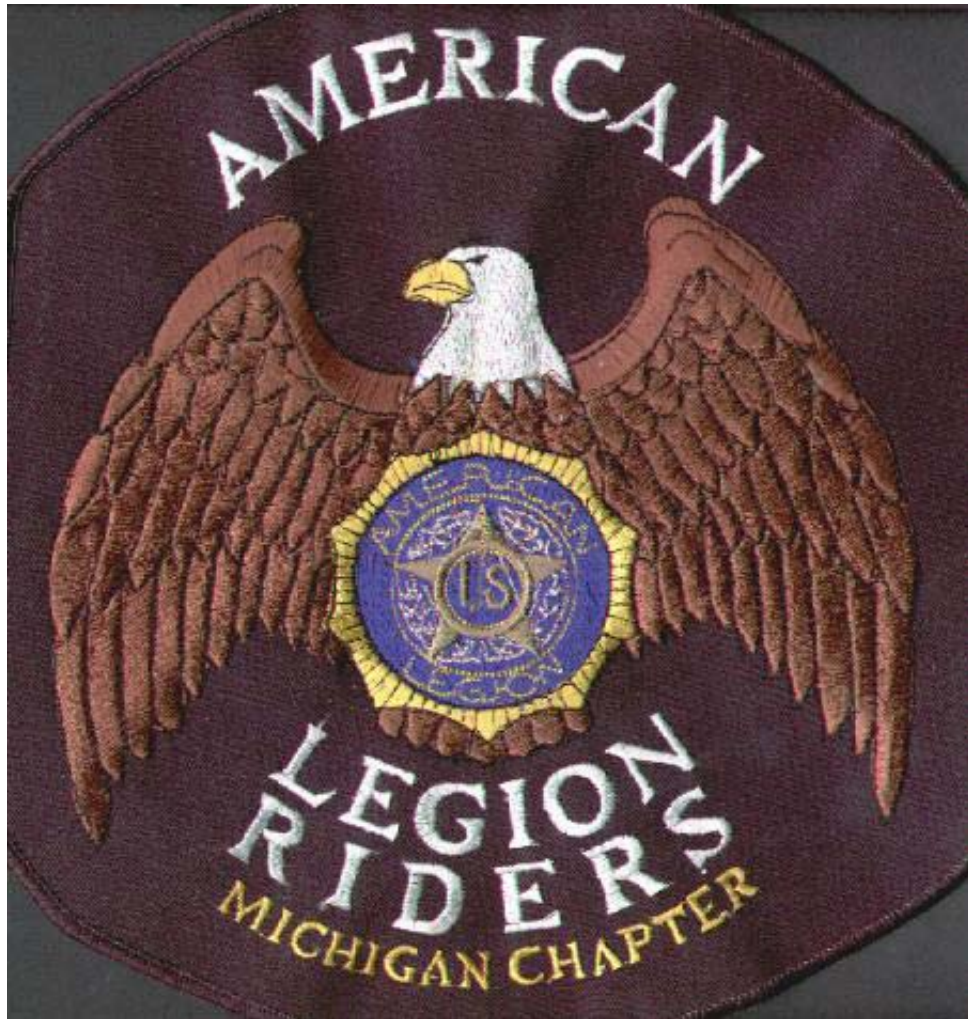


# *The American Legion Riders*



*To: Participate in parades and other ceremonies that are in keeping with the Aims and Purposes of the American Legion. To promote motorcycle safety programs and to provide a social atmosphere for American Legion members who share the same interest. To use our Association to promote and support programs of the American Legion.*

## *The Beginning of the American Legion Riders*

In the fall of 1993 Chuck (Tramp) Dare shared a dream with then Post Commander (Polka) Bill Kaledas at the American Legion Post 396 in Garden City, Michigan. The idea came about to start a motorcycle association that would operate within the American Legion. The idea was to provide an atmosphere whereas Post, Auxiliary and S.A.L. members, who shared an enthusiasm for motorcycles, could come together. It was meant to be a family oriented group.

Not knowing how to start this group up, and stay within the scope of the American Legion, a letter was written to then Department Adjutant Hubert Hess. In his November 19<sup>th</sup>, 1993 reply he stated that it "Sounds like a great idea". In this letter, and follow-up phone conversations, he gave us instructions on how to manage this program at our Post. He also provided us information on how to get approval for the use of the American Legion Emblem. We then sought to get this program recognized through our Post Membership. The idea was brought up at our Post meeting to have our Post sponsor the group to be known as the "American Legion Riders". It was passed by our members and thus became the birth of the first American Legion Riders group.

We started with just a small group. Within a few months we grew to nineteen members. We worked on developing a set of by-laws to help us to provide structure to our group. We designed an emblem for the American Legion Riders. This emblem, contained within its design, the emblem of the American Legion. Working closely with our Department Adjutant we were able to gain approval, by the national headquarters of the American Legion, to have our emblem manufactured for our group. This emblem is worn today by Legion Rider groups throughout the country.

Another important decision we made, with concurrence of our Department Adjutant, was to not require members that wanted to become legion Riders to transfer to our Post. Our Post sponsored the American Legion Rider group, but not all of our members belong to our Post. We felt that if we required members to transfer to our Post that this would cause a lot of hard feelings in other Post near our own community. What we soon found out was that our membership grew, not from current legion members, but many joined the American Legion to become members of the American Legion Riders. A very conservative estimate would say that over half of our current membership joined the American Legion to enable them to join the Riders.

