



THE AMERICAN LEGION FAMILY DINNER

Planning Guide

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Suggested Timeline Legion Family Dinner Planning

Here is a suggested timeline to plan and promote Legion Family Dinners in local communities. These dinners can be held in conjunction with the Legion's birthday, your post's birthday, Memorial Day, Veterans Day, Thanksgiving, Christmas and more. For questions about the dinner project, email magazine@legion.org.

As Soon As Possible:

- Reach out to department and/or district to invite leadership to attend the Legion Family Dinner. If a department or district representative attends, see if they would like to participate in speaking and/or welcoming the guests as part of the program.
- Legion Family leaders should get together to outline the best way the post/squadron/unit can deliver the Legion Family Dinner message, assign responsibilities and set deadlines for accomplishment.
- Identify specific groups/people from the community to invite, such as law enforcement officials, school teachers, National Guard families, Military Family Support Groups, Scouts and college veterans associations.
- Determine how best to incorporate into the dinner the centennial message, and history of post, interesting figures, displays, traditions, etc.
- Make a list of possible local sponsors who may be able to offer funds or food and decide how best to recognize them at the event and in media.
- Specify logistics of the event itself (menu, pricing, advance reservations).
- Develop a media plan to promote event, using local outlets, fillable flyer (included at www.legion.org/nalpa/resources), and social media.
- Identify opportunities to make the dinner an opportunity for membership recruitment, fundraising or basic awareness of what the Legion Family does.
- Enlist the help of local American Legion youth program participants, their coaches and instructors; consider offering them a percentage of the dinner proceeds.

Two months prior to dinner:

- Finalize logistics – place, time, menu, estimate of numbers, promotional budget, volunteer staffing needs and clean-up.
- Prepare a message for the dinner that emphasizes both current services and post history, to go along with the centennial.

- Decide if funds from the dinner can be used to help a specific cause, such as restoration of a veterans memorial, support for a youth program, flag purchases for the community, or other opportunities.

One month prior to dinner:

- Invite groups in the community to the dinner and begin collecting a reservation count in order to plan accordingly for numbers.
- Explore opportunities to serve free or discounted meals to homeless veterans, those at long-term care facilities or others in the community who might feel isolated.
- Pursue local sponsorship opportunities, such as donations of food items or funds, to help offset the cost of this expanded dinner.
- Begin implementing media plan; emphasize advance reservations and the Legion Family's passion to share with the community all the good the post does.
- Review media plan, adjust as needed to reach the desired audiences, encourage advance reservations, and deliver the message – preferably in person – to local media managers and editors.
- Complete the fillable flyers and begin posting them.
- Begin social media announcements, which can continue on a regular basis as the event nears. Use hashtag #LegionFamilyDinner.
- Announce plans for your event on your website, social media channels and submit a story on the national website, www.legion.org/legiontown.

10 days before dinner:

- Prepare the post or event venue for the dinner, with a focus on the Legion's "Legacy and Vision," how programs through the local post history continue to improve lives today. Consider a display of post artifacts and treasures or a speech/presentation about the post namesake, particularly if the namesake is a World War I casualty, in this year of the U.S. centennial of the war that led to the formation of The American Legion.

Day of dinner:

- Conduct the dinner event.
- Take photos, shoot video, report success and post on social media channels, as it happens and immediately afterward. Use hashtag #LegionFamilyDinner.
- Report attendance and participation, not only to the post members but to those in the community at large so they will be interested in future years.

After the dinner:

- Share your post's Legion Family Dinner success at www.legion.org/legiontown.
- Prepare and deliver an article with photos for the post, district or department newsletter, website or social media channels.
- Get feedback from Legion Family members and other invited groups to determine how the dinner can grow and improve in future years.
- Follow up with attendees to see if they are interested in joining The American Legion Family or supporting in other ways.
- Have an after-action meeting, or make an after-action report part of the post meeting, to go over the numbers and what the dinner achieved in terms of local awareness.



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Local sponsorships can help

American Legion posts, Sons of The American Legion Squadrons and Auxiliary units can pursue local sponsorship opportunities, such as donations of food items or funds, to help offset the cost of serving up a Legion Family Dinner.

By visiting local businesses and potential sponsors, members of The American Legion Family can also promote how the local post serves the community and build awareness of the organization's coming centennial.

It's important to remember that sponsorship funds and other donations are not filling operational budgets but are being used to help and honor veterans, troops and youth, and to promote patriotism in your community.

