



## Protocol

This section on Protocol is intended to assist those responsible for planning and conducting American Legion Functions to achieve successful outcomes for these events. Following established protocols enables functions to proceed smoothly and predictably and serves to enhance the image of both the host organization and the American Legion. This is critical, especially when American Legion visitors from outside the Department and when non-Legionnaire visitors are present.

This section covers planning and conducts of American Legion functions, including visitations by American Legion dignitaries. It does not cover public events such as Memorial Day and Veteran's Day ceremonies.

### Protocol Guidelines

Although "protocol" is a term used primarily in setting the rules of etiquette, which govern diplomatic functions, there is a certain amount of protocol, which applies to American Legion meetings and social functions, especially those to which dignitaries have been invited. Protocol for those events is the responsibility of the Post Commander who should be aware of certain guidelines, which begin with the planning of the event.

If the Department Commander is to be invited, this matter should be cleared promptly with department headquarters. In preliminary planning, it is advisable to have an alternate date in the event the Department Commander is already committed for the original date.

Accompany the invitation with some basic facts about the engagement: Time, place, whether or not it is a dinner occasion, significance of the event, etc. Will it be a joint Legion-Auxiliary function? Will there be non-Legionnaire dignitaries present? Remember, this is your "home" and those you've invited deserve all the courtesies and considerations to be accorded such distinguished guests.

If the event is a dinner, those who will be seated at the head table should have been notified of this fact before they arrive. They should be escorted to their places to avoid confusion. The main speaker is seated just to the right of the podium. Place cards identifying those at the head table should be used.

The Presiding Officer is always at the center of the head table or right off center, first place. The guest of honor is always seated at the right of the Presiding Officer and takes precedence over any other dignitary. Other guests may be seated right, left, right, etc., of the Presiding Officer according to rank, or all other guests of honor may be seated to the right of the Presiding Officer and other dignitaries to his/her left.



The SAA, Asst SAA and the Distinguished Guest Chairman should escort guests being escorted to platform or head table. Upon reaching the Presiding Officers station, the escort will step to the side and wait while the Distinguished Guest Chairman presents the guests to the Presiding Officer. The Presiding Officer shakes the hand of each guest as presented and seats him/her before the next guest is presented. After all in the group have been presented and seated, the SAA, Asst SAA about face and followed by the Distinguished Guest Chairman, return to the rear of the room to await the order to present the next group of guests.

Introductions begin after the meal. The presiding officer stands at the center of the head table and makes the introductions, beginning at the extreme left, continuing to the center of the table, and then starting at the extreme right and continuing to the center. The main speaker, the guest of honor, is the last person introduced.

American Legion officers are introduced in the order by which they were installed into office: Sergeant-at-Arms, Service Officer, Historian, Judge Advocate, Chaplain, Treasurer (Finance Officer), Adjutant, Vice Commanders, and Commander.

As with all rules, there are some exceptions. If it is a function of both The American Legion and the American Legion Auxiliary, the Auxiliary officers, dignitaries, etc., are introduced first. A National Executive Committeeman or Alternate NEC man should be introduced immediately before the Department Commander.

#### **DISTINGUISHED GUESTS – BASIC PROTOCOL**

- a) Write or call your guest/speaker as soon as you have decided on your program. If you call, follow up with a written confirmation. Advise each invited guest of his/her particular function at the meeting. Include a brief outline of the tentative program and a data sheet on your organization, which describes its aims and purposes. Tell the person why the group would appreciate having him/her as a guest or speaker.
- b) Tell the guest the time that has been allotted for his/her speech or remarks, the time the meeting will begin and the probable time of adjournment.
- c) Ask your guest if he/she would like to be excused early. The guest may have other commitments and may not wish to stay for the business and entertainment part of the meeting.
- d) Request confirmation and ask for material that may be used for advance publicity or in introducing the guest. Ask whether he/she objects to being photographed or to being interviewed by the press.



