



Round-Up



The Newsletter of Sons of The American Legion Central Region

Volume 2 – Issue 41 – August 9, 2020

2020 Central Region Membership
125,490 – 94.568%
Third Place as of August 6, 2020

RECRUIT!
RETAIN!
REINSTATE!

2020 Central Region Renewals
114,301,114,278 – 87.03%
First Place as of August 3, 2020

2021 Goals Announced

Gentlemen,

National Headquarters has issued the membership goals for the 2020 – 2021 membership year. As you can see the numbers are different than we expected, but all these goals are attainable. We need to work hard on my challenge of 100% by August 28, 2020. We can do it!

Let's get a great start on 2021 and prove to the world how strong the Central Region is! We can do it; we just need to try new things. Let's contact all of our members this week and see how many we can get renewed. Then contact them again, and again. We really need to do this early this year, so we can spend more time on our projects and fundraising. We can spend more time on our programs if we get membership behind us.

While we begin our work on 2021, we cannot forget our renewals we need to continue to get for 2020. These members are very valuable to the organization, and we need everyone to get on board and help get them renewed. **Who's next?**

There is still time for our Detachments to reach their 2019-2020 quota. Each member who has not renewed yet should be called or visited by doing a Buddy Check, talk to him and see what can be done to get the dues paid. We cannot forget any of these members. They are just a call or visit away. **Who's next?**

If you are trying new ways of renewing members, please share with us. We want to know what works for you because it might work for someone else. Success needs to be shared so everyone can benefit. As a team, the Central Region will see earlier re-

newals, growing numbers, and First Place at the 2021 National Convention.

As always, please do not hesitate to contact Doc Pfeiffer or me if you need help with anything.

Thanks for your support of this publication!

Proud Possessor of a Priceless Heritage,



#SALSTRONG

Jeff Vrabel, Sr.
Sons of The American Legion
National Membership Committee
Central Region Chairman
jeffvrabelsr@gmail.com

**Serving Those Who Served...
Full Steam Ahead**

MEDIA ALLIANCE



Thanks for still serving America.

Do you have yours?

2021
Sons of The American Legion
Detachment Membership Goals

DETACHMENT	2021 - GOALS
ALABAMA	2,063
ALASKA	1,431
ARIZONA	7,491
ARKANSAS	585
CALIFORNIA	11,464
COLORADO	3,311
CONNECTICUT	1,813
DELAWARE	2,322
DIST OF COL	177
FLORIDA	19,650
FRANCE	252
GEORGIA	4,707
HAWAII	34
IDAHO	580
ILLINOIS	14,547
INDIANA	39,365
IOWA	4,376
KANSAS	6,691
KENTUCKY	3,252
LOUISIANA	1,958
MAINE	2,663
MARYLAND	16,497
MASSACHUSETTS	5,593
MEXICO	41
MICHIGAN	24,084
MINNESOTA	11,749
MISSISSIPPI	754
MISSOURI	3,706
MONTANA	1,157
NEBRASKA	6,863
NEVADA	461
NEW HAMPSHIRE	6,326
NEW JERSEY	9,973
NEW MEXICO	1,727
NEW YORK	30,558
NORTH CAROLINA	2,334
NORTH DAKOTA	871
OHIO	31,134
OKLAHOMA	1,321
OREGON	1,609
PENNSYLVANIA	63,258
PHILIPPINES	60
PUERTO RICO	53
RHODE ISLAND	302
SOUTH CAROLINA	1,307
SOUTH DAKOTA	701
TENNESSEE	1,644
TEXAS	6,448
UTAH	589
VERMONT	3,951
VIRGINIA	4,468
WASHINGTON	2,686
WEST VIRGINIA	2,602
WISCONSIN	3,745
WYOMING	1,246
TOTAL(S):	378,550



The American Legion Family

To All,



Included is the year-end membership report for 2019 – 2020 and the first membership report of the 2020 – 2021 year. Our first target date of 10% is September 10. Congratulations to Illinois and Wisconsin for already surpassing that goal.

