



EVERY DEPARTMENT HAS A STORY

THE AMERICAN LEGION OF

FLORIDA

The American Legion Department of Florida proudly stands at over 123,000 members, with 292 posts scattered throughout the Sunshine State. Members rally to support our military and their families in a variety of ways, through promoting strong national security, advocating patriotism and honor, mentoring youth and sponsoring 28 different programs in our communities. The Department of Florida has influenced considerable social change and fought for veterans' benefits, both across the state and on Capitol Hill.

FL Legionnaires



Billy Anderson of Miami was the 39th Department Commander, serving from 1956-1957. Anderson taught the importance of saying "thank you" or acknowledging people for a job well done. The "Billy Card" was created in an effort to get officers to thank and acknowledge local posts and members for the things they do. The important part was that it had to be handwritten. Today the Department provides Billy Cards for free to Posts, District and Department Officers who request them.



Clarence Hill of Jacksonville was a 1967 delegate to Ohio "Buckeye" Boys State, and a 1972 Naval Academy graduate. He retired as a Captain in 1996 after a 24-year career in the Navy. Hill, a member of Atlantic Beach Post 316 for over 30 years, served as Department Commander from 2002-2003. He was elected the 91st National Commander of The American Legion – and the first from Florida – serving from 2009-2010.



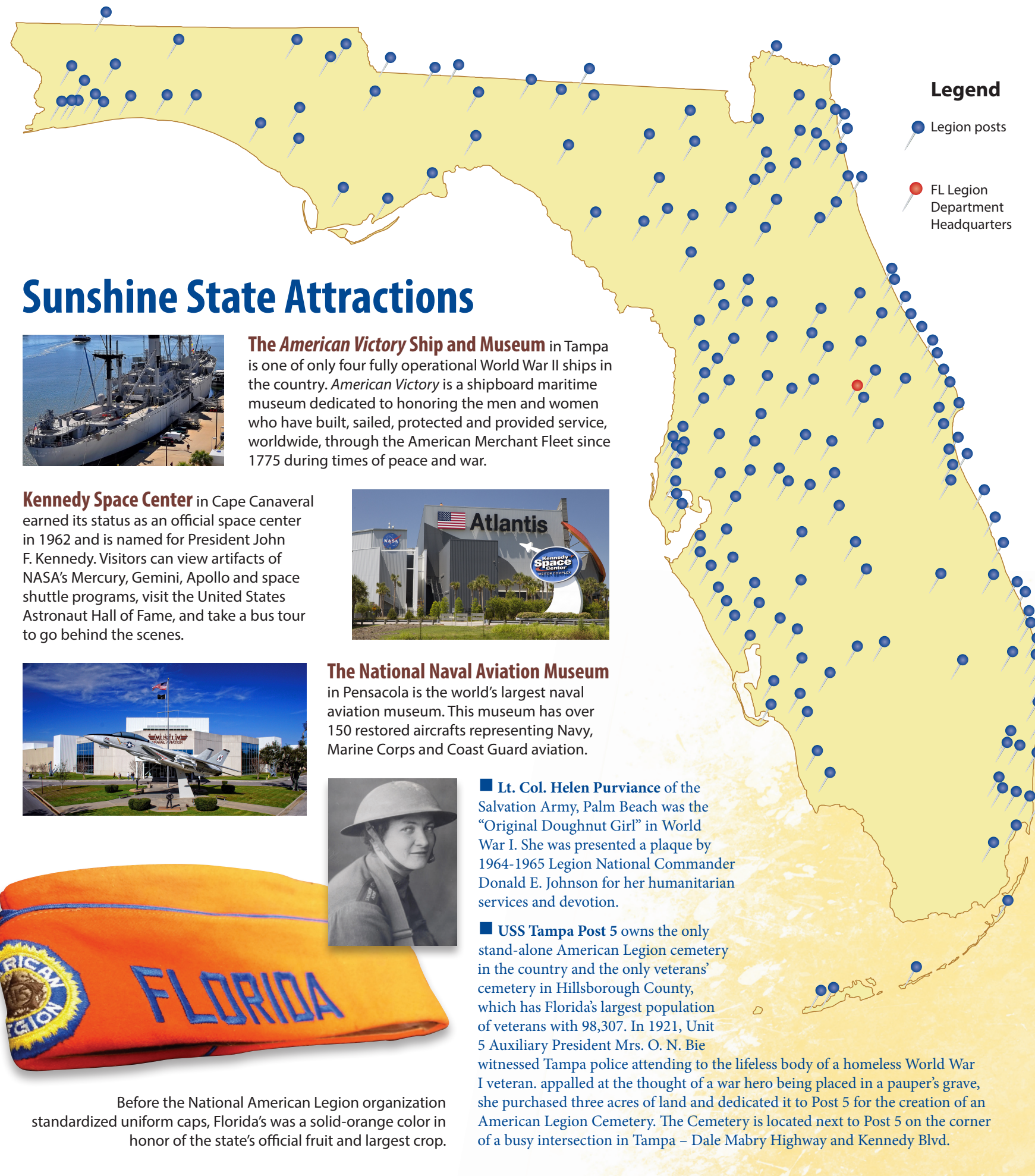
Sumter L. Lowry of Tampa was one of six Floridians to form the Department. Lowry was elected in 1919 as Florida's 1st Department Adjutant, and was the 3rd Department Commander, serving from 1921-1922. Lowry left his mark on Tampa through civic activities such as developing Lowry Park, and starting the Lowry Freedom Award at the University of Tampa.