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- e) Tell him/her whether or not a question and answer period is scheduled following the speech.
- f) Give your guest/speaker some idea of what you would like him/her to talk about.
- g) Tell your guest/speaker the type of meeting (dinner, luncheon, etc.) that is scheduled and the appropriate dress (formal, semi-formal, casual, etc.).
- h) Tell him/her in writing where the meeting will be held. Give the address and directions on how to get there.
- i) If the visit requires an overnight stay, describe the type of accommodations available and make reservations for the person if that is desired. Determine whether the guest will need transportation.
- j) Tell your guest the name of the person who will escort him/her during his/her visit so he/she will know whom to ask for upon arrival. Send your guest a copy of your program and tell him/her the name of the person who will introduce him/her.
- k) A day or two before the meeting call or write your guest to remind him/her of the upcoming meeting.
- l) If tickets are required for your guest, see that complimentary tickets are provided in advance.
- m) If you have made arrangements for overnight accommodation for your guest, allow him/her some time alone to relax. Be sure to consult him/her before arranging parties or other activities.
- n) If your guest brings a companion, be sure they are introduced to the persons seated on either side of them. Ascertain their correct names and whether they have titles. BE sure they are introduced to the assembly.
- o) If the guest/speaker wishes to leave at the end of his/her part of the program, thank him/her on behalf of your group and have the escort conduct him/her to their transportation.
- p) If you are giving your speaker a fee, expense money or a gratuity, present it in an envelope before they depart.



### **GENERAL VISITATION PROTOCOL**

The following protocol enables American Legion activities to proceed smoothly and predictably and serves to provide the courtesies that we should extend to one another. It enhances the image of the American Legion to the benefit of everyone associated or touched by its activities and functions.

#### **Post Visitations**

The County, District, and Department Membership Chairman, Vice Commanders and/or Commanders should individually attend at least one complete meeting at all Posts in their respective area, coordinating these visits well in advance.

#### **County Visitations**

The District, and Department Membership Chairman, Vice Commanders and/or Commanders should individually attend at least one complete meeting at all counties in their respective area, coordinating these visits well in advance.

#### **District Visitations**

The Department Membership Chairman, Vice Commanders and/or Commanders should individually attend at least one complete meeting at all Districts in their respective Department, coordinating these visits well in advance.

#### **Department Commander Visitations**

Coordination for Department Commander's Visitation to Posts  
The Post is the host for these visitations  
ESVP letters if invitation, with itinerary and complimentary ticket(s), if applicable, should be sent to:

Department level – Commander, Adjutant, NEC and/or Alt NEC, Vice Commander, Sergeant-at-Arms, Auxiliary President, SAL Detachment Commander (if joint visitation).

District level – Commander, Vice Commander, Adjutant, Aide to the Commander, County Commanders.

Other – Past Department Commanders, Past Department Presidents from the host District, Auxiliary Officers (if not a joint visitation), local dignitaries of the host organization.

#### **National Commander's Visitation**

The Department is the host for these visitations.  
Coordination with Department Commander and Adjutant  
RSVP letters of invitation, with itinerary and complimentary



tickets(s), if applicable, should be sent to:

See Department Commander's Visitation invitee list, above, plus any media representatives as applicable.

### **GENERAL PLANNING GUIDELINES**

Detailed planning and effective execution usually determine successful outcome. The individual responsible for an American Legion Function must establish an appropriate team to handle the various details of the planning and execution phases. Team members should be familiar with American Legion Protocol. Following are issues, which should be addressed in the selection of team members and the planning and conduct of American Legion functions.

#### **Confirmation of Date**

This is a critical issue, often overlooked. In the case of National Commander's Visitation for instance, his/her visit is part of a country wide itinerary established well in advance and it determines the schedules for many other Department representatives. For a Department Commander's Visitation, it must be communicated through Department Headquarters. Schedules sometimes change, so we must be alert to any changes and their implications.

#### **Site Selection**

The function site selection depends upon its purpose. Generally it should be in a central location, readily accessible to those attending. The facility should be able to support the size of the audience. Considerations: room layout requirements, proper public address equipment, adequate parking, etc. This is preferably an American Legion Post, but site selection should be based upon the suitability of the facility.

#### **Event Chairman**

This is the key individual. The event chairman should have prior experience with planning and conducting the type of function in question and should have a proven track record of managing a functional team, motivating other team members to perform their assigned tasks correct and advising them appropriately.

#### **Dinner Chairman**

Must be able to manage all details of dinner planning with either the host Post or the event facility. Responsibilities can include tickets, ensuring proper room layout, head table arrangement, reserved tables, seating, menu planning, flowers and decorations, program, etc.