Even though we are starting a new membership year, we cannot forget nor give up on our members that did not renew for 2020. These members can still renew for the old per capita of \$2.00 until December 31. After that date, all per capita will be \$5.00.

The closing of our Posts due to the Coronavirus is all the more reason to push MySAL. Squadrons using it have all the ability to transmit membership without going to the Post or mailing it to a Department that may be closed due to the virus.

*Richard "Doc" Pfeiffer,
National Vice-Commander Central*

**"Serving Those Who Served...
Full Steam Ahead"**

National Commander Clint Bolt's 2019-2020 Goals

Please remember as you travel and promote the Sons of The American Legion and National Commander Clint Bolt's goals for Membership and all Legion Charities.

- **RECRUIT, RETAIN, AND REINSTATE** to reach **400,000** members
- Renewal rate above 95%
- Obtain 105% in membership by National Convention in Louisville, KY
- Recognize our achievements
- Child Welfare Foundation \$500,000
- National Emergency Fund \$100,000
- Soldiers Wish \$100,000
- Legacy Scholarship \$100,000
- Veterans & Children's Fund \$100,000
- Operation Comfort Warriors \$100,000

**2019 – 2020 Detachment Membership Standings
as of August 6, 2020**

**2019 – 2020 Detachment Renewal Rates
as of August 3, 2020**

DET	GOAL	ACTUAL	%
IA Q1 * 🏠	4,375	4,624	105.691
WI Q2 *	3,744	3,955	105.636
IL	14,546	14,382	98.873
OH	31,133	29,639	95.201
MN	11,748	11,036	93.786
MI	24,083	22,812	94.722
IN	39,364	36,070	91.632
MO	3,705	2,972	80.216
TOTALS	132,698	125,490	94.568

DET	2019	RENEWED	%
IA	4,452	4,116	92.45
IL	14,431	13,219	91.60
WI	3,945	3,494	88.57
MN	11,565	10,137	87.65
MI	24,126	20,494	84.95
IN	38,876	32,856	84.51
OH	30,456	27,355	89.82
MO	3,485	2,630	75.47
TOTALS	131,336	114,301	87.03

Q = QUOTA – CONGRATULATIONS!!!

🏠 = All Time High

* = Met July 29 National Target of 105%

**2019 – 2020 National Renewal Rates
as of July 28, 2020**

**2019 – 2020 National Membership Standings
as of July 29, 2020**

REGION	GOAL	ACTUAL	%
Southern	42,763	42,705	99.864
Western	26,395	25,313	95.901
Central	132,698	125,490	94.568
Midwest	30,366	28,278	93.124
Eastern	146,273	134,658	92.059
TOTALS	378,495	356,444	94.174

* = Met July 29 National Target of 105%

-13,537 ahead of last year

REGION	2019	RENEWED	%
Central	131,317	114,301	87.03
Eastern	144,840	123,667	85.36
Southern	42,858	36,230	84.50
Midwest	29,920	24,921	83.28
Western	26,524	21,188	79.86
TOTALS	375,540	320,307	85.29

PLEASE SEND 2020 – 2021 OFFICERS, DEC, AND COMMITTEE/COMMISSION CHAIRMEN CONTACT INFORMATION TO ME AND DOC AS THEY ARE AVAILABLE

jeffvrabelsr@gmail.com
docsal423@gmail.com

THANK YOU!!!

**Sons of The American Legion
Membership Committee Call**

6:00 PM MST

Call in # (515) 604-9644 Access Code: 889133

<http://join.freeconferencecall.com/jrnavarr>

The National Membership Committee holds its monthly Conference Calls on the **third Tuesday of each month**. It is important that we get the message out to as many Membership Chairmen as possible. Please share this with your District and Squadron leadership and ask them to join us.

**Sons of The American Legion
Central Region Conference Call**

7:30 p.m. Eastern Time

Phone (774) 220-4000

Access Code 04423

The Central Region holds its monthly Conference Calls on the **Third Thursday of each month**. Please pass the word as we would love to have more participation.

