



**JOHN E. JACOBS LEGION POST 68 LELAND
MEDIA RELEASE**

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LEGION POST 68 BE THE ONE PROGRAM UPDATE

Suicide respects no boundaries – not age, gender, skin color, marital status, education, or profession. Inspired by David Berkenfield, a retired Navy SEAL, the American Legion launched its Be The One Program in spring 2022 to help curb an alarming rise in veteran suicides. At the time, the multi-digit National Suicide Prevention Hotline was also transitioning to an easy-to-remember 3-digit dialing code (988) to help people in crisis connect with suicide-prevention and mental health crisis counselors. “Dial 988, Press 1” for veterans became a reality in July 2022, along with texting capabilities.

From the outset, several members of Leland’s John E. Jacobs American Legion Post 68, led by Past Commander John Hacker, recognized the need the Be The One initiative was intended to address and quickly stepped up to support their local veteran community. To date, Post 68’s efforts to implement and promote the initiative have included:

- By June 2022, under John Hacker’s leadership, the team had launched a suicide awareness program for law enforcement and emergency responder personnel in the Leland area. The team built on the VA’s SAVE (Seek, Ask, Validate, and Encourage) initiative to identify veterans in crisis and connect them with appropriate care and assistance. Since then, this outreach has expanded to include other Legion posts across eastern North Carolina and local political leaders.
- Recognizing that existing community resources could help veterans and families in need, Post 68’s team set out to develop an easy-to-use resource listing. The listing could be used by emergency responders, law enforcement, and other service providers to help veterans and their

families access the resources they needed—housing, medical care, food, substance abuse services, and more. The effort culminated in a wallet-sized plastic resource card that is easy for users to carry and to access these critical resources.

- Post 68 developed a 10-step guide for other Legion Posts to use when developing their own Be The One program to help veterans and families in need. The guide can be downloaded at https://www.ncpost68.org/files/ugd/72bd88_c4946901988543579abd8dbd74433a38.pdf.
- The Post recently redesigned its website, including enhancements and expansions to its resource listings in the Be The One Toolbox at www.betheoneconnects.org.
- This summer, Post 68 member Scott Wargo composed and, with backup singers Kobe Kelley and Bex Helton, released the song *Be The One*, produced by Ten Crow Studios in Jacksonville, NC. The song is key to expanding community awareness and is available on Post 68's website and on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/ewX3YYHMz40?si=v7d1Z7gaA1PsaHZW>.

Today, Post 68 is recognized as the leading American Legion organization for Be The One in North Carolina, with Hacker serving as the program's State Chair. Its work has been accomplished primarily through monetary donations and grant awards. As long as suicides remain an issue and veterans' families are in crisis, Post 68's work remains unfinished. Increasing public awareness and taking steps to address and reduce veteran suicide are not enough. Under the theme of *Connection, Collaboration, and Service*, as the Post expands its community work, it continues to engage with local law enforcement, elected officials, businesses, and other service organizations to make the community a better place to live.

As National Suicide Prevention Month in September approaches, the Post has also begun working with Green Star Families. For generations, the United States has honored military families through the service banner tradition. Blue Star families represent those actively serving. Gold Star families are recognized for those lost in combat. There is no national recognition for families who have lost a veteran to suicide. Green Star Families of America, a national nonprofit, is working to secure recognition for families who have lost a veteran to suicide. Post 68 recognizes that families affected by veteran suicides need support from a caring community. We intend to honor those lost lives, support their families, and ensure that no one carries this loss alone.

The John E. Jacobs American Legion Post 68 is committed to "Veterans Serving Veterans." To learn more about the John E. Jacobs American Legion Post 68, visit <https://www.ncpost68.org/>. Membership meetings are typically held in the banquet room at Blossoms Restaurant (1800 Tommie Jacobs Drive, Leland) on the 3rd Thursday of each month. Dinner is an informal gathering for members, starting between 4:30 pm and 5:00 pm. The official meeting begins at 6:00 pm. After the meeting, members socialize over drinks in the Blossoms bar area. Everyone is welcome: members, visitors, guests, and spouses. NOTE: Due to a scheduling conflict, the next Post 68 meeting is on Wednesday, August 19.