

THE QUEST FOR EXCELLENCE IN LEADERSHIP

September – October 2018 Issue

To my fellow Legionnaires in the Great State of Texas:

Greetings. Everyone agrees that The American Legion is a good organization. We do a lot of good things for our community, state and nation.

Not only does everyone agree that The American Legion is a good organization, but I'm convinced that everyone also agrees that our noble organization can do a whole lot better. Our communities, state and nation need The American Legion today more than ever! The harvest is plenty, but the laborers are few ... and unfortunately the laborers are getting fewer all the time.

I have no doubt WE CAN do better ... MUCH better. But, in order to do better, WE HAVE TO CHANGE THE WAY WE DO BUSINESS. It will take excellent leaders to make that change. That's where you come in.

All the Departments in the rest of the country are expecting Texas to step up and set the example for The American Legion. Our vision should be to make the Department of Texas the best Department in the nation ... to raise the bar and set a high standard as an example of how good The American Legion can be ... to show that The American Legion REALLY CAN be a positive influence in our American society ... an American society that is hungry for REAL heroes to look up to ... a society that needs The American Legion today more than ever. Your excellent leadership can make that vision a reality.

This newsletter is not an official American Legion publication. Rather, it is intended to be a medium for communicating ideas among leaders for the purpose of improving the performance of The American Legion in Texas, the same way we would communicate via e-mail.

Are you counted among the growing number of Legionnaires in Texas who have joined the quest for excellence in leadership? Are you one of the faithful and patriotic Legionnaires who understands what the words "For God and Country" truly mean? Please let me know if you are one of those excellent leaders who wants to share your ideas to help make the Department of Texas THE BEST!

I am faithfully and patriotically "For God and Country",
JEROME ILTIS



My name is JEROME ILTIS. I'm not currently a candidate for any high office in The American Legion, nor am I appointed to any National or Department Commission or Committee. I'm looking for excellent leaders to share their ideas to make the Department of Texas the best Department ... for the Good of the Legion ... and for the Good of the communities, State and Nation that we serve.

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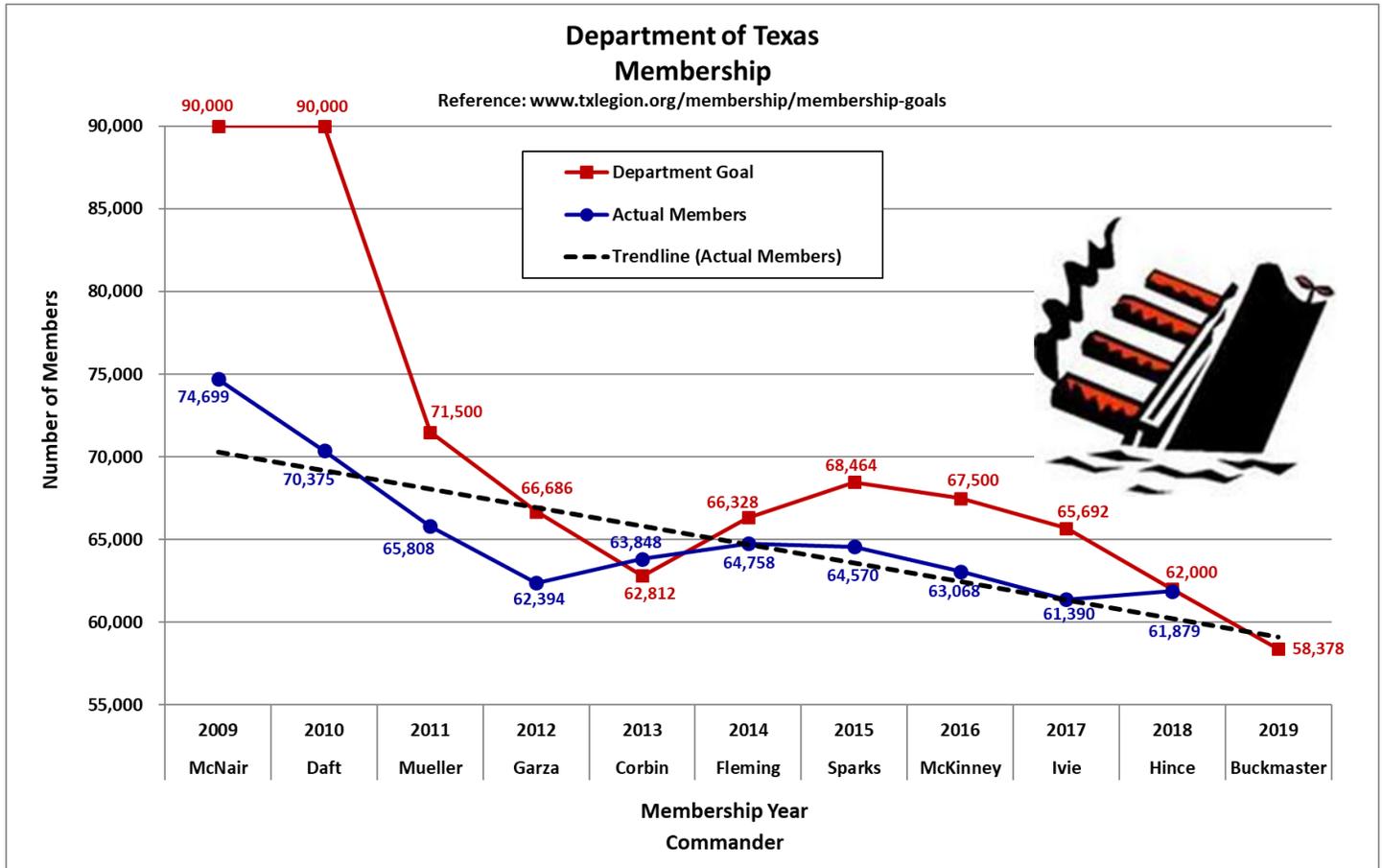
The Violin Plays While the Ship Sinks