Right after starting we proceeded to get down to "business". Our objective was to support the aims and purposes of the American Legion, through service to our Community, State and Nation. We did such things as putting on a "Bingo" at the VA Hospital, putting on fundraisers for local charities, participating in motorcycle "runs" to raise money for charity and participation in ceremonies and parades. We did have some Post members who thought, in the beginning, that we would be just a bunch of "Bikers". After seeing the kinds of things we did, we gained a lot of respect in both the American Legion community as well as our own community.

In 1996 we had an article published about the American Legion Riders in the American Legion National publication of the "Dispatch". An article in the American Legion Magazine soon followed up this article. In about 1996 "Tramp" moved to Texas, where he did a great job of promoting the Legion Rider program there. Today, there are groups of American Legion Riders throughout the country.

## *Where we are today*

As the membership of the American Legion Riders is a very diverse group, so are the programs that they are involved in. By allowing each American Legion Rider Chapter to give their members the ability to manage their program at the Post level, the program has been allowed to grow. Today there exist Legion Rider programs in several states, and many more starting. The types of things that these groups are doing are far too many to mention in this article, but here are a few examples:

- (1) Participation in the annual POW/MIA Rally held each Memorial weekend in Washington D.C. known as "Rolling Thunder".
- (2) Sponsoring or participating in local Charity events.
- (3) Raising money for such organizations as local VA Hospitals, Battered Women and Children's Center, Varied Children and Youth programs, a School for Blind Children, Veterans Relief, Needy families and many, many others.
- (4) Sponsoring or participating in motorcycle "Runs" to benefit numerous charities, including charities for underprivileged children and medical research, just to name a few.
- (5) Participation in memorial ceremonies and community parades.
- (6) One group is spearheading an effort to erect a "Veterans Memorial Park" in the center of their Downtown area.

The recognition by local communities has marked the program as a true success. The American Legion Riders Group in Michigan was even honored by the Local City Council, when they drafted a resolution Declaring the American Legion Riders as a valuable asset to the community. Motorcyclist can be a very dedicated group of people. When you combine this with the fact that they are legionnaires, you create a win/win situation.

## *Who benefits from forming an American Legion Riders Group?*

We all do!!!! Many of the groups, in existence today, have all had stories where some of their Post members were a little reluctant to let a group of "Bikers" in to their Post. After seeing what these groups were doing for the American Legion their opinion soon changed. Not only did the Post welcome them, but in most cases did what they could to help support their efforts, by participating in some of the groups fundraising events. There are also many stories where the American Legion Riders group worked in conjunction with the Post to sponsor a program. The Post was glad to have their help and the Riders were honored to be asked. We were able to break down some barriers. Just because one person wears a leather motorcycle jacket and another wears a golf shirt and slacks, we now know that we can work together to promote the aims and purposes of the American Legion. We have done it, and everyone involved was able to see the benefit. The American Legion Riders was never intended to be a "Motorcycle Club". As stated, it is to be able to work with the Local Post to assist in promoting the American Legion.

Membership, Membership, Membership!! Literally every Post program of the American Legion Riders has brought in members that may not have joined the American Legion were it not for the Riders program. The Riders program has been able to spark a new interest to join the American Legion. Some of these members, who joined for the Legion Rider program, have gone on to serve as Officers within their Post. Conversely, we have also had Post members go out and purchase motorcycles just to join the Riders. There was one story from a Post that recently started an American Legion Riders group. It advertised for the first meeting of the group. They originally intended for only about six or seven members to show up to the first meeting. When the meeting started they had seventeen people wanting to join, nine of these people were joining

the American Legion that night so that they could become members of the Legion Riders. Have you had a program that has brought in that many new members in one night lately?

Pure enjoyment!! The program was designed to have people work together and enjoy themselves. It may be a group of Riders working on a fundraiser for a local charity, it may be just a warm summer evening ride together or maybe just sitting at the Post sharing stories. It's all about members working together and playing together - it is there for them to enjoy.

### ***What are the requirements to become an American Legion Rider?***

- (1) Be a current member of the American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary or Sons of the American Legion.
- (2) Own a motorcycle (at least 350cc) or be the spouse of an owner who is an American Legion Rider member.

### ***What do I have to do to get an American Legion Riders Group started in my Post?***

- (1) Get the interest of a few members of your Post. It only takes a few to get the ball rolling.
- (2) Obtain approval of your post membership to sponsor your group.
- (3) Obtain further information by contacting;  
Bill Kaledas  
30215 Rush  
Garden City, MI. 48135  
(734) 421-7146  
e-mail: [bkaledas@hotmail.com](mailto:bkaledas@hotmail.com)  
or  
Chuck (Tramp) Dare  
106 Bauman  
Gatesville, TX. 76528  
e-mail: [tramp962@centraltx.net](mailto:tramp962@centraltx.net)
- (4) We can provide an updated list to let you know if an American Legion Riders Chapter already exist in your State, along with contact names.
- (5) Although this program is run from the Post level, it is still a good idea to send "Courtesy Letters" to your District and Department officers to keep them aware of your progress. Where two or more chapters exist in a single state, you may want to seek the advice of your Department Adjutant to bring the program in to a Department program that will have a state (Department) board of officers.