A local business may be interested in assisting if needy members of the community, such as homeless veterans or those in long-term care, will be provided free meals on Veterans Day, Christmas Day, Memorial Day or other holidays.

Remember that when you ask for donations or volunteers, you also should invite the managers and employees of the company to come to the event and share in the experience.

Even if the business does not commit to help this year, thank them for their consideration and visit them again soon to explain how the event went.

For those who do commit funds or volunteers, be sure to recognize them in promotional materials such as flyers, releases and radio spots. Following that, a thank you letter from the post commander to the business owner or manager is important.

And in future events, dinner sponsors can be listed in programs or otherwise recognized at local post events.



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Legion Family Dinner Suggested Message Points on The American Legion

(for publicity, media interviews, remarks during dinner, etc.)

On the national level:

- The American Legion is nearing its 100th anniversary. It was founded in March 1919 in Paris, France, by U.S. World War I military personnel stationed there who were dedicated to four pillars of service: veterans, national security, youth and patriotic values.
- The American Legion today consists of 55 “departments” in each of the 50 states as well as the District of Columbia, France, Mexico, the Philippines and Puerto Rico. There are approximately 13,000 local posts worldwide. It is the nation’s largest veterans service organization.
- Current national American Legion membership is 2 million. Combined with the American Legion Auxiliary and Sons of The American Legion, membership in what is known as The American Legion Family exceeds 3 million altogether.
- American Legion membership is open to military personnel and veterans who have served their nation on active duty during wartime. Eligibility has been open to all who have served on active duty since Aug. 2, 1990, the beginning of continuous U.S. armed conflict in the Middle East and other locations around the planet.
- The American Legion has been instrumental in the creation of a number of major institutions of American society, including formation of the Department of Veterans Affairs, U.S. Flag Code, writing and passing the GI Bill and successfully fighting for adequate care for veterans suffering with such wartime conditions as post-traumatic stress disorder and those connected to Agent Orange exposure.
- Accredited American Legion service officers are working on approximately 750,000 benefits claims cases for veterans, free of charge, at any one time, year-round.
- The American Legion works daily in Washington to improve VA health care, benefits delivery, employment and business opportunities for veterans.
- The American Legion works daily in Washington and at the Pentagon to ensure our nation’s troops are adequately equipped, rewarded for their service and given a reasonable quality of life for their families.
- The American Legion serves thousands of young people a year through such programs as Boys Nation, American Legion Baseball, Junior Shooting Sports, Youth Cadet Law Enforcement, Boy Scout sponsorship, Oratorical Competition and Junior ROTC.

American Legion Posts around the nation:

- Fulfill more than 3.7 million hours of volunteer service in their communities per year

- Donate more than 80,000 pints of blood to collection centers nationwide, which makes The American Legion the nation's single largest blood donor
- Awards more than 8,000 medals to Junior ROTC students
- Sponsors more than 2,500 Scouting units serving more than 64,000 young people
- Awards more than \$4 million in college scholarships

Centennial:

- The American Legion will mark its 100th anniversary with a 15-month celebration running from its national convention in August 2018 through Veterans Day 2019.
- The Legion's 100th Anniversary mantra is "Legacy and Vision" – both a celebration of past accomplishments and a renewal of the organization's resolve to serve communities, states and the nation for a second century.
- Centennial initiatives of note include collection and housing of a worldwide database of memorials and monuments to military and veterans, participation in a national grant program to restore and raise awareness of local World War I memorials, connections with post-9/11 generation veterans groups on multiple projects, and more.

Post Message Points

Local post message are succinct, fact-based clauses or sentences that provide information you can easily share with others, such as the media. Posts are encouraged to create their own, featuring local historical facts, activities, programs and services. After completion, they can be saved for future use.

A few questions you can ask yourself as you prepare local post message points include:

Who is the post namesake and what is his or her story?

Who founded the post, and when?

Who are some notable members in your post's history?

Who are some notable alumni of your youth programs?

What are some important dates in the history of your post, and why are they important?

What community organizations has your post associated with over the years?

What community service roles does your post play now, or has it played in the past?

What great things has your post done for your community, such as the construction of war memorials, sponsorship of Scouting units, presentation of the colors at local patriotic events and activities, involvement in School Awards programs, scholarships and more?

What is your post's vision for the future and what are you doing to get younger veterans involved The American Legion?



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