Most people know about the sinking of the RMS Titanic. Legend has it that the orchestra on board played their music during the catastrophe in the face of their impending doom. Is the legend of the Titanic analogous to The American Legion in Texas? Is the proverbial violin playing as our once thriving organization sinks into the depths of oblivion?

Obviously, if there are no Legionnaires, there is no American Legion. Below is a chart that depicts a loss of 12,820 members – a 17% decrease – since 2009.

year to present a variety of membership awards at the Department Convention. Perhaps unwittingly, membership has become our primary purpose. Our leadership continually pounds it into our heads ... “It’s all about membership!”

Imagine a violinist playing the Titanic music as the membership awards are announced and as the recipients walk on stage to receive their awards. Rightly so, individuals, Posts, Districts, Divisions, and Departments should be rewarded for increasing



If membership is akin to a ship’s seaworthiness, then we haven’t sunk yet, but we’re definitely taking on water. If membership continues to decline at that 17% rate, in 44 years there will be no Legionnaires in Texas!

The one thing we do really well is measure membership, in many assorted ways. Obviously, membership is critically important to the health of The American Legion. A lot of time and effort are invested in trying to increase membership. A substantial amount of money is budgeted every

membership. But, unfortunately, while the numerous awards are given and while the violin plays, membership statewide continues its downward trend and the ship remains in jeopardy of sinking.

Our focus is misplaced. We exist to fulfill our organization’s noble purposes. Nowhere is the word “membership” mentioned in our Preamble as one of the ten purposes for which we associate ourselves together. Neither is membership a direct measure of the extent to which we fulfill our

purposes. The number of members in our organization is only an *indicator*. It's an indication of our performance, not a measure. In other words, increased membership in a Post is an indirect result of the Post actively serving its community through our programs. Post activity creates a positive public awareness and entices veterans to join. Conversely, declining membership indicates a Post's lack of activity because an inactive Post offers no reason for a veteran to join.

A much *truer* measure of performance is the Consolidated Post Report (CPR) ... at least, it would be a true measure if all the Posts would submit their CPR annually. Only a fraction of the Posts submit a CPR; consequently, we don't have a true measure of our performance.

If we measured Posts' activities down to the gnat's ass like we measure membership, and if we rewarded Posts' service to their communities like we reward membership, our focus would be where it needs to be. However, just because the current CPR reporting process is broken, we can't just surrender and accept the fact that it's broken. We need to fix it ... and with a little leadership, it can indeed be fixed. Until then, it is essential that specific activities be measured, particularly the programs that have Department commissions and committees in charge. Especially important is the need to measure participation in the youth programs – Oratorical, Boys State, Baseball, Flag Education, Junior Shooting, School Awards, and other officially recognized youth programs. Once these programs are measured, then Post participation awards can be created for each of these programs. In the meantime, all Posts should continue striving to earn the Texas Post Excellence Award.

Furthermore, what is the use of having Districts and Divisions if we don't collectively measure their Posts' performance as a whole? Other top organizations and successful businesses measure their performance regionally. Why don't we? It would be great if District Commanders and Division Commanders had the benefit of a Consolidated District Report and a Consolidated Division Report. They could then analyze past performance trends and focus their leadership and mentorship where needed in order to improve performance in their respective Districts and Divisions.

