying their impact on local families. Auxiliary Unit 490 partnered with **Sarah's House** - a place of hope and healing for those rebuilding their lives. Each contribution is a step toward resilience.

Together, **SFRS, the American Legion, Auxiliary, and Sarah's House** form a compassionate network, illustrating how collective kindness strengthens communities and inspires hope for all.

October 15, 2025: Acts of Compassion: The American Legion Post 490's Enduring Commitment to Community Service

The South Houston American Legion Post stands as a true example of what it means to serve and support one another, especially in times of hardship. When a fellow Legionnaire—a disabled Vietnam Combat Veteran—tragically lost his home to a fire; Post 490's unwavering dedication was evident as his Marine flag - which remained flying - symbolizing strength and resilience through adversity.

The Post connected him with the Department Service Officer and other helpful agencies, ensuring he had access to crucial resources. Going even further, Post 490 Terry Contella (Judge Advocate) and Earl McClearen (Board of Trustees Chair) purchased and delivered a much-needed appliance to his temporary home. This thoughtful gesture brought comfort and hope during a challenging time, and the veteran was deeply grateful for the support his fellow Legionnaires provided.

Stories like these highlight the incredible impact that joining the American Legion can have—not only for veterans in need, but for the entire community. By coming together, we can offer practical assistance, compassion, and the reassurance that no one is ever alone. If you know a veteran that is seeking a meaningful way to give back and make a real difference, tell him or her to join the Legion. Their commitment could change someone's life and strengthen our community's spirit of service and solidarity.



Veteran's home engulfed in flames

October 16, 2025: Spreading Holiday Cheer: American Legion 490 Supports Seniors

In a heartwarming gesture of generosity, the South Houston American Legion Post 490 stepped up to make the holiday season brighter by donating funds so that seniors at the Friendswood Senior Center can enjoy festive Christmas dinners together at Luby's. Their kindness not only nourished bodies but also lifted spirits, showcasing the power of community and compassion in action.



Friendswood Senior Center Director and Rene Sanchez

October 18-19, 2025: Community, Patriotism, and Aviation Take Flight at American Legion Post 490 Airshow Viewing Event



Casey Coyne, Owen Thornhill and Nick Hughes posting the colors



Aircraft flying above the military flags

The American Legion Post 490 Airshow Viewing event, held over the weekend of October 18th and 19th, proved to be an unforgettable celebration of community spirit and patriotism. While attendees may have missed the U.S. military aircraft, the event soared to new heights thanks to the dedication of the American Legion Post 490 Family—including the Auxiliary, SAL, Riders, and Legionnaires—who transformed the venue into a prime viewing spot filled with delicious food and fantastic music.

Guests were enthralled by a packed schedule, highlighted by the breathtaking maneuvers of vintage historic aircraft and the exhilarating TORA! TORA! TORA! Reenactment. The energy and excitement were palpable, creating an atmosphere that brought everyone together and celebrated aviation history in style.



Tora! Tora! Reenactment



Viewer observing aircraft

On Sunday, the Post 490 Family extended a special welcome to fifty veterans from the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center, offering them an experience filled with delicious meals, uplifting music, and a deeply patriotic atmosphere. Smiles, laughter, and heartfelt moments were shared, making memories that will be cherished for years to come.



The Miller Lite Bunch Team



Parking Lot Volunteers

This annual tradition could not shine without the remarkable contributions of so many individuals. Special recognition goes to **Casey and Amber Coyne** for their tireless leadership and vision.

To the **Miller Lite Bunch Team** for donating their time and effort to provide outstanding meals, including a complimentary breakfast for volunteers. **DJ Rod** kept spirits high and toes tapping with his fantastic music selection.



The Miller Lite Bunch Team



DJ and Legionnaire Arnold Rodriguez

Above all, the commitment of **every volunteer truly inspired**, reminding us of the power of coming together for a greater cause.



Amber Coyne, Siomara Sanchez and Diana Aguilar



Manuel (Sgt. Scooby) Escobedo and Loretta Balboa

As the weekend ended, the sense of camaraderie and celebration lingered, leaving everyone already looking forward to next year's airshow. With memories made, friendships strengthened, and hearts full, anticipation is building for an even greater event ahead. Mark, your calendar - next year promises to be even more spectacular!



Casey Coyne at the Membership Drive Table



Wendell Denney and David Witucki selling tickets

October 23, 2025: Board of Trustees selected EGA as the General Contractor for the Building Construction



Architectural Design of Future Building

The Board of Trustees had carefully selected EGA Construction Services, a respected veteran-owned firm, as General Contractor. We had signed a pre-construction contract for a smooth process.



Rene Sanchez, Earl McLearen, Terry Contella and General Contractor

November 7-8, 2025: The 15th Annual Salute for Service & First Responders (STS&FR) 2025 Celebration

SSG Eliu Rojas (Ret), President of the Texas Chapter for Children of Fallen Soldiers Relief Fund, representing founder Becky Campbell, welcomed the entire American Legion Post 490 Family to a dinner generously provided by Elks Lodge #2322 in Kemah, Texas. The Friday evening event set the tone for a broader weekend of recognition and fellowship for veterans and their families.

Afterwards, veterans and their families were treated to a heartfelt Veterans Breakfast and Boardwalk Adventure on November 8th, once again courtesy of the Elks Lodge #2322.



Siomara and Rene Sanchez



Estella and Owen Thornhill

On November 9th, the celebration featured a delightful brunch aboard Landry's Fantasia, a beautiful yacht offering a relaxing and reflective atmosphere to honor those who serve.



