

American Legion: serving those who serve freedom

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For God and Country, we associate ourselves together for the following purposes: To uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States of America; to maintain law and order; to foster and perpetuate a one hundred percent Americanism; to preserve the memories and incidents of our associations in the Great Wars; to inculcate a sense of individual obligation to the community, state and nation; to combat the autocracy of both the classes and the masses; to make right the master of might; to promote peace and goodwill on earth; to safeguard and transmit to posterity the principles of justice, freedom and democracy; to consecrate and sanctify our comradeship by our devotion to mutual helpfulness.

— Preamble, American Legion Constitution

The American Legion's mission is much greater than the words of its national constitution, though. Committed to serving

veterans, their families, and its communities, the organization has nearly 3 million members in about 15,000 posts throughout the world, making it the largest veterans' organization in the world.

The American Legion Department of Wisconsin was chartered Aug. 1, 1920; the national charter was ratified by Congress in 1919. There are currently 527 posts throughout the state—24 in Dane County alone—with a total membership of 76,000.

To qualify for membership, a soldier must have served at least one day of active duty at some point since April 16, 1917, with an honorable service record. Programs offered by the American Legion of Wisconsin—aside from the powerful national lobby—include the Family Support Fund, Camp

American Legion and scholarships such as the Eagle Scout of the Year Scholarship, as well as assistance accessing all of the benefits available through the various Veterans Associations and Veterans Administration.

One of the more unique programs offered by the American Legion, which serves the state as a whole, is Badger Boys State. It is expected that some 900 boys from throughout the state will take over Ripon College for eight days this summer.

The boys will take on and carry out all aspects of being "The 51st State," including the main functions of city, county and state government—complete with legislative representatives, police, attorneys and judges—using Wisconsin's government structure as a guide.

Boys can take part in sports and music activities, as well. To be eligible for Badger Boys State, one needs only to be a high school junior in good academic standing who displays strong leadership abilities; a local post must sponsor the boy, paying his fees to attend.

The American Legion also works hard to take care of active troops and their families. Operation Airtime funds satellite phones so troops in Iraq can contact their families back home. A number of Wisconsin schools, such as Maple Grove Elementary in Greenfield, have held fundraisers for the program.

For those who want to show their support for our troops, the American Legion has an online store with a full line of "Support the Troops" merchandise, including yard signs, wristbands and car magnets. A number of citizens with no ties to the military have purchased merchandise from the store, which funds the American Legion's activities.

