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.

In a tradition that dates at least as far back as the 3rd American Legion National Convention in Kansas City in 1921, the Iowa delegation continues to host cornshucks during annual American Legion National Convention Parades.

The Iowa Veterans Cemetery near Van Meter, was completed in 2008 with support from The American Legion. It is the final resting place for more than 2,000 Iowans and others who served in uniform and their families. Monuments and a visitor center can be found on the picturesque hilltop. Newly rebuilt American Legion Post 403 in Van Meter offers a veterans reception center for families visiting the cemetery.

The USS Iowa, which became known as “the world’s greatest naval ship” due to her big guns and speed, is first commissioned, beginning more than 50 years of service that includes 14 battle ribbons around the planet. Known as the battleship of presidents, she ferried President Franklin D. Roosevelt to Tehran for a secret meeting in late 1943 with Allied leaders Winston Churchill of Great Britain and Joseph Stalin of the Soviet Union.

The Sidney Iowa Championship Rodeo was launched by World War veterans of William Illiams-Jobe-Gibson American Legion Post 128 in 1923 and is now a top-level major professional event that seats 8,000.

The Fort Des Moines Museum and Education Center honors the history of African-American and female military service with extensive galleries and film areas dedicated to both, supported by The American Legion. In 1917, Fort Des Moines was the first U.S. military base to train black officers and in 1942, it became the national training center for the Women’s Army Corps (WACs).

Fort Monmouth was launched by The American Legion of Mason City, a combat officer of the American Expeditionary Forces, was fourth national commander of The American Legion and led a U.S. victory tour for France’s Marshal Ferdinand Foch in 1921. He later served as assistant secretary of war and as a commanding general in the Pacific during World War II.

U.S. Sen. Joni Ernst, a member of Stanton American Legion Post 407, was the first female veteran to be elected to the U.S. Senate. A former lieutenant colonel in the Iowa Army National Guard, she has been a frequent speaker at the American Legion Auxiliary Iowa Girls State.

Iowa Veterans reception center for families visiting the cemetery.

In John– home of the Iowa National Guard – is also the location of American Legion Hawkeye Boys State each summer. The Legion-supported Iowa Gold Star Military Museum there offers historical displays, weapons and a research library.

Stanton American Legion Post 407, in Mason City, has been a member of The American Legion Department of Iowa since its inception. The post was founded on May 12, 1919, and was the first American Legion post in Iowa to be chartered.

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With a wiggling fastball of 100 mph or more, Feller was known as the “Heater from Van Meter.” He started playing American Legion Baseball at 12. Five years later, he made his Major League debut, at 17, for the Cleveland Indians and struck out 17. Two weeks later, he struck out 17. The next season, the teen phenomenon was on the cover of Time magazine.

In 1941, following the attack on Pearl Harbor, Feller enlisted in the U.S. Navy, the first professional sports star to jump into the war. He served on the USS Allenwood and finished as a chief petty officer in 1945, with six campaign ribbons and eight battle stars. He was a member of The American Legion and one of the greatest American Legion Baseball alumni of all time. More than 70 Legion players would follow him into the Hall of Fame.

The Bob Feller Pitching Award is presented annually to the American Legion player who throws the most strikeouts in the regional and AL World Series tournaments.

**The Iowa Idea: Serve in peace as we served 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 continues today. The idea was simply that Legionnaires can and should volunteer their time, raise funds and substantially support other value-driven civic organizations and efforts in their communities.

Harry MacNider, who was elected national commander of The American Legion in 1921, was a leading proponent of the original Iowa Legion 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 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, built by war service, comradeship and working for a common cause, “can do things no other groups can do.”

The Iowa Idea was the basis of 1923’s fifth American Legion National Convention in San Francisco, “for the betterment of schools, recreation, park and playground facilities. Boy Scout work, medical clinics, municipal music concerts, public forums, community buildings, city planning and all forms of better citizenship.”

Inspired by the original Iowa Legion Idea, The American Legion of Iowa Foundation was incorporated on Nov. 29, 1978, reinvigorating the concept by raising funds and disbursing grants to deserving local programs and organizations. Now with more than $2 million in the corpus and having awarded over $2.3 million over the years, The American Legion of Iowa Foundation supports programs and activities ranging from Junior ROTC at high schools to medical equipment for clinics that help the solely to museum exhibits that honor POWs and MIA.

In 2016 alone, over $100,000 in grants were awarded from the Iowa Foundation, including some $30,000 in scholarships.

To learn more about The American Legion of Iowa Foundation, call (515) 282-5068 or send a tax-deductible donation to Iowa American Legion Foundation, 720 Lyon Street, Des Moines, IA 50309.

**Veterans of Valor**

Bob Feller’s story is just a small part of the stories that can be told about the contributions of veterans. The American Legion provides services and programs to help veterans and their families, including:

- **Veteran Services:** Assistance with benefits claims and other veteran services.
- **Veterans' noch Judiciary:** Legal representation for veterans.
- **Veterans' Employment:** Employment resources and job placement assistance.
- **Veterans' Mental Health:** Programs to help veterans with mental health issues.
- **Veterans' Housing:** Assistance with housing needs, including home repairs and adaptations.
- **Veterans' Benefits:** Help with understanding and applying for veteran benefits.
- **Veterans' Education:** Education and training opportunities.
- **Veterans' Transportation:** Assistance with transportation needs.
- **Veterans' Recreation:** Programs to help veterans engage in recreational activities.
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But the American Legion is about more than just providing services to veterans. It is about creating a sense of community and belonging for everyone who serves or has served in uniform. The American Legion is a community service organization that works to improve the lives of all Americans, not just veterans. It is about making a difference in the lives of those who have served and those who have not.

The Legion is a place where people can come together and work towards common goals. It is a place where veterans can connect with others who have shared experiences and where non-veterans can learn about the sacrifices made by those who served. It is a place where people can find support and encouragement.

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