Estella Thornhill, Robin Lott and Diana Aguilar

November 8, 2025: The first Veterans Day Party at Parker Williams Branch Library

The American Legion Auxiliary Unit 490, Post 490 and fellow veterans were invited to this event, which featured an exceptionally warm, welcoming, and inspiring environment. Attendees thoroughly enjoyed themselves and appreciated the thoughtfully planned agenda, especially the fun educational games that brought everyone together and fostered an intense sense of camaraderie.



Post Commander Sanchez speaking



Veterans, Legionnaires and Auxiliary members participating in activities

Post 490 expresses profound thanks to Elyssa Peterson, the Adult Programming Librarian, and her dedicated staff for their outstanding commitment to honoring veterans. Their efforts made a significant impact, showing that each detail was carefully considered and executed with respect. The work they do truly matters, and together, Post 490 believes we can continue to inspire and uplift each other and our wider community.



Veterans speaking to community members about his service

November 17, 2025: American Legion Post 490 and Auxiliary Unit 490 Volunteer at VA Event

On November 17th, the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center teamed up with Combined Arms to host a drive-through event offering free turkey dinners, complete with sides and dessert.

Members of American Legion Post 490 and Auxiliary Unit 490 helped distribute meals to 1,200 veterans. Their efforts included quickly loading heavy turkeys into cars, managing traffic flow, and—most importantly—welcoming and thanking veterans for their service.

We appreciate our volunteers for their dedication and support; their energy and hands-on involvement made this event possible.



Rene Sanchez, volunteer and Nick Hughes



Rene Sanchez assisting other volunteers



Siomara Sanchez

December 13, 2025: DJ Arnold's Annual Christmas Toy Drive

On December 13th, DJ Arnold filled the season with hope and happiness at his Annual Christmas Toy Drive, delivering toys and smiles to local Women's Family Shelters. The American Legion Post 490 Family, together with generous neighbors, came together to lift spirits and make a real difference. Mr. Arnold, our cherished Post 490 member and favorite DJ, showed us the true meaning of giving—and inspired everyone to join in the celebration of kindness.



Rene Sanchez, Earl McLearen, Arnold Rodriguez and Terry Contella

Want to experience the joy firsthand? Be a part of next year's Toy Drive! Whether you're donating a toy, volunteering, or simply coming out in support, you'll leave with lasting memories and a heart full of holiday spirit.

December 13, 2025: District 22 American Legion Auxiliary Wreath Across America

On December 13, members of American Legion Auxiliary Unit 490 joined District 22's Wreath Across America Event at Soldier's Rest Section of Forest Park Lawndale Cemetery. With the Department of Texas American Legion Commander as keynote speaker, veterans and guests came together in a moving tribute to honor our nation's fallen heroes by laying beautiful wreaths on their graves. The ceremony was filled with warmth, remembrance, and gratitude, a touching reminder of the enduring power of community and the importance of keeping our heroes' memories alive during the holiday season. Special recognition to Joann Mata for organizing the event.

If you're looking for a way to truly honor our heroes, connect with your community, and make a meaningful impact, consider joining us at next year's Wreath Across America event.



Rene Sanchez, Susie Tristan, Siomara Sanchez, State Commander Rick Huntley, Diana Aguilar, Sheri Contella, JoAnn Mata, Maria Holmes

December 14, 2025: Holiday Workshop and Christmas Party

On December 14, the American Legion Post 490 Family embraced the spirit of the season at their heartwarming Holiday Workshop and Christmas Party. Volunteers assembled 128 care bags brimming with essentials, showing compassion and generosity through their annual Holiday Giving Campaign. The festive celebration continued with a joyful Potluck, a lively White Elephant Gift Exchange, and watching the Texans Game together. It was a wonderful kickoff to the holidays—lifting spirits, strengthening community bonds, and spreading holiday cheer to all.



Diana Aguilar, Robin Lott and Loretta Balboa



Susie Tristan



Sheri Contella



Sheri's grandson



Vie Denney and Siomara Sanchez



Sheri's grandson and Estella Thornhill

December 15, 2025: Holiday Giving Campaign



Constable Jerry Garcia (far right), his deputies, staff, Post 490 Legionnaires and Unit 490 Auxiliary members

On December 15, braving the freezing temperatures, the American Legion Post 490 Family partnered with Harris County Constable Precinct 2 (Jerry Garcia, his Deputies, and staff) to deliver care packages to residents at Nueva Vista Apartments and South Houston Vista Apartment. Their dedication and resilience in the face of the cold truly embodied the spirit of giving, showing that together, we can overcome any obstacle to spread kindness in our community.



Constable Jerry Garcia



Diana Aguilar



Rene Sanchez



Jesse Martinez

Tommie Martinez

December 20, 2025: Radical Firearms LLC – Donation for a Fundraiser



Radical Firearms owner and Casey Coyne

On behalf of American Legion Post 490, Assistant Sergeant at Arms Casey Coyne presents Radical Firearms owner with a Certificate of Appreciation for their exceptionally generous donation to our building project fund. Their remarkable support is both inspiring and invaluable, advancing our mission to create a welcoming space that will serve veterans and the broader community for generations.

We are sincerely grateful for their gift of a **custom-made Radical Firearms R-16**. Their commitment and generosity exemplify the spirit of service and community that our organization values so deeply. Because of supporters like Radical Firearms, we can transform our facilities into a vibrant, community-centered environment—one that will remain a cherished resource for many years to come. Their leadership and benevolence will be remembered as instrumental in restoring and strengthening our Post.

Post 490 is truly blessed by Radical Firearms generosity and partnership.

January 6, 2026: South Houston American Legion Post 490 FOUNDATION
Established



Post 490 resolved to establish a Foundation to secure additional funding for its programs and facility. The initial step involved obtaining approval from the Department of Texas American Legion. Subsequently, Post 490 formed a nonprofit corporation in Texas by submitting the required documentation, including the Articles of Incorporation, to the Texas Secretary of State.