Hurricanes can't tear us apart

Hurricanes are no strangers to Florida. One thing our Department prides itself on is that during these times of chaos and devastation, Legionnaires can band together to provide aid and support to their communities and Legion Family.

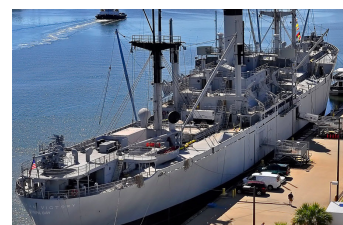
In 2017, Hurricane Irma made landfall at the Florida Keys and moved upward through the rest of the state, and in 2018 Hurricane Michael was the strongest storm on record to ever hit the Florida Panhandle. In both cases, Department staff and many Legion Family volunteers showed up to the headquarters office to collect and distribute supplies to those areas hit the hardest. Past Department Commander Stephen Shuga and Disaster Preparedness Chairman Bill Hoppner led relief efforts across the state with a convoy of volunteers and semi trucks full of supplies. The Department received aid from both Legion National Headquarters and other Departments such as Indiana, South Dakota, Maine, Delaware, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Kentucky, Texas, New Jersey, Illinois and Virginia.



Legend

- Legion posts
- FL Legion Department Headquarters

Sunshine State Attractions



The American Victory Ship and Museum in Tampa is one of only four fully operational World War II ships in the country. *American Victory* is a shipboard maritime museum dedicated to honoring the men and women who have built, sailed, protected and provided service, worldwide, through the American Merchant Fleet since 1775 during times of peace and war.

Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral earned its status as an official space center in 1962 and is named for President John F. Kennedy. Visitors can view artifacts of NASA's Mercury, Gemini, Apollo and space shuttle programs, visit the United States Astronaut Hall of Fame, and take a bus tour to go behind the scenes.



The National Naval Aviation Museum in Pensacola is the world's largest naval aviation museum. This museum has over 150 restored aircrafts representing Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard aviation.



■ **Lt. Col. Helen Purviance** of the Salvation Army, Palm Beach was the "Original Doughnut Girl" in World War I. She was presented a plaque by 1964-1965 Legion National Commander Donald E. Johnson for her humanitarian services and devotion.

■ **USS Tampa Post 5** owns the only stand-alone American Legion cemetery in the country and the only veterans' cemetery in Hillsborough County, which has Florida's largest population of veterans with 98,307. In 1921, Unit 5 Auxiliary President Mrs. O. N. Bie witnessed Tampa police attending to the lifeless body of a homeless World War I veteran. appalled at the thought of a war hero being placed in a pauper's grave, she purchased three acres of land and dedicated it to Post 5 for the creation of an American Legion Cemetery. The Cemetery is located next to Post 5 on the corner of a busy intersection in Tampa – Dale Mabry Highway and Kennedy Blvd.



Before the National American Legion organization standardized uniform caps, Florida's was a solid-orange color in honor of the state's official fruit and largest crop.

1919

May 24: Department of Florida is chartered. **A.H. Blanding** is the first Commander. By Oct. 18, there are 50 posts and 1,575 paid members.

1935

The Department is the first to receive the **Henry L. Stevens Jr. Trophy** for enrolling the highest percentage of its member quota by the time of the annual telegraphic roll call – 8,001 out of the 9,903 goal.

1946

Edmond Gong of Miami is elected the first Boys Nation president.

1948

James Grant of Orlando wins first place at the National American Legion High School Oratorical Contest in Savannah, Ga.

