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Volunteer receives top honor

By [Karen Pearlman](#), UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

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El Cajon's Robert Tade has been named the American Legion's Legionnaire of the Year for California.

I was caught completely off guard," the longtime East County resident said.

Wade had just arrived in Fresno for the American Legion's annual convention two weeks ago when he heard the news.

I was up at Boys State (an American Legion-sponsored educational program dealing with government) in Sacramento and drove to Fresno, and the commander of the Department of California, Dennis Fercho, got up and made the announcement. I heard "Area 5, District 22, Post 303" ... and then he says "Rob Tade." I was totally surprised. It really is a tremendous honor. I got up to say a few words ... I'm usually not at a loss for words but I thanked them for selecting me and thanked the officers at my post for what they've done."

Tade, who lives in an unincorporated area near Lakeside, is a Navy veteran who was stationed aboard the Hornet when it recovered the trio of astronauts from the first moon landing in July 1969. The father of four and grandfather to eight who turns 64 on July 18 is in his third year as commander of El Cajon Post 303. He's been involved with the American Legion for almost 20 years.

The American Legion is the nation's largest veterans service organization, around since 1919. Members are committed to mentoring children, advocating patriotism and supporting service members and veterans.

Since Tade has been at the helm, the number of members at Post 303 has nearly doubled, from 179 to 330. A natural schmoozer, the Kearny High School graduate said he simply talks people up while he's out and about, approaching folks who look like they may have served and selling them on the American Legion.

Much of his time is spent working on Post 303 business.

He is so busy, I actually see less of him now since he retired," said his wife, Cheryl, a schoolteacher at Chet F. Harritt Elementary School in Santee. I come home from teaching and I don't talk to him, he's so busy on the computer getting stuff done for the Legion," she said, laughing.

Among his duties, Tade keeps his post's Elementary School **Peace Builders** Bicycle Program and the National High School Oratorical Contest program running smoothly. The bicycle program rewards peace-promoting kids at Anza and W.D. Hall elementary schools with a free bike every month. The oratorical contest involves several East County high schools.

Tade said he is looking forward to serving meals at the yearly "Stand Down" for homeless veterans event near San Diego High School later this month.

One of his sons, Lance, who works with the San Diego County Sheriff's Department, isn't surprised that his father has earned the prestigious award.

My dad touches the lives of a lot of people," his son said. I don't think he realizes how important he is to a lot of people. What he does, especially with something like 'Stand Down,' is hugely important. And he's a great dad, he's always been there for us. We weren't rich by any means, but we never were wanting for anything and we were rich in love."

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