



# EVERY DEPARTMENT HAS A STORY

THE AMERICAN LEGION OF

# CONNECTICUT

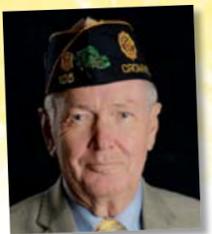
One of Connecticut's many nicknames, the Constitution State, resonates strongly with The American Legion, whose members swore to protect and defend America's founding document. From the time of its 1919 founding, members of the Legion – the nation's largest veterans service organization – have been committed to grassroots volunteerism through sponsorship of youth programs in communities, advocating patriotism and honor, promoting a strong national security, and continued devotion to servicemembers and veterans. With more than 17,700 members in more than 150 posts across the state, the Department of Connecticut works every day to make the state a better place to live. Along with the American Legion Auxiliary and the Sons of The American Legion, the department envisions a strong second century of service to community, state and nation.

## Connecticut Legionnaires



**Arthur J. Connell** served as national commander of The American Legion from 1953 to 1954; he was one of the last World War I veterans (Navy) to hold that office. He served as post commander from 1933 to 1934, and department commander from 1941 to 1942. He died in 1962.

**Sen. Richard Blumenthal**, a member of Post 18 in Essex, was Connecticut's attorney general for five terms and is in his second term representing the state in Washington. As ranking member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, he addressed the 2015 Legion national convention.



**Richard W. Anderson**, a member of Post 105 in Cromwell, has been chairman of the national American Legion Americanism Commission since 2013. He also served as department commander from 1982 to 1983, post commander from 1995 to 1996, and on the National Executive Committee from 1987 to 2013.



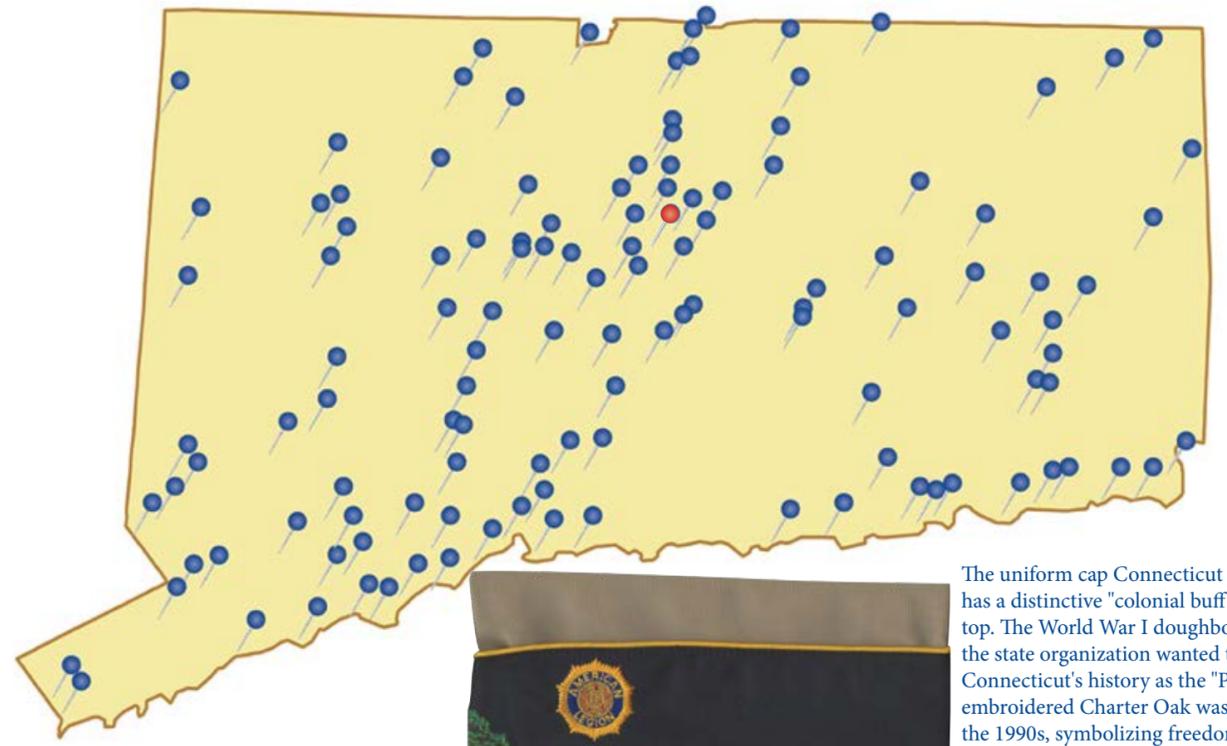
## Soldiers, Sailors and Marines Fund

The Connecticut Soldiers, Sailors and Marines Fund was established by the state General Assembly in 1919 as a \$2.4 million trust using money donated by doughboys; the interest, after investment, was to be used for the benefit of needy veterans and their families.

The legislation that created the fund gave The American Legion Department of Connecticut administrative power over its activities and "soldier relief work" – a relationship that continues today, governed under the department's bylaws. The Legion's department treasurer also serves as administrator of the fund; many municipality fund representatives are Legion volunteers. The trust fund principal is \$69 million, and the annual assistance budget is \$2 million.