Upon receiving the approved Certificate of Formation, Post 490 applied for an Employer Identification Number from the IRS. The IRS then determined that the South Houston American Legion Post 490 Foundation qualified as tax-exempt under the Internal Revenue Code.

South Houston American Legion Post 490 Foundation will operate as a non-profit corporation organized exclusively for educational and charitable purposes within the meaning of Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, or the corresponding section of any future federal tax code. The Foundation is structured to benefit, support, or carry out the purposes of one or more specified publicly supported organizations described in Section 509(a)(1) or 509(a)(2) of the Code.

Specifically, the South Houston American Legion Post 490 Foundation will operate on behalf of American Legion Post 490.

January 11, 2026: District Oratorical Contest Judge



District 22nd Vice Commander Jim McGuire and Oratorical Contest Award Winners

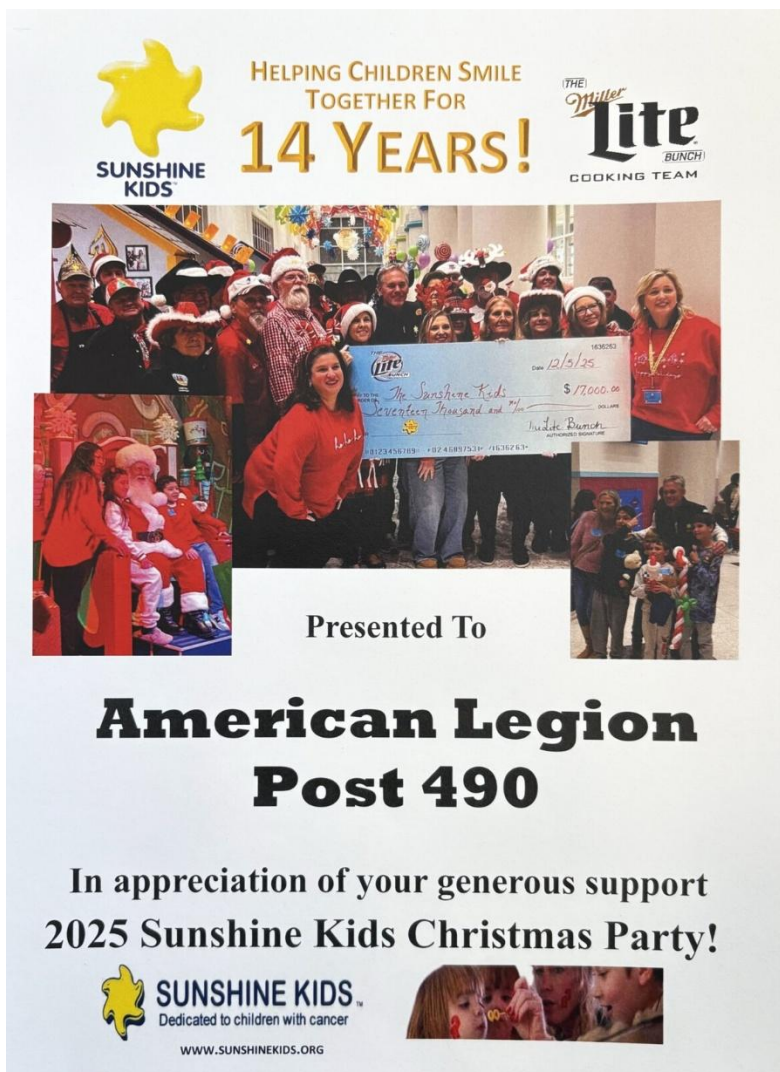


Vice Commander McGuire and Rene Sanchez (judge)

January 14, 2026: The Miller Lite Bunch Cooking Team – Certificate of Appreciation to Post 490

Post 490 extended its heartfelt thanks to **The Miller Lite Bunch Cooking Team** for their wonderful and thoughtful gesture of presenting American Legion Post 490 with a **Certificate of Appreciation** in recognition of supporting their annual Sunshine Kids Program.

It meant a great deal to Post 490, and we are truly grateful to be part of such a meaningful cause.



Certificate of Appreciation

February 11, 2026: Post 490 Donation to Sempre Fi #3

American Legion Post 490's Assistant Sergeant at Arms - Casey Coyne presents Donation to Semper FI 3 Memorial Honor Detail's Andres Cortez - Gunner Sgt. USMC (retired).

Sempre Fi #3's Mission Statement:

"In keeping with the United States Marine Corps tradition of "We take care of our own," the Marine Corps Core values of Honor, Courage and Commitment and in honor of those who lived the good life, fought the good fight and made the ultimate sacrifice, the SEMPER FI #3 Memorial Honor Detail is committed to provide US Marines and veterans (men and women) of honorable service but not limited to other branches of services full military honors, with dignity, integrity and professionalism at the time of their interment in the Houston, Harris County, Texas area."



Andres Cortez - Gunner Sgt USMC Retired and Casey Coyne

February 14, 2026: Auxiliary Unit 490's Post Valentine's Dance Benefit - A Night to Remember

Auxiliary Unit 490 truly outdid themselves in orchestrating an unforgettable Valentine's Dance Benefit. Each ticket purchased became a powerful contribution toward the Building Funds, turning every moment of celebration into a step forward for Post 490's future.

A heartfelt thanks goes to Dixie Pub for opening their doors and making this magical evening possible. The dance floor came alive with laughter and joy as friends, old and new, mingled and celebrated. The American Legion Post 490 Family dazzled in their finest Valentine's attire, radiating community spirit and love.

From the lively music and show-stopping door prizes to the delicious treats, every detail made the night electrifying. Romance and camaraderie filled the air, making it a Valentine's celebration to remember for years to come!