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**Communications  
Chairman**

This responsibility should include both internal American Legion communications (including The American Legion Auxiliary and The Sons of The American Legion) and public relations activities. This position should be filled by someone with excellent communications skills and past history of working with the media.

**Itinerary Chairman**

This responsibility should include transportation, coordination of any tours to be conducted, rooming, special parking, etc.

**Master of Ceremonies**

Must be an effective public speaker and familiar with American Legion protocol.

**Color Guard**

Posting of colors enhances any American Legion function and should be included wherever possible.

**ITINERARY PLANNING GUIDELINES**

These are the essential support activities that will enable the overall function to run smoothly and problem free. Visitors from outside the area will experience the results of proper itinerary planning. Paying attention to the details pays off with satisfactory results.

**General**

Finalize list of visitors (from RSVP's) with arrival time, departure times, rooming requirements, and transportation requirements if any.

**Agenda**

Develop detailed activities plan to include arrivals of visitors, luncheon, tours, press conference, dinner, other related activities, breakfast next day, departures, etc.

Coordinate agenda with Department Commander/Adjutant and other Department level organizations (Auxiliary, SAL) as applicable.

**Rooming**

National Commander should be located in a small suite

National Commander's Aide located near the Commander  
Department Commander located near National Commander

Consider spouses accompanying guest

Non smoking rooms preferred by guests?

Advise guests of financial arrangements for room charges and other miscellaneous charges to room.

(Room charges for National Commander and Aide should be paid by host organization. Other guest room charges are absorbed at the discretion of the host organization.)



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**Transportation**

Establish Welcoming Committee – Department Vice Commander for the area, Sergeant-at-Arms host District, District and County Commander should greet Distinguish Guests upon arrival.

National Commander should be greeted by Department Commander, Department Adjutant, NEC, and Department Vice Commander for the area and District Commander plus other(s) at the discretion of the host organization.

Coordinate airport pick-up, Use private autos/vans (arrange for drivers) or public transportation as applicable for all phases of the visitation. Vans are often convenient for tours, etc. Arrange for reserved parking for visiting dignitaries. (Usually reserved parking spots are provided for National Commander, Department Commander, Department Auxiliary President, and SAL Detachment Commander.

**COMMUNICATIONS PLANNING GUIDELINES**

Getting the word out is essential. Most American Legion functions require communication both within the American Legion Family and to the general public.

**Notification & Coordination**

National Commander's Visitation – date will be advised by Department Adjutant.  
Coordinate all details closely with Department Commander and Department Adjutant.  
Coordinate with Department Auxiliary and SAL.

**Invitations**

Letters of invitation to Distinguished Guest, local dignitaries, news media, etc. Include complimentary ticket(s) with invitation, where applicable, List should include:

Department level – Commander, Adjutant, NEC and/or Alt NEC, Vice Commander, Sergeant-at-Arms, Auxiliary President, SAL Detachment Commander (if joint visitation).

District level – Commander, Vice Commander, Adjutant, Aide to the Commander, County Commanders.

Other – Past Department Commanders, Past Department Presidents from the host District, Auxiliary Officers (if not a joint visitation), local



dignitaries of the host organization.

**Publicity**

News releases to local TV, Radio, Print media.

Usually a National Commander's Visitation will include a press conference.

Determine invitation list and suitable site.  
Posters to advertise.

American Legion Post Newsletter articles(s)

**General**

Obtain biographical data for honored guest(s) for use in news releases and program. Edit as appropriate. Obtain picture if they're available for news releases and/or programs  
Gifts for honored guest(s)

**SITE SELECTION GUIDELINES**

Site selection should provide the maximum suitability and convenience for the attendees of the function with the goal of maximizing participation. This is especially important for National Commander's Visitations and Department Commander's Visitations.

**Geographic Location**

Central to applicable region (District, County, Division, Post) considering population distributions.

Accessible to transportation, e.g. airport for National Commander's Visit

Media presence, if applicable

Points of interest for tour, if applicable  
Map(s) available (for first-time visitors)

**Facilities**

Large enough to handle anticipated audience  
Parking (including reserved spots for Honored Guests)  
Food preparation, serving capacity  
Separate luncheon facility, if applicable  
Press conference area, if applicable





**Meeting / Banquet Room** Check to see the room is well lit and ventilated.  
Check to see that the podium light works.  
Check to see that sufficient chairs are available and that there are seats reserved for your guests, both on the platform and in the audience.