Temporary assistance is available in a number of areas. Applicants (who can be from any service branch) must be residents of the state of Connecticut at the time of application for assistance and while in receipt of assistance.

Visit [www.alctssmf.org](http://www.alctssmf.org) to learn more.



**Legend**  
● Legion posts  
● Connecticut Legion Department Headquarters



The uniform cap Connecticut Legionnaires wear has a distinctive "colonial buff" styling on the top. The World War I doughboys who established the state organization wanted to pay tribute to Connecticut's history as the "Provision State." An embroidered Charter Oak was added to the cap in the 1990s, symbolizing freedom.

## Nutmeg State Attractions



**Palmer Field** in Middletown is the home field of Milardo-Wilcox Post 75. It has played host to eight Northeast Regional tournaments, and two World Series tournaments, in American Legion Baseball.



**The War Memorial Tower** on Fox Hill in Rockville was built in the late 1930s by Works Progress Administration (WPA) employees, and is dedicated to local veterans of all wars. A drum corps from the Willimantic performed at the 1939 opening.



**The Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Arch**, part of Bushnell Park in Hartford – dedicated in 1886 as a tribute to local veterans of the Civil War – was for many years the starting point for American Legion parades during state conventions.



**Fort Trumbull State Park** in New London is the site of the fort that saw action from the American Revolution to the Cold War. Facilities from the 1800s and beyond are restored for visitors, the visitor's center features interactive history exhibits, and one of the piers is available for fishing.

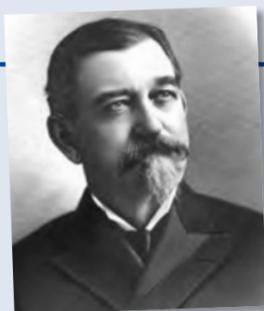
1919

A temporary executive committee agrees to incorporate a Connecticut American Legion at the City Club in Hartford.

1920

The Rehabilitation Commission is initiated by department adjutant Thomas J. Bannigan, who would later serve as a regional manager in the Veterans Bureau, forerunner to today's VA.

Gov. Marcus H. Holcomb proclaims the week of May 22 as American Legion Week.



1926

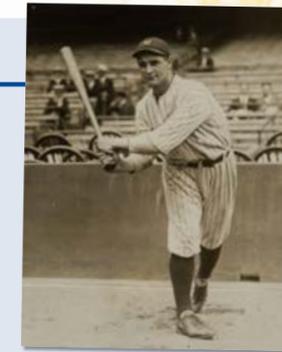
A department youth baseball program is initiated, with 29 posts participating.

1931

**Post 91 in Moosup** presents one of the first resolutions to form the national Sons of The American Legion, for male descendants of Legion-eligible veterans; in 1935, it will be the first squadron.

1937

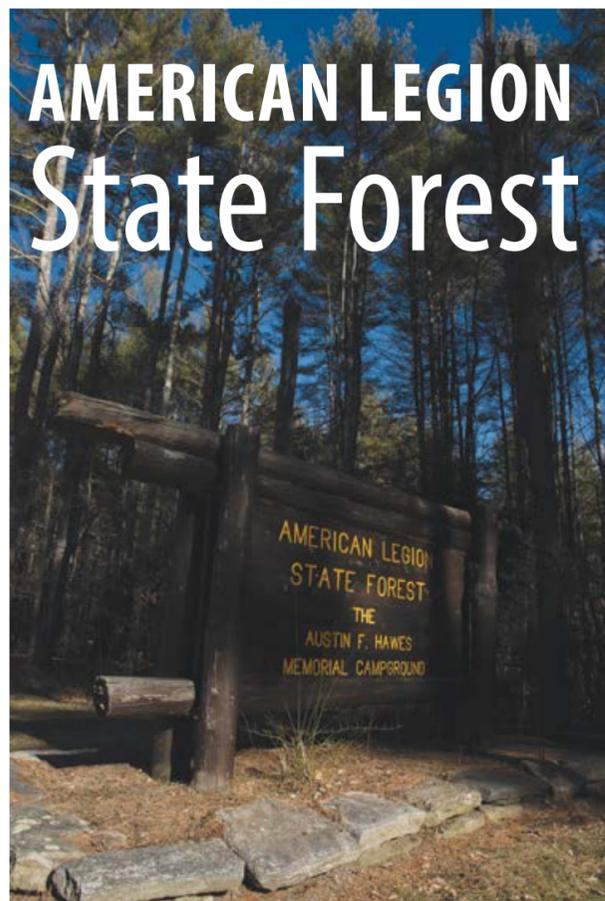
Lou Gehrig assists with the presentation of department baseball awards to the 1936 state-winning team of **Bronson-Hawley Post 134 in Bridgeport**.



1947

The department initiates a Vice Commander for Women. This position will remain until 1984.

