The race to be No. 1

The American Legion Department of Iowa began accepting applications for post charters on May 12, 1919. As in many Legion departments, it was determined that the post whose charter was submitted and approved first would become Post 1. Thus was staged the great race between Council Bluffs and Spencer.

At the stroke of midnight on May 12, 15 veterans of each city signed application forms, had them notarized and got them on their way. The Spencer group set out in a Ford, hoping to beat the train to Des Moines from Council Bluffs. The train carried the other application. The Spencer team ran into bad roads, abandoned the car, boarded a train at Carroll, called a taxi at Des Moines and rushed to submit the application just five minutes ahead of the delivery from Council Bluffs. Thus Spencer was Post 1, Council Bluffs Post 2.

Sai Giunta, of Hiawatha, was the fourth member of the U.S. Armed Forces to receive the Medal of Honor for actions in Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. A member of American Legion Post 73 in Hiawatha, he received the medal after stopping an enemy ambush and killing a high-value Taliban combatant while serving in the military, everyone who goes into the unknown is a hero. “If I’m a hero, every man that stands around me, every woman...
The Iowa Idea: Serve in peace and serve in war

Community support is often considered the fifth pillar of the American Legion, and the so-called "Iowa Legion Idea" of the early 1920s planted seeds of local service that spread nationwide and continue today. The idea was simple that Legionnaires can and should volunteer their time, raise funds and substantially support other values-driven civic organizations and efforts in their communities.

Handford MacNider, who was elected national commander of The American Legion in 1921, was a leading proponent of the original Iowa idea. "We must continue to serve the country in the same spirit we had in war, and we can do that only if we have every post doing something for its community," MacNider said in the early years of the American Legion. Because its members are in nearly all other organizations and in all the churches, and because it represents so many different types of Americans welded by war service, comradeship and working for a common cause, can do things no other groups can do.

A May 25, 2008, tornado ripped through Parkersburg, killing seven and destroying hundreds of homes, soon followed by severe storms and flooding in New Hartford. American Legion Post 285 in Parkersburg quickly transformed to become a relief center, serving more than 30,000 meals in a six-day period. The devastated area received numerous American Legion National Emergency Fund grants. Post 285's response inspired creation of the national NEF Post Excellence Award.

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This organization is for everybody. The service officers that we have, how we fight for veterans, and the legislative projects that are sponsored by the Legion – those are our biggest assets. Getting that out into the public's eye has been a big help. It's been my best experience since I got out of the service. I can't believe we've been able to have done this 20 years ago when I first got out. It gives me a sense of camaraderie, the stuff you miss from the service.

That's what really pulled me in.

Marine Corps veteran Darrin Alderson, Commander of American Legion Post 34 in Oskaloosa and 2016 National American Legion College graduate