Check public address system to be sure it works properly.  
If your guest has asked for special equipment, such as a projector, screen, blackboard, etc., see that it is set up and in working condition.

**Rooming** Suitable hotel/motel accommodations (small suite for National Commander, if applicable) Consider all potential guests in visiting party.

### **DINNER PLANNING GUIDELINES**

Proper planning will ensure a smooth-running function and support the necessary protocol. Following are guidelines, which may help in planning the dinner and associated activities.

**Facility Selection** Establish preliminary estimate of attendance, usually based upon past experience.  
Adequate parking available? Reserved parking spots?  
Will it support room layout?  
Will non-smoking area(s) be available?  
Public Address System to do the job  
Kitchen facilities, serving capability to handle anticipated attendance expeditiously  
Note that Department dinners and events involving special guest should have dinner served on china with metal utensils.

**Menu & Refreshments** Time – cocktail hour, dinner service, ceremonies  
Dinner selection  
Hors D'oeuvres  
Open bar vs. cash bar  
Cost calculation; per person and total (consider cost of complimentary tickets and other non-food costs).

**Tickets** Develop list of distinguished guests (free tickets) note that funds are available, suggested recipients of complimentary tickets would be:



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Department Commander and Aide(s)  
Department Adjutant  
Department Vice Commander from host organization  
District Commander  
NEC and/or Alt NEC  
Spouses of Guests receiving complimentary tickets  
Other as host organization desires  
Develop cost per ticket (note cost like decorations, etc)  
Develop advertising strategy, invitation letter?  
Design/print tickets  
Establish ticket sales team, distribute tickets, record numbered blocks if applicable, and develop sales records system.  
Distribute complimentary tickets (indicate “complimentary” on ticket itself.

**Room Layout**

Coordinate with banquet facility for head table.  
Table tent cards, head table place cards.  
Head table arrangement.

**Escorting**

The SAA or Distinguished Guest Chairman, when escorting, will keep the guest on his/her right. If he/she takes hold of the guest's arm, it will be the left arm.  
Never walk between the Chair and the assembly.  
The highest-ranking group of guests being presented to the Chair is brought up to the Right of the Presiding Officer. If space dictates that the lesser ranking guests be seated to the left of the Chair, reverse the escort procedure. The guest of honor is always presented to the Right of the Presiding Officer. Your distinguished guest always takes precedence over any other dignitary, regardless of title.

**Escorting Lines**

1. Double Line: SAA and Asst SAA on the left, Distinguished Guest Chairman behind the Asst SAA, with the honored guest on his/her right side.
2. Single Line: SAA leads, Distinguished Guest Chairman second, guest third, and the Asst SAA last.

If the guests to be presented are American Legion members, escort in the following order, the lowest ranking group first:

- a. SAL Detachment Commander (joint function)
- b. Auxiliary Department President (joint function)
- c. District Chairman



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- d. District Officers
- e. Past Department Commanders/ Presidents
- f. Current Department Chairman
- g. District Commanders/Presidents
- h. Current Department Officers
- i. Current National Officers or Chairman
- j. National Executive Committeeman or Committeewomen
- k. Department Commander/President
- l. National Commander/President

When the guest is not a member of the organization, he/she is escorted first and alone.

**SPEAKING PROTOCOL**

Protocol helps to make American Legion functions precede smoothly and expeditiously. Generally, all speeches should be brief with a simple and clear message. This will help to keep the interest of the audience.

**Speaking Order** The main speaker/guest of honor speaks last as he/she will receive the longest speech of introduction and their address will conclude the speaking portion of the program.

**Speeches of Introduction** INTRODUCE one not known to the assembly, PRESENT one who is already known to the group. Should be brief, to the point. Refrain from reciting biographical data, use anecdotes when appropriate. Length of speech of introduction varies with respect to the rank of the individual being introduced: the highest-ranking guest the longest speech of introduction.