Please share this with your District and Squadron leadership and ask them to join us.

2020-2021 Central Region Membership Program



2020 – 2021 Central Region Membership Program

For this year's membership program, we will be breaking down the Central Region into three divisions based on Detachment membership totals for the end of the 2020 membership year.

Any Detachment reaching 100% by the 2021 American Legion Birthday will receive a plaque.

Any Detachment reaching 105% by the May 12, 2021 National Target Date will receive a plaque.

Any Detachment that reaches 95% Renewals by July 28, 2021 will win breakfast for their Detachment Commander and Membership Chairman at the National Convention in Phoenix.

- Division 1 Under 10,000 members (*Iowa, Missouri, Wisconsin*)
- Division 2 10,001 – 20,000 members (*Illinois, Minnesota*)
- Division 3 20,001 members and up (*Michigan, Ohio, Indiana*)

Richard "Doc" Pfeiffer,
National Vice-Commander Central

Jeff Vrabel, Sr.,
Central Region Membership Chairman

Serving Those Who Served...Full Steam Ahead

2020 – 2021 Membership Report as of August 7, 2020

MEMBERSHIP					
Region	Goal	Actual	Needed for Quota	Percent	Difference
Southern	42,763	3,946	(38,817)	9.228%	38,817
Midwest	30,366	1,653	(28,713)	5.444%	28,713
Central	132,705	7,206	(125,499)	5.430%	125,499
Western	26,395	861	(25,534)	3.262%	25,534
Eastern	146,273	1,500	(144,773)	1.025%	144,773
TOTALS	378,502	15,166	(363,336)	4.007%	363,336

Membership ahead of 2020 5,634

Detachment	Goal	Actual	Needed for Quota	Percent	Difference
Illinois *	14,547	3,466	(11,081)	23.826%	11,081
Wisconsin *	3,745	573	(3,172)	15.300%	3,172
Indiana	39,364	1,812	(37,552)	4.603%	37,552
Minnesota	11,749	474	(11,275)	4.034%	11,275
Iowa	4,376	148	(4,228)	3.382%	4,228
Ohio	31,134	585	(30,549)	1.879%	30,549
Missouri	3,706	32	(3,674)	0.863%	3,674
Michigan	24,084	116	(23,968)	0.482%	23,968
TOTALS	132,705	7,206	125,499	5.430%	125,499

* Met Sept. 10 goal of 10%

Red Division					
Detachment	Goal	Actual	Needed for Quota	Percent	Difference
Wisconsin	3,745	573	3,172	15.300%	3,172
Iowa	4,376	148	4,228	3.382%	4,228
Missouri	3,706	32	3,674	0.863%	3,674
TOTALS	11,827	753	11,074	19.546%	11,074

White Division					
Detachment	Goal	Actual	Needed for Quota	Percent	Difference
Illinois	14,547	3,466	(11,081)	23.826%	11,081
Minnesota	11,749	474	(11,275)	4.034%	11,275
TOTALS	26,296	3,940	(22,356)	27.861%	22,356

Blue Division					
Detachment	Goal	Actual	Needed for Quota	Percent	Difference
Indiana	39,364	1,812	(37,552)	4.603%	37,552
Ohio	31,134	585	(30,549)	1.879%	30,549
Michigan	24,084	116	(23,968)	0.482%	23,968
TOTALS	94,582	2,513	(92,069)	6.964%	92,069

**2020 – 2021
Central Region
Membership Challenge**
from Jeff Vrabel, Sr.

August 28, 2020
100%

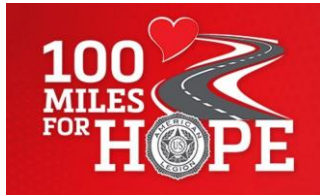
Who's next?

**2020 – 2021
National Target Date**
September 10, 2020

10%

[JOIN](#)[DONATE](#)[RENEW](#)

Dear American Legion Family Members
and Friends,



I have taken the first steps on a 100-mile journey in support of our nation's veterans and children. The unique challenge — 100 Miles for Hope — was created to help drive resources toward our Veterans & Children Foundation.