1960

Department Historian, **Robert Francis**, is named the winner of The American Legion Department History Contest.

1970

The first Sons of The American Legion Detachment of Florida Commander, **Richard Kepler**, is elected.

1973

Carl Clinton Wilkinson III, sponsored by Post 81 in Melbourne, is named the first American Legion National Boy Scout of the Year.

1986

Sept. 1: **Jensen Beach Post 126** takes an 8-2 victory over Las Vegas at the American Legion Baseball World Series in Rapid City, S.D.



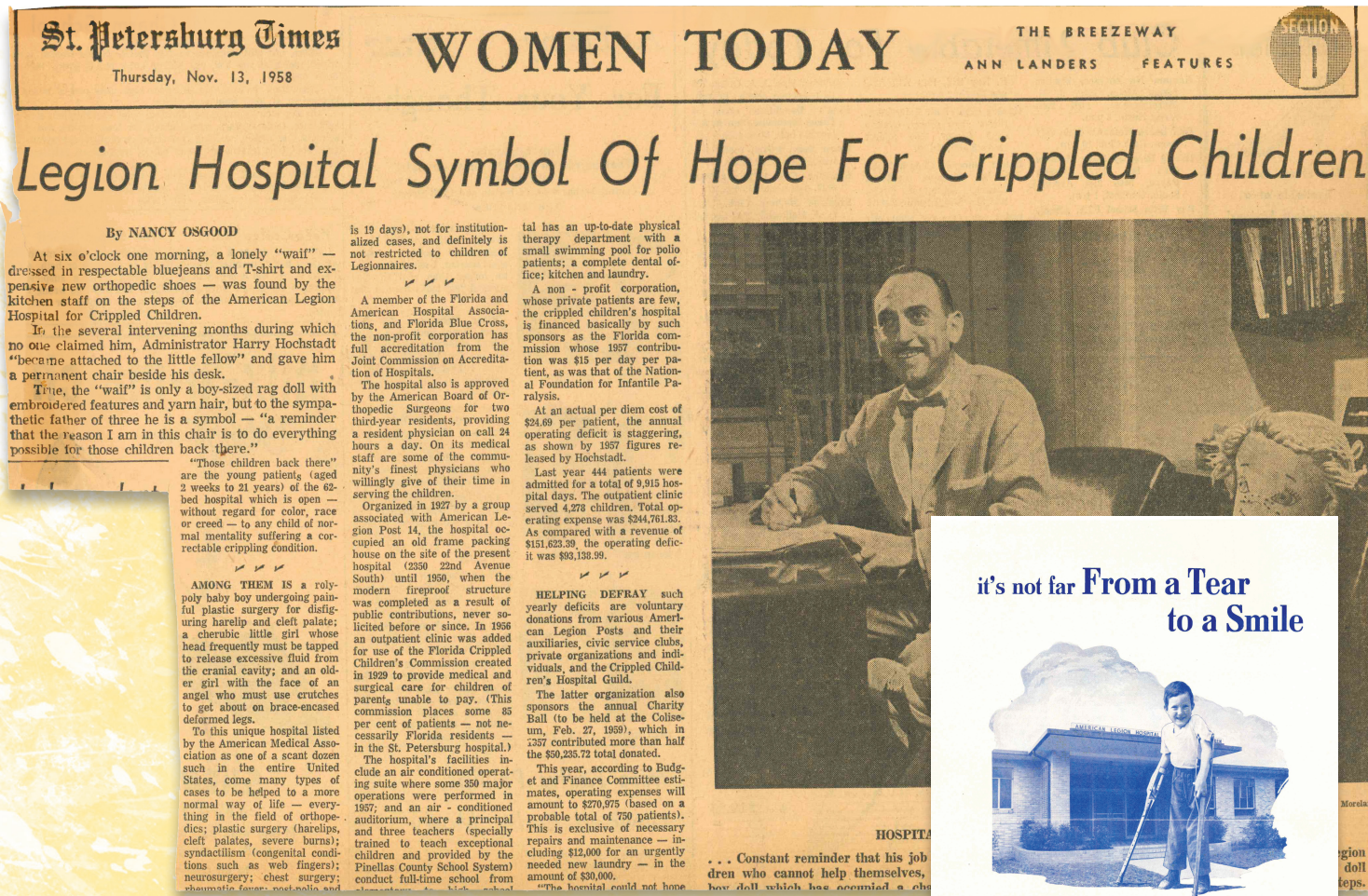
Florida American Legion Boys State

Florida American Legion Boys State started in 1940. Due to World War II, the program was suspended from 1942 to 1945; it was re-established in 1946. Throughout the years the program has enjoyed staying at Florida State University in Tallahassee and utilizing the State Capitol Chambers. In 2018, the program celebrated its 75th session. Former governor and current U.S. Rep. Charlie Crist is an alumnus of Boys State.