A concerted effort should be made to research past records to produce charts for the various programs similar to the membership chart. Then, the Long Range Planning Committee should be tasked to conduct a study to verify if, in fact, there is a correlation between program activity and membership.

We can play the violin music and pretend everything is OK, hoping that our organization will miraculously stay afloat. Or, we can recognize that we need to change the way we do business by measuring performance, by planning strategically and by developing and instituting best business practices to achieve strategic goals.

Strong leadership is absolutely essential at all levels in the state – at the Post, the District, the Division, and at the Department – to save the sinking ship. Such strong leadership is necessary to implement sound strategies and tactics in order to maximize the fulfillment of the noble purposes of The American Legion. Our communities, state and nation need us to make it happen, more than ever before.

Are you willing to step up and be that strong leader?

TEXAS POST EXCELLENCE AWARD

Posts that achieve this award will be recognized at the Department Convention and will be presented with a distinctive plaque by the Division and District Commander at a local community event to recognize the Post's efforts. The Department Headquarters will provide a press release to local media outlets. Posts must meet the following qualification by 30 days before Department Convention.

Award qualification requirements:

1. 90% retention of previous year's members.
2. Participate in a National Security Award Program.
3. Minimum 10% Increase in recruiting new members.
4. Participate in three American Legion youth programs.

Making Perfect Business Sense

The Direct Membership Solicitation (DMS) program is administered centrally by National Headquarters. It has been, and continues to be, the reason for thousands of veterans in Texas to join The American Legion. The veterans who join under the DMS program are placed as members in a virtual Post, which is fondly referred to as the “Ghost Post”. The official name is Post 345. Although it is chartered, it doesn’t function as a typical Post. It is a Post that exists in name only. The DMS members are held in Post 345 until they are transferred into a real Post.

The DMS program was developed and implemented by the National Organization as a result of Resolution 29 which was approved by the National Executive Committee October 14-15, 1981. It resolved that “prompt appropriate and timely action be taken to assist those members so processed to transfer into an American Legion Post near their residence”.



On August 4, 2012, several days before James Koutz was elected as the 2012-2013 National Commander, he laid out his membership plans including his strategy to have a DMS chairman in every department.

The Department of Texas had not previously executed Commander Koutz’s strategy. However, that may be changing. Resolution 25-18 was approved at this year’s Department Convention assembled in San Antonio, Texas, July 13-15, 2018. It resolved that “the American Legion, Department of Texas assign these DMS and TX-345 Members to

a Local Post or District Commander by the zip code provided within the State of Texas and within their respective areas.”

Justification

There were compelling reasons why several virtually identical resolutions were submitted to address this issue during the Department Convention. The primary reason was because people felt that the process to transfer DMS members from Post 345 into a local Post needed to be improved. For example, the Final Membership Report for the Department of Texas dated June 12, 2017, showed that only 1,081 DMS members were transferred into local Posts during the membership year, an average of 47 per District, while 6,329 DMS members remained in Department Headquarters Post 345.

It is time consuming to train people in each Post and then for the Posts to spend the burdensome effort to acquire the DMS member data, contact the DMS members, complete the Member Data Forms and mail the forms to Department. Likewise, it is time consuming and costly for National Headquarters personnel to visit Districts to conduct revitalizations for the sole purpose of transferring DMS members.

The time and effort to transfer DMS members distracts the Post members from instead devoting their time and effort toward recruiting new members and retaining existing members. More concerning, it distracts the Post members from fulfilling their purposes as Legionnaires for which we associate ourselves together.

The past practice authorized numerous individuals to contact DMS members. This practice risked the possibility of the DMS member receiving redundant communications and inconsistent messages from different individuals. On the other hand, many of the DMS members have never been contacted by a Post member or by anyone else in the Department. A National Headquarters study determined that lack of personal contact is one of the main reasons DMS members fail to renew their membership.

It is exponentially more efficient and more

productive for one person to accurately transfer DMS members into local Posts. This was proven by the 3rd Division Commander who conducted a test of the process in 2017 to determine the effectiveness of transferring DMS members from one central location. The Commander, who had access to adequate office resources, was somewhat experienced working with databases. The test was conducted during 16 consecutive days in his spare time. During that short timeframe, 101 DMS members were transferred into local Posts, far more than the annual average of 47 DMS transfers per District. As intended by National, each of the 101 DMS members were contacted either by e-mail or by personal phone call, and each granted their permission to be transferred. Essential to the success of the test was a concise message that resonated with the DMS members.

The Angel is in the Details

Many applaud the approval of Resolution 25-18 and see it as a way to compel our Department to better comply with the intent of National's DMS program. However, the angel is in the details. The resolution doesn't prescribe a process. There are important implications depending upon how the new process is drawn up. The spotlight will be focused on the Department Adjutant and the MO&PA Commission to develop the process and procedures in order to optimize the benefits of this resolution.