In a show of American Legion Family solidarity, Sons of The American Legion Commander Clint Bolt and American Legion Auxiliary President Nicole Clapp have committed to their own 100-mile challenges.

We're asking for support from our American Legion Family members to put on their walking or running shoes, get on their bikes or rev up their motorcycles for 100 miles today through Veterans Day, which is 100 days from now. And I am issuing a special challenge to department commanders to join me, if they are physically able, in the 100-mile quest.

[For a \\$30 registration fee](#), 100 Miles for Hope participants receive a slick tech shirt (available in men's, women's, and children's sizes), a sign to display and a certificate of accomplishment when they finish. Roughly 50 percent of the \$30 fee will go toward V&CF after figuring in costs for the shirts, shipping, etc.

Posts can also participate by creating their own events for members while keeping local social distancing rules in mind. This is a great opportunity to safely celebrate Patriot Day, American Legion Day, and Veterans Day later on.

Learn more about this initiative on the Legion website, www.legion.org/100miles and get started by registering at [Emblem Sales](#).

One hundred miles may seem like a long way. But it was chosen with a purpose. The 100-day time frame was selected so that walkers could break it down to a mile a day. That's roughly 20 to 30 minutes a day, which is the activity level many health experts recommend.

I'll be walking 100 miles and riding my bike for another 100 miles to support our veterans and children. I'm sure my health will benefit from the increased activity, after being sheltered in place for so long. But the real beneficiaries are veterans and children in need who receive vital assistance from The American Legion Veterans & Children Foundation, formerly known as the American Legion Endowment Fund.

The foundation provides necessary funds to train and support The American Legion's network of more than 3,000 accredited service officers who represent veterans, free of charge, with their benefits claims and other needs. Additionally, military families facing financial crises are eligible to receive Temporary Financial Assistance, which is funded by American Legion Veterans & Children Foundation donations.

It's up to you how you cross that 100-mile threshold (and when you do, share your journey on [our Legiontown web page](#)). On days when you lack the motivation to put in a mile or two, just remember who we are doing this for.

Join me in keeping this important foundation strong to ensure we honor our commitments to all veterans, military families, and children in need.

For God and country,

James W. "Bill" Oxford,
National Commander

National Membership Update



Gentlemen,

During this unprecedented time, we have been faced with several challenges. The Sons of The American Legion has always taken pride in recognizing their accomplishments, sometimes we forget to give that much deserved pat on the back, however we never forget our main mission of serving the needs of our veterans and their families.

Because of all the closures and shutdowns from Covid-19 we have decided to extend the deadline for the Individual Recruitment and Blue Brigade Awards. The new deadline will be August 31st.

Remember that recognizing our achievements is one of our goals for the year, let's make sure to make a final push and do all we can to recognize those members for all their recruitment efforts.

Thank you for your time and all you do for the Sons.

[2020 Individual Recruitment Award Form](#)

[2020 Blue Brigade Award Form](#)

Joseph Navarrete, Chairman
National Membership Committee
2019-2020
(505) 301-7903

"Serving Those Who Served... Full Steam Ahead"



**I WANT
YOU
TO RENEW!!!**

NEW DEADLINE
08/31/20

2019 - 2020 Individual Recruitment Award

The National Membership Committee offers a recruitment pin award for those members recruiting five (5) new members into the Sons of The American Legion within a membership year. This pin is suitable to wear upon your cover or lapel. You must meet the requirements and directions listed below:

- Recruit five (5) new members to S.A.L. **Must be new members only**, no renewals.
- All information must be legible. **Un-readable forms will not be accepted.**
- The new members membership record must be available on the national database.
- This form must be sent prior to midnight August 31, 2020
- American Legion Family members are also eligible for this award.
- Only one (1) award pin per member regardless of the total new members recruited

