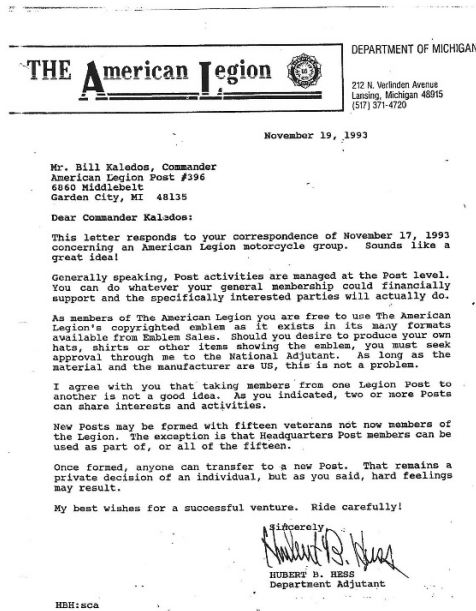


The American Legion Riders
The First 20 Years
Written 05/07/21

My name is Bill Kaledas and I am going to attempt to write some history on the American Legion Riders. As Chuck Dare (Tramp) and myself started the riders at Post 396, In Garden City, MI., about 28 years ago, I will write this to the best of my memory. Some dates may be a little off, and some details missed, but it is the best my memory has to offer.

After our regular Post membership meeting back in November of 1993, Tramp and myself sat at the bar, in the Post Clubroom, and had a Beer. Tramp started a discussion about the American Legion and motorcycles and as we sat there, we discussed how to join the two. At that time, I was the Post Commander and Tramp was the Sr. Vice Commander. We discussed how we could try to start a motorcycle group within the American Legion for those members who shared in interest in motorcycles. I then wrote a letter to our Department Adjutant and shortly after received a favorable reply.



Tramp came up with the name American Legion Riders. Soon we attracted 16 more members and that became the "Founding Members" of the first ALR Chapter. Tramp became the first Chapter Director.



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Now was the time to get to work. We needed an emblem to represent the ALR (Back Patch). My first wife, Bonnie (Passed away from abdominal cancer in 1998), put together a design for the ALR Emblem and one of our Founding members, Bob (Animal) Reynolds, provided some detail work to complete its design. We then sent this design to the National Judge Advocate, through our Department Adjutant, for proper approval. We received proper authorization to have patches made with this design, and thus created the first back patches for the ALR. This design is still in use today and now available, in many forms, through National Emblem Sales.



I think it was in 1996 that Tramp, and his wife Bernie, moved to Texas. I became the Chapter Director, and held that position for the next 8 years. Tramp was then able to start the first ALR Chapter in Texas and elected as its first Director. Later in 1995, a few of us in the chapter thought it might be a good idea to inquire about the ALR becoming recognized by the State. Myself and Mike Globke (Ponytail) made a trip to Department Headquarters in Lansing, MI. for a discussion with our Department Adjutant. I remember he cautioned us against Department involvement stating that the ALR in Michigan could be controlled by a group of "Old Guys" at the Department level. He advised us to continue with the ALR as a Post sponsored group.

Back then the internet and social media were still in their infancy and not widely used. I made up some information packages about the ALR. Many of the Founding Members would take these information packets to any event that we might run in to American Legion members who were also motorcycle riders in an effort to promote the growth of the ALR. We did this for several years during the "Rolling Thunder" event in Washington D.C. I remember while we were in D.C., we were down by the Lincoln Memorial, and one of our Founding Members, Pam Globke (Lips) came up with an idea. She had a piece of rope and had our group of about 12 members each hold on to the rope. She always called me "Pa" and she told me to take the lead of the rope so none of our members would get lost. It was sure quite a sight to see a bunch of Bikers, being lead around like School Kids, and it did get a lot of attention. Going to Rolling Thunder, back in those days, helped to spread information about the ALR on a broader scale. People would call me at home and I would then send them more information through the mail. Slowly, the chapters starting springing up around the country. In 2001, I flew down to Texas to meet up with Tramp and his wife, Bernie. Together we rented a table space at the American Legion National Convention in San Antonio to provide information on the ALR. During the Convention, the National Adjutant (Bob Spanogle) took notice of us and invited us to meet the National Commander in his office. We had a discussion with the National Adjutant and the National Commander and provided information about the ALR. At that meeting the National Adjutant suggested that I take a trip down to the Legion Headquarters (I lived within driving distance) and speak in front of the National Internal Affairs Committee. One of our members (Crazy Bob Squires) came with me and we had our first official contact with the National Internal Affairs Committee. This was the start of an exchange of information between the ALR and the National Headquarters of the American Legion.