Estella and Owen Thornhill



Post 490 Legionnaire



Post 490 Members



Vie and Wendell Denney



Loretta and Manuel



Tommie and Jesse Martinez



Susie Tristan, Diana Aguilar, Tommie Martinez Vie Denney, Alexi Martinez, Estella Thornhill, Loretta Balboa



Siomara and Rene Sanchez

February 21, 2026: ODINS Sons Veterans Club Benefit

The American Legion Post 490 extends its heartfelt gratitude to the ODINS Sons Veterans Club Darkhorse Chapter for their generous and selfless donation to our Building Fund.

Their commitment to our cause was powerfully demonstrated through the benefit event they organized on February 21st, with proceeds graciously contributed to support our ongoing mission.



ODINS Sons Veterans Club Benefit Flyer

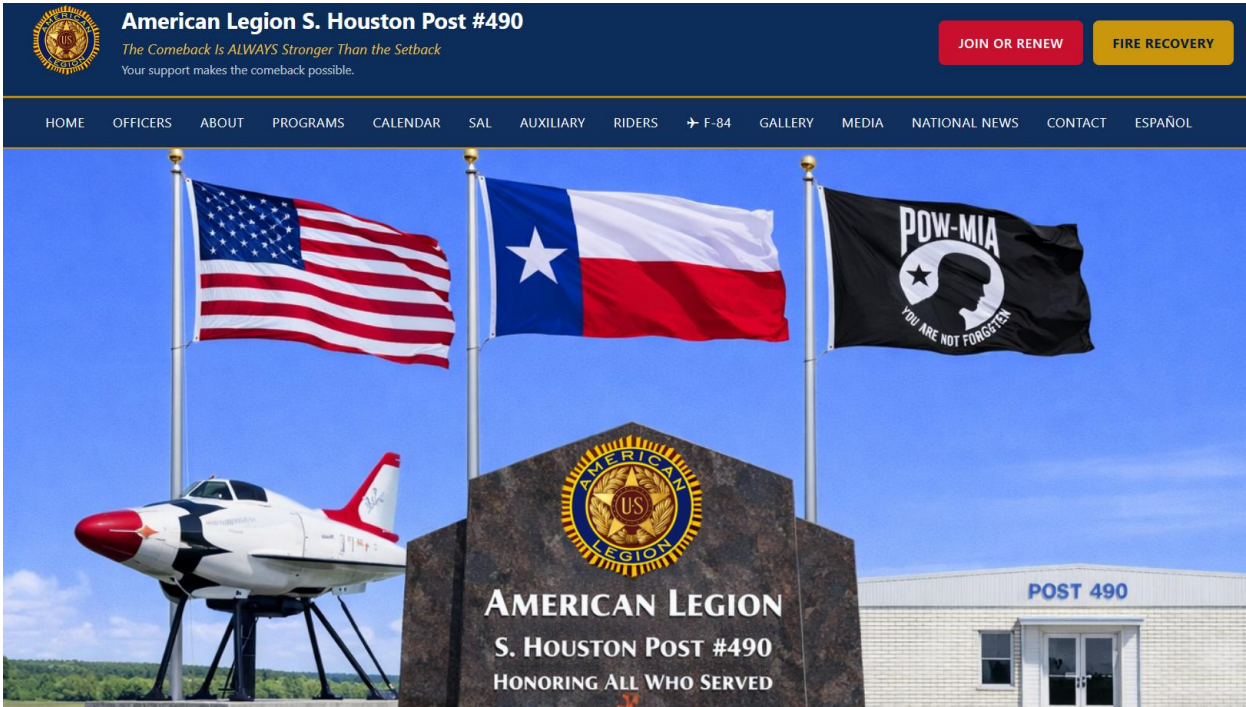
This act of solidarity exemplifies the spirit of camaraderie and service that unites us as veterans and inspires our entire community. We are especially grateful to our Second Vice Commander, Manuel Escobedo, whose presence and speech at the event represented Post 490 with honor and dedication.



2nd Vice Commander Manuel (Sgt Scooby) Escobedo and Rene Sanchez

We deeply appreciate our fellow veterans from OSVC for their unwavering commitment, tireless efforts, and steadfast support of our mission. Your generosity uplifts us all and strengthens our resolve to continue serving those who have served.

March 16, 2026: New AI-Enhanced Post 490 Webpage



We extend our heartfelt gratitude to Mr. Richard Hughes for his exceptional vision and dedication in transforming our webpage into a dynamic, AI-powered platform.

His innovative approach has not only enhanced our site’s functionality and user experience but has also positioned our organization at the forefront of technological advancement. We are truly fortunate and deeply appreciative to have Richard as a valued member of our team!

LATEST FROM POST 490

Riders Honored by St. Jude

Riders Chapter 490 received a **2026 Certificate of Appreciation** from St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. Outstanding work by our Riders!

Membership Update

1,020 active members — only 17 more to reach 100%! 20% discount on 2026 membership for a limited time — call [\(281\) 481-1186](tel:2814811186) or [\(832\) 933-7395](tel:8329337395).

Military Appreciation Game — April 1

FREE game — April 1, 2026 at 6 PM
San Jac Ravens vs. Alvin College at J.R. Harrison Field (Andy Pettitte Park). Presentation of Colors at 5:45 PM. All members and veterans welcome — game is free!

Upcoming Dates

Apr 11 — District 22 Spring Convention, Post 521 Pasadena (8 AM–3 PM)
Apr 15–22 — Navy Fleet Week Houston
May 13 — Post 490 Elections, South Belt Ellington Chamber, 7 PM
May 16–17 — Dept. of Texas 2nd Division Convention, Post 159 Bryan

Newsletter Information posted automatically

April 16, 2026: American Legion Post 490 Participated in South Belt Ellington Chamber of Commerce Top Ten Luncheon



Nicholas Huges presents Evelyn Watkins



Evelyn with Chamber of Commerce



Commander Rene Sanchez, Evelyn and Nicholas

South Houston American Legion Post 490 experienced a truly uplifting moment as they proudly presented Lutheran South Academy's Evelyn Watkins at the award ceremony. Evelyn's achievements shone brightly, earning her one of just three coveted \$1,000 Scholarships. Her dedication and passion serve as a beacon of inspiration, reminding us all the incredible impact young leaders can make in our community.

