



EVERY DEPARTMENT HAS A STORY

THE AMERICAN LEGION OF

INDIANA

The American Legion's Department of Indiana approaches its second century of service to the state's veterans with a membership of nearly 90,000 men and women who served during World War II, the Korean War, Vietnam War, Panama/Grenada and Lebanon, and every U.S. military action since Operation Desert Storm and Desert Shield. One Legion program that has zoomed ahead – pun intended – in the last several years is the Indiana American Legion Riders. This group of motorcycle enthusiasts has raised thousands of dollars for children, veterans, wounded servicemembers and Legion scholarship programs. They also provide escorts at military funerals, ride in parades and more.

IN Legionnaires



Col. Harvey Weir Cook was a Legionnaire, a World War I flying ace and a pioneer in commercial aviation who helped develop the air mail service. He died in 1943 during a combat mission in the South Pacific. The Indianapolis International Airport is named in his honor.



Paul V. McNutt was a World War I veteran, governor of Indiana from 1933 to 1937, and commander of both the American Legion state (1926-1927) and national (1928-1929) organizations. The Franklin native was also a presidential contender in 1940. He died in 1955 and is buried in Arlington National Cemetery.



Eddie Rickenbacker was also a World War I flying ace – in fact, his record 26 aerial combat victories earned him the nickname “Ace of Aces.” The Ohio native had been involved in the early days of auto racing before turning his attention to the skies, and after the war he became president of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, having bought most of its common stock. Rickenbacker was a member of the Aviators Post in New York City. He died in 1973.