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Somewhere around 2001, we had one of our members (Pat Babcock – Bobcat) start a website. This really boosted the ability to move information about the ALR. The site was called the “National American Legion Riders Information Center” or NALRIC. We were then thrust in to the internet age. With this site we could quickly disseminate information people wanted to know. The site gave them information on how to start a chapter, had a venue for chapters to provide and share information, had contact information for established chapters, and had a chapter locator. The NALRIC site took us out of the dark ages and provided us an easy way to connect with each other.

Along came Keith Jones (Dawg) from Indiana. He promoted an idea of having a National gathering of Chapters from around the country. In a phone conversation, while talking to Tramps wife, Bernie, he struggled with a name to call this gathering. Bernie suggested to use the term “Romp”. Dawg ran with it and we had the first ALR Romp in southern Indiana in 2001. As I recall there were about 250 ALR members from around the country. We held a membership meeting and elected a “National Advisory Committee” that consisted of Myself, Tramp, Bernie, Dawg and Bobcat. At that meeting, we discussed the future of the ALR and set some direction to proceed in the future. After that, it was time to party! The food was great, the Bands were excellent, and the beer was cold. It was decided at that meeting to declare the event the “National Romp” and continue it every year at a location voted on by the members. Dawg and his Crew in Indiana did a great job and set the stage for the Romps to continue. Thereafter, at each Romp it would be voted on at the membership meeting, which state would hold the next Romp. The “Romps” still continue to this day (Although they can’t use the term “National”). It was at these Romps that the “Good Ole Boys” from the Kentucky ALR Chapter introduced us to a drink called “Apple Pie” and they were directly responsible for many hangovers the next day. As Tramp and I were recognized as the “Founding Fathers” of the ALR we would always have a have a general membership meeting, along with the Advisory Board, at each annual Romp to further promote the aims and purposes of the ALR. During the Romps, Tramp and myself were always asked to say a few words to the membership. The question most asked from the membership was “Did you ever think the ALR would get as big as it is when you first started it?” It was hard for us to imagine how fast it was growing.

Tramp and I at a Romp (I am the good looking one holding the mic. LOL)



It was right around the time of the First Romp that Gary Stephan (Iceman) from Texas approached us with an idea. He wanted to start awarding the American Legion Riders of Honor award (ALROH) at each Romp. This award was to be presented at each Romp to those ALR members who went above and beyond to promote the ALR. These awards were presented each year at the National Romps. As memory serves me each State could nominate a candidate for the award and the final nominees were chosen by the previous members who had already received the ALROH award. Iceman passed away a few years back, and as of this day, I am not sure if this tradition will continue.

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As earlier mentioned, several ALR members from our Chapter in Garden City would go to “Rolling Thunder” over the Memorial weekend. Over the next few years, as information spread about the ALR, we would start seeing more ALR members each year we attended. My wife, Diane, would block rooms at the Courtyard Marriott hotel and we would advertise these rooms on the NALRIC site. We would host a Barbecue in the courtyard each year and had the chance to share information with other chapters from around the country.



In 2005, Diane wrote a letter to the Department of the Army at Arlington National cemetery to request if the ALR could present a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown. Permission was granted and we were able to present the wreath on the Memorial Day weekend when “Rolling Thunder” was also going on. Tramp and myself presented the Wreath along with two other ALR members: Terry Woodburn and Roy Helms. This tradition continued for several years.