At Florida American Legion Boys State, high school students are exposed to the rights and privileges, and the duties and responsibilities, of a franchised citizen. The training is objective and practical, with city, county and state governments operated by elected and appointed officials duly placed in office by the participants of Boys State.

Activities include legislative sessions, court proceedings, law enforcement presentations, assemblies and recreational programs. The American Legion Auxiliary conducts Girls State for female high schoolers.

High school juniors are selected cooperatively by school officials and Legionnaires to participate in Florida American Legion Boys State. Every year, the program brings 500-plus boys from all over the state to attend the weeklong session. For many of these young men, it is the only time they will ever see the state capitol.



From Legion to Johns Hopkins, for all children

On Feb. 19, 1927, St. Petersburg Post 14 established "The American Legion Hospital for Crippled Children" to care for children with polio and other crippling disorders, without regard for race, creed or ability to pay. The hospital expanded in 1936 and again in 1950, being able to accommodate nearly 500 patients each year. By 1960, more than 5,000 additional square feet were added for rehabilitation and occupational therapy, a library and additional school facilities.

From 1961 to 1965, the threat of polio started to recede, causing hospital leaders and trustees to plan for a new future that would

provide specialized services for children with a diverse range of health-care needs. Through the years All Children's Hospital continued to expand by adding more space, programs and diverse pediatric care. In 2011, All Children's Hospital joined the Johns Hopkins Health System as a fully integrated member of Johns Hopkins Medicine. Even though the hospital has gone through so many changes, one thing has remained, and that is Post 14. They have a seat on the board of directors in perpetuity for their dedication to rallying the community to create a special place for children all those years ago.

Did you know?

The late Stanley Martin Lieber – better known as Stan Lee, for his work with Marvel Comics – was an honorary life member of Clermont Post 357. Every year at MEGACON, Post 357 Commander Jim "Dusty" Douglas presented Lee with the Department Commander Challenge Coin for that year.



1988



June 4: **Frank Reese Jr.** of West Palm Beach Post 199 is elected the first African-American Department Commander.



1991

May 18: The new **Florida American Legion Headquarters building** in Orlando is completed and dedicated.

2003

Department of Florida adopts the **American Legion Riders** program for motorcycle enthusiasts. Post 75 in Crestview is the first chapter to form.

2013

July 1: The **Florida American Legion License Plate** is enacted and made available for pre-order. A portion of revenue goes to the Department to support Boys State and Girls State, as well as Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation programs.

2014

PROJECT: VetRelief (PVR) is formed; it becomes an official program of the Department in 2017. Today, \$326,748 has been given to 381 veterans and their families in need of financial assistance.

2018



July 7: **Dianne Boland** of Palm Bay Post 117 is elected the first female Department Commander.

Post-9/11 FL LEGION



"I didn't realize how much I missed the comradery and sense of purpose until I was invited to join the Legion and remembered what it was like to know someone understands your experiences and will back you up without batting an eye. It's not just me though – it's knowing that Legionnaires are willing to do the same for veterans and families through our amazing programs, services and legislative projects in our local area, state and nationwide. I'm glad I found an organization that continually honors those who have served in the past while keeping an eye toward the future."

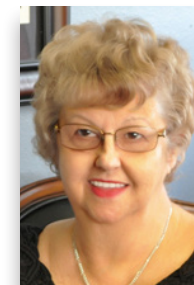
Bekki Tibbs, a member Post 117 of Palm Bay, who served in the Air Force as a cryptologic linguist and currently translates her skills for the Department of Florida.



■ The longest-serving Boys State counselor is **Willie Leonard**, who has been quartermaster for 55 years. He has been a Department employee for 49 1/2 years.

■ The largest Legion post in the world is **Lady Lake Post 347**, boasting 6,459 active members. It was chartered in 1987.

■ The largest American Legion Family membership in the world is **Madeira Beach Post 273**. The Post is also the second largest Legion Post in the world, boasting 3,808 members. It was chartered in 1947.



■ The current Department Membership Director is **Irene Graham**. She has been serving our veterans for the past 33 years, and is affectionately referred to as "The Queen."

■ Post 122 (est. 1940) was the **first all-nurses post**. They turned in their charter in 2005.

Contact The American Legion of Florida

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