Recruiter Information

Name _____ Member ID# _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Full Squadron Name/Number _____ Detachment _____

Email _____ Phone _____

Unless specified different, the pin will be sent to the above address

New Member Information

#1 Name _____ 6 Digit Sequential Card or ID # _____

#2 Name _____ 6 Digit Sequential Card or ID # _____

#3 Name _____ 6 Digit Sequential Card or ID # _____

#4 Name _____ 6 Digit Sequential Card or ID # _____

#5 Name _____ 6 Digit Sequential Card or ID # _____

VERIFYING SIGNATURES

SQUADRON / POST COMMANDER _____ DATE _____

SQUADRON / POST ADJUTANT _____ DATE _____

RETURN COMPLETED FORMS TO: (Regional Membership Chairman)

East - Richard Huntley, Jr. (ME) dickie_huntley@hotmail.com 38 Whale Cove Rd., Machiasport, ME 04655

South - Jason Roberts (GA) robertsjason215@gmail.com 215 Oak Hollow Ct., White, GA 30184

Central - Jeffrey Vrabel, Sr. (OH) jeffvrabelsr@gmail.com 2222 Birch Bark Trl., Grove City, OH 43123

Midwest - Juan Torres (TX) juantorres10@hotmail.com 10828 Sycamore Dr. S, La Porte, TX 77571

West - Leslie "Jim" Stewart (NV) controller@bordertowncasinonv.com 664 Sheffield Ct., Sparks, NV 89431

PINS WILL BE MAILED UPON VERIFICATION AND APPROVAL

National Commander Clint Bolt's Goal

National Convention August 30, 2020

105%



The American Legion
myLegion Request Form - Squadron



Sign up for mySAL! The American Legion National Headquarters has designed a secure internet site to assist Squadron Adjutant's in their day-to-day membership processing duties. This site serves as a direct portal from the local squadron to National Headquarters' membership system. You must have internet access to use this tool.

Features include:

- View and edit member information.
- Membership Processing: Renew, Add and Transfer Paying Members
- Generate membership reports
- Submit Consolidated Squadron Report electronically
- View Squadron Information

Prior to creating a site, a Request Form must be on file at National Headquarters signed by both the Post Adjutant and the Squadron Adjutant. No other signatures will be accepted.

** Note: Membership Processing is not available to all squadrons, based on Detachment approval.

Submit Form

Email: mylegion@legion.org

Fax: 317-860-3131

Mall To: The American Legion
IT, Product Support Specialist
5745 Lee Road
Indianapolis, IN 46216

Already have an account?

If your squadron already has an account, you do not need to complete a new form.

Call the myLegion Support Team at 833-253-9995 to assist with log in instructions.

Post/Squadron # _____ State: _____

Squadron Adjutant (Printed): _____

Signature *Required, must be Squadron Adjutant* _____ Member ID# _____

Post Adjutant (Printed): _____

Signature *Required, must be Post Adjutant* _____ Member ID# _____

Contact Information:

Does not have to be Squadron Adjutant. The information below provides us where to send correspondence and registration instructions to register a mySAL log in. Please note: Once the site is registered, only the Squadron Adjutant can request a username or password re-set.

Contact Name (if not Squadron Adjutant): _____

Daytime Phone #: _____

E-mail (required) _____

Updated 3/4/2020

SONS OF THE AMERICAN LEGION



MySAL

MEMBERSHIP DATABASE



BUDDY
CHECK

LET THEM KNOW WE CARE!

The American Legion
Legislative Division



Whether starting a small business, working towards education, and training goals, or simply applying for jobs, access to computers and computer technology is a necessity in the 21st century. Across our nation, millions of Americans, including many of our veterans, lack access to critical pieces of technology that are required for advancing their economic opportunity, education, and civic engagement.

The federal government has a history of providing surplus computers and technology to educational partners, and we think it's time to expand on those programs to offer training programs in high-demand trades like computer repair and to make those programs available to veterans.