Her profile:

*Named Lutheran South Academy's **valedictorian**, Evelyn Watkins closes out an extraordinary high school career that included soccer, track, Model UN, Concert Band, National Honor Society, National Charity League, TAPPS Academic Competition, Girls Advancing in STEM (GAINS), NASA High School Aerospace Scholars, and NASA Moonshot.*

Her post-graduation path is one of the most ambitious in the class: she intends to major in Aerospace Engineering while completing a pre-med track, attend medical school, and ultimately complete a residency in Aerospace Medicine to become a flight surgeon - **a doctor for astronauts**.

In ten years, she expects to be midway through that residency and already exploring opportunities to go to space herself.

April 26, 2026: Post 490 Visibility at Blessing of the Fleet

Post 490's logo display during the Blessing of the Fleet extended the organization's visibility into a well-attended regional event and demonstrated effective community-facing representation beyond traditional Legion settings. While modest in format, the exposure supported brand recognition, affirmed local partnerships, and reflected the Post's broader strategy of staying present where veterans, families, and civic partners already gather.



May 23, 2026: United in Service, Anchored in Patriotism: Post 490 Family Cruise



American Legion Post 490 Family - Legionnaires, Auxiliary, SAL, Riders and their loved ones

The American Legion Post 490 Family—Legionnaires, Auxiliary, Sons of The American Legion, and Riders—came together for a memorable cruise filled with fellowship, pride, and shared purpose.

Throughout the many activities and excursions, members strengthened the bonds that unite each entity in service to our veterans, our community, and our great nation.

This special time together offered an opportunity to celebrate the accomplishments of the past year, honor the spirit of patriotism that guides our mission, and return refreshed, motivated, and ready to stand shoulder to shoulder as one Post 490 Family in the year ahead.

Post Everlasting



Eternal Tribute

Honoring Our Heroes

Name	Post Everlasting Date	Branch	Obituary
Jerome Wayne Blaylock	5/28/2025	US Army	https://www.crowderfuneralhome.com/obituaries/40952/
Otto M. Thornhill	6/15/2025	US Navy	https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/gainesville-times/name/otto-thornhill-obituary?id=58697400
Robert Steven Nouis	7/18/2025	US Air Force	https://www.dignitymemorial.com/obituaries/webster-tx/robert-nouis-12458575
Jon Albert Nelson	8/7/2025	US Navy	https://www.peeveyfunerals.com/guestbook/jon-nelson
Billy Brown	9/8/2025	US Army	https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/name/bill-brown-obituary?id=59400246
Robbie Cartwright	10/22/2025	US Army	https://www.taylorbros.net/obituaries/robbie-cartwright
Thomas Boone	2025	US Army	PUFL - 21 years continuous years – Persian Gulf Veteran
Tom Devlin	12/7/2025	US Navy	https://www.pacestancil.com/obituaries/thomas-devlin-jr
Ronnie Ferguson	12/23/2025	US Army	https://victoriaadvocate.com/2026/01/07/ronnie-lee-ferguson/
William Simpson	2025	US Air Force	PUFL - 53 years continuous years – Korea War Veteran
Thomas William Larsen	2/28/2026	US Air Force	https://www.dignitymemorial.com/obituaries/webster-tx/thomas-larsen-12766402

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Appendix B - Chronology of significant dates of the American Legion History¹

1919

March 15-17: Members of the American Expeditionary Force convene in Paris for the first American Legion caucus.

May 8-10: At its stateside St. Louis Caucus, The American Legion adopts its official name, and the preamble to the organization's constitution is drafted.

June 9: The National Executive Committee adopts The American Legion emblem.

Sept. 16: Congress charters The American Legion.

Nov. 10-12: Minneapolis is home to the first American Legion National Convention, attended by about 15,000. Membership at this point exceeds 684,000. Among the delegates are 140 women veterans of World War I, and The Constitution and Preamble are adopted. Delegates consider 350 resolutions but approve only 50, including equal treatment for women who served in the war, employment programs for veterans, fair government benefits for those who came home disabled from service, support for the Boy Scouts, mandatory patriotic exercises in schools and the establishment of an air branch of service.

Dec. 16: Relentless lobbying by The American Legion results in an increase of disability compensation for war-wounded veterans, from \$30 per month to \$80 per month.

1920s

Sept. 27, 1920: The poppy is named the official flower of The American Legion during the organization's second national convention in Cleveland.

Dec. 16, 1920: With more than 5,500 war veterans hospitalized nationwide with neuropsychiatric conditions, The American Legion raises awareness of the condition later to be defined as post-traumatic stress disorder.

July 7, 1921: The American Legion and the National Education Association enter a formal relationship that calls for more stringent qualifications for teachers and curriculum in civics education.

Aug. 9, 1921: The Legion's efforts result in the creation of the U.S. Veterans Bureau, forerunner of the Veterans Administration.

Nov. 11, 1921: American Legion leaders join Allied generals and President Warren G. Harding in ceremonies to dedicate the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery. The tomb was the culmination of Legion-supported legislation introduced by U.S. Rep. Hamilton Fish, Jr., a founder of the organization.

June 15, 1923: The first Flag Code is drafted during a Legion-organized conference in Washington, with 68 organizations participating. The code is adopted a year later and, in the decades, ahead applied throughout the states and schools until Congress adopts it as U.S. Flag Code in 1942.