**Introduction of Head Table** Generally done by the Master of Ceremonies. Order of introduction starts with speaker's extreme left, working toward the center, then with speaker's extreme right, working toward the center. Introduction should be brief – names and titles/function. Refrain from lengthy introduction of any particular individual

**Order of Introductions** Are generally done in order of rank within the organization, from low to high:



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Local dignitaries, non American Legion guests, SAL, Auxiliary Officers – Post, County, District, Department, National

American Legion Officers are usually introduced in the order by which they're installed into office;

Sergeant-at-Arms  
Service Officer  
Historian  
Judge Advocate  
Chaplain  
Treasurer  
Adjutant  
Vice Commander(s)  
Commander

If NEC or Alternate NEC is present, this officer should be introduced just prior to the Department Commander, with the Alt NEC before the NEC.

**Inspirations, Invocation,  
Closing Thoughts and  
Grace:**

All should be short and should be generalized.

INVOCATION: The assembly rises at the direction of the Chair or MC. An invocation is an earnest entreaty or prayer calling for assistance and guidance. It is given at the beginning of the meeting, dinner, concluding with "Amen".

GRACE: The assembly remains seated. Grace is a blessing asked or thanks offered before a meal, and it technically becomes a benediction if offered after a meal. If "Blessing" is used rather than "Grace," it must conform to religious precedent. Conclude with "Amen."

INSPIRATION: The assembly should remain seated or it may stand if inspiration is offered at the beginning of the event. An inspiration is an expression along spiritual or ethical lines. "Amen" is **not** used at the conclusion.

**GUIDE FOR MASTER OF CEREMONIES**

**Program Activity**

**Comment(s) / Suggested Wording**

**Call to order**

**May I have your attention, please?** (...pause...)

**Entrance of  
Distinguished Guests**

Distinguished Guests may be escorted into the function room. As a minimum, the single Honored Guest should be escorted unto the hall at the beginning of the event. ***Please rise for the entrance of***



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*(name, title), escorted by (name, title)*

Announce each escorted guest this way, and/or then introduce the guest of honor...**Let us welcome our Honored Guest for this evening, (name, title), escorted by (name, title).**

**Salute Colors** (if colors are in place, not to be posted).

**Please rise to salute the Colors of our Nation.** (...pause...) **Right hand salute!** (...pause...) **Ready, two.**

**Posting Colors**

**Please rise for the posting of our Nation's Colors** (...pause...) As Colors approach... **Right hand salute!**

Color Guard Commander will ask for permission to post colors – response **Sergeant, post the Colors!** Hold salute until Colors are posted, then **Ready Two!** Allow Color Guard time to leave.

**Invocation**

**We will have the Invocation delivered by (name), of (\_\_\_). Please uncover.** After Invocation is delivered... **Thank You (\_\_\_)**

**Pledge of Allegiance**

**With your hat over your heart, please recite with me the Pledge of Allegiance to our Flag.** Recite Pledge slowly.

**National Anthem** (if used)

**Please join (\_\_\_) in the singing of the National Anthem, the Star Spangled Banner.** If you do don't sing, please render a hand salute at this time. NATIONAL ANTHEM

**POW/MIA Service** (if used)

MC may conduct POW/MIA Memorial Service or it may be conducted by another. **We will now conduct a service of remembrance for our POW's and MIA's. In this somber moment, let us reflect upon their plight and the plight of their loved ones.** Optional, if service is led by someone other than the MC...**This service will be conducted by (name, title).** Conduct Service; see POW/MIA Remembrance Service.

**Welcome**

Appropriate brief welcoming remarks by MC

**Introduction of Head Table**

Brief introduction of Head Table, names and title/positions only. **We are pleased to have with us tonight several distinguished guests seated at our Head Table.** Begin at far left of speaker.. **At my far left we have (1,2,3,4,etc).** Then introduce head table from speaker's right.. **Starting at my far right, we are pleased to have with us (1,2,3,4,etc)**



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**Dinner**

**Thank you. Please enjoy your dinner.** Optional – you may wish to remind male Legionnaires that they should uncover during the meal.

**Introduction of Distinguished Guests**

Brief introductions of those seated at Distinguished Guests Table(s), such as spouses not seated at Head Table, Guests not participating in the program, etc. **May I have your attention, Please? We have several Distinguished Guests with us tonight. I ask that you please stand when I announce your name.** Optional, depending upon the number of Distinguished Guests to be introduced ... **Please hold any applause until all of our Distinguished Guests have been introduced.** Introduce Distinguished Guests.