H.R. 7566 would do just that by expanding on federal programs that transfer surplus computers to educational institutions and nonprofits, including computer refurbishers, greatly increases the effectiveness of these programs and helping bridge the digital divide that many of our veterans face. This bill allows for the transfer of surplus computers to nonprofit computer refurbishers who will offer training programs on the use of computers and technology equipment to veterans, as well as provide those renewed computers to them for continued use.

The American Legion proudly supports this legislation as it improves the quality of life for our veterans.

Contact your Representative today to tell them to support H.R. 7566 and help close the digital divide that many veterans face!

Click the link below to log in and send your message:

https://www.votervoices.net/BroadcastLinks/8VqxJZcXiGfb5YA_m2-yag



2020 NCHV ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Virtual Edition

SEPT 14-18 & SEPT 21-25

We are excited to announce that registration for the **2020 NCHV Annual Conference** is open.

The **2020 NCHV Annual Conference (Virtual Edition)** will be held from **September 14-18 and September 21-25**.

Appreciating the health and safety of our members, partners, and staff are of the utmost importance and given the uncertainty surrounding COVID, our conference is now entirely virtual. **Click the link below to register.**

We will still have all the qualities our members love about the NCHV conference: high-quality speakers, recent research, innovative practices, and the ability to network with colleagues. **Click here to view the schedule.**

Thank you for all you do on behalf of veterans and for your partnership in this work.

[Register Here](#)

NCHV2020.COM

National Coalition for Homeless Veterans
1-800-VET-HELP
1730 M Street NW, Suite 705
Washington, DC 20036
www.nchv.org



Gentlemen,

This information was received from the Detachment of Illinois VA & R Chairman Bruno Williamson regarding the upcoming virtual conference from the Coalition for Homeless Veterans.

Although veteran homelessness falls under Veterans Employment and Education, but the rehabilitation component once veterans are off the street and into affordable housing gives VA &R an opportunity to serve.

Please share this information and participate if you are able. I am sure that we all will receive information that we can use.

God Bless!

*Butch Ray, Chairman
Sons of The American Legion
Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Commission*

VA, America's Adopt A Soldier partner to help Veterans at risk of or experiencing homelessness stay connected

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced today it is collecting laptop and mobile phone donations through an established partner non-profit organization, [America's Adopt A Soldier](#), to help Veterans at risk of or experiencing homelessness stay connected to their health care providers, case managers and loved ones.

Through these donations, Veterans can access treatment plans, medical support, social networks and more while also following [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) safe distancing guidelines. "As VA continues to help provide secure, safe and stable housing for all Veterans, we're also helping them stay connected to needed services, family and friends," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "This partnership makes those valuable connections possible for Veterans who might not otherwise have access to mobile phones or computers."

Hundreds of smartphones and laptops have been collected through public and corporate donations. These donations have been shipped to [Veterans Integrated Service Network \(VISN\) 21](#), which includes VA Health Care Systems for [San Francisco](#), [Palo Alto](#), [Northern California](#), and [Southern Nevada](#). The laptops and smartphones will go to Veterans enrolled in one of three VA programs: [Housing and Urban Development – VA Supportive Housing, Grant and Per Diem](#) transitional housing and [Health Care for Homeless Veterans Contract Residential Services](#). As additional donations arrive, America's Adopt A Soldier will work with VA to identify additional VISNs in need.

"While America's Adopt A Soldier has had a long-standing partnership with VA to help Veterans at risk of homelessness in other ways, this project allows for the organizations to meet the urgent needs of Veterans at risk of or experiencing homelessness during the COVID-19 pandemic," said Mary Keeser, founder and chair of America's Adopt a Soldier and former U.S. Army Officer. "The success of this project will also ensure we are able to better plan for and respond to future or long-term requirements." Learn more about how VA is working to protect Veterans during the COVID-19 pandemic at [homeless coronavirus](#).

Legislation Worth Watching

HR 2224: To direct the Secretary of Labor to prioritize services to homeless veterans with dependent children in carrying out homeless veterans' reintegration programs and for other purposes. (Ariel/John) Resolution No. 326: Support Funding for Additional Housing for Homeless Veterans with Families.