Oct. 17, 1923: The American Legion National Convention in San Francisco passes a resolution (still in effect) that expresses its firm support of equal rights and opportunities "without distinction as to race, color, creed or class." The resolution condemns any individual, group or organization that "creates or fosters racial, religious or class strife among our people, or which takes into their own hands the enforcement of law, determination of guilt, or infliction of punishment, to be un-American, a menace to our liberties and destructive to our fundamental law."

¹ "History of the American Legion", American Legion, <https://www.legion.org/about/organization/history>, 19 June 2025

Oct. 18, 1923: The American Legion National Convention passes a resolution calling for “Congress to immediately enact a law providing for the erection of a suitable Archives Building” to house documents, artifacts and, emphatically, world war military records. This becomes the National Archives in 1934.

March 21, 1924: American Legion uniform caps are introduced.

Sept. 19, 1924: The American Legion launches a successful campaign to raise \$5 million – more than \$83 million in today’s dollars – to support disabled veterans and war orphans. This becomes the American Legion Endowment Fund, now doing business as the American Legion Veterans & Children Foundation.

June 17, 1925: The American Legion formally accepts its first permanent national headquarters home in Indianapolis.

June 17, 1925: First proposed in Milbank, S.D., American Legion Baseball is born, adopted as an official national program in October that year.

Oct. 15, 1926: Yonkers, N.Y., Post 321 defeats Pocatello, Idaho, 23-6 in the first American Legion Baseball World Series.

Nov. 9, 1926: The American Legion School Award Program, first established in Pennsylvania, becomes national and continues to operate today.

April 1 – May 30, 1927: American Legion posts along the Mississippi River provide assistance, relief, housing and food for some 400,000 residents left homeless by historic flooding.

1930s

June 30, 1930: The federal Veterans Administration is established after tireless lobbying from The American Legion.

Sept. 12-15, 1932: The Sons of The American Legion is founded and officially recognized during the 1932 National Convention in Portland, Ore.

June 23, 1935: The first American Legion Boys State convenes in Springfield, Ill., to help high school boys gain an understanding of the structure and operation of the federal government.

Jan. 19 – March 11, 1937: The American Legion raises over \$250,000 and delivers it to the Red Cross to help victims of floods on the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers.

June 1, 1938: The final round of the Legion's first annual National High School Oratorical Contest is conducted in Norman, Okla.

1940s

Aug. 22, 1941: The U.S. Navy commissions the USS *American Legion*, and her World War II career begins, including landing some of the first troops at Guadalcanal, supplying a hospital, conducting rescue missions and training exercises.

Dec. 7, 1941: Japan’s attack at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, brings the United States into World War II. Soon, more than 150,000 members of The American Legion (World War I veterans and career officers) return to wartime service. In addition, nearly 400,000 Legionnaires serve as air-raid wardens, 300,000 as volunteer police officers and 50,000 as volunteer firefighters to fill wartime needs in their communities.

May 1, 1942: The American Legion Blood Donor Program is established.

June 22, 1942: Congress passes U.S. Flag Code, adapted from the rules of flag respect established at the Legion-led flag conferences of 1923 and 1924.

Sept. 19-21, 1942: The Preamble to the Constitution of The American Legion is changed for the first time since it was written in 1919. The word “war” is changed to “wars,” and “association” to “associations.”

Dec. 15, 1943: Past National Commander Harry W. Colmery starts to write in longhand, on Mayflower Hotel stationery in Washington, the first draft of what will later become the “GI Bill of Rights”— considered the Legion's single greatest legislative achievement.

June 22, 1944: President Franklin D. Roosevelt signs into law the original GI Bill, or Servicemen's Readjustment Act, ushering in monumental changes in U.S. society. Higher education becomes democratized after more than 8 million veterans go to school on the GI Bill, get better jobs, buy houses, finance businesses and raise families. For every dollar spent on educating veterans, the U.S. economy eventually gets \$7 back.

June 27, 1944: The American Legion-backed Veterans Preference Hiring Act is signed into law.

April 8, 1946: Gen. Omar Bradley, head of the Veterans Administration, establishes an advisory council, led by The American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary and Veterans of Foreign Wars to develop a massive new volunteer network for VA health-care facilities, which becomes the VA Volunteer Service (VAVS).

May 29, 1946: The Legion and the American Legion Auxiliary present a small, struggling organization called the American Heart Association with a \$50,000 grant. The grant inaugurates a nationwide program for the study, prevention and treatment of rheumatic heart disease.

Aug. 9, 1946: The American Legion Boys Forum of National Government, later renamed American Legion Boys Nation, is conducted for the first time at American University in Washington, D.C.

1950s

May 4, 1950: The Legion votes to contribute funds to the field of mental health, thereby playing a key role in launching the National Association for Mental Health.

Aug. 20, 1950: A new American Legion National Headquarters building is dedicated in Indianapolis. The 100,000-square-foot \$2.5 million structure greatly expands capacity for the nation's largest veteran's organization, on State of Indiana property known as “American Legion Mall.”

Aug. 14, 1951: A new seven-story American Legion National Headquarters building in Washington D.C. is dedicated by President Harry Truman.

July 9, 1954: The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation is formed to provide grants for organizations that help children facing severe challenges.

1960s

March 30, 1960: U.S. Highway 281 – stretching from the Canada border to Mexico, though North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas – Is formally dedicated as the national “American Legion Memorial Highway.”

July 23, 1962: Pitching phenomenon Bob Feller of Iowa – known as the “heater from Van Meter” – is the first alumnus of American Legion Baseball inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame at Cooperstown.

July 24, 1963: Future U.S. President Bill Clinton, then a 16-year-old student at Hot Springs, Ark., High School, famously meets and shakes hands with President John F. Kennedy at the White House during American Legion Boys Nation.