**Welcoming Remarks by Post/County Commander of local dignitary (if any)**

MC will introduce Post or County Commander and/or local dignitary for brief welcome remarks. **We are pleased to have with us this evening (name/title) who will offer welcoming remarks.** Similar introduction for any other speakers. **Thanks you, (name).**

**SAL Detachment Commander Remarks (if applicable)**

MC will introduce SAL Detachment Commander if remarks are to be delivered. After SAL Commanders remarks, **Thank you, (name).**

**County Auxiliary President Introduction of District President (if applicable)**

MC will introduce County Auxiliary President, who will introduce District President. **We are pleased to recognize (name), President of the ( ) County, American Legion Auxiliary.** County President introduces District President.

**District Auxiliary President Introduction of Department President (if applicable) Department Auxiliary President's Address (if applicable)**

District President introduces Department President.

**County Commander Introductions of District Commander (if applicable)**

MC will introduce County Commander, who will introduce District Commander. **We are pleased to recognize (name), Commander of the ( ) County.** County Commander introduces District Commander.



<b>District Commander Introduction of Department Vice Commander</b> (if applicable)	District Commander introduces Department Vice Commander.
<b>Department Vice Commander introduces Department Commander</b> (if applicable)	Department Vice Commander introduces Department Commander.
<b>Department Commander</b>	If this is a Department Commander's visitation, Department Commander will make address here. If this is a National Commander's visitation, Department Commander will make a speech of introduction for National Commander.
<b>National Commander's Address</b> (if applicable)	Address by National Commander. Then, MC assumes the podium. <b><i>Thank You, (National Commander, Name)</i></b>
<b>Presentation of gifts</b> (if applicable)	If gifts are presented during the function, the order of presentation is: SAL Detachment Commander, Department Auxiliary President, Department Commander, and/or National Commander.
<b>Benediction</b>	<b><i>Please stand and uncover for the Benediction to be delivered by (name). Benediction. Thank you, (name).</i></b>
<b>Salute Colors</b> (if Colors have not been Posted)	<b><i>Please cover and remain standing as we salute the Colors of our Nation. (...pause...) Hand salute! (...pause...) Ready, Two!</i></b>
<b>Retiring of Colors</b> (if colors have been posted)	<b><i>Please cover and remain standing as we retire our Nation's Colors. Color Guard Commander will ask for permission to retire the colors. Sergeant, retire the Colors of our Nation! Hand Salute! Remain at hand salute until colors leave the room. Ready, Two!</i></b>
<b>"God Bless America"</b>	Traditional singing of "God Bless America" <b><i>Please remain standing and join hands for the singing of "God Bless America".</i></b>
<b>Closing</b>	<b><i>This concludes our program for this evening. Thank you for joining us tonight.</i></b> May add remarks about post-event activities, thank you for participants, a reminder to drive home safely and sober, etc.



### **SAMPLE LETTER OF INVITATION**

A letter of invitation is a courtesy to prospective guest. It should encourage them to attend and describe the event(s) that will take place and define the role, if any, that the invitee will have. Consider a separate letter for those invitees who will receive a complimentary ticket or for guests who will be requested to participate.

(See example on next page).







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Organization Stationery

Date:

Invitee,  
Title  
Street  
City, State, Zip

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

We are pleased to announce that **organization** will host **event** on **date** at **location**. We would be honored if you attend. *For those receiving complimentary ticket – For your convenience, we have enclosed complimentary tickets for you.*

*Describe event and associated activities such as tours here, include dates, times, locations, travel directions, cost of ticket(s), if applicable and any other information which will help invitees to plan to attend.*

For those guests staying in our area overnight, we've made arrangements at:

**Hotel**  
**Street**  
**City, State, Zip**  
**Phone**  
**E-Mail**

*As applicable – Please contact the hotel directly to make reservations for whatever nights you wish to stay.*

*As applicable – As an Honored Guest, we have arranged for you to be seated at our Head Table, and, as applicable – and we would like you to **describe speaking responsibility**.*

Please help us to plan for this event by contacting **event coordinator** at **phone** no later than **date**. *For those Guests being greeted upon arrival – Please advise us of your arrival and departure plans to enable us to coordinate local transportation. If you have any questions, contact **name** at **phone**. We look forward to seeing you at **event**.*

Sincerely,  
**Event Chairman**

Sons of  
The  
American  
Legion

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