

American Legion Post 73 has long legacy in Calloway County

Author's note: The following information was provided by Mark Kennedy, service officer with the American Legion Post 73. The article itself was written by Hawkins Teague.

American Legion Post 73 has a long legacy in Calloway County.

Murray's American Legion Post 73 celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2021. On August 4, 1921, the Department of Kentucky American Legion awarded the charter for Post 73. Ten days later, it was presented at the Kentucky American Legion headquarters in Louisville to a delegation of officers from Murray.

Membership in Post 73 has varied over time, the highest being 660 shortly after the onset of World War II. Typically ranging between 100 and 160 annually, in 2021, there were around 125 members. The leaders of Post 73 represent a virtual "Who's Who" of this community, and their names are maintained in a framed display at the current Veterans' Hall.

In 2000, the post was reconstituted, and the old post at Sixth and Poplar streets was sold to First United Methodist Church. For three years, the post met at the Murray-Calloway County Chamber of Commerce while lease arrangements and building designs were finalized with the City of Murray and Morton Buildings, Inc.

Through the efforts of 14 charter members of the reconstituted post, permission was granted by the family of Billy Lane Lauffer to rename the post in his honor. Lauffer was a Vietnam War Medal of Honor recipient and is buried in Murray Memorial Gardens. In May 2004, the new building was dedicated at 310 Bee Creek Drive, and members began meeting there.

Each Memorial Day, the Post 73 Honor Guard tours multiple local cemeteries. The post's chaplain says a prayer for the veterans buried there, the firing detail fires a rifle salute, and the bugler plays "Taps." When requested, the Honor Guard provides these same honors for funerals in western Kentucky so that all veterans are sent off with appropriate burial honors.

In addition to honoring veterans who have died in the last year, the post also provides free grave-marking flags to those who want to mark their family members' graves.

Post 73's annual Veterans Day event is also an important tradition. The Veteran of the Year is always honored at that ceremony.

Members of Post 73 assist veterans with their Veterans Administration claims and other needs. They also serve as coordinators for the Post 73 van used to transport veterans to the VA Medical Center in Marion, Illinois.

Post 73 supports multiple community causes and is the hub of the First District and Area "A" support for the American Legion National High School Oratorical Scholarship Program. Post members conduct this contest each year, resulting in three state champions, three state runners-up, two third-place state finishers, and one national champion.

Murray High School graduate Ashley Winkler was a national finalist in 2007 after winning at the state and district levels.

McCracken County High School graduate Carlissa Frederich was the First District champion in 2018, winning at the state level and then earning a first-place finish and \$20,000 scholarship in the national contest.

Marshall County High School student Jackson Boone won at the district and state competition in 2021, but the national contest was not held.