

Post 57 welcomes national visitor

Legion National
Commander stops
by local post.

By **TONY BRITT**

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American Legion Post 57 played host to a very distinguished guest on Monday evening, welcoming the organization's national commander as a dinner and tour guest.

James A. LaCoursiere Jr., who was elected national commander of the nation's largest veterans organization in August 2024 in New Orleans during the American Legion's 105th national convention, spent close to two hours at the local post.

POST *continued on 6A*



TONY BRITT/Lake City Reporter

James A. LaCoursiere Jr., national commander of the American Legion, speaks Monday during a visit to Post 57 in Lake City.



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William 'Bill' Huggins, American Legion Post 57 Commander, receives mementos from James A. LaCoursiere, the national commander of the American Legion, during his visit to Post 57 on Monday.

POST

Continued From 1A

William 'Bill' Huggins, American Legion Post 57 Commander, said he was pleased to have LaCoursiere as a guest.

"It's a very high honor," he said. "He travels a lot, but he gets to see very few posts. Fortunately today he was able to visit not only usable to see us, but we formed a prison post — Post 421 in Columbia Correctional (Institute), the first time he's ever had the opportunity to visit a prison post."

In his 13 years as an American Legion member, Huggins said Monday's visit marked the first time he can remember the national commander visiting the local post.

"I consider it quite an honor," he said of the visit. "It gives our members a chance to see that we are important, not just at the post level, but also at the national level."

Huggins said the visit resulted in several more members visiting the post on Monday night, including representatives from American Legion Post 215 in Jasper and American

Legion Post 224 in Madison.

LaCoursiere, national commander of the American Legion, arrived from Phoenix, Arizona, last Wednesday and prior to that he and his entourage were in Guatemala. His overseas tour has included visits to Taiwan, Guam and Guatemala.

"We've actually been visiting various posts since last Wednesday around the State of Florida," he said. "We came up into this area on our way out to Post 57 and dropped by the correctional facility to drop out the American Legion Post that's out there. Post 57 is an integral part of the prison post. From there they tied in Post 57 as an official visitation post for this evening, with a chance to meet with the Legion family in this area."

LaCoursiere noted that the recent visit to Florida is the second trip that he and his aide have made to the state. He said when national commanders are elected, they traditionally go to each state once and noted he wound up canceling a few other department visits that were scheduled right after recent hurricanes.

"My aide and I wanted to be here," he said. "So when

we were down in Southern Florida, we checked out all of the devastation out there and got to see the active role of the American Legion family being active in the community and the big role that they played — working with the first responders, American Red Cross, and Team Rubicon. It was great to see that."

LaCoursiere and his aide also visited hurricane impacted areas in North Carolina.

"To actually see the Legion family in action is what it's all about, so we can share the message," he said. "We'll turn around and head toward the Jacksonville area tomorrow (Tuesday) and tomorrow is our last full day in Florida before we carry on."

LaCoursiere lives in Connecticut and the American Legion National Headquarters are in Indianapolis, Indiana. The organization also has a secondary office in Washington, D.C.

"I just want to remind everybody that our number one mission in American Legion is 'Being The One,'" he said. "Be the one to save the life of a veteran, child, spouse or a stranger in your community."

Huggins led LaCoursiere on a tour through the local facility, noting recent improvements and upgrades, as well as allowing LaCoursiere an opportunity to meet post members.

"He was greeted at the front door with a (television) monitor welcoming him in, with his name and picture on it. I don't think he's seen that many times before," Huggins said. "He's a very down to earth guy and it's just an honor and a privilege to have him and his entourage."

"The whole entire duration we've been in Florida, it's been absolutely fantastic," LaCoursiere said. "We've been off to a lot of posts and we're seeing the Legion family in action."