VA, Elizabeth Dole Foundation to offer respite relief for Veteran caregivers

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs in partnership with the [Elizabeth Dole Foundation](#) (EDF) today announced the launch of a new foundation program granting family caregivers access to no-cost, short-term aid to help those caring for wounded, ill or injured Veterans or service members in their homes during the coronavirus pandemic.

Under the [Respite Relief for Military and Veteran Caregivers](#) program, caregivers of Veterans can apply to receive approximately 24-hours of respite care from a [CareLinx](#) professional to help with bathing, companionship, cooking, exercising, grooming, light housekeeping, medical and medication reminders, mobility assistance, transportation and other activities.

"Caregivers charged with caring for our nation's Veterans face new challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "They have become increasingly isolated and are hindered from getting reliable, outside help. This program provides caregivers compassionate and needed relief during this stressful time."

Respite Relief for Military and Veteran Caregivers will initially be available in select regions of California, Florida, and Texas. The EDF will work to expand the program to other regions of the country later this year. [AARP](#) will also be supporting the effort by sharing information about the program with their members in the selected states.

Applicants to the Respite Relief for Military and Veteran Caregivers program will be selected and awarded by the Elizabeth Dole Foundation. Apply at [hidden heroes](#).

*Information on this page provided by
PDC Bill Towns
Detachment of Ohio*

After hearing this story, I will never look at a fork again the same way!

Keep your fork!



There was a young woman who had been diagnosed with a terminal illness and had been given three months to live. So, as she was getting her things 'in order,' she contacted her Pastor and had him come to her house to discuss certain aspects of her final wishes.

She told him which songs she wanted sung at the service, what scriptures she would like read, and what outfit she wanted to be buried in. Everything was in order and the Pastor was preparing to leave when the young woman suddenly remembered something very important to her.

"There's one more thing," she said excitedly.

"What's that?" came the Pastor's reply.

"This is very important," the young woman continued. "I want to be buried with a fork in my right hand."

The Pastor stood looking at the young woman, not knowing quite what to say.

"That surprises you, doesn't it?" the young woman asked.

"Well, to be honest, I'm puzzled by the request," said the Pastor.

The young woman explained. "My grandmother once told me this story, and from that time on I have always tried to pass along its message to those I love and those who are in need of encouragement. In all my years of attending socials and dinners, I always remember that when the dishes of the main course were being cleared, someone would inevitably lean over and say, "Keep your fork." It was my favorite part because I knew that something better was coming like velvety chocolate cake or deep-dish apple pie. Something wonderful, and with substance!"

"So, I just want people to see me there in that casket with a fork in my hand and I want them to wonder... "What's with the fork?" Then I want you to tell them: "Keep your fork ... the best is yet to come."

The Pastor's eyes welled up with tears of joy as he hugged the young woman good-bye. He knew this would be one of the last times he would see her before her death. But he also knew that the young woman had a better grasp of heaven than he did. She had a better grasp of what heaven would be like than many people twice her age, with twice as much experience and knowledge. She KNEW that something better was coming.

At the funeral people were walking by the young woman's casket and they saw the cloak she was wearing, and the fork placed in her right hand. Over and over, the Pastor heard the question, "What's with the fork?" And over and over he smiled.

During his message, the Pastor told the people of the conversation he had with the young woman shortly before she died. He also told them about the fork and about what it symbolized to her. He told the people how he could not stop thinking about the fork and told them that they probably would not be able to stop thinking about it either.

He was right. So, the next time you reach down for your fork let it remind you, ever so gently, that the best is yet to come. Friends are a very rare jewel, indeed. They make you smile and encourage you to succeed. Cherish the time you have, and the memories you share. Being friends with someone is not an opportunity, but a sweet responsibility.

Share this to everyone you consider a FRIEND... and I'll bet this will be a message they do remember, every time they pick up a fork!

And just remember ... keep your fork!

The BEST is yet to come!