# AMERICAN LEGION State Forest



On July 16, 1927, the Department of Connecticut's executive committee authorized a tract of 213 acres near Barkhamsted to be signed over to the state. The Legion had raised the funds to purchase the land with the intent "to provide citizens an example of proper forest management as observed by U.S. soldiers throughout Europe during World War I," according to the website of the Department of Energy & Environmental Protection, which maintains the forest today. At the time, one acre cost about \$10. Legion volunteers cleared camping sites; B.H. Matthies – who wrote "The Story of the American Legion in Connecticut" in 1920 and later served as the Legion's Forest Education chairman – donated a building and some acreage.

By 1930, over 300 more acres had been turned over, through donations and additional fundraising by the Legion and contributions by the state. Today, the American Legion State Forest measures about 1,000 acres. The park is open year-round.

■ During World War II, thousands of American Legion members staffed Connecticut civil defense and aircraft warning stations.

■ What became the Department of Connecticut was formed in 1919 from the combination of the Legion organization and the Army and Navy Association of the Great War, which had organized in February in Stamford and numbered about 300 by its end.



## Jewett City Veterans Housing

In June 2012, LaFlamme-Kusek Post 15 in Jewett City took a giant leap forward in the fight against veterans homelessness, with the opening of a groundbreaking housing facility and the welcoming of its first permanent residents, at-risk veterans referred there by the state Department of Veterans Affairs. Such free housing is usually given on a temporary basis.

A decade and \$6.26 million in the making, The American Legion Veterans Housing Inc. (TALVHI) was an idea first floated by Bill Czmyr, a former Post 15 adjutant. The facility is made up of 18 individual apartments spread out over the top floor of the 130-year-old post structure – necessitating the installation of a whole new building within the brick shell – and a specially built adjacent building, connected by a breezeway.

Furnishings, as well as exercise equipment for a fitness area, were donated by Waterford Hotels. The veteran resi-

dents also receive support services such as job counseling, career placement and mental-health resources. The local bank sets up cost-free savings and checking accounts for residents, who can also receive financial advice from the bank.

The offering of permanent supportive housing has been something of a revolution in the field; when the facility opened, Avery Tillinghast, fundraising chief for TALVHI, said he had heard from more than 15 individuals nationwide who were inspired to start similar projects. "It really is a national model because the Legion gave up its building," he said.

Today, 18 residents call TALVHI home. A house next to the facility has been bought and demolished, and a courtyard is being constructed. And progress shows no signs of slowing as Post 15 and The American Legion Veterans Housing Inc. continue making differences for their comrades in arms.

## Did you know?

Every year since 1982, the department has conducted Nathan Hale Day at the Connecticut State Capitol in Hartford; the Revolutionary War spy was named State Hero in 1985. The department chaplain and members of the department Americanism Commission are in attendance to speak and lay a memorial wreath.

## Post-9/11 CT LEGION

My service was the best eight years of my life. It ended over a decade and a half ago, and the thing I missed the most was the camaraderie. The American Legion has given me the opportunity to serve again and, even greater, has allowed me to regain the camaraderie I missed so much. I have made some truly great friends through the Legion who all share the desire for continued service. Whether they served in the jungles of Vietnam, or the mountains of Afghanistan, or on an aircraft carrier or a hundred leagues below the surface, we are all brothers and sisters with a common goal: service to the community, state and nation.



**Dilworth-Cornell Quey American Legion Post 102 Commander/Adjutant Joe Haney**, who was a Navy and Connecticut Army National Guard veteran deployed to Japan, Diego Garcia and Oman; has served as commander of one post and adjutant of two; and graduated from national American Legion College in 2016. Several younger veterans have taken on leadership positions at different levels throughout the Department of Connecticut, such as post commander, district officer, district commander and department officer.

■ When an advertising company has space available throughout the state, it will fill it with a billboard promoting Legion membership free of charge. The department has also commissioned membership billboards, of all sizes, throughout Connecticut.

■ The Connecticut contingent of the Legion Riders organization numbers around 300. The Riders conduct motorcycle runs to raise money for Legion scholarships and programs, veterans and their families in need of aid, and more.

## Contact The American Legion of Connecticut

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☎ 860.436.9986 🌐 [www.ctlegion.org](http://www.ctlegion.org)



## Join The American Legion

🌐 [www.legion.org/join](http://www.legion.org/join)

1961

The first V-J Day Parade is held in **Moosup**. Ever since, **Post 91** has conducted the parade on the second Sunday in August at 1 p.m.



1980

The department receives the Legion's National Service Trophy for its work on behalf of veterans and their dependents.

1989

**Post 44 in Bantam** starts its Veteran of the Month program. Each month, a deceased veteran is honored with a ceremony that includes the playing of Taps and the raising of a burial flag.



1992

The American Legion Family initiates the first annual "Kids Walk" for what is today the Connecticut Children's Medical Center.

2000

The first State Police Youth Week is held in Mansfield.

2013

Mark Edward Chmielewski, a junior at East Lyme High School in Salem, is named American Legion Eagle Scout of the Year.

2018

The Connecticut Legion is planning a gala at the Aqua Turf Club in Southington on Nov. 10, kicking off the official Centennial Celebration.

