

**COMMANDER:** American Legion is expanding its role in communities

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August 2019, and in his first six months in office he was able to visit 31 departments. In March 2021, he resumed his travels and after being in Oregon, Oxford will visit Oklahoma, Arizona, New Jersey, North Dakota, West Virginia, and finish up in Idaho. He has also traveled out of the U.S. in Europe as well as Taiwan and Australia.

The American Legion, at 102 years old, is an all-volunteer organization whose main purpose is to take care of military veterans and their families. The national headquarters are located in Indianapolis. There are four concepts that form the basis for their programs: supporting American military veterans; supporting a strong national defense; addressing veterans' affairs; and providing youth programs to help prepare the leaders of tomorrow with an understanding of Americanism.

Oxford's personal platform for his term as national

commander is "A Foundation for the Future" – for both the Legion and the country. They sponsor numerous youth programs including American Legion baseball, Boys and Girls State, and youth orators, bringing 200,000 youth a year into American Legion activities. Former Boys State participants include Bill Clinton, Mike Pence, and Michael Jordan.

"The future of our country depends on our future leaders, and we owe it to our country to provide future leaders," said Oxford.

According to Oxford, the key to the future of the American Legion is increasing membership. In 1946, after World War II, there were 3.3 million Legion members. In 2021, there are 1.7 million members, with 4.2 million new veterans eligible for membership.

"We as a Legion family can fix it," Oxford told the Sisters post. "By making what we do as Legionnaires relevant to today and the future, we will leave a powerful legacy."

The Buddy Check program that used to only check on the welfare of veterans in need has expanded to



PHOTO BY S. FLYNN PHILLIPS

American Legion National Commander Bill Oxford visited the veterans memorial maintained by American Legion Post 86 at Sisters Village Green Park.

include anyone who finds themselves needing assistance. Oxford provided an example from Anderson Island, Washington, where during the pandemic, an American Legion member made trips twice a week to the mainland. He utilized a phone tree to find out what he could bring back to island residents. He ended up talking with 1,200 of the 1,400 Anderson Island residents over the months.

A native of Lenoir, North Carolina, Oxford is a paid-up-for-life member and past commander of Post 29 in Lenoir. A veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps, Oxford was an aviation electronic technician for the A-6 Intruder and served in Vietnam during his initial enlistment. After being discharged as a sergeant in 1970, Oxford joined

the North Carolina National Guard. He subsequently attended officers candidate school and transferred to the U.S. Army Reserve, where he ultimately retired as a colonel after more than 34 years of military service.

Oxford admits he originally joined the American Legion, after serving in Vietnam, for the Saturday night parties, eventually letting his membership lapse. In 1986, he was asked to help out with the American Legion youth baseball program. He went to a meeting, focusing only on the baseball program, and by the end of that meeting found himself serving as the post commander. From there he went on to serve at every level of the American Legion, including 15 years as the post

adjutant in North Carolina and as district, division, and department commander.

In May 2012, he was asked to consider becoming the national commander, which requires assuming a number of different positions to prepare for the top job. Oxford indicated it has been the unfailing support of his wife, Frances, that has made it possible for him to assume and carry out the duties of national commander.

The Oxfords, married since 1967, have a son and daughter, and four grandsons. Oxford's life has been one of service to his country and his community, serving as a mayor and city councilor, youth athletic volunteer, administrator, public address announcer, and a member of several fraternal orders.



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American Legion National Commander Bill Oxford with City Council President Nancy Connolly at the Post 86 dinner last week.

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