As part of the procedures, it is imperative that each DMS member be personally contacted, either by e-mail or by phone, to receive permission to execute the transfer. Not only does this meet the instructions from National, but there are other important reasons to contact the DMS member:

- Some DMS members would feel disenfranchised if they were transferred without their permission.
- Rather than transferring into the closest Post, some DMS members prefer to transfer into a different Post.
- Some members don't want to transfer but instead desire to remain in Post 345.
- This is a good opportunity to conduct a brief "climate survey" to determine the level of their

satisfaction with the organization and to answer any questions they may have.

- Simply making the effort to personally communicate with a DMS member gives him or her a sense of inclusion, which reduces attrition.
- Unreported deceased members are identified and the membership database is corrected.

Part of the Department's process should include tracking the Posts' duty to vote the transferred DMS member into the Post.

Because there is currently no vetting process for The American Legion to validate the veteran status of DMS members, the Department process should include a strong reminder to the Posts to check the transferee's DD-214.

District Commanders are encouraged to start new Posts. High concentrations of DMS members in localized areas are typically prime locations for starting a new Post. These DMS members are the source of members for the new Posts. Therefore, the Department should avoid transferring any DMS members who are targeted for a new Post.

Staffing

This wouldn't be a full-time job. There is no doubt, however, that this new Department responsibility would impose an additional burden on an already lean Department staff, a burden most likely too large to absorb. However, instead of hiring additional permanent staff, a consideration would be to initially pilot the program with temporary, part-time or contracted staff for a trial period, say two or three years, to determine the amount of time demanded of the task.

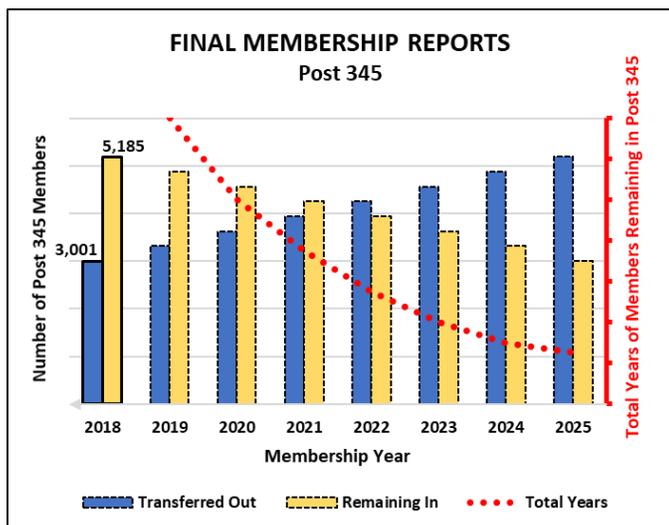
Any cost associated with centralizing the function of transferring DMS members at the Department should be considered and budgeted accordingly to coincide with the beginning of the 2018/2019 membership year.

The success of the National DMS program is measured by its Return on Investment (ROI) which depends upon the success of renewing DMS members beyond the year of acquisition. The MO&PA Commission should consider establishing performance measures for the DMS program in the

Department of Texas similar to the “Return on Investment” measures established by National. At the conclusion of the pilot period, if the ROI justifies hiring a permanent staff person, there are other business practices that could be beneficially centralized at the Department for the individual to undertake in order to justify full-time employment.

Measures of Success

In addition to measuring ROI, other DMS program measures should be considered. Perhaps the measures could be summarized similar to the following illustration:



Most importantly, as a result of lessening the administrative burden on the Posts, it should be determined if there is any tangible improvement in the performance of the Posts as measured by increased participation in our programs.

It is expected that the measured performance of the Department DMS program would be reported annually at the appropriate statewide convention(s). Upon completion of the pilot period, it should be determined whether or not to change the process depending upon the success or failure of the pilot.

Opportunity for Excellence

This endeavor could be a perfect example of leadership excellence. It has the potential to help make the Department of Texas the best Department in the country.

Calling all leaders!

Your leadership is needed to confront the urgent situation we face in the Department of Texas. Not only is the declining trend in membership already diminishing our relevance, but it is threatening our mere existence.

If you agree that The American Legion needs to play a more active role in the betterment of our American society, then you are called to lead.

Legionnaires everywhere are counting on you to step up and lead the Department of Texas to be the BEST Department in the country.

- Please let me know if the constructive suggestions offered by this journal are beneficial.
- Please let me know if this journal should be continued.
- Please let me know if you have any excellent ideas that you wish to share in future issues of this journal.

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