For the next few years, the ALR continued to grow and National Headquarters was taking notice. Tramp and myself, along with some other riders around the country, were invited to National Headquarters to attend a meeting titled, “The American Legion Riders Study Group.” This meeting took place on March 15-16, 2007. Chapters from around the Country were interested in getting more attention from National. Tramp and I both agreed with some limited input from National, but strived to retain it as a Post level program. We truly did not see a need to have the ALR program become a National program at that time. The ALR was growing rapidly and we thought too much guidance from National may not be the right decision at that time. Well then, the inevitable happened, and a couple of other states (Departments) were putting together resolutions to make the ALR a National Program. With some warning from the staff at National, they let me know that these other resolutions may not be in the best interest of the ALR, as a whole, and suggested I write one. At that point I wrote what was to become

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Resolution 35. I attempted to write it with few restrictions, but as the original resolution went through the various committees a few more articles were added. Resolution 35 was then adopted by the National Executive Committee in October of 2007. This resolution then made the ALR an official program of the American Legion. Below is a copy of the Resolution as I originally wrote it:

Resolution

American Legion Riders Program

American Legion

Department of Michigan

Whereas, the American Legion Riders was first formed in 1993 as a Post level activity at Garden City Post 396, Department of Michigan, and;

Whereas, today there exist almost 700 local American Legion Rider Groups at the Post, District and/or Department Level whose membership consist of members of the American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary or Sons of the American Legion and who share a common interest in motorcycle ownership and motorcycling to establish group membership, and;

Whereas, American Legion Rider groups currently exist in at least 48 states, and in three other countries outside the United States. This astonishing growth pattern, especially over the past 5 years proves that there is a real interest in the American Legion Riders program to both current and potential members of the American Legion, and;

Whereas, the purpose of the American Legion Riders is to use their common association and interest to promote the aims and purposes of the American Legion and to promote motorcycle safety and awareness while maintaining the image of the American Legion, and;

Whereas, the American Legion Rider local programs have been a true asset to the American Legion by service to the local Community, State and Nation through promoting the Aims and Purposes of the American Legion, and;

Whereas, membership numbers in The American Legion, Sons of The American Legion, and The American Legion Auxiliary has grown steadily in many posts that have supported this activity and, in many circumstances, American Legion Rider members have had new exposure to the programs of the American Legion and went on to serve in various offices of the American Legion, Sons of the American Legion and The American Legion Auxiliary, and;

Whereas, the American Legion Rider groups have raised millions of dollars nationally and have contributed thousands of man hours to support the programs of the American Legion, and;

Whereas, the American Legion Riders have promoted a positive image for the American Legion by their involvement in local parades and ceremonies from the local through national level, and;

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Whereas, the American Legion Riders have worked to support our veterans and those active duty soldiers currently serving our nation, in both the hostilities in the middle east and around the world, and;

Whereas, the American Legion Post, Districts and Departments that have adopted the American Legion Rider Groups have shown a forward commitment to change the sometimes-negative image of a motorcyclist and to promote the positive image they are capable of. This acceptance has worked to promote the open-minded image of the American Legion and its ability and vision to see the true potential in people and make use of the American Legion Rider member's uniqueness, creativity and dedication to promote the American Legion, and;

Whereas, there currently exist a vastly accepted emblem for the American Legion Riders program that is sold, in many formats, by the American Legion National Emblem Sales, and;

Whereas, the American Legion Riders program continues to grow, it would be of intrinsic value, to both the American Legion and the American Legion Rider programs, to establish basic national guidelines in order to provide for consistent growth and maintain the purposes and integrity for which it was originated; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the American Legion National Executive Committee, during the Fall conference of 2007, adopt the American Legion Riders as a National program under the direction of the National Internal Affairs Committee and promote it as a Post, District and Department program, and provide basic guidelines to help insure the continuity and stability of the program while being ever mindful of it's purpose to promote the aims and purposes of the American Legion through service to the Community, State and Nation; and, be it further

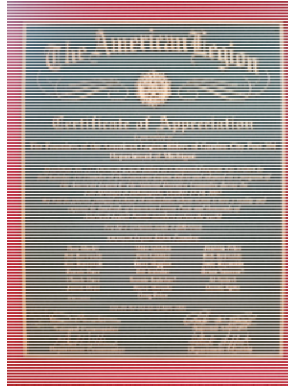
Resolved, That the American Legion recognize the current American Legion Riders emblem, as sold by The American Legion National Emblem Sales, as the standard emblem for the American Legion Riders program.