March 15, 1969: The U.S. Postal Service officially issues a 6-cent commemorative stamp to honor The American Legion's 50th anniversary. Sales of the stamp begin on March 17, the 50th anniversary of the end of the Paris Caucus that formed the organization.

Aug. 24, 1969: The Legion's National Executive Committee establishes the National Emergency Fund as a result of the effects of Hurricane Camille.

1970s

May 1, 1972: The Legion implements a Halloween safety program for children.

April 1, 1975: The Legion-sponsored Freedom Bell traverses the nation aboard the Freedom Train during its tour of the country in celebration of the U.S. Bicentennial. Six years later, the bell is dedicated at its permanent home in Columbus Plaza, opposite Union Station in Washington.

April 1978: The "American Legion Study of the Psychosocial Adjustment Among Legion Veterans" by Purdue University Dr. Charles R. Figley reveals psychosocial challenges faced by Vietnam War veterans adjusting to civilian life and, ultimately, formal diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder.

July 18, 1979: Long promoted by The American Legion, National POW/MIA Recognition Day is accepted, to be recognized annually on the third Friday of September.

Nov. 27, 1979: Orville E. Kelly, a member of American Legion Post 52 in Burlington, Iowa, announces that he has been approved for VA disability compensation for lymphatic cancer related to radiation exposure in 1957 and 1958 during 22 atomic tests he witnessed in the Marshall Islands. The approval of his claim, with help from an American Legion service officer, opens the door for VA disability benefits for hundreds of conditions caused by toxic exposure in the military in the years to come.

1980s

February 1980: After decades of American Legion pressure and proof, post-traumatic stress disorder is recognized as a psychological diagnosis.

Aug. 26, 1982: The Legion presents a \$1 million check to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund for construction of the Wall in Washington, becoming the largest single contributor to the project.

July 21, 1983: The Legion announces its sponsorship of an independent study on the effects of exposure to Agent Orange on Vietnam War veterans. Congress receives the results of the "American Legion-Columbia University Study of Vietnam-era Veterans" in 1989.

Jan. 1, 1989: The Veterans Administration is elevated to Cabinet-level status as the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The Legion fought hard for the change, arguing that veterans deserve representation at the highest levels of government.

Aug. 31, 1989: In just 60 days, The American Legion completes the collection of more than 1 million signatures on a petition supporting a constitutional amendment to protect the U.S. flag from deliberate acts of desecration, in the aftermath of a Supreme Court decision ruling that such acts are protected under the First Amendment.

Oct. 16, 1989: The long-standing objective of the Legion to improve adjudication procedures for veterans claims is achieved when the U.S. Court of Veterans Appeals becomes operational.

Oct. 19, 1989: The American Legion National Executive Committee officially re-establishes its Disaster Relief Fund, later the National Emergency Fund, a permanent endowment to provide disaster relief for veterans and American Legion posts.

1990s

Aug. 2, 1990: The Legion files suit against the federal government for failure to conduct a Congress-mandated study about the effects of Agent Orange on veterans who served in Vietnam.

Oct. 11, 1990: The Legion creates the Family Support Network to assist families of servicemembers deployed for operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm in the Middle East. Through local posts, the network offers a wide range of assistance, including financial assistance, mowing lawns, baby-sitting and more.

June 15, 1991: The Legion hosts its first Junior Shooting Sports National Air Rifle Championships at the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, Colo.

Fall 1993: In Garden City, Mich., Chuck “Tramp” Dare and Bill “Polka” Kaledas, commander of American Legion Post 396, start an association to bring all American Legion Family members together to share a common love for motorcycles; this evolves into the national American Legion Riders.

Aug. 24, 1994: The Legion announces the creation of the Citizens Flag Alliance, a coalition of organizations and individual citizens united to work for a constitutional amendment to protect the U.S. flag from physical desecration.

July 26, 1995: Electronics giant Samsung chooses The American Legion to administer a scholarship fund of \$5 million, as a gesture of appreciation for U.S. military personnel who came to South Korea’s aid to fight communist forces in the Korean War. The first 10 scholarships are awarded on Sept. 16, 1996, the anniversary of The American Legion’s federal charter approval.

June 11, 1997: The National Emergency Fund surpasses the \$1 million mark in cash grants given to flood victims who belong to the Legion family. Most grant recipients reside in the flood plains of Ohio, Kentucky, Indiana, Minnesota and North Dakota.

Sept. 3, 1997: The Legion presents its first National Law Enforcement Officer of the Year award at the 79th National Convention in Orlando, Fla.

2000s

Sept. 5, 2000: The American Legion presents the first “Spirit of Service” Awards to active-duty service members for their off-duty volunteer activities.

Aug. 28-30, 2001: The American Legion passes a resolution to rekindle Blue Star Service Banner program.

Sept. 12, 2001: The American Legion reactivates the Family Support Network following terrorist attacks in New York City and Washington, D.C.

Oct. 10-11, 2001: The American Legion creates the American Legacy Scholarship Fund for children of military members killed on active duty on or after Sept. 11, 2001.

Sept. 11, 2002: The American Legion takes lead in conducting “A Day To Remember” events to mark the anniversary of the terrorist attacks on the nation.

November 2002: The Legion launches the national "I Am Not A Number" campaign to identify and document the delays veterans face in obtaining medical care from VA.

Sept 19, 2004: The American Legion launches a national program, the Blue Star Salute, where posts across the country hold public events to recognize troops, their families, and local businesses on Armed Forces Day.

August 2005: Delegates at the 87th National Convention in Honolulu unanimously voice their support for the global war on terrorism with Resolution 169.

September 2005: The American Legion National Emergency Fund disburses more than \$2 million grants to provide relief after Hurricane Katrina.