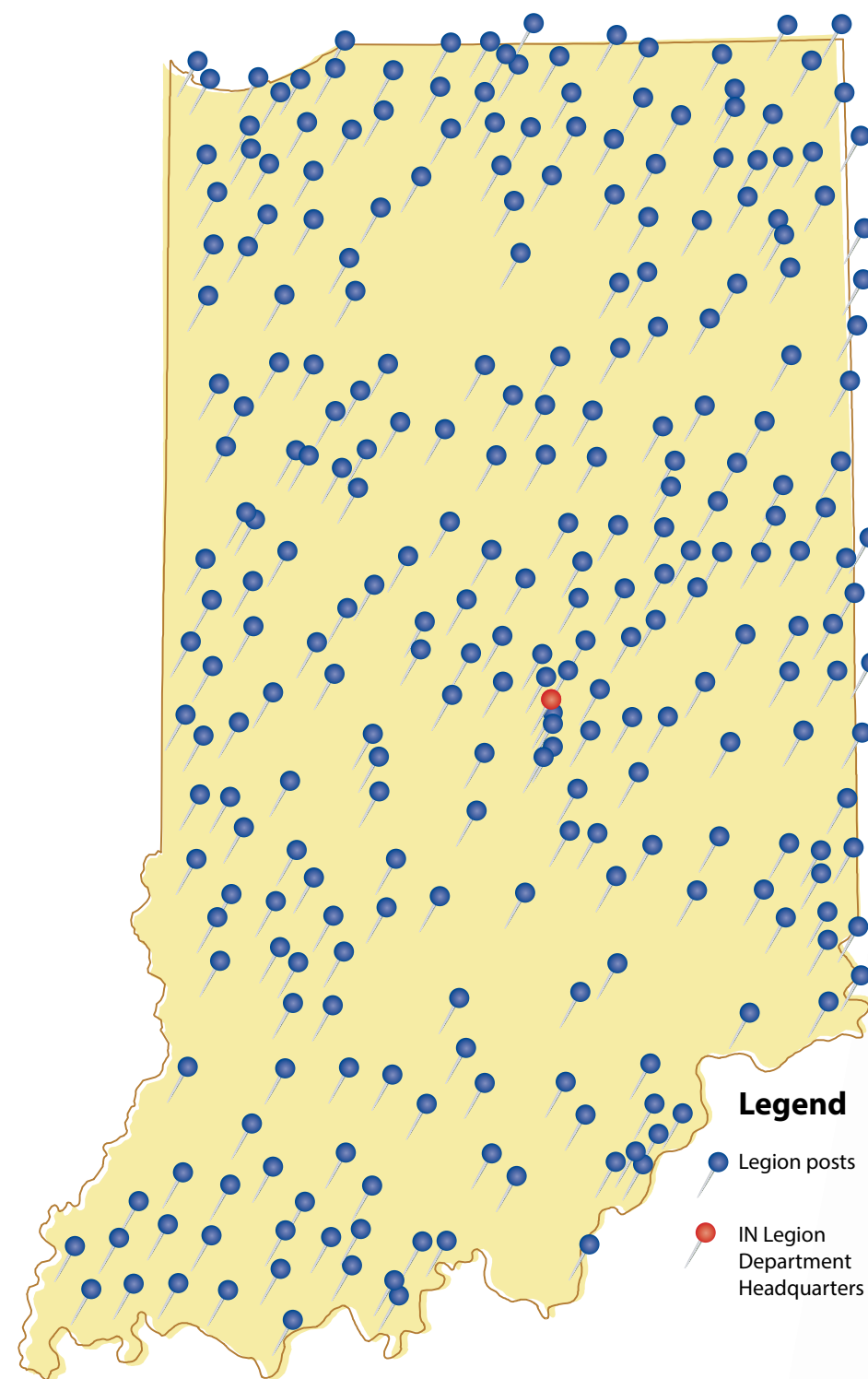
Vital help in crisis

In late January 1937, Jeffersonville flooded when the ice-clogged Ohio River crested over the 72-foot levee designed to protect the town. Many buildings were washed away. Towns all along the Ohio River were impacted. But southern Indiana had a group of guardians who sprang into action: American Legion and American Legion Auxiliary members.

The Indiana Department Headquarters appealed over the radio and in a bulletin to posts for relief supplies. More than 1,500 truckloads of materials soon appeared. Legionnaires patrolled the Ohio River area looking for breaches in the levees and repaired them. They also used boats to evacuate the elderly, disabled and those who were late to escape. Legionnaires teamed with police to augment rescue squads and assist with traffic snarls. With flood waters at their peak, Legionnaires went out in boats of all types to rescue those isolated by the flooding.

The Jeffersonville Legion post was turned into a refugee center, providing shelter and food for the flood victims until the structure collapsed, killing members who remained. Auxiliary members provided countless meals to refugees and relief workers, sometimes under the worst of circumstances.

At the peak of relief efforts, The American Legion took over part of New Albany, Ind., setting up a commissary and first aid station.



Legend

● Legion posts

● IN Legion Department Headquarters

■ **Speedway American Legion Post 500** is located across the street from the famous Indianapolis Motor Speedway (IMS), and was organized in 1941 by 16 World War I veterans employed at Allison Division, General Motors Corp. The post reached an all-time high of 1,268 members in 1997, and generates a majority of its revenue by offering parking at IMS events.

■ **Herbert Kuhn Post 253** is one of the largest in Indiana, with nearly 3,000 American Legion Family members, located in the small fishing village of North Webster (population 1,146 at the 2010 census). The post is named after the first North Webster native to be killed in World War I. The post is very active in its community through sports, scholarship programs and outreach to local disabled veterans.



The insignia on the Indiana Legionnaire's cap is a rendition of the Soldiers and Sailors Monument in the center circle of Indianapolis; the first monument in the United States to honor the common soldier, it was publicly dedicated

in 1902 for Hoosier veterans of the Revolutionary War, the Mexican-American War, The Civil War and the Spanish-American War.

Hoosier State Attractions

American Legion Mall, Indianapolis

The American Legion Mall extends from St. Clair Street to North Street between Meridian and Pennsylvania streets in Indianapolis. The mall gets its name from the Legion's former and current national headquarters buildings, which front Meridian and Pennsylvania. A collection of war memorials adds to the site.



Bartholomew County Memorial for Veterans, Columbus

Columbus is world-famous for its architecture, so the atypical appearance of its veterans memorial should be expected. Dedicated in 1997, it consists of 25 40-foot limestone pillars arranged in a grid. The interior contains names of the fallen, inscriptions and more.