After Resolution 35 was adopted, myself and Terry Woodburn (IN.) were appointed as liaisons, for the ALR, to the National Internal Affairs Committee. Things continued to progress, with limited support from National. The Romps continued, the NALRIC website was providing good information to the ALR groups and new Chapters were springing up across the country. The National Advisory Committee (As originally voted in at the first Romp in Indiana) continued to help Chapters with questions and to assist in new chapters forming. At that time, we were approaching over 1000 ALR Chapters. Sometime, just prior to the adoption of Resolution 35, we had a staff person at National Headquarters, Bill Sloan, that would handle inquiries for the ALR through the National office. Bill Sloan would do what he could to promote the ALR and would keep myself and the rest of the Advisory board in the loop. For a few years our NALRIC website site was promoted in the American Legion website as a place to get information about the ALR.

In 2008, we had our National Adjutant, Department Commander, and Department Adjutant visit our Post in Garden City to recognize the First Chapter of the American Legion Riders and its Founding Members. Each Founding member was presented with a plaque signed by the National Commander, National Adjutant, Department Commander, and Department Adjutant. The Post was also presented a

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plaque, from National, that recognized the Garden City Post 396 as the Birthplace of the ALR. This plaque still resides at the entrance to Post 396. We were also given another plaque that named all the Founding Members. This visit from the National and State officers was coordinated through my wife, Diane. She was supposed to keep it as a surprise, but the logistics made it tough and I found out a few days before.



In 2012, an American Legion Riders Ad-hoc committee was formed and authorized by the National Commander. I was asked to be a member of that committee and held on to that position for several years. As I recall, the committee wanted to play a bigger part in the growth of the ALR. They seemed opposed to the NALRIC website due to the fact that it appeared the site would interfere with the consensus of the Ad-hoc committee. They did not like the fact that the site was called the "National American Legion Riders Information Center" indicating using the term "National" was mis-leading. I tried to support the NALRIC site by stating that the NALRIC site was used by thousands of ALR members to share information, was user friendly and had a place for ALR members to communicate with each other, share ideas and events and was a source of information that helped start hundreds of Post ALR Chapters. My argument for the NALRIC site didn't seem to sway the committee and the site was removed after Pat Babcock (Bobcat) received a letter from National requiring him to remove any words that implied "National". The site was taken down in 2012. I believe that is also the same reasoning used that we can no longer use the term "National" when advertising our annual "Roms". I continued to be a member of the ALR National Ad-Hoc Committee for the next 4 or 5 years. I was an advocate of the ALR growing from the Post level and National playing a least restrictive role. I was not a fan of the National Committee stating what could, or could not, be put on a vest as long as it was promoting the principles of the American Legion and in good keeping with the image of the American Legion. I was not re-appointed to the committee a few years back. I would hope, that in the future, the National ALR Committee does not issue any further guidance that would detract from the original vision of the ALR to grow at the Post level. I am sure that Tramp would agree that when we started the ALR it was not meant to be a motorcycle "Club" but rather a motorcycle association to promote the principles of the American Legion. I am very proud of what we started. I would hope that it helped to change the image of those who ride so that people can understand the good things we accomplish. The ALR has helped to raise membership in the American Legion, raised Millions to support our Veterans, and promoted Community programs where we live.

God Bless the USA!!!

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In closing, I would like to remember those Founding Members who have since passed away:

Bonnie Kaledas

Bernie Dare

Judy Reynolds

Dave Higgins

Don Blasky