May 2007: Operation Landstuhl is launched after National Commander Paul Morin finds broken televisions and inadequate comfort items for U.S. troops recovering from wounds at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany; the campaign raises \$257,000 in less than six weeks to purchase the items.

Oct. 17-18, 2007: American Legion Riders becomes a national program of The American Legion.

June 30, 2008: President George W. Bush signs into law the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act, a next-generation GI Bill strongly supported by the Legion.

December 2008: Operation Landstuhl expands to help recovering troops at military facilities elsewhere and is renamed Operation Comfort Warriors.

Oct. 22, 2009: President Obama signs the Veterans Health Care Budget Reform Act of 2009, guaranteeing “advance funding” for VA appropriations, a formula that The American Legion has strongly supported for many years. The new law sets funding for VA one year in advance.

2010s

May 5, 2010: Shelby, N.C., is officially selected to be the long-term site of The American Legion Baseball World Series.

Sept. 1, 2010: Marcus Haynes of the Valdosta, Ga., Fire Department receives the first American Legion Firefighter of the Year Award.

October 2010: The Legion forms a PTSD-TBI Ad Hoc Committee to examine current methods by VA and the Department of Defense of treating the two signature wounds of the Post 9/11 generation – post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury and investigate potential alternative treatments.

December 2010: The Legion officially begins a relationship with United Services Automobile Association (USAA), making the veteran-founded insurance company "The American Legion's preferred provider of financial services."

May 5, 2011: The American Legion National Executive Committee passes a resolution formally establishing the Junior Law Cadet Program under the national Americanism Commission.

August 2011: The American Legion Baseball World Series is held for the first time in the tournament's new permanent home, Shelby, N.C. Prior to this, the tournament had rotated to different cities. Total paid attendance at the Shelby contests soars to an all-time high of 86,000 total.

Aug. 30, 2013: National Commander James E. Koutz announces that the American Legion family raised more than \$1.1 million for Operation Comfort Warriors during the 2012-2013 fundraising year, surpassing the original goal by over \$500,000.

May 5, 2014: In the midst of a VA waiting-list scandal that reached up to the deaths of veterans waiting for care, The American Legion calls for the resignations of several top officials, including VA Secretary Eric Shinseki, who leaves office before the end of the month.

June 9-13, 2014: The American Legion conducts the first in a 15-month nationwide series of town hall meetings and assistance efforts to help veterans facing difficulties with VA.

Aug. 16, 2017: The Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017 – also known as the “Forever GI Bill” because it removes time limits for veterans who wish to use it for college – is signed into law by President Donald J. Trump. The legislation is named for The American Legion past national commander who in the winter of 1943-44 drafted the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act that changed the nation after World War II.

Aug. 23, 2017: President Donald J. Trump signs the Veterans Appeals and Modernization Act of 2017 onstage at the 99th American Legion National Convention, in Reno, Nev.

Aug. 24, 2017: Denise H. Rohan of Wisconsin is elected national commander, the first woman to hold the role in the Legion's history.

June 6, 2018: President Trump signs into law the sweeping VA MISSION Act – officially the John McCain III, Daniel K. Akaka and Samuel R. Johnson VA Maintaining Internal Systems and Strengthening Outside Networks Act – which includes a number of American Legion resolutions to improve VA health-care services.

Jan. 31, 2019: The American Legion's Temporary Financial Assistance program completes a record-breaking month of cash-grant disbursements. Of the \$1,030,163 delivered to military and veteran families, most is distributed to U.S. Coast Guard families with children at home who were affected by the 35-day federal government shutdown.

March 15-17, 2019: The American Legion celebrates its 100th birthday in Paris, France, throughout the United States and around the world.

June 20, 2019: The U.S. Supreme Court rules 7-2 in favor of The American Legion in its case to allow a 40-foot cross-shaped World War I memorial in Prince George's County, Md., to stay on public property.

July 30, 2019: President Trump signs the Let Everyone Get Involved in Opportunities for National Service – the LEGION Act – which extends recognized wartime service to cover previously unrecognized periods of U.S. military conflict, back to World War II.

2020s

March 16, 2020: American Legion National Headquarters staff begin a period of social distancing and work-from-home procedures amid the deadly COVID-19 pandemic. American Legion posts, departments and facilities worldwide are forced to temporarily close their doors to members and the public. The organization responds with hundreds of Buddy Check activities to assist older veterans; dozens of blood drives as need increases; food-delivery services; supplies for parents suddenly forced to home-school their children; protective mask making and distribution; and hundreds of other acts of community support. The pandemic leads to cancellation or postponement of national meetings, including the 101st National Convention, American Legion Baseball World Series and American Legion Boys Nation.

Aug. 4, 2020: American Legion National Commander James W. "Bill" Oxford launches the 100 Miles of Hope challenge that asks registrants to walk, run, bicycle, ride, paddle, swim or transport themselves however they like 100 miles by Veterans Day 2020, 100 days away.

Dec. 1, 2020: The American Legion and Chip Ganassi Racing announce plans for a multi-year sponsorship relationship in support of the Legion's Veterans & Children Foundation; the relationship soon shifts gears to promote veteran suicide prevention through the Be the One mission.

June 16, 2021: The American Legion conducts a press conference on the steps of the U.S. Capitol calling for the urgent evacuation of some 18,000 Afghan translators and others who assisted coalition forces during the war.

Aug. 10, 2022: President Joe Biden signs into law the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxins Act, a historic move strongly supported and promoted by The American Legion, to provide health-care service and disability compensation to some 4 million additional veterans, mostly post-9/11, who were exposed to toxic contamination in the military.

Oct. 1, 2023: American Legion accredited service officers secure what is believed to be an all-time one-year high in VA benefits for disabled veterans, with \$18.8 billion. Claims related to the PACT Act account for a \$4 billion increase in benefits between 2020 and 2023.