LST-325, Evansville

On the National Register of Historic Places, LST-325 is a decommissioned Navy Landing Ship, Tank that saw extensive service in World War II, including D-Day. In 2001, a group of former sailors and history buffs took it over; its home is now on the Ohio River in Evansville, where a shipyard built LSTs during the war. It is open for tours, and goes on river cruises to raise funds for upkeep.



1919

A state convention of World War Veterans meets and authorizes the formation of the Indiana Branch of The American Legion. Its first two posts are chartered on June 14.



1920

The American Legion Department of Indiana receives its permanent charter on Aug. 1.

1926

The first radio program for the department is broadcast Jan. 13 on WFBM (now WFBQ and WNDE) in Indianapolis.



1927

More than 400 Hoosier Legionnaires make the trip to the national convention pilgrimage from New York to Paris.

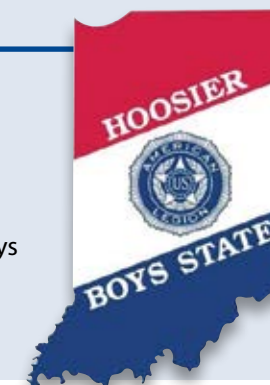
1928

The Blanford Cubs, anchored by Margaret Gisolo, win the Indiana American Legion Baseball title.



1946

Hoosier Boys State, an adaptation of a national program to teach high-school boys about the workings of U.S. government, begins.



iVETS

One of the newest programs of The American Legion Department of Indiana is designed to fill a gap in the assistance the department can provide for veterans in need.

Department initiatives such as the Child Education and Welfare Fund grants money to veteran households with children to get them through hard financial times. But nothing was available to households without children – whether because the children

have aged out of the home or the veteran is not a parent.

So, in May 2016, work began on the Indiana Veterans Emergency Transition System (iVETS). Parenthood is not necessary for direct short-term financial assistance of up to \$500

for veterans in need. It was approved by department resolution in early 2017, and is considered a permanent program.

Approximately \$50,000 has been raised through projects and donations. Among the initiatives: T-shirts, wall art, and the opportunity for Legion Family members to volunteer at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway in May, with proceeds going to iVETS.

■ The first commander of **Leora Weare Post 173** in Versailles, Alva “Judy” Bronnenberg, served in that capacity in 1919, 1920, 1921, 1922 and 1948, an almost unprecedented span.

■ In 1946, the Department of Indiana embarked on a statewide campaign to save a 1,450-acre tract of timber known as “The Shades” in Waveland from a whiskey distilling company that would have turned the forest into barrels. A two-year fundraiser generated more than \$265,000 – more than \$2.6 million in today’s economy – allowing the Legion to purchase the land and present it to the State of Indiana in 1948 to become the 15th state park. The 1,450-acre park was dedicated officially as “The Shades Indiana Memorial American Legion Park.” In 2016, during a rededication of the park, a time capsule was buried containing items donated by the Department of Indiana.



Home of firsts in the Legion Family

Almost since its creation, The American Legion’s Department of Indiana has served as an early adopter of programs and initiatives that have since become fundamental parts of the national organization.

That penchant for early adoption has been in force since the beginning – the department’s initial charter was issued on May 24, 1919, less than one month after the first U.S. caucus of what would become the Legion in St. Louis.

The first Legion national convention was held in Minneapolis in November 1919; on Dec. 6, acting upon authority granted by that convention, the first national application for an American Legion Auxiliary unit was granted to R.E. Kennington Unit 34 in Indianapolis. It began with 30 members.

Efforts in which the Department of Indiana took part would bring it even closer to national influence. In the early 1920s, Indianapolis went up against Chicago, New York City and Washington, D.C., for the opportunity to be the home of the national organization – and won. When a national headquarters building was built downtown in the early 1920s, the state

organization shared space with it until the national headquarters moved to larger quarters in a new building across the Legion Mall. The department wouldn’t depart for a building of its own, on the Fort Benjamin Harrison campus, until 2014.

In 1933, soon after its official recognition as a national program at the 1932 National Convention, the first charter to a Sons of the American Legion squadron in any department went to Bruce P. Robinson Squadron 133 in Indianapolis. Today, the Auxiliary and the Sons combine with the Legion to form the American Legion Family.

In 1944, it was a resolution at the department’s convention that called for a national-level “American Legion College,” to teach new Legionnaires coming out of World War II about the history and workings of the organization. The college, which started in 1946, is still held at National Headquarters each fall.

And leading the way for the organization as a whole has not stopped. The department is regularly the leader in donations to Operation Comfort Warriors, a national Legion program that donates helpful and recreational items to injured servicemembers.

Post-9/11 IN LEGION

“After 9/11, a lot of my friends deployed. As I’ve gotten older, I’ve done more for veterans, because I never did any sort of combat.

The American Legion has done so much for the veterans community nationwide. I’d want to be a member of any organization that helps the veterans community like that.”



Cedar Lake Post 261 member Jason Zaideman (right), who served in the Army from 1996 to 2000. An example of an active young Indiana veteran, in 2015 he founded a nonprofit – Operation Combat Bikesaver – that was endorsed by the American Legion’s Department of Indiana via resolution in 2017. Veterans and first responders suffering from TBI, PTSD and depression learn how to refurbish old motorcycles, which they then get to keep. Sundays see them learning to build, fabricate, weld and paint, using donated bikes and parts. According to the nonprofit’s website, “All of us here at Operation Combat Bikesaver have lost someone to the after-effects of defending their country and community. We would love nothing more than to help our heroes return to feeling normal again.”

■ As the Department of Indiana moves into the future, technology, culture, generational differences, and character and composition of the Armed Forces will help determine the shape of The American Legion in the 21st century. The department has a strong presence on the Internet and social media sites, is continuing to develop abilities to communicate with all members electronically, and increasingly relies on online services to renew, report and maintain membership. Posts all across the state are updating and modernizing their facilities and providing innovative support and activities for younger veterans – such as Wi-Fi hot spots, smoke-free facilities and after-school programs for the children of veterans at work.

■ In 2013, University Veterans Post 360 at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) – one of the first of the post-9/11 generation of campus posts – worked with representatives from the Department of Indiana on state legislation extending resident rates for tuition at state universities to all veterans.

Contact The American Legion of Indiana

Will Henry – Department Adjutant

5440 Herbert Lord Rd.

Indianapolis, IN 46216

☎ 317.630.1300 🌐 www.indianalegion.org



Join The American Legion

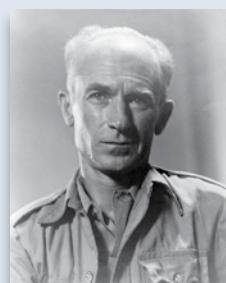
🌐 www.legion.org/join

Did you know?

The American Legion’s Department of Indiana advertising program brings the Legion’s message to the airwaves and into packed sporting venues. Launched in 2013, the “We Change Lives” campaign has included membership commercials on local radio and television stations, and membership booths at Indianapolis Colts football and Indianapolis Indians baseball games. It even conducted a 33-second digital commercial on Comcast Spotlight with Colts placekicker Adam Vinatieri as the spokesman.

1943

Herbert O. Ficklin, youngest member of The American Legion at just 13, joins Broad Ripple Post 312.



1945

Ernie Pyle Post 247 at Indiana University is the first World War II post to be established on an Indiana college campus, after the famed war reporter’s death.



1947

The department alerts posts that there will be 11,000 returning dead from World War II and plans for proper burial services will be required.

1965

The 8th District promotes Legion programs by placing messages on 250,000 Pure-Pak milk cartons for purchase in stores.

1996

Wendee Whisman of Morton Memorial JROTC wins the Legion’s 3-Position Air Rifle National Championship in the Sporter category.



2012

James E. Koutz of Boonville is elected national commander of The American Legion.



2016

Ground is broken on the Indiana Military Veterans Hall of Fame site adjacent to the Department of Indiana headquarters in Lawrence; the department